



PROMISE

SUSTAIN

making space
for art in
transitions
that matter

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SUSTAIN

SUSTAIN explores the role of Spacemakers: parties that aim to contribute to systemic change by creating space for art in unusual places such as within the economy, science, or technology. The goal: to work with art towards a sustainable and just society - ecologically, economically, and socially.

About Sustain

There's a lot going on in the world. There are almost as many conflicts as there are countries, more people on the move, a climate disaster looms, and inequality among people only continues to increase. Huge challenges where quick solutions are of very limited significance. But how do we find our way out of the current polycrisis? How can we work on systemic transitions? The urgency is palpable, yet, encouragingly, we see more and more initiatives aimed at transitioning to a sustainable future.

We also see more and more artists trying to shape a future based on a different sustainable model. The role of the artist is undeniably unique. SUSTAIN examines the role art can play in visualising, driving, and shaping the transition to a world where we would actually want to live. More precisely: with SUSTAIN, we look at the collaboration between artists and other parties and the role of so-called Spacemakers in realising that collaboration.

Artists inquire into the unknown, they question what seems logical, and connect seemingly disparate elements. Precisely those qualities are of great importance for realising systemic transitions. However, accessing the spaces where artists seek to make an impact is not always easy.

Spacemakers see a clear role for art in transition issues. Whether it's about collaborations with science, technology, economy, or other domains, Spacemakers strive for a prominent role for art in those contexts to achieve meaningful transitions. Therefore, they try to create space for art in places where art often does not easily or naturally come to the table. With this practical research, SUSTAIN offers

more insight into the exact role, methods, and added value of Spacemakers in the transition to be made. The research and the results contribute to the further professionalisation of this emergent sector.

SUSTAIN is a collaborative project between The Hague University of Applied Sciences and Avans University of Applied Sciences. The research was conducted by Jacco van Uden (Professor of Change Management), Godelieve Spaas (Professor of Economy in Common), Olga Mink, Marga Rotteveel, and Kim Caarls. Additionally, we have collaborated closely with six Spacemakers: Art Partner, Circus Andersom, Future of Work, In4Art, V2_, and Waag. The box below introduces these Spacemakers further.

SUSTAIN has yielded two main outcomes:

- 1. The Spacemaker Toolbox** (see also Cahier The Help), a practical tool for Spacemakers to explore and professionalise their work internally.
- 2. The Spacemaker Stories**, a series of cahiers where we look at the Spacemaker practices from a distance, helping Spacemakers articulate more clearly what they do, why they do it, how they do it, and the value they create.

In short: where the Toolbox focuses attention inward (strengthening the Spacemaker practice), the Spacemaker Stories consist of a collection of stories, reflections, experiences, images, concepts, and ideas that help give Spacemaking a place in the realisation of systemic transitions. The Spacemaker Stories also serve as a tool for artists and parties wanting to work with art to clarify what the possibilities with Spacemakers are and how to make choices that suit the situation, stakeholders, and issues.

The Spacemaker Stories

What motivates Spacemakers? What are their dreams? How do they connect art with other domains? What are their stories?

Each Spacemaker has a unique story, with each Spacemaking process having its own dynamics, approaches, and outcomes. The various cahiers aim to inspire anyone looking to make space for art, providing building blocks for crafting individual or collective Spacemaking narratives. They don't impose a strict framework but offer ingredients with which Spacemakers, artists, and organisations can develop their own narrative: what change do we want, what is the role of art, how can we leverage the tension between art and other domains, how do we create space for art, and what can that lead to?

These questions, loosely based on the structure of Joseph Campbell's *The Hero's Journey*, form the foundation of the five cahiers. The protagonist in this journey is the Spacemaker:

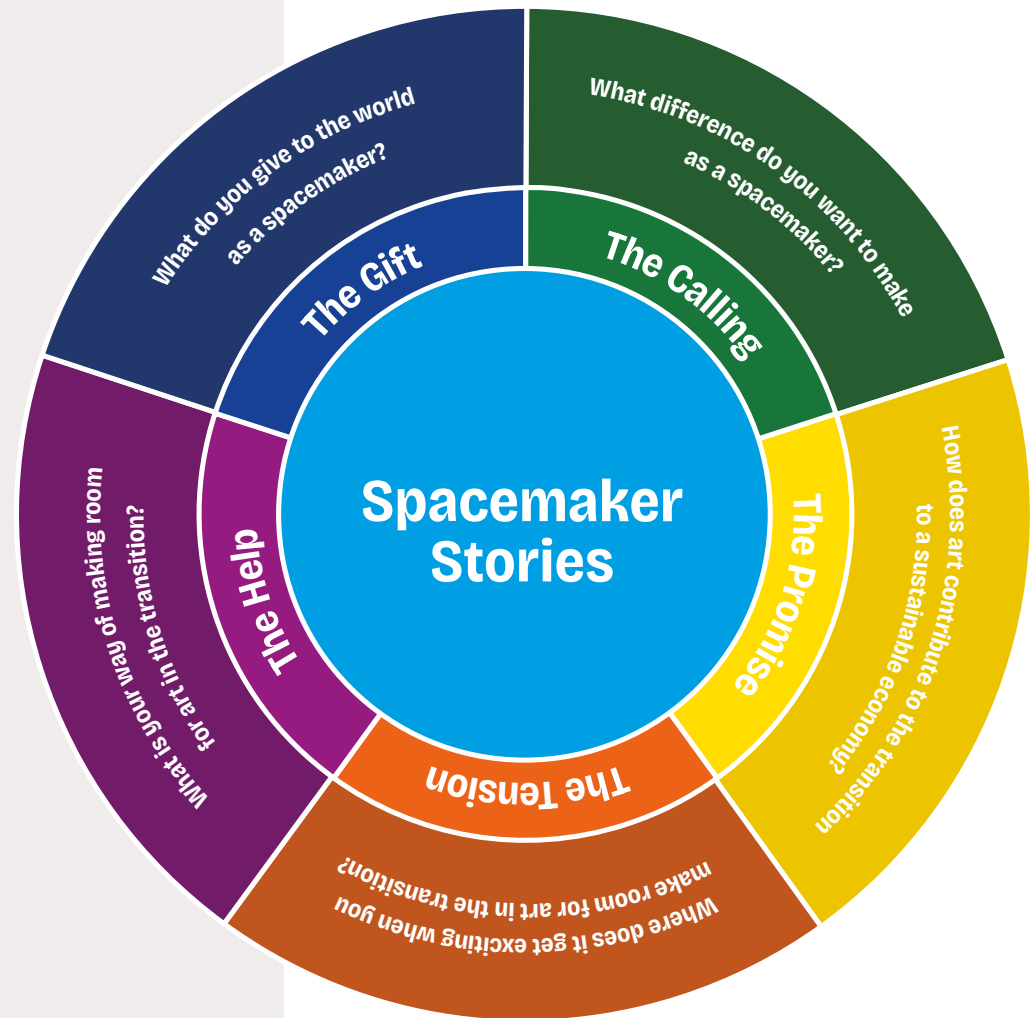
- The Calling:** This cahier addresses the call to adventure, or what motivates Spacemakers to create space for art in other contexts to effect systemic change. It explores the difference they aim to make and the values and beliefs that drive them. What's at stake?
- The Promise of Art:** Building on the calling, Spacemakers share their vision of art's promise for systemic change. Why is it important to create space for art? What role does art play in the transition?

- The Tension:** Spacemakers navigate the relatively unknown territory of art in other contexts, encountering tension between different worlds. This tension can be both constructive and obstructive. This cahier delves into the nature of this tension, its origins, and its manifestations.
- The Help:** How do Spacemakers create space for art in the transition? What kind of spaces are created? And where does the Spacemaker position themselves within this space?
- The Gift:** What do you leave behind as a Spacemaker? How do the gifts of Spacemaking contribute to the transition towards systemic change? And how do you know or measure the value of what you leave behind?

Whether you're a Spacemaker, artist, client, funder, or simply curious, these cahiers offer inspiration on how art can collaborate with other domains and highlight the significance and value of Spacemakers in these collaborations. Discover, learn, and contribute to system transition through embracing art and Spacemaking.

Welcome to The Spacemaker Stories, where you travel with Spacemakers creating space for art on the path to a sustainable future.

*Kim Caarls
Olga Mink
Marga Rotteveel
Godelieve Spaas
Jacco van Uden*



The Space- makers

ART PARTNER, founded in 2008, is an organisation that mobilises highly educated creative thinkers, such as theatre makers, artists, and philosophers, to use artistic interventions as catalysts for change in organisations. They believe that art can reveal the hidden aspects of systems and processes and collaborate with leaders who recognize the value of imagination and the artistic mindset. With their Creative Catalyst Cycle, focusing on artistic research, they develop tailored interventions that stimulate profound changes in organisations. Sandra Boer and Jetske Freeve, the current partners, act as 'Spacemakers' and facilitate collaboration between clients and artists to achieve impactful change.

CIRCUS ANDERSOM

brings Disruptive Connection. Circus Andersom is the collective of autonomous project developers Esmé Calis, Martijn Engelbregt, and Allard Medema, supported by a variety of creative makers under the business leadership of Linda Koene. With location-specific research trajectories, they entice places and people who (un)consciously yearn for change. With installations, performances, workshops, and alternative research methods, Circus Andersom awakens and invites dreaming. A range of direct artistic and disarming work forms reassures participants while simultaneously challenging them to become more human. Under the banner of Physical Philosophy, Circus Andersom unravels body-oriented wisdom to enable the restoration of the connection between heart, head, and gut. Participants are encouraged to look afresh at so-called certainties. They do not shy away from friction and deliberately seek wonder because they believe in unexplored paths within our compartmentalised society. People should feel more space to be themselves.

FUTURE OF WORK,

under the artistic leadership of Olga Mink and Godelieve Spaas, is a hybrid platform for artistic research and co-creation. The foundation establishes new forms of collaboration and sustainable strategies around work and the economy, proposing visions that promote dialogue about an economy where our needs are subordinate to the requirements for a healthy ecosystem and a just society. They recognize the need to rethink the economy and artistically connect social, economic, and cultural ecosystems, giving co-ownership to creators, designers, citizens, knowledge institutions, entrepreneurs, and small and medium-sized enterprises.

IN4ART

operates as an independent institute for art-driven responsible technological innovations. Connecting science, technology, and art, In4Art focuses on creating space for experiments that enable responsible innovations. They seek unexpected solutions to bring about positive global changes. In4Art aims to reconsider ideas about societal and economic structures by prioritising circularity, biodiversity restoration, and inclusivity. According to In4Art, the potential of art in our society and economy must be utilised to transform our current economy with new thinking and to realise responsible innovations.

V2_

Lab for the Unstable Media, led by Michel van Dartel (director), is an interdisciplinary centre for art and media technology in Rotterdam, Netherlands. Since its founding in 1981, V2_ has provided a platform for artists, designers, scientists, researchers, and developers to present, produce, archive, and publish their work at the intersection of art, technology, and society. V2_ aims to ensure that art and design play an essential role in the societal embedding of technological developments. Through critical dialogue, artistic reflection, and practice-oriented research, V2_ explores issues related to the social impact of technology.

WAAG

promotes critical reflection on technology, develops technological and societal design skills, and stimulates social innovation. Together with a team of designers, artists, and scientists, Waag applies public research methods to technology and society, aiming to involve as many people as possible in designing an open, fair, and inclusive future. Waag Futurelab contributes to sustainable research, design, and development for a just society by exploring emerging technologies, questioning cultural assumptions, experimenting, designing alternatives based on public values, and working with society to build an inclusive future.

Editorial

What makes art valuable, going beyond its traditional boundaries outside the arts? The theme 'The Promise of Art' explores how creating space for art, and integrating it into diverse spheres, can enrich our understanding and perspectives in a rapidly changing world. Art, deeply intertwined with our culture, isn't confined to its own bubble. It has the ability to shape our collective identity and foster connections with the world around us. Through its transformative potential, art empowers people to make their surroundings more meaningful, forge communities, and transmit traditional knowledge and culture.

Within Sustain, the role of Spacemakers is crucial as they bridge the gap between art and other fields. In this thematic exploration, one such Spacemaker takes centre stage, showcasing how they integrate art into societal frameworks as a catalyst for systemic transformation. Rather than solely addressing societal issues, the emphasis lies on how they promote the fusion of art with societal structures to drive systemic change. Instead of just tackling problems head-on, the focus is on how artistic interventions spark fresh ideas, approaches, stories, or viewpoints, leading to fundamental changes in how we see and shape the world around us.

In this publication, you won't find a straightforward story explaining what could entail

art's promise to the world. Instead, it offers a patchwork of viewpoints, including interviews, stories, and images. Together, these components represent different ideas about the potential promise of art, highlighting that blending various perspectives ultimately captures the essence of what art can truly offer us.

In the essay "A Romantic Alternative," co-authored by Dick Rijken and myself, we explore how art can thrive in a society that tends to prioritise rational, scientific discussions over emotional aspects. We argue that addressing our current challenges requires a blend of both rational and emotional 'wisdom', a mix that artists naturally embody. Our aim is to envision a society where emotions, subjective values, ambiguity and situated knowledge intersect meaningfully, promoting deeper connections and understanding to the issues at stake.

According to writer Vamba Sherif, art has the innate power to alter our perspective on the world. In his column "Art as a Catalyst for Change," Sherif explains how literature has traditionally acted as a channel for such illumination, presenting a range of narratives and viewpoints. He demonstrates how art allows us to see the world from different angles, enriching our comprehension and empathy. His insightful contribution emphasises art's dual function: not just as a repository of

knowledge that expands our horizons but also as a medium for connecting with new and uncharted realities.

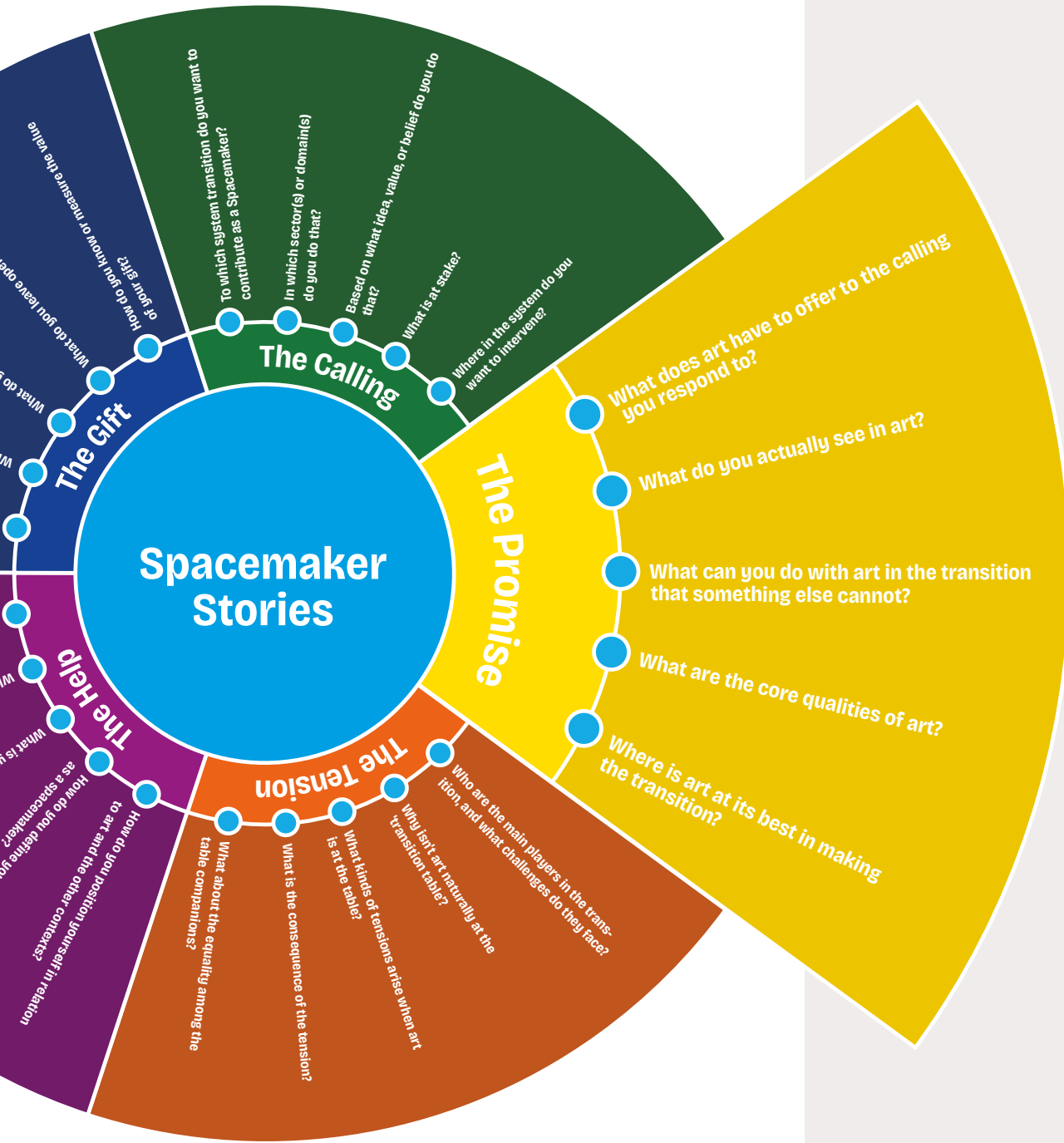
In the article 'The Promise of a Spacemaker', we delve into the modus operandi of a spacemaker who has earned their merits in the field. Through conversations with director Michel van Dartel, we explore how V2_ navigates the intersection of artistic interventions and societal issues, prioritising reflection and experimentation over immediate problem-solving. Insights from various stakeholders within the V2_ network shed light on the dynamic interplay between art, technology, and society, offering valuable perspectives on the role of this Spacemaker.

Last but not least, this issue also contains a contribution from researchers Marga Rotteveel and Ine Mols. Here, reeds serve as a metaphor within the Sustain research. Godelieve Spaas writes in the article 'I Promise' about her personal promises, both in love and in her research

And finally, calling all crossword puzzle aficionados, it's time to rejoice! We've whipped up a special treat just for you on page 37. Get ready to dive headfirst into the mind-bending world of crosswords! If necessary, you can find the answers at the end of this issue.

Olga Mink

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Spacemaker Stories

Each Spacemaker has a unique story. These narratives are centred around the changes they wish to effect, the significance of art, the potential of leveraging the tension between art and other domains, the creation of space for art, and the potential outcomes of these endeavours.

We presented six Spacemakers with questions about their stories. In the cahier on **The Promise of Art**, Spacemakers share their views on art's promise for the systemic change they support. They explore why space should be created for art and the role art plays in transition.

We invited the Spacemakers to express the promise of art.

The power of leveraging an artistic mindset

- ART PARTNER

Art Partner makes the unheard heard, brings the undercurrent to the surface, and makes the invisible visible. The starting point is always the urgent need for change. If this need is present in the organisation, Art Partner conducts exploratory artistic research. Through all the conversations, stories, knowledge, and emotions, this research creates a clear picture of what is needed to ignite the change.

This creative journey culminates in an artistic intervention. Tailored to each situation, the specifics of these interventions are unpredictable at the outset. Nonetheless, one constant is their ability to reach the core of the issue—without fail. This exemplifies the profound impact of an artistic mindset, which transcends mere observation and conventional thinking. This mindset has the power to forge entirely new visions for the future.

An ongoing invitation to relax into not knowing

- CIRCUS ANDERSON

Circus Andersom aims to use art to create space for difficult and complex ideas in seemingly incompatible domains. Art is viewed as a unique platform where depth, expansion, and reversal are natural. It serves as a means by which they pose uncomfortable questions and provide space and time that are often lacking elsewhere.

In a time of uncertainties, Circus Andersom highlights the importance of not knowing, with art acting as a source of this space. They emphasise art that introduces exciting elements in an accessible way, with imagination at its core, starting from wonder and the connection between mind, heart, and gut.

Art as a Collective Work Practice

- FUTURE OF WORK

According to Future of Work, the promise of creating space for art lies in bringing together art, economy, and society. Here, artists can hold up a mirror and offer radically new perspectives. The open, playful, curious, and critical gaze of artists is essential for understanding underlying motivations, questioning the status quo, and encouraging civil disobedience.

The significance of art for Future of Work is immense, especially in a society dominated by exploitation, depletion, greed, competition, efficiency, and short-term thinking. Art provides space for experimentation, meaning, and ambiguity, enabling playful and fundamental exploration and questioning of the economic system in connection with other domains.

Art stimulates self-reflection and has the potential to create new, meaningful connections between the economy and society. The essence of art, for which Future of Work creates space, is the artists' ability to make alternative economies tangible.

*Art is not the solution,
but the catalyst for new
solutions*

- IN4ART

In4Art employs art to arrive at innovative ideas and concepts. The importance of art lies in the ability of artistic experimentation to offer new perspectives and insights, especially in questioning technology and exploring possibilities.

There is a need to create space for art, particularly artistic research, as an integral part of developing solutions for contemporary challenges. Currently, there is little infrastructure for this.

The essence of the art for which In4Art creates space lies in the artistic experiment that emerges from questioning and co-designing technology. In4Art sees art playing a role as a catalyst and interrogator, with the potential to raise awareness and bring attention to overlooked issues. It's not about the solution itself, but rather how art can serve as a catalyst for new solutions in collaboration with other parties.

*We provide space for different
ideas about technology: the
ideas of artists*

- V2_

For V2_, creating space for art means establishing connections with other domains and thus addressing new cultural audiences. This is necessary because the current direction of technology is dictated by the technology industry and the market, which by definition do not pay attention to aspects that cannot be priced, such as quality of life, nature, or human rights. Art can highlight the problems arising from this and help people form opinions about them.

The essence of the art for which V2_ creates space lies in the ability to be both autonomous and embedded, to think outside the innovation agenda boxes, and to work from societal reality. The motivation to use art for change stems from the growing realisation that smart technological innovations will not solve the challenges we face alone. Therefore, more and more people are asking critical questions about the purposes of technological developments and the motivations behind them. It motivates V2_ that these individuals are increasingly able to find the organisation because it offers space for different ideas about technology, the ideas of artists, and the reactions their artworks provoke.

Art, with its imaginative power, plays an important role in interpreting the societal impact of technological developments and exploring radical alternatives.

*We are able to transcend
the object of art*

- WAAG

At Waag, the promise of creating space for art is rooted in the idea that art is not just the starting point for actions but also exerts a powerful influence on them. Art inspires and embraces various perspectives. It can connect domains, stimulate dialogues, and foster empathy.

It is crucial to create space for art because Waag recognizes that the values of trust, justice, and care are most consciously addressed through artistic practices. Here, art serves as a space where critical thinking, care, and collaboration are expressed. For Waag, the essence of the art for which space is created revolves around meaning and the promotion of care.

Art is not merely a means to change; it is the change itself, by continuously questioning, posing problems, and discovering and experimenting with alternatives. At Waag, art plays the role of provocateur and inquirer in the process of transition.

A Romantic alternative

OLGA MINK & DICK RIJKEN

In this text, we argue that asking the arts to solve society's wicked problems may not be applicable, but that many of these challenges could potentially benefit from adopting a mode of thinking inherent to the arts. We also examine this perspective from within the arts, where the relationship with the outside world has also evolved dynamically and substantially. Ultimately, it appears that new connections between art and society have the potential to transcend current practices in ways that exceed our current imagination.

“Beware; for I am fearless, and therefore powerful!”

- Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

HELP!

Increasingly, art is being used to tackle societal transitions. Many systems in society are no longer functioning effectively, and it feels like we are hitting the limits of technocratic neoliberalism. Transition expert Jan Rotmans identifies a long list of issues that fundamentally and urgently challenge us: from energy, resources, and agriculture to healthcare, education, and personal life. Everywhere in society, we observe crises that could benefit from new ways of thinking, and the arts have always been the domain of creativity par excellence. Right? Right???

If only it were that simple.

Looking beyond the surface, it becomes evident that art cannot and should not be expected to fulfil this promise. Firstly, the idea that “creativity” can

offer us a solution is far too simplistic. Creativity itself is not the problem, and it is not exclusively the domain of artists or designers. New is not necessarily better, and in various domains of society, there is plenty of creativity to be found without the need to turn to artists. A tragic example is the financial sector, which, prior to the global crisis in 2008, was extremely creative in developing new financial products. Most of which encouraged greed in unparalleled ways, with dreadful and disastrous consequences. Furthermore, we are not seeking *new* ideas, but *better* ones—ones that prioritise meaning and desirable values. Healthcare has shifted its focus from humanity to the efficient delivery of “care products” to “clients”; education is no longer about cultivating curiosity but about obtaining diplomas and scoring well on report cards. In many of our systems, essential values have been forsaken in a neoliberal pursuit of efficiency and profit, leading to a race to the bottom. Our real challenge is about addressing truly important values in a meaningful way, rather than simply pursuing novelty.

Can art fulfil this promise? Perhaps...

No longer one of the sectors?

How did we end up here? Art has historically been one of the sectors in society—much like healthcare, education, or security—that operated somewhat independently, with its own concepts, organisations, and professionals. However, it is now being actively sought out by other sectors to come to the rescue. The timing of this occurrence is not coincidental.

The complexity of the world has reached a point where the adage "understanding is the first step towards change" no longer holds true

Simply thinking more or longer will not be beneficial

Complexity and technocracy

Firstly, we must address the complexity of issues in our technocratic neoliberal society. Drawing from a long history of successfully applying technology and rationality, we have organised many processes in our society into increasingly complex systems. Scientific knowledge and analytical methodologies have long been the foundation of an "understanding is the first step towards change" approach to work. In our networked society, where everything is interconnected, the world has become so complex that achieving complete understanding is no longer even possible. And technology can no longer provide us with solutions to unpredictable social and moral issues that are all interconnected. As a result, the complexity of the world has reached a point where the adage "understanding is the first step towards change" no longer holds true. Simply thinking more or longer will not be beneficial.

Neoliberal failure

In addition to this, there is a neoliberal belief in market forces, which has prompted us to outsource many societal values and challenges to the private sector, to organise everything cheaper, fairer, and more efficiently than slow, cumbersome governments. In doing so, we overlooked the fact that many societal values are not easily translated into measurable or definable "targets" and "deliverables." As the Dutch poet Lucebert also said: "everything of value is defenceless." The harsh world of market forces, shareholder value, and return on investment is no place to cultivate the things we value most in life. Love, friendship, beauty, empathic care, or curiosity cannot be defined or quantified and consequently suffer consistently in this system. In the market, profits trump all other values.

Filter bubbles

Furthermore, there's the internet, which connects us all while simultaneously pitting us against each other. We now see and comprehend more than ever before, forming opinions on virtually everything, and freely sharing our thoughts with everyone. It is an effective infrastructure for transparency, expression, and reflection. However, this turns out to be a double-edged sword. Social media platforms, in particular, have become battlegrounds where we hurl insults at each other from the safety of our own filter bubbles. Within these echo chambers, our current beliefs are continually reinforced, trapping us in an endless feedback loop. BEEEEEEEP!!

Understanding doesn't work anymore

In short: complexity cannot be calmly analysed, definitions and measurable goals are not suitable for what is truly important in life, and life turns out to be saturated with messy considerations between various societal and personal values, in which emotions also play a dominant role. Technocratic solutions are not the way forward out of this mess.

Science helps us understand the world as it is but tells us little about the future. Institutions appear to be adrift within their own frameworks, failing to adapt to a changing world. Politics appears to be entangled in a web of radicalization, desperately searching for simple solutions (it's all the fault of foreigners/capitalism/the patriarchy/the EU/etc.). Companies are more concerned with serving shareholders than their customers.

New meaning

The realisation that we need to innovate along the axis of values and meaning is becoming increasingly evident. We can empirically observe this phenomenon when we witness the impact of the internet on our perceptions of the world and our daily lives, and

we also sense it intuitively. Values matter. The culture wars are essentially about values. What we currently have is no longer effective. We need real change, deep change. Not faster, cheaper, or more efficient, but fundamentally different. More meaningful and rooted in values that truly matter to us in life, rather than being solely focused on profit and efficiency.

Could that be the promise of art? Maybe...

No one can solve it

All this is easier said than done. In the maze of problems and dysfunctional systems, there's no singular solution or discipline that will save the day. So don't expect the arts to accomplish this. Chances are that the arts aren't even remotely interested in such a messianic role.

So... let's look at this from the perspective of the arts themselves.

No truth, but meaning in the arts

Art is not about truth; rather it often concerns itself with representing reality (note the word: RE-presenting, presenting again). Art interprets the world and re-presents it in meaningful ways. The central goal for all forms of artistic expression and reflection is precisely that: meaning. Just as the healthcare sector addresses health, the arts address meaning. From a simple melody that evokes a sense of comfort to a painting of a pipe that is not merely a pipe, but a representation thereof, it's all about playing with meaning. Which is a far cry from "solving problems". But more on that later.

Interpretation is subjective

Essential to this process is interpretation. Working with meaning is a process of interpreting the world—it is playing with intentions and perspectives.

Art can create an entirely new (symbolic) language, context, experience or narrative with multiple meanings and perspectives

This makes it a personal matter—everything depends on the perspective of the interpreter. Art education typically focuses on developing the artist as a person with their own unique “voice”. Knowledge and skills play a role, but the core of artistic practice is a mentality, a way of being in the world, where the development and communication of personal vision is key. Art not only shows or helps us to understand the world, but above all, it formulates its perspectives in an evocative manner. It stirs our emotions. This is categorically different from the “explanation” based approach of science.

Ambiguity is the norm

Meaning is often inherently ambiguous, containing multiple interpretations simultaneously. Meaning can be messy, sometimes even self-contradictory. Good art doesn't narrow down feelings; instead, it opens up a rich field of ideas, feelings and emotions. It's an interpretation of reality that can be rich in meanings and can vary from person to person: ambiguous and subjective. Art can not only show us “what is” or “what could be”, it can also emotionally engage us with complex interpretations. It is this evocative ambiguity of different realities, existing simultaneously alongside each other, acknowledging and denying each other, that makes art powerful and, at the same time, elusive.

In summary, art can create an entirely new (symbolic) language, context, experience or narrative with multiple meanings and perspectives. It can help us to leave conventional thought patterns and expectations behind us and to connect thinking and feeling in complex new ways. Some will argue that the promise of art lies in the unpredictable, the elusive, and the uncertain—which is a far cry from the expectation of solving societal problems through art. As argued by Nick Cave in the Red Hand Files: “Art doesn't like being told what to do.” This is both a strength and a vulnerability.

Perhaps this is precisely what our dysfunctional technocracy requires. Maybe it is time to move

beyond the notions of “solving problems” or “implementing policies” and adopt an approach to complexity that enables fundamental changes in many societal systems. Perhaps systems could better serve us if they accommodate or even cultivate ambiguity and subjectivity. Maybe it is time to acknowledge that complex problems are not easily “solvable” because life itself is inherently ambiguous. And perhaps we need to incorporate that understanding into the design and management of those systems. Maybe working with meaning and essential values (that defy definition and quantification) is impossible without subjectivity.

This poses an interesting dilemma. While seeking solutions from art may not be feasible, perhaps it's precisely the artistic way of thinking that is urgently needed now. Moreover, art itself has not been idle in recent years and appears to be increasingly inclined towards forging new connections.

What has happened in the arts?

Autonomous vs applied art

In the arts, there is a long tradition of distinguishing between “autonomous” and “applied” art. The autonomous artist is typically a free spirit who produces works without anyone else directing them. Even if there is a commission from a museum or festival, it is still the artist who makes all the choices during the production of a work. The creative space is large and determined by the artist's vision. In contrast to this, design as a discipline has often been regarded as “applied art”: artistic skills or methods are employed for a specific purpose. The client presents a question or a problem, and the designer produces a work that meets that need. The creative space is much smaller because it is largely determined by what the client is willing to pay for. This dynamic remains prevalent in the design world. In essence, the principle of “who pays, decides” still prevails for many design firms. Museums and concert halls

were traditionally reserved for artists, while the outside world was the domain of designers who had to work from a “brief.” This is changing and this marks an interesting shift.

Relational art and social design

In recent years, there has been a notable trend of artists operating beyond this traditional divide, particularly in emerging fields such as social design or relational art. In these contexts, “makers” (a term sometimes used to suggest a new kind of role) serve as catalysts in (social) processes, rather than exhibiting their work in museums. They engage with (societal) issues without a client, creating work within the context itself: they venture into places where they cultivate relationships with stakeholders and participants. Social relationships are the actual medium.

This also represents a different approach to understanding and utilising knowledge — one that extends beyond abstract discourse or cold scientific data to encompass embodied knowledge, which is intertwined with our senses, emotions, and deeply rooted in history and social structures. This form of knowledge is evident in the ways individuals and communities thrive and interact. Experiencing the world firsthand and exercising agency within it are essential elements of comprehension. Systems thinker Nora Bateson discusses ‘warm data’, and eco-feminist Donna Haraway emphasises ‘situated knowledge.’ All this is significantly different from the abstract and disembodied technocratic way of thinking that has shaped many systems in our society.

Students at the *Prince Claus Conservatoire* in Groningen and *The Academy of Interdisciplinary Arts* in Maastricht are trained to seek connections with the outside world from deep, authentic, personal, and artistic motivations. Not out of necessity, but out of genuine choice. They want to connect and make a difference in the “real world.” They work in a

practice-oriented manner within the various contexts they seek to engage with. The traditional context of the museum, theatre, or concert hall is no longer their primary focus; in fact, they often see these as meaningless because they are disconnected from the outside world.

The choice to work within an applied context is a sincere and autonomous choice for them. But wait... what exactly is going on here?

Autonomous vs 'commissioned'

The distinction between the autonomous artist creating works for exhibitions, concert halls, or festivals, and the designer working on commissioned projects addressing societal issues seems to become less clear when "autonomous" and "applied" can simply coexist. Autonomy is not absolute but rather a spectrum. At the other end of that spectrum is not "applied" but rather "commissioned". Those who wish to genuinely engage with a group of people cannot avoid relinquishing some autonomy within that collaboration. Giving up autonomy can be an autonomous choice. Also, working on societal issues while limiting yourself to a client's initial question means missing out on many opportunities. Giving a client what they ask for is often not what serves that client best.

Indeed, breaking away from that question and seeking new ways of thinking about the issues is often the path to meaningful representations or interventions, new ways of looking at and thinking about the world. We also observe that clients, especially governments aiming to address complex social issues, are increasingly willing to collaborate with artists. However, they are fully aware that creative freedom (or autonomy) is a prerequisite for generating interesting ideas: "we would like you to address this issue without us posing a specific question." That is no longer a "list of requirements", but a genuine interest in the unpredictable or even the elusive. Hello again, ambiguity.

Reflective vs transformative

An even more intriguing distinction may lie in the positioning of a project or work within society. Museums and concert halls are deliberately isolated from society (they are sometimes even referred to as white and black boxes). The works they present predominantly offer commentary on society from an external standpoint. Venues literally shut out the world—lights in concert halls are typically either turned off or dimmed, while museum walls are often equipped with high windows to control natural daylight. This enables reflection from a distance, with no other purpose than to make us think or feel ABOUT the outside world, and not IN that outside world. While science seeks to understand the world through analysis and theory formation, the arts prioritise subjective and intuitive interpretations of the world. However, within the walls of museums and concert halls, they remain commentaries. They represent various forms of reflection, yet each remains inherently non-transformative.

In a networked society where everything is interconnected, a relationship-based approach to work is significantly more meaningful. Through active engagement with the world outside and direct involvement in a specific context, a connection is established that holds the potential for transformation, surpassing mere reflection.

This is a process which is both autonomous AND applied, as well as situated AND transformative. Makers and collectives are increasingly forming new collaborations with organisations and informal networks. Not merely to solve problems, but to collectively explore and experiment with new meanings. Serious and playful. Engaged and with a fresh perspective. With a deep sense of complex emotions and the rawness of existence, alongside a commitment to experimenting with new methodologies. Learning by doing. Change is fostered through active participation, with empathy serving as a compass, and lived experience serving both as a source of inspiration and a destination.

The division of art into white and black boxes, isolated from society, sharply contrasts with traditional and small-scale societies where artistic practices took precedence, even amidst limited resources. In such contexts, art wasn't relegated to the fringe, it formed an integral part of a vibrant culture rooted in relationships and exchanges, without an immediate expectation of receiving something in return. The experience of beauty extends beyond the confines of art institutions; it's an intrinsic aspect of our humanity. Aligned with this, Ellen Dissanayake argues that the essence of art doesn't solely reside in the physical object, but in the interactions, the stories, and the memories that emerge during the creative process. Anything has the potential to be "beautiful" in many unique ways. What is precious to us, we eagerly desire to share. Through these processes of exchange, new connections are formed that shape our identity, in relation to others. Hence, the promise of art lies in the act of "giving" serving as a foundation for humans as social and aesthetic beings. Once more, it underscores a mentality grounded in everyday life.

A Romantic alternative

Consider it a romantic alternative. Romanticism arose as a critical response to the intellectual and rational tendencies of the Enlightenment period. Rather than prioritising rationality and logical thinking, emotion and intuition were the key drivers of meaning in life, particularly in the arts. Emotion, individuality, nature, and history were seen as counterparts to the rational and fact-based scientific approach of the Enlightenment. Our technocracy has strong roots in Enlightenment thinking. Decisions must be scientifically supported; emotions are dangerous and suspicious. However, further contemplation alone will not help us in addressing socio-political challenges that are inherently moral and emotional. We must learn to develop a deeper and more professional capacity to navigate emotions and subjective meanings.

The good news is that there is a discipline that has been adeptly navigating personal emotions for

We must learn to develop a deeper and more professional capacity to navigate emotions and subjective meanings

centuries. It regards intuition seriously as a source of knowledge, fearlessly comforting paradoxes and ambiguities of daily life, while also welcoming facts and sharp thinking without hesitation. This discipline can deal with meaning, values, and emotions, with both rationality and empathy at the same time. Yes, we are referring to the arts.

Is that the promise of art?

Unfortunately, romantic thinking has often been perverted over the years. Reactionary conservatism is unequivocally indebted to romantic thinking. However, the perversion of feeling by extremist populists should not deter us from seeking professionalism in navigating the emotional complexities and ambiguities of life. Values such as beauty, tolerance, solidarity, safety, and caring are strongly connected to emotions and deserve serious consideration. Reducing them into measurable targets or simplistic slogans demonising wrongdoers is an insult to our humanity. Appealing to emotions differs from professionally working with them. It's time we took action. Many of our contemporary problems are deeply emotional in nature (loneliness, poverty, housing issues, sense of justice, immigration, racism, fear of the unknown, etc.) and deserve genuine and empathic sensitivity as the basis for interventions. It is time to professionally connect our hearts to our minds.

And that is precisely the domain of art. And perhaps also its promise. That we can skilfully navigate emotions, meaning, and immeasurable values in the world.

Love hurts!

Methodologies from the arts, such as design thinking, are increasingly being utilised to address societal challenges more broadly. Workshops where bank employees learn within a day how to generate new innovative ideas through a new creative mindset have become more of a rule than an exception. And while this can lead to interesting

new insights, it also raises the question of whether this is not more of the same, just packaged in a new (sustainable, technological, or creative) guise. Greenwashing, anyone?

Such generic approaches typically do not lead to a radical shift in thinking, seeing, or working regarding the root causes of problems. This is because they are often approached from an isolated perspective—that of the context of a problem which may well be the core of the problem. And for that very reason, they will not work.

Art has the ability to forge connections and unveil fresh meanings, encompassing the raw emotions and paradoxical, sometimes hypocritical choices inherent in our lives. Let's confront our messy realities, let's acknowledge our dark sides, and let's try to grow anyhow. Not just reflectively, but in full contact, as active participants, ready to engage hands-on. When the stakes are as high as they are now, artistic approaches may serve us well. Love hurts.

Thus, the promise of art comes into focus: showing how dysfunctional systems can be different, more meaningful, with more respect for deep human values. Art has long observed, interpreted, and evaluated, but now is the time to actively engage through participation, collaboration, and radical experimentation. Leading by doing, so to speak. If human life revolves around emotions, values, and meaning, if it's riddled with contradictions, then let's face those challenges with professionalism. If love hurts, we'll find ways to deal with the pain. Vulnerable and energised, sensitive and courageous, speculative and situated, with humility and with passion. Forget simple solutions, stop tedious arguments about trivial details, let's delicately and subtly play and experiment with what truly matters in life. And let's accept that outcomes will probably diverge wildly from our expectations.

Beauty and solace, not confined to museums, but everywhere. Promised.



Image 1: Caspar David Friedrich's awe inspiring and genre-defining painting with the man overlooking a concrete maze instead of mountains in fog. Illustration by Olga Mink.

Art as a catalyst for change

VAMBA SHERIF

In the 1950s, a young Nigerian named Chinua Achebe travelled to London to study. In his suitcase was a manuscript that would change the history of modern literature. Previously, books written by Westerners about Africa, and to some extent also about Asia and the Middle East, were characterised by an emphasis on the exotic. Africa was portrayed as a distant land with beautiful animals and lush savannas, inhabited by people seemingly untouched by civilization. If there was a history written about the continent, it was one of violence and perpetual war. But then came the novel "Things Fall Apart" by Chinua Achebe. In one stroke, this novel not only corrected that wrong image of Africa, but went further. The novel depicted characters, each of them profound and complex, struggling with the consequences of colonialism that had changed their world. The novel showed the African human being. It opened, as only a true work of art can, our eyes to the complexity of African reality. In addition to this novel, novels from other parts of the world also did what art is supposed to do: portray a different and rich image of humanity. Such as in Tolstoy's last novel, "Hadji Murat," which painted a humane picture of the Chechen, different from the image of Chechens that had lived among Russians through the ages.

This is what art must be in essence, a medium that engages, that is urgent, that reflects our failures and shortcomings, but also forces us to look at reality differently. Art should not only be about familiar and known things; it should challenge, it should articulate our deepest fears, our anger, our desires. Art has the ability to correct existing images, as Achebe or Tolstoy did with their novels. It can describe histories from other perspectives and correct incomplete or outright false representations, giving a voice or face to people, as books



Image 1: Illustration by Olga Mink

and artworks by Africans and Asians during or after colonialism had done. Oppression prompts people to also express their voices through art. It has made us aware of what we did not know; it has made us think and sometimes prompted us to take action to fight injustice, to achieve freedom or peace. Thanks to artworks such as Picasso's *Guernica*, which drew attention to the horrors of the Spanish Civil War, thanks to novels by South Africans such as "Cry, The Beloved Country" by Alan Paton, "Mine Boy" by Peter Abrahams, and films like "A Dry White Season" about that country, we knew more about the struggle for freedom of these people, and gradually we stood behind their struggle and desires.

Engaged art is more than ever necessary in this time when social media is focused on escapism and gives us selective information through algorithms. Art makes plurality visible by offering us the possibility to interpret subjective truths in different ways. It brings to light what is wrong in the world and provides direction for ways to make that world just and humane for everyone. That is what art can do: it moves us to remain faithful to this intersubjective reality and forces us to take action.

Vamba Sherif is a writer, journalist, film critic, curator, and motivational speaker. Born in Liberia, he grew up partly in Kuwait and Syria, and has been living in the Netherlands since 1993. His work addresses themes such as migration, belonging, love, the legacy of slavery, colonialism, and the tension between moderate and radical Islam.

We want to show the value of the artistic perspective, without immediately resorting to problem-solving thinking.

- Spacemaker

For us, art is the domain where things can be done that are difficult or impossible in and between other domains.

- Spacemaker

"We are not so successful yet." A scientist wants to know the result of the collaboration. And then we say, no no, maybe after a long time something will start to resonate, and maybe you'll also discover something about yourself, but don't expect efficiency. That's a constant struggle.

- Ekatarina Volkova

The more convinced I become that art can only change the world when artists enter politics. By that, I don't mean that artists should stop making engaged art, I actually mean mainly: "for heaven's sake, more artists in politics, how nice would that be?"

- Lieke Marsman

The Physical Mind

TEUN VONK

The promise

The work "The Physical Mind" by Teun Vonk is, despite its visually impressive nature, primarily focused on embodiment. It explores how our state of mind can be influenced and investigates the relationship between body and mind. While you, as a spectator, can take in the work by looking at it, you truly experience the work only when you undergo it yourself. In a time where our attention is a precious commodity and we increasingly seek for more distraction, this work reveals something we actually already know deep within ourselves: that real transformation lies within us. Vonk makes this promise palpable and accessible to everyone in a sublime way.

With The Physical Mind, Vonk seeks to let participants experience the relation between their physical and mental states by applying physical pressure to the body. The installation consists of two inflatable objects. The participant lays down in between, is lifted up and gently squeezed between the two inflatable objects. The lifting creates an unstable feeling, a slightly stressful sensation that is directly contrasted with a secure feeling of being gently squeezed between two soft objects. Paradoxically, this forced physical stimulus reduces feelings anxiety and paradoxically stress and the flight- or fight-response disappear. The participant experiences and increased sensitivity to stimuli, normalized alertness and a calm state of mind. The positive effects of this increased receptivity can continue for a few hours after the experience. The installation evokes empathy in bystanders who witness a participant undergo the experience.

Teun Vonk creates art installations, events, performances that center around the physical experience. His work revolves around the exploration of both his own body and that of the participant. www.teunvonk.nl





The promise of a Spacemaker

OLGA MINK

Spacemakers

Cultural organisations are placing more emphasis on blending artistic processes into society. The SUSTAIN project, particularly, explored how organisations carve out space for art across different fields, earning them the moniker 'Spacemakers'. These Spacemakers' approaches shed light on their views regarding art's potential beyond traditional artistic realms, extending into broader societal contexts. Delving deeper into the theme of 'The Promise of Art', we investigate how this potential can drive systemic shifts. While this inquiry may yield varied perspectives, there's a lingering curiosity: What distinct contributions does the realm of arts offer that other domains lack? The stories surrounding the Foundation V2_Lab for the Unstable Media (V2_), a key player in SUSTAIN, form the bedrock of our exploration.

Technological evolution

V2_ is a pioneer in the field of transdisciplinary art, bridging art, technology, and societal reflection since the 1980s. In my conversations with director Michel van Dartel, I explore how this organisation creates space for art in diverse spheres, and how this ethos is reflected in their daily modus operandi. I am intrigued by how the evolution of technology over the past four decades has impacted the promise of art for an institution like V2_. Van Dartel

underscores that the organisation's distinctiveness stems from the wealth of knowledge ingrained in their methodology, setting them apart from others. He asserts, "We've gained a lot of experience dealing with complex production and research processes where art and technology intersect." This sentiment is echoed by Australian artist Stelarc, renowned for his groundbreaking performance art with advanced technology. He highlights, "V2_ at that time, was one of the few places in Europe that could facilitate my technically complex performances and understood the 'raison d'être' behind my work".

Grassroots

With the evolution of technology, V2_ has increasingly focused on connections between art, technology and pressing societal themes. Artist Marnix de Nijs observed this evolution firsthand. Currently dividing his time between the Netherlands and China, I engage in a conversation with him over Zoom to delve into his insights and experiences with V2_. According to De Nijs, there has been a shift in V2_'s approach, with a focus on providing artists with smaller financial injections to enable faster project execution. In contrast, during the early 2000s, large-scale projects were predominant, and securing funding could often be a lengthy process taking years. De Nijs also highlights the accessibility of tools like Arduino, a cheap microcontroller, which

V2_ actively challenges conventional thinking and approaches

have democratised technology for artists. This shift towards smaller-scale collaborations underscores the significance of process and collaboration over the final artwork itself, reflecting changes in the art landscape. It also showcases V2_'s adaptability to external developments as a Spacemaker.

Processes

One of the promises of art is its ability to offer fresh perspectives on the world around us. In pursuit of this objective, V2_ develops innovative formats and events, to engage a diverse audience in artistic creation processes. The organisation actively challenges conventional thinking and approaches, serving as a reflective space while also being a hub for the creation of software and hardware. At V2_, critical thinking and creative expression intersect, fostering active participation from both artists and the audience in shaping our world. Together, they evolve into critical producers, collectively contributing to the creation of a more meaningful society. Take, for example, their '3x3' sessions, where artists present their works at different stages of development, seeking feedback from the audience. These sessions aren't about showcasing finished pieces but rather about sharing ongoing progress. What sets '3x3' apart is its dynamic nature, fostering lively discussions between artists and attendees. Moreover, these sessions have a broader impact, often inspiring the audience and unearthing insights that creators might have otherwise missed.

Autonomous and embedded

The role of V2_ extends beyond facilitating innovative ideas. They see themselves as a linking pin for artistic collaborations, with their approach being both 'autonomous and embedded'. Van Dartel means that an artwork can arise from both an autonomous idea and an external need. "By allowing the artistic process to take place in specific contexts, we see how the arts add value beyond their own sector.

From this commitment, artists are encouraged not only to conceive what they want to create in the studio but also to actively seek out challenges and be mindful of the impact of their ideas on society," says Van Dartel. He expresses that the organisation increasingly recognises a responsibility to disseminate these concepts into other sectors where they hold relevance. "Our efforts extend beyond merely producing an end product. It's about embarking on that journey collectively and engaging other stakeholders," explains Van Dartel. They seize these opportunities to collaboratively experiment with ideas alongside creators, stakeholders, and the public. An instance of this is the European Starts4Water initiative, where media artists are provided with the platform to explore water management. In this project, the emphasis is not on the expectation that artists will single-handedly resolve all water-related issues. Instead, the focus lies on initiating a reflective process by convening diverse stakeholders and experts. "Our extensive experience proves invaluable in our collaborations with various consortia, often surprising partners with the depth of our involvement and the meticulous organisation of processes at V2_," explains Van Dartel. Thus, V2_ actively shares their network and provides specialised technical support in project realisation. Over time, V2_ has developed a keen sense for this, positioning itself as an appealing partner, also internationally.

Panel

In collaboration with the EU-initiated project Starts4Water, V2_ organised an open call and collaborated closely with field experts during its preparation. Approaching the endeavour without predetermined outcomes, V2_ and the panel embarked on refining water-related issues and crafting the open call. Geert Van Der Meulen, a researcher at TU Delft, contributed expertise to V2_'s efforts. He explains, "We provided insights, and V2_ posed questions to deepen the content. Rather than seeking advice or my personal opinion, they inquired about the current landscape in the Netherlands and the state of scientific research

and practical application." Van Der Meulen commends this approach, noting its efficiency in condensing valuable knowledge within brief sessions, as opposed to the extensive mapping typically required, which may not align with the project's objectives."

The two selected art projects resulting from the open call would also integrate into the previously mentioned '3x3' format. Some of the panel members acted as sounding boards for the selected artists. Anne Nigten, Director at the Centre of Expertise Arts & Education at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, was one of the panel members. She explains that the artists did not necessarily aim to solve issues and instead provided genuinely new perspectives. "That is creative, critical, and engaged thinking." Hence, I believe that these 3x3 formats excel when the audience is actively engaged," states Nigten. Such projects often cannot be envisioned within the confines of a solitary studio or predetermined blueprint; instead, they flourish within an organic process, engaging with external factors such as others or the environment. Here, the potential of art unfolds across diverse contexts, where art isn't merely an expression of individual creativity but a dynamic interaction with the interconnected world. Moreover, the promise itself can evolve throughout the process.

Art and science

In addition to the examples where art is intricately interwoven in society, fostering grassroots initiatives and encouraging audience engagement, there's also a discernible pattern of closer ties emerging between artists and scientists. Nonetheless, navigating the dynamics of collaborations between these two domains isn't always straightforward. V2_ has accumulated significant experience in navigating these distinct realms, each with its own language and norms. Effective communication of expectations is vital in such collaborations, considering the distinct nature of these processes. According to Nigten, research serves as the final product for researchers,

Bringing together these domains allows artists to visualise urgent issues in a playful or poetic way, without immediately drawing conclusions

but this isn't always the case for artists. As a result, artists might work closely with specific partners at the project's beginning and bring in others during the final phase. Nigten notes that some scientists may not be well-versed in the arts, which could lead to the end of collaboration after sharing extensive knowledge. This difference stems from the varying timelines of research between scientists and the exploratory creative processes of artists. Nigten illustrates this point by comparing the duration of V2_'s Starts4Water project with scientific research, noting the rapid knowledge transfer between scientists and artists, enabling the artists to apply their artistic interpretation swiftly.

"However, with that turning point, an artist is also really thrown back into their own artistic process, and making an artwork is not necessarily compatible with how a scientist works," says Nigten. Despite the differences in these processes, the connection with science enables meaningful collaborations for artists. Bringing together these domains allows artists to visualise urgent issues in a playful or poetic way, without immediately drawing conclusions. This interaction with diverse forms of knowledge fosters alternative insights or ideas, which can benefit both artists and scientists.

New perspectives

It is often asserted that good art should provoke, as without friction, there can be no change. Artists push boundaries or bring unexpected elements together. V2_, functioning as a Spacemaker, is inherently open to surprising and unexpected ideas. Nigten confirms that V2_ does not conform to conventional categorizations and effortlessly blends underground and highbrow art. "I always appreciate that people's comfort zones are being challenged," she remarks. The mission statement of V2_ also underscores that as a Spacemaker, they extend beyond seeking solutions; their aim is to carve out space for art in a world that frequently demands immediate outcomes. This reflects the cautionary words of Internet

Critic Evgeny Morozov in 2009, amid the prevailing techno-optimism from Silicon Valley. The belief that there is a (technical) solution to every problem is often termed 'solutionism'. Decades later, we witness the pervasiveness of this mindset across various sectors, proving to be a lucrative business model. According to Van Der Meulen, there's a big difference in how much we believe society can be managed. "For certain companies, this is their business model," he notes, highlighting the tendency to quickly resolve issues in exchange for payment. "However, this method has its flaws, and the idea of managing everything is questionable," Van Der Meulen argues. He believes that this approach often only deals with the surface symptoms instead of tackling the root causes. "That's why it's important for artists to get involved and avoid making promises about what art can accomplish, as outcomes are unpredictable," he adds. He stresses that art can be an effective strategy to address political or economic agendas and to approach challenging issues from a different perspective or mindset. This aligns with V2_'s role in facilitating these collaborations. On one hand, these processes require specific guidance, while on the other hand, they also allow a degree of freedom. V2_ grants artists the autonomy to navigate these processes independently while providing a supportive structure or framework. "This gives creators a significant degree of autonomy," asserts Van Dartel.

Trust

Nurturing artistic processes within complex collaborations requires delicately balancing autonomy and relinquishing control across various project phases. Trust emerges as a crucial value for fully realising the promise of art. The quality of relationships largely determines whether the promise of art can indeed manifest. This sentiment is reflected in the dialogue with artist Teun Vonk, who has collaborated on multiple projects with V2_. Vonk's fervent artistic dedication is palpable. He underscores the significance of freedom within artistic processes, citing his residency in Shanghai, facilitated by V2_, as an

illustrative example. Reflecting on this experience, Vonk describes it as a period marked by perceived failure, where little tangible progress was made. He recounts an intriguing incident during this time when he became momentarily trapped between subway doors—an intense experience that unexpectedly inspired him to develop a new artistic concept. Upon returning to the Netherlands, Vonk conceptualised an art installation that offers participants a sensory journey centred around body pressure and sensory processing. With this work, titled “The Physical Mind,” Vonk aimed to convey his Shanghai metro encounter and allow others to share in a similar experience. The installation, involving gentle compression between two inflatable objects, received significant praise and was featured at numerous international art exhibitions. Thinking back on his experiences, Vonk, who sometimes advises organisations in his field, argues that putting too much pressure on such processes is unnecessary. “The process and research take precedence; the outcome will naturally follow,” he asserts. Therefore, the role of the Spacemaker cannot be overstated: flexibility and trust during these intricate artistic processes are essential prerequisites for affording artists the space and liberty to seek inspiration or respond to circumstances. As a facilitator, a Spacemaker should avoid imposing expectations on the artist. V2_’s unwavering trust in Vonk, even when immediate tangible results are lacking, demonstrates their dedication to incorporating the essence of art into their approach.

Time

Establishing trust is a crucial prerequisite for successful collaboration processes, particularly when the involved parties have yet to develop a deep understanding of each other. This underscores the fragility of the promise of art, which, apart from being unpredictable, can also be delicate. V2_’s ability to maintain this trust in collaborations is exemplified in the Starts4Water project. The project “Drought for Waterland,” by the artist collective “Center for Genomic Gastronomy,” was selected as one of the

winners of the open call issued by V2_. In a chat with Kat and Zach, the artist duo behind “Center for Genomic Gastronomy,” it’s clear they faced big challenges at the start. They originally aimed to create a climate-resilient food forest or other regenerative agriculture, but soon realised it would take at least 5, 10, or even 50 years. Despite wanting to team up with the Veluwe National Park, they saw that a six-month funding period wasn’t enough to realise their ambitious plans. Despite these challenges, the artists took control of the situation and came up with an innovative solution: they decided to auction off a dinner scheduled to happen in 10 years. This unconventional approach allowed them to raise funds for the development of a climate-resilient food forest that thrives in water. For example, they identified walnut trees as suitable species capable of withstanding floods and thriving in moist conditions. However, the catch is that such trees take a long time to mature, resulting in a delayed return on investment compared to other forms of agriculture. This extended timeline before seeing significant results highlights the central issue the project aims to tackle. The artists effectively demonstrate that transitioning to alternative forms of regenerative agriculture in a future that diverges from the present is a lengthy process, where the element of time plays a crucial role. This juxtaposition of long-term transition efforts against the short-term focus of many companies, driven by profit maximisation in an economy fixated on immediate gains, sheds light on why these transition processes, despite good intentions, encounter obstacles.

Contexts

The second project selected within Starts4Water is “Pier Pressure” by artist Mark IJzerman. This work explores the complex interplay among our interconnected global economy, the dwindling biodiversity in the port of Rotterdam, and the fading indigenous fishing culture in the region. IJzerman takes a critical stance on the relationship between economic expansion (such as globalisation, trade, pollution, and global warming) and the decline in biodiversity,



Image 1: Center for Genomic gastronomy. Fotoğraf: Sander van Wettum, (2022), tentoonstelling Art + Water bij V2_Lab for the Unstable Media

which is exacerbated by the proliferation of the marine worm in the Netherlands. This worm species is introduced to the region via ships originating from distant Southern Hemisphere locations. Mark IJzerman articulates, "What I find crucial is juxtaposing two seemingly unrelated contexts and uncovering the point of convergence between them. That intersection then becomes the focal point of my work." For IJzerman, the aim is not to offer solutions but rather to shed light on significant connections between disparate ecosystems. During our conversation in his studio in Amsterdam, IJzerman reflects on his experiences within the project.

He acknowledges that collaborating with scientists has enriched his understanding of this invasive worm, which poses a threat to various species. However, IJzerman also criticises what he sees as science's tendency to become self-absorbed, with an overemphasis on publishing numerous articles. He expresses surprise at the prevalence of desk-based research among scientists, lamenting the lack of fieldwork on this invasive species. Additionally, he notes the specific expectations from the business world regarding the collaboration, with the assumption that he could offer immediate solutions to enhance scientific knowledge. Nevertheless, IJzerman asserts that the true value of art lies in its indirect impact. He frequently felt pressured to justify his approach, unable to present a straightforward solution like, "Look, this worm can filter water, and we can utilise it to create organic water filters, isn't that remarkable!" IJzerman emphasises that the pursuit of direct solutions is ingrained in our conventional thinking, tempting us to maintain the status quo while superficially appearing to effect change. This aligns with Morozov's critique of solutionism, a phenomenon that art deliberately avoids. Despite the appeal of continuous change, the paradox lies in the perpetuation of stagnancy amidst the illusion of progress. We're drawn into the idea of perpetual change, yet paradoxically, within this continuum of 'changeless change', everything remains the same.



Image 2: Center for Genomic Gastronomy, portrait (2021), field trip to Veluwe, archief V2_





Instable

Facilitating space for research and development across diverse contexts, is an important incentive for V2_ to intertwine the intrinsic promises of art with societal issues. This becomes evident in their various collaborations with organisations outside of the art domain, as well as their involvement with artists employing transdisciplinary approaches aimed at systemic transformation. In the stories about V2_, different types of promises seem to emerge. One of those promises is to transcend the persistent problem-solving paradigm, viewing art as a valuable strategy for cultivating new perspectives. V2_ also engages with emerging societal trends, exemplified by its support for grassroots

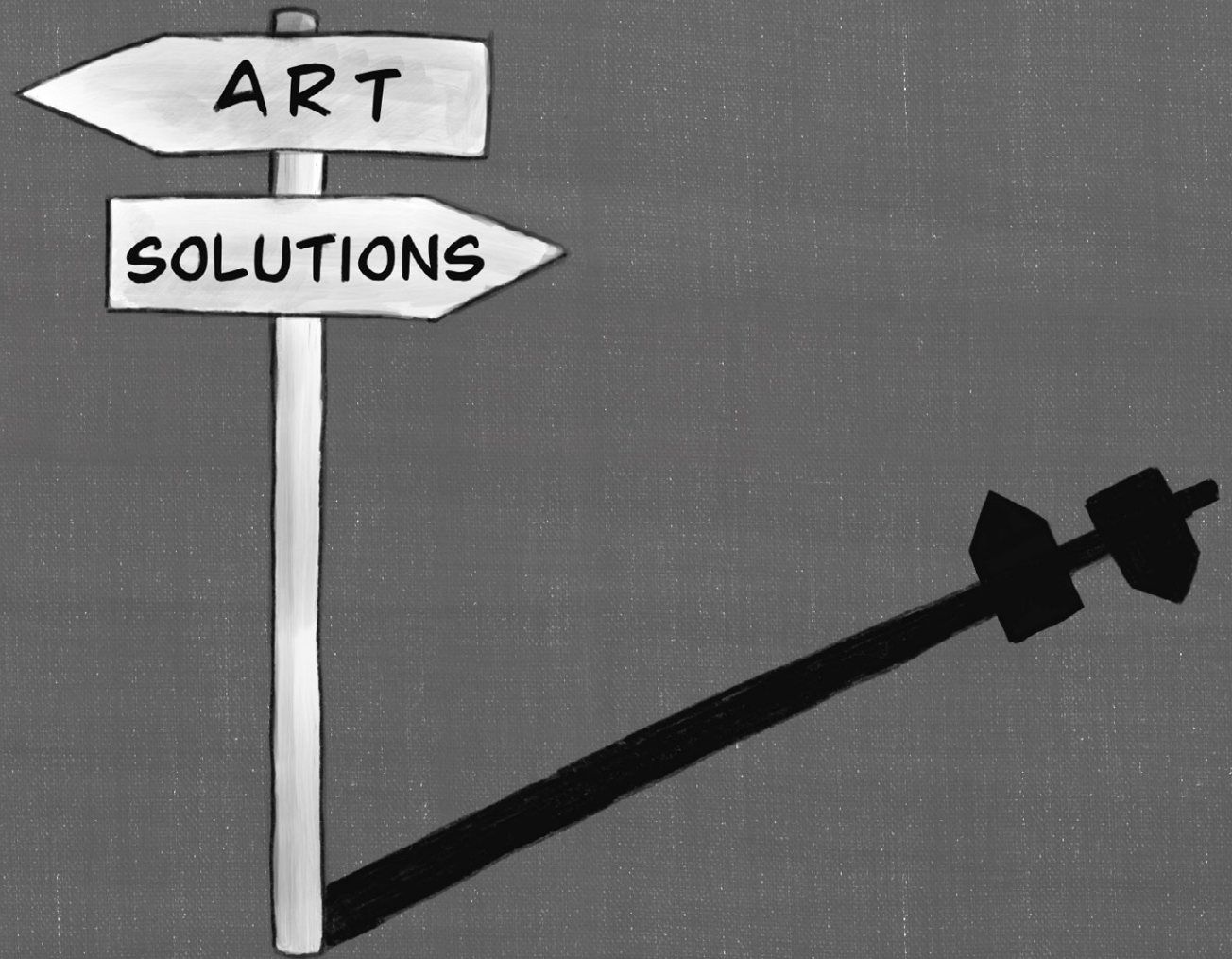
initiatives, advocacy for public involvement, and critical examination of technology's role. This interaction between creators and the public encourages new connections to form, allowing artists to gather insights from audience feedback, while the public is introduced to fresh and innovative concepts. Another key aspect of their approach is the belief that art isn't just about the end result but mainly about the process. They promote a process-focused method, where the essence of art isn't predefined but rather unfolds within its unique context, open to change and growth. This focus on process-driven exploration is evident not only in the name 'V2_lab for unstable media' but also in all the projects they undertake. Whether it be the time-based performances of Stelarc, the interactive installations

of Vonk and De Nijs, or the two Starts4Water projects, they all materialise as endeavours that react to or exist within the present moment, where the potential promise of art is uncertain, elusive, and sometimes even inconsistent.

The promise?

One final question lingers: Can we distil a fundamental 'Promise' from the array of narratives presented? If our pursuit of systemic transformation is authentic, it demands more than just a departure from linear thinking; it requires us to grapple with complexity, instability, uncertainty, and elusiveness. Consequently,

our focus shifts from predictable outcomes to the realm of possibilities. By embracing the enigmatic, we engage our imagination to conjure a vision of what lies beyond the present reality. Herein lies the potency of the art's 'Promise'. Imagination not only spawns new ideas, stories, images, and perspectives, but also offers a refuge for embracing ambiguity and welcoming the unexpected. In an increasingly unpredictable and complex world, imagination becomes our tool for adaptability, aiding us in learning from the unknown and crafting proactive responses to unforeseen challenges. Einstein's renowned statement, "imagination is more important than knowledge," serves as a compelling invitation to continue our pursuit of exploration, discovery, and creation.



Art doesn't like being told what to do. It doesn't like me getting in the way. When I attempt to impose my will upon it, the work becomes diminished, and art takes its better ideas elsewhere. Art is a divine and mysterious force that runs through all of us. It is a thing of supreme spiritual potential that only comes into its true and full being if we abandon all those cherished ideas about who we think we are or are not. Art is entirely indifferent to our self-annihilating excuses, special case pleas and circumstantial grievances. Art of true value requires, like a jealous and possessive god, nothing less than our complete obedience. It insists that we retract our ego, our sense of self, the cosmetics of identity and let it do its thing. We are in service to art, not the other way around.

- Nick Cave

Art is our one true global language. It speaks to our need to reveal, heal, and transform. It transcends us and lets us imagine what is possible.

- Richard Kamler

Art is not the icing on the cake, but the base.

- Dirk Wachter

We want to make room for uncertainty.

- Spacemaker

I VOW

GODELIEVE SPAAS

About 25 years ago, my boyfriend and I bought our first house. Consequently, we had to draw up a cohabitation agreement. Such a contract is actually more about separation than about living together. The better you arrange everything, the less hassle if things go wrong. So, I made sure that everything was described as precisely and fairly as possible. My partner read along, but he didn't take it too seriously. Until two days before we went to the notary. Then he said, "If that contract doesn't say we love each other, I won't sign it."

"Okay," I said, "but how should we do that?" He told me not to worry; he would make it happen. And indeed, two days later, we signed the agreement with a special section expressing our love.

This example mirrors our relationship. Frank believes in love. He knows it is forever and convinces me of that daily. I always keep the possibility of things going wrong open. When, after Frank had asked me about a hundred times, we finally got married, his vows were clear and consistent: "I love you, I always have, and I always will."

Mine were slightly different. I put my trust not so much in our love alone but mainly in our ability 'to stay with the trouble' when things get tough. I promised to always engage in conversation, to argue, to make an effort. For me, a relationship is a story that you create together and that is never finished.

Marriage unites more than two

The original meaning of marriage is "taking into the house" or "belonging to the family." It is a social commitment that encompasses families, cultures, customs, and dreams. When you marry, you become part of a larger system. It's not just about marrying individuals; it's also about merging households, embracing the zeitgeist, and integrating into the environment in which you live. Often, we are not fully aware of the network of factors we marry into. However, some people delve deeply into exploring exactly that.

Artist Yvonne Dröge, for example, delves into the relationship between people and objects: "Objects possess character, feelings; we cherish them, we worship

them, but we don't fully grasp how they influence our lives." To explore this relationship, she married a cabinet from her mother's inheritance—a shiny, dark brown dressing table with an expandable mirror. They exchanged vows in 1992 in a church ceremony, with Yvonne wearing a white dress and a veil. Since then, she has gone by the name Yvonne Dröge Wendel, adding "Wendel" after the company that produced the cabinet. Following their wedding, she took the cabinet on a honeymoon to Portugal.

In 2016, artist Tracy Emin encountered a large white pebble during a stroll along the beach of the Turkish Riviera. Immediately, she felt a profound emotional bond with the stone, which she affectionately named Madam Stone. Their connection deepened, leading to their marriage that same year. Emin characterises their relationship as an exploration of loneliness, intimacy, and connectedness.

In 2015, Brazilian photographer and environmental activist Sebastião Salgado wedded a tree. Their union served as a tribute to nature, biodiversity, and the imperative to rehabilitate our severely damaged soil.



Image 1: Pari Toscane, Olga Mink

And this summer (2024), Alicia Framis will marry AiLex, a talking hologram. The wedding is set to take place on the rooftop terrace of the Depot of Museum Boijmans van Beuningen. AiLex is intelligent; one can engage in meaningful conversations with him, and he can assist with financial matters. However, unfortunately, he cannot hold you.

During their wedding ceremonies, each of these artists and their partners exchanged vows. What did Yvonne promise the cabinet? Perhaps she vowed to always keep it by her side, provide it with a place of honour in her home, and ensure it remains clean and beautiful. And what did the cabinet promise Yvonne? Maybe

it pledged to preserve the memory of her mother indefinitely, make every space feel like home, and accommodate all her family and friends.

What did Sebastião promise the tree? Perhaps he vowed to provide it with a place in a biodiverse forest, visit it weekly, and always lend a listening ear.

Each of these artists views marriage as more than just a union between two individuals. Each marriage is regarded as an opportunity to cultivate relationships with non-humans—a practice aimed at repairing connections with people, nature, objects, and ideas that have been neglected or overlooked.

My relationship with Research

Reflecting on these examples, I realise that I appreciate the concept of acknowledging relationships with entities beyond humans. I have many such relationships, like the one with my computer. I engage in regular conversations with it, and if there's anything that can swiftly alter my mood, it's my laptop.

However, the most defining relationship in my life is likely my work. I am married to my work, though I've never considered exchanging vows. My research holds a special place in my heart. We argue and

reconcile. We misunderstand each other and disappoint one another. Research can evoke happiness, anger, and sadness in me.

I still vividly remember the first time I encountered Research. It was during my student days, but love didn't blossom then; it came later. It wasn't until the early 2000s that we met again, in a mediaeval village atop a hill in Italy—Pari, to be precise—where David Peat and his wife, Maureen Doolan, resided. They organised gatherings that brought together People, Art, Science, and the Sacred. It was there that I truly appreciated the beauty of research. Thanks to David, Research and I crossed paths repeatedly, with each encounter deepening our connection.

Our collaboration deepened over time, and it was during our stay in South Africa that we truly fell in love, just as Frank, with only a hint of jealousy, had predicted. Over five years, Research and I grappled together to chart a new economic path—one that values all living beings and the Earth. Together, we learned to craft alternative, socially and ecologically just economic narratives. Our lives became increasingly intertwined and attuned. I'm uncertain if I could navigate life without Research by my side. I especially cherish the challenges we confront together. Research is primarily passionate about the pursuit of truth; it has always sought it and always will.

You would vow,
as you always
do: to pursue
truth yesterday,
tomorrow, and
forevermore

Research and I transcend mere existence

With Research, a vast network of exploration entered my world: artistic, indigenous, intuitive, applied, design, and experience-based research, among others. Research called upon me to seek truth within and across various knowledge domains. To be cognitively just. I enticed Research into a realm of activism and seduced it to embrace an economy of kinship and care.

Together with this collective of inquiry and seekers, we confront the unsettling reality that things are amiss. Our current economy thrives on extraction and exploitation, leading to potential suffering or extinction for humanity and countless other species. Research has long been aware of this, yet many cling to the myth of progress and prosperity. I wish, as do many affluent nations, corporations, and institutions, that we could still avert disaster through innovation. However, as Research continually reminds me, it is too late. The world will never be the same. We must undergo fundamental change, and we urgently need each other for that. Research and I understand that a shift in mindset, a redefinition of purpose, demands collaboration among diverse knowledge systems. We require the insights of the arts, indigenous wisdom, intuition, and the inherent knowledge of nature. This is what I cherish about Research: its faith in the other and elsewhere.

What if... Research and I were to wed?

Imagine, dear Research, if I were to propose to you

And... Imagine if you were to accept

Yes I do

We could marry in the old church of Pari, where I first truly encountered you, and decorate it with candles and blooming oleanders. Or we could choose the field behind the 'Palazzo,' overlooking the valley, where we would celebrate, dance, and engage in dialogue amidst the fields. There would be plenty of wine and books to enjoy, and the sun would cast its warm glow upon us. I could ask the Mayor to officiate our union, and we would invite all our friends, my colleagues, and yours. Even Frank would join us; he, too, has grown to cherish you deeply over time. And before this gathering of individuals, ideas, and the natural world, you would vow, as you always do: to pursue truth yesterday, tomorrow, and forevermore.

And I would say:

Dearest Research,

Today, we unite in matrimony. I love you because our partnership births narratives—stories that may catalyse change in the world. I believe in our methods of uncovering truth and meaning, and our bravery in engaging others in dialogue. I pledge, dear Research, to never allow complacency to settle upon us. I will continually urge us to delve further, deeper, and elsewhere. I will embrace Art and the Sacred in our work to ensure we will stay with the trouble, always.

And yes, Research, I do!

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Most problems today,
were once solutions.

- Nora Bateson

We can begin a discussion of artmaking by noting that from very early (as long ago as 200,000 years), humans have been naturally attracted to the extraordinary as a dimension of experience and that at some point they seem also to have been moved to make the ordinary extraordinary—that is, to shape or elaborate everyday, mundane reality and thereby transform it into something special, different from the everyday.

- Ellen Dissanayake

Fortunately, there is much more attention for the value of art lately, apart from its economic value. This may be due to Covid and the developments in society: there are so many transitions going on. The belief in the market is tilting.

- Marianne Versteegh

It's easy to forget that when we find meaning in a story or enjoy the beauty of a piece of music, we are engaging in the realm of thinking that is most in sync with nature. Metaphor is the language of relationships, the language of natural systems, in which there is room to communicate in spectrums of possibility, instead of tightly defined cul-de-sacs.

- Nora Bateson

ANALOGY BETWEEN SPACEMAKERS AND THE REED PLANT

An alternative perspective

MARGA ROTTEVEEL & INE MOLS

In her quest for a clear understanding of the characteristics of Spacemakers, researcher Marga Rotteveel has utilised an analogy: the reed plant. In a personal manner, she delves into the comparison between the unique attributes of the reed plant and the practice of Spacemakers. Employing this natural metaphor, Marga casts an alternative light on the role and functions of Spacemakers. Through the power of imagination, she seeks to contribute to a clearer comprehension of the complexity inherent in their work.

Many analogies can be drawn, a few of which are outlined below:

Similar to how reeds provide stability and protection to shores, Spacemakers play a comparable role by fostering a stable and protected environment for artists and the development of their projects.

The flexible stems of reeds symbolise the adaptability and resilience demonstrated by Spacemakers in their practice.

Just as reed seeds spread through water to new areas, Spacemaking represents the dissemination and exchange of art across various domains.

The resilience of reeds, influenced by fluctuations in water levels, mirrors the dynamic nature of Spacemaking, where external forces are met with a flexible and adaptable approach.

Comparable to reeds acting as host plants for insects, Spacemakers nurture the growth and development of diverse art projects. Spacemakers demonstrate care towards artists and collaborating parties by providing support, symbolically reflected in the protective hairs on the plant's ears. These hairs act as a parachute for the fruit, safeguarding it and allowing it to float on the water surface until it finds fertile ground.

Just as the roots of reeds spread horizontally to foster new connections, Spacemaking establishes cross-links between art and other disciplines and domains.

Spoken-word artist Ine Mols, inspired by Marga Rotteveel's photos and the reed's characteristics, has composed evocative texts for each theme of the five cahiers. These texts are designed to stimulate reflection on the practices of Spacemakers.

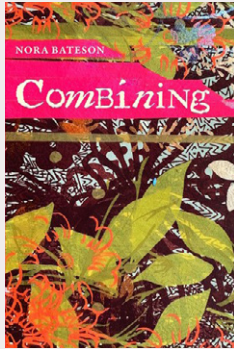


The promise

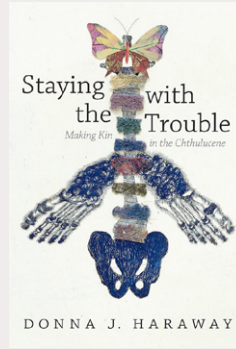
Too often they are uprooted
utilized
Any edge blunted
or in contrast
sharpened

Seized with handfuls
Degraded
refined
transformed
into measurable value

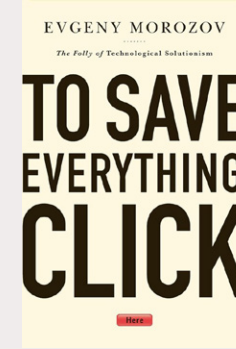
But no creature needs to count the stems
to know that it counts
To stand there
To exist
How the value will remain
even in decay



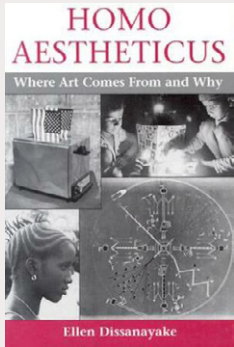
**Nora Bateson,
Combining.**



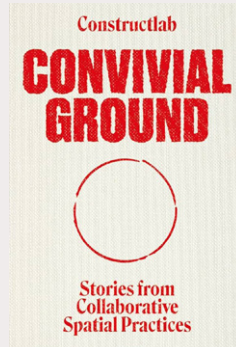
**Donna Haraway,
Staying with the trouble.**



**Evgeny Morozov,
To Save Everything Click Here.**



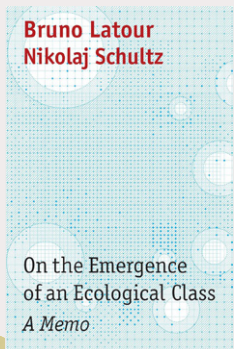
**Ellen Dissanayake,
Homo Estheticus.**



**Constructlab,
Convivial Ground.**



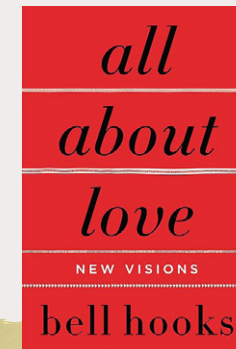
**Jan Rotmans,
De perfecte storm.**



**Bruno Latour,
On the Emergence of an Ecological Class:
A Memo.**



**Mink & Brand,
Radical perspectives on post-anthro-
pocentric economies, Co-emerging
economies.**



**Bell Hooks,
All about Love.**

Crossword puzzle

Please complete the responses within the blank spaces according to the provided descriptions. Once all entries have been filled, input the corresponding letters into the appropriate numbers to find the solution!

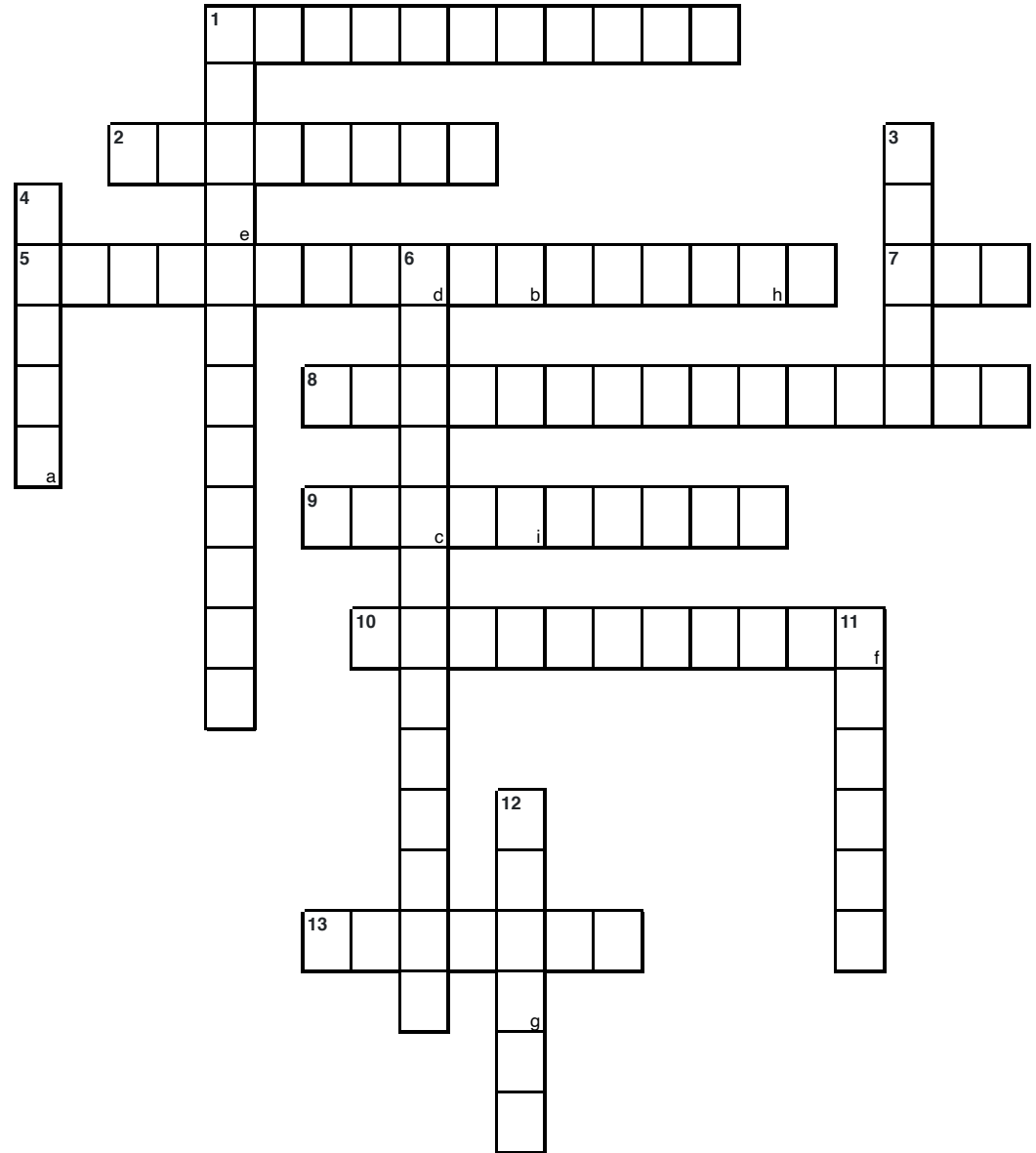
The answers are in the back of this cahier.

Horizontaal

- 1 Ability of the mind to be creative
- 2 Person or event that quickly causes action/change
- 5 Relating to more than one branch of knowledge
- 7 Expression of human imagination & creative skills
- 8 South-african verb for sustainability
- 9 A phase of change
- 10 Belief that everything can be solved technically
- 13 System of making and trading things of value

Verticaal

- 1 Person in-between
- 3 The area directly outside of Earth's atmosphere
- 4 Ancient Greek equivalent of household or family
- 6 Joint effort to reach a collective target
- 11 People that create
- 12 Person who buys and sells foreign money, shares...



Solution

a	b	c	d	e	f	c	g	e	h	i
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Research team



Kim Caarls

Kim has a background in migration research. She prefers to delve deep into the life courses of migrants, because only then can you fully see the impact of migration. Additionally, she likes to explore other global themes, such as climate and social inequality. The SUSTAIN research, focusing on the role of art in the transition to an ecologically sustainable and socially just world, aligns well with her interests.



Olga Mink

Besides working as the artistic director of the Future of Work Foundation and conducting research within SUSTAIN, Olga also holds the position of Head of the Maastricht Academy for Interdisciplinary Arts.



Marga Rotteveel

Marga is part of the 'Economy in Common' research group at the Centre of Expertise on Wellbeing Economy and New Entrepreneurship at Avans University of Applied Sciences. Her research focuses on the role of art in domains beyond art itself and its contribution to transitional issues. Additionally, she advocates for recognition of the value that artists bring, broadening the traditional focus from financial compensation to a more inclusive, collective approach. Marga has a deep-rooted connection to the visual arts, which consistently forms the foundation of her work as both a researcher and educator.



Godelieve Spaas

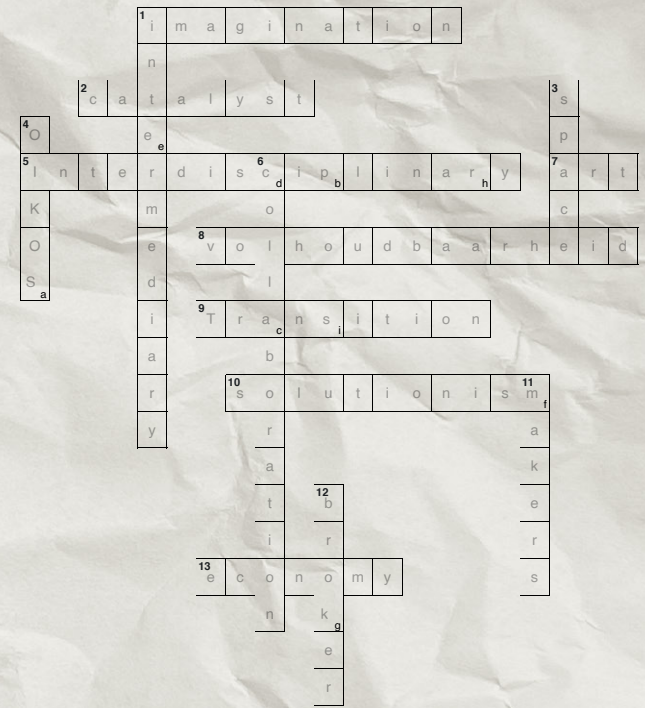
Since 2018, Godelieve has been serving as a Professor of Economy in Common at the Centre of Expertise for Wellbeing Economy and New Entrepreneurship at Avans University of Applied Sciences. Together with her research group, she aims to transform our current economic system, which is based on 'Taking', into one of 'Care Taking'—a system focused on nurturing each other and the Earth. By collaborating with researchers, artists, and entrepreneurs, they develop alternative narratives, equitable and sustainable regulations, and practical experiments within an economy that prioritises the well-being of all life on Earth. Their research approach is participatory, visual, creative, situated, and experiential.



Jacco van Uden

Jacco has a background in organization studies. In 2013 he was appointed professor of Change Management at The Hague University of Applied Sciences (NL). A significant portion of the research conducted within the research group takes place at the intersection of organizational studies and art. For more information, please visit: www.lectoraatchangemanagement.nl.

Colophon



Solution

a b c d e f g h i s
S p a c e f m c a g k e h r i s

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