<u>Research field</u>

Themes

Central to my recent work is looking at how technoscience (as a concept referring to the increasingly blurry traditional borders of science as 'the act of knowing' and technology as 'the act of doing') is used to narrativize the world. I am interested in how people construct webs of meaning based on the prevailing set of values within each epoch and how that negotiates the perception and reflection of ourselves in relation to the universe we inhabit. For example, in the West, animistic values saw ancient time as a magically infused world, theological values defined the Middles Ages as rigid hierarchical top-down world, and rationalist values powered The Enlightenment in debunking illusions, powers, belief systems of the previous epochs. In the 19th century, the era of scientism and industrialism, science became a kind of religion expected to provide instant explanations for everything.

Since then, the promise of technology has only been exacerbated by cultural and ideological trends. What fascinates me is the myth that humanity and civilization would be freed of its constraints by inventing artificial compensational technologies started the ascend of the dream of progress, of techno-utopianism. (Ancient and modern myths alike, they are an embodiment of ideological fables in which are meant to naturalize and neutralize orthodox values as if it was natural and unquestionable. Myths are used as a political strategy to impose the dominant value systems.) For example, Albert Robida's futuristic fantasy, La Vie electrique (1892), clearly exemplifies the desire of control over nature's once untamable climatic landscapes during the 19th century. He writes that human "*electricians opposes the aerial currents of the north with more powerful counter-currents, engulfing them in the core of an artificial cyclone and bearing them to the Saharas of Africa and Asia, where they reheat and create fertility by their torrential rains. Thus have we reconquered the Saharas of Africa, Asia and Ocenia; thus have we fertilized the Nubian sands and the burning wastes of Arabia.*"

The idea of the Sublime as an overwhelming natural force that threatens human beings also changes in the 19th century. From embodying the awesome and frightening grandeur that the Romantic poets associated with nature, instead became attached to culture and technology - or as Leo Marx calls it, the 'technological sublime'. The split with nature and God put the oyster in our hands. We came to see culture and nature as one and the same thing, like reuniting with a long lost twin and struggling with power relations while trying to make amends. It is here where most of my stories begin.

Mode(Mindset)

In recent history, this bubble we call 'universe' has expanded in complexity, namely the consequence of new relational dynamics in economy, politics, technology, science, ideology, culture.etc. To paraphrase a Romanian historian by the name of Lucian Boia; there is no such thing as influence, only a negotiating web of extremely complex relationships. Determinism in all its forms may help to provide easy answers, perhaps it is even a human default in the desire for coherence. But just as benign as that may seem, it is also a reductionist way to explain the logic of causality and furthermore a way to justify irresponsibility. In my work, I try and juggle with these different dynamic forces and see them each as having individual agency. I also like to experiment with the choreography of these actors; just as Prejudice quickly experiences a momentary bout of liberation from the confines of gravity, ready to embrace the skies, its journey downwards is equally matched when it comes crushing down into my hands, breaking free of its assumptions, until my other hand waits to catch and launch this entity again, re-shifted, re-networked, renewed.

Practice

In my daily life, I have always aspired to simultaneously create and expose parallel dimensions both rhetorically and literally. This comes from a resistance to accept official truth as an infallible absolute (but sometimes admittedly, out of dogged stubbornness and fierce independence). By looking at how prevailing technoscientific values create certain realities, I often find my way through narrativizing grander narratives. I also find myself hanging out at spots where the mysterious dwells, gaps left out by actors like religion, science or politics. It's a strange and imaginary place, because it is here that the actors have failed to unexplained the unknown. To me, these spaces feel almost like the virtual reality game, Second Life, where you get to the end of a road and blackness just lingers ahead. Sometimes you see that people have already constructed bridges to cross over, and depending on the materials you find, the bridges differ in form, strength, beauty, stability, size...etc. Ad sometimes I like to build my own bridges as it allows for me to get to new destinations to suit different occasions.

       In light of this, one way of looking at my practice is conspiratory. Conspiratory in the sense of filling the gaps of between discourses, facts, and reality to allow for the mysterious to take me to other intervals where I can try and make sense of everything and anything. The mysterious fuels my paranoid search for details which may or may not be related. I scrutinise and (over) rationalise signs and codes in an effort to piece them together until they appear standing. Just like conspiracy theories, I fluctuate between the esoteric and exoteric, overground and underground, official and imagined. Creating alternate realities as a means to expand and critique current norms is what I wish to continue with, however, I am also keenly aware of the fine line where belief systems become officially implemented so much so, that it's dogmatism defeats the purpose of its original reason to exist. One could say that my work is "pseudoistic", that is pseudo-scientific, pseudo-philosophical, pseudo-literally, pseudo-critical, pseudo-pseudo!
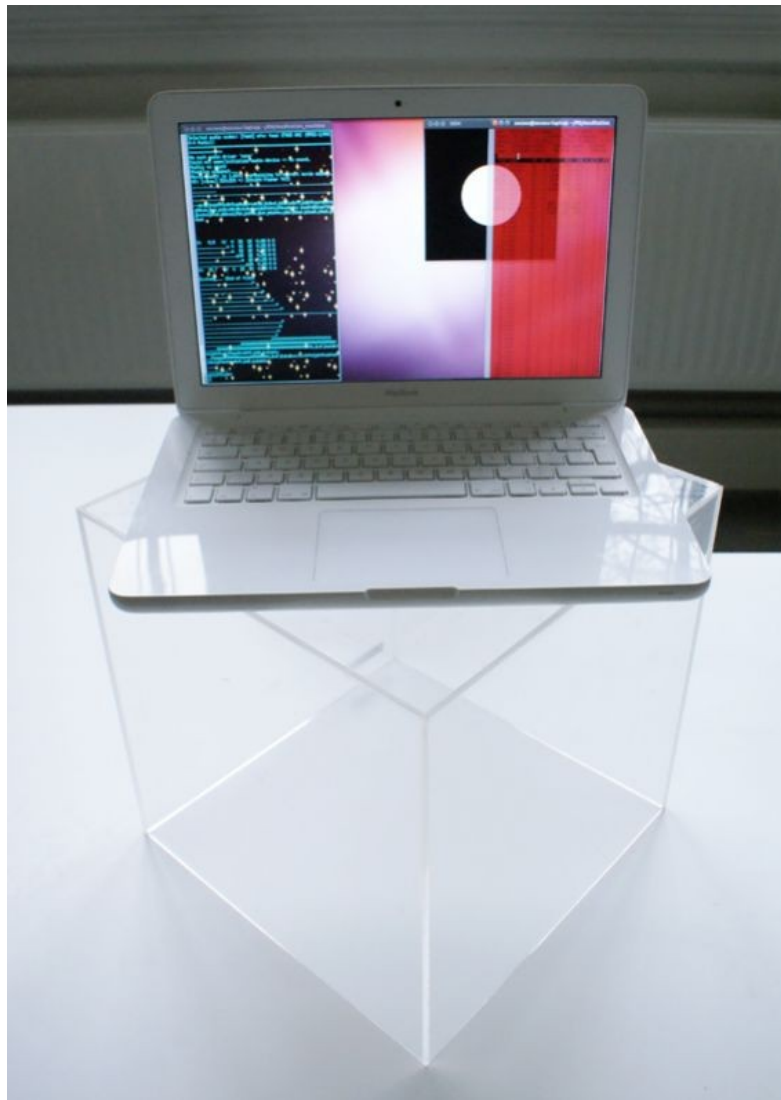
Meditation Machine.

Meditation Machine was a installation whereby my white laptop was set on a transparent perspex box of 30cm cubed and flanked by a set of speakers. Using the metaphor of my laptop's CPU(the computer's internal processing) as the body's energy flow I transformed it's CPU fluctuating information into a low droning sound resembling a kind of heart beat or flow of breath. This audio was then visualised taking the form of a pulsating white circle.

      Visually, the desktop of my screen consisted of two rectangular windows on the far left and right, a square window under the right window and periodic pop-ups near the left window. The right window was red and translucent with a table of updating CPU usage on the right side. These fluctuating numbers corresponded with the sound, while the white circle located under the right window was the visualisation of the sound which can be interpreted as a kind of meter monitoring these internal movements. The left window featured scrolling text of the computer's internal monologue. This served as the narrative space in which prompted certain programs and pop-ups to open and close. When an application opens, the CPU usage increases thereby triggering the sound and visual to grow louder and faster. Similarly when it the application closes, the CPU usage decreases triggering the sound and visual to become softer and slower.

This project was programmed in Pure Data, a real-time graphical programming environment for audio, video and graphical processing. Pure Data is an open source program that was originally developed by Miller Puckette. Using Pure Data I was able to sonically amplify the CPU information while GEM (Graphics Environment for Multimedia) visually rendered the sound into the white circle. The control mechanism of this installation was a bash script (a Unix shell command processor) that called upon various CPU-intensive applications to open and close, consequently causing the differences of the fluctuations of the internal processing to be seen and heard.

This outcome was a result of my research of the myth of technology as a mechanism capable of compensating for our inherent flaws and transcend human deficiencies. Apparently, machines are able to magically relieve the trappings of interpersonal connections, promising to cross the divide of living to the dead, to transcend the confines of time, to abolish physical/emotion distance and even to reach the divine. Technology as compensation machine (Kluitenberg, 2005) then becomes the embodiment of its' inventors desires. In some ways, it is the instrument in which our irrational desires are invested and projected in, however are always falling short of expectation. This is because the very nature of desire lies in its unattainability. Through technology, this impossible expectation is visibly manifested and experienced (e.g. discussion around why smartphones are dumb). From this line of thought, technology is thus the physical manifestation of irrational desires which cannot be satisfied. As a rhetorical gesture, I attempt to free my laptop of its' inventors desires by way of meditation. I was inspired by the meditation techniques of the Shambhala teachings of Tibetian Buddhists. The goal of this practice is to direct full attention to your breath while the act of thinking should be given little attention so that it remains in the background. Adapting this into a digital realm, I created an environment for my laptop to focus on its interior landscape so that conceptually, it became a system of responsive, self-reflexive inter-relations.

Benji

Benji is a fictitious entity that journeys into the world of bio-information as a commodity and consequently envisions the prospects of genetic discrimination and the increasing personalisation of marketing strategies. Named after the child of Sergey Brin, co-founder of Google.com and Anne Wojcicki, co-founder of 23andme.com (a privately held personal genomics and biotechnology company), Benji represents the ideological and economic union as historically practiced in royal political marriages and commonly witnessed in corporate mergers.

Inheriting strands from both parents, Benji's mission is to be the world's leading DNA search engine. Using state of the art technology, Benji matches you directly to personalised advertisements based on your class rank which is determined by an advanced analysis of your genetic code. So revolutionary is it, that even behavioural patterns can be detected to predict and preempt every decision so that your consumer cravings may be satisfied. This narrative also touches on the supernatural powers that users imbue in search engines or perhaps technology in general. Reflecting on the irrational and yet convincing mechanisms of belief experienced in fortune telling and horoscopes, a certain willingness to believe is perhaps key in creating more possibilities to discriminate.

Benji eventually developed into a writing piece that evolved into the imaginary biography of Professor Benji Brin, the man behind the corporation. Adopting aggrandising rhetoric from texts written on the Church of Scientology leader, L. Ron Hubbard, I continued to add to a few more flavors of advertising talk and religious chant. This became a short paper which was submitted to ISEA (International Symposium on Electronic Art) this year, where a presentation of 15 minutes was followed up. In the presentation I assume the role of a close friend of Benji Brin and speak briefly about his history leading up to his scientific discoveries. I also explain in further detail about how Benji, the DNA search engine works while subtly underlining their ideology, view on race and political aspirations. The next manifestation will soon take the form of a video that mimics the aesthetic qualities and rhetoric of TED talks.

Struggling with finding a way to deal with online privacy, I invented an allegorical world where I could take the privacy debate onto the genetic level and into the potential future. In this world genetic information is under central control of a private multinational DNA search engine called Benji. Through this project, I wanted to highlight and problematise the activities of centralising health and DNA records. A plausible consequence is genetic discrimination as witnessed during the eugenics movement earlier on last century. Secondly, as a reflection on the pharmaceutical industry working towards personalised, custom-made medicine, I wanted to push the limits of bio-information as a commodity - targeted advertising at its most efficient. Finally, what was also interesting was the kind of reverence to the mysterious power of the veiled search engine. It is veiled because the inner-workings of the search results powered by secret algorithms are shrouded by walls. Perhaps trivial, though compelling, empathy and the desire to relate plays a major role. Psychologically, it functions as a kind of self fulfilling prophecy, a desire which pre-empts and causes realities.

Where No Flag Has Gone Before

Where No Flag Has Gone Before was a live bluescreen studio installation set up so that visitors of the exhibition could reenact their own glorious moment of the first planting of the American flag on the surface of the moon.

This installation was a part of the first years' final show of MA Networked Media, Piet Zwart Institute. It was located in Roodkapje, Rotterdam and the title of show was called "No Such Thing as Repetition". Complete with props and costume, consisting of a large American flag together with the flag pole, homemade space-suit pieced together with white disposable painters' coveralls, cardboard, bits and bobs from an old coffee machine, white spray paint, gloves, an unused back-pack, motorbike helmet and the foam insoles of moon boots, I helped visitors gear up for the arduous journey to the moon.

Once prepared and dressed, the newly-initiated astronauts step into the bluescreen area where the upright flag awaited them to pick it up and gradually plant it back. The participant had 20 seconds to perform this act as it was being recorded and composited in the open-source computer program, Pure Data. The background image of the very first participant's video, was the iconic photograph of Buzz Aldrin standing next to the American flag on the moon, taken during the 1969 Apollo 11 mission. However, the only difference is that in this video, the participant replaces Buzz and becomes the national hero. Consecutive video recordings of people reenacting the planting of the flag serve to become the background footage for the next participant. Gradually accumulating, the final video graphs the episodes of reenactors as colonisers on the moon.

Whether the 1969 moon landing event was real or staged has been at the centre of much debate. Shifting focus away from its contested reality, I decided to rather scrutinise the very moment that has inscribed itself so deeply into the collective global consciousness: that of the planting of the American flag on the moon. I selected to render this iconic image as a political symbol of colonisation in the name of technological progress. The moon landing is one example that clearly reflects the grand story of political motivation driving technological progress, more specifically anticipating the ongoing US program of outer space colonisation as an incentive to preserve self-serving powers.

<u>Project proposal</u>

The weather in daily life seems like the most banal topic to bring up, and is usually done to the prevention of the oncoming of awkwardness or boredom. But yet it holds such a omnipresent role for much of our lives and that of our ancestors. Gods were created after them and weather is almost always present in myths of origin. Our ancestors interpreted them as omens, signs of the gods emotional state and awesome power. The biblical Flood formed part of the arsenal of the forces of divine justice. However as time passed, they were demoted to natural phenomena. The secularisation of the weather, however still demands the logic of sin and punishment. Climate change are generally considered perverse effects – unexpected but 'deserved' – of our abuse of the natural world. Here our relationship to that twin, nature, weather gets complicated.

The topic of Global warming is such a controversy that has been inversely elevated to the level of conspiracy. Why is this?

I want to look at climate change and forecasting as a starting point to decode the current ideological tendencies at play manifested through media and politics. I want to explore what is means to predict and prepare for our futures, and how technology seems to be placed in the position to facilitate this. Climate change is highly speculative, and the debate even more so and yet the environmentalist and liberals alike are equally sure of their predictions. Both advocates and critics of the global warming thesis are responsible for framing the debate in ideological terms. Those who dispute the dangers of global warming generally favour the capitalist version of progress. faith in technology, industry, economic development and the profit motive is total. Society and environment are secondary concerns.The members of the other camp put society and environment before economic development. They oppose neo-liberal laissez-faire attitudes. They do not like globalization, which they see as leading to social and economic disparities and environmental disasters, including global warming.

In this 2004 article (Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern), Bruno Latour feels deeply sorry about his state of affairs in these 'most depressing of times'. It is a essay which he writes about the ethnics of critique and how they should be used. Latour dedicated his life as a sociologist in try to show "the lack of scientific certainty" inherent in the construction of facts. After reading an article in a doubtful New York Times on global warming he is shocked to see that his intentions of emancipating the public from assumptions has now backfired. He writes: "the danger would no longer be coming from an excessive confidence in ideological arguments posturing as matters of fact– as we have learned to combat so efficiently in the past– but from an excessive *distrust* of good matters of fact disguised as bad ideological biases! While we spent years trying to detect the real prejudices hidden behind the appearance of objective statements, do we nowhave to reveal the real objective and incontrovertible facts hidden behind the *illusion* of prejudices?"

And finally, this brings me to conspiracy - a strategy used in the ideological war and its loaded with guns that can forecast forward into the future.