



Diller + Scofidio, **Blur Building**, exposition pavilion for Swiss Expo, Yverdon-les-Bains, 2002.

Techno-poetry of Augmented Reality and Interactive Architecture

Interview with Daan Roosegaarde
Arie Altena

One late summer's day, I visited Daan Roosegaarde's studio, a warehouse on an industrial site just outside Waddinxveen. In the last two years, Roosegaarde's career has taken off like a rocket; ten people now work in his studio developing and realizing his projects. Brimming with energy and infectious enthusiasm, he shows me around the warehouse. Here they store ready-made modules for his interactive installations, like *Dune* and *Liquid Space*, work on prototypes, and test innovative materials. Daan Roosegaarde's work is exhibited all over the world and he flies regularly to the United States and Asia. He has become a true artist-entrepreneur because of his method of working. The artistic concepts he seeks to realize require this type of dedication.

Experience is central to your work, it's all about what you feel and perceive. Is this more important than the discursive meaning of a piece?

My work is about stimulating connections and making people aware of them. We live in a relational society: your relational network determines who you are. Being able to build relationships and knowing how to fine-tune them is extremely important. If you walk through a tunnel and *Dune* reacts to you, then you become aware of your own body, of your relationship to other people, and of your relationship to architecture. *Liquid Space* was more successful at the Oerol Festival on the island Terschelling compared to the STRP Festival in Eindhoven. This was because of the context. It was located outside, surrounded by nature, with the result that the public attributed all sorts of natural properties to an artificial installation. This is the type of narrative I'm trying to encourage; it gives meaning to a piece. I make a work of art, visitors become participants, I watch them, and I learn. I engage the audience from the moment they first experience something. The first reaction you want is 'Wow!' – the old grey matter keeps on working even then – a dialogue starts between the work and the participant. In a way I make unfinished films and visitors have the starring role. *Liquid Space* is concerned with something that people think is alive: conveying a natural feeling by means of something artificial, and people will experience it as an extension of themselves. It's comparable to an escalator that you can also experience as an extension of the body. Your body adjusts to it, adapts itself. This is something you feel if you walk up an escalator that isn't working.

It's about incorporating technology, you make it tangible and you anticipate it?

I am interested in how technology develops in a natural way, how technology can dramatically change reality without us being aware of it because we adapt to it. Technology has resulted in a new nature: it is *supernatural*. It contains a poetry, techno-poetry. It's very interesting to see what happens when technology crawls off the screen and becomes part of the world around us. I want to encourage people to think about things like Augmented Reality by letting them experience it. Art provides a redefinition of reality and asks, 'Is this what we want?' It's bizarre that people feel threatened when they walk through a tunnel where hundreds of cameras are observing them, while they just love it when they see 10,000 light fibres light up,



Studio Roosegaarde, **Dune 4.2**, permanent interactive landscape beside the river Maas in Rotterdam, 2009.



Studio Roosegaarde, **Dune 4.2**, permanent interactive landscape beside the river Maas in Rotterdam, 2009.



Studio Roosegaarde, **Liquid Space 6.1**, public interactive artwork placed on the island Terschelling for Atelier Oerol, 2009.

as happens in *Dune*. This is the power and provocation of design. The role of the new media artist is to give meaning to these types of developments. Who else will do it otherwise? As an artist you do this by engaging with the world.

Is this why you think it so important that *Dune* is located in the public space?

‘That is key. And I didn’t rest until we achieved this. *Dune* was developed for the public space. It has been exhibited about 70 times, usually in as public a space as possible. The corridor at the Netherlands Media Art Institute (NIMk) in Amsterdam and the Maastunnel in Rotterdam are examples of this. *Dune 4.2* is permanently installed on the banks of the Maas River in Rotterdam. It is a wonderful example of a work that claims its own space and makes a place for itself. If you read Mondrian’s writings about his hope that art and life would merge, how he wanted to manifest that art in society, he’s not talking about museums, but about work that is truly part of the world. And that is precisely why we seek out public spaces: my most recent media art is about our world in the here and now, and is concerned with art, culture, creative industries, daily life, media and industry.

Your engagement with the world is extremely positive. You don’t create technological installations that scare people.

Yes, that’s a choice. People talk about technology as something to be feared, but it’s better to focus on the good things you can do with technology. To quote Kevin Kelly: ‘Technology is everything which was invented after you were born’. I believe that you can make technology your own by conducting a relationship with it and by provoking engagement with it. And in the same way, you can lay claim to artistry and autonomy in your work with technology. Things only become worse if you close the door in its face.

In your work, you introduce a possible future with spaces that respond to you, spaces that feel what you feel and think.

That future is already here. It just has to be completed. In a strange way I have already visited the future, I already know it. Flexible screens, 3-D printing, Augmented Reality, StreetView – all of these are already here. I’m more interested in bringing the future into the present and pushing it a centimetre further. I’m not that interested in futurism, the ‘what-if’ question. I’m interested in the poetry of it. I want to make it tangible; I want people to touch it. The way we look at black-and-white television now is the way we will look at ‘dead’ objects in the future, objects that don’t have any sensors and don’t react to outside input. This is what Augmented Reality is very much concerned with. But the key question is, who is going to make it, and who has control over it? Who has the agency? Look at how people use their iPhones. Technology is so much a part of our social identity. It’s going to speak our language; it’s becoming more and more simple. I’d like to see a real merging. I’d like to see it become so accessible and understandable that people can play with it themselves. I believe in co-control.

The Poetics of Space

It's tremendously important for you that the work is not about technology...

I am not interested in techniques – for me they are merely tools. An installation of mine has to work perfectly, because it has to be about the question of what it generates, what it stirs up – it has to transcend media. My work has aesthetic value because that way I can lure people in; the users have to be unconsciously seduced. Once they're inside, I can enter into a dialogue with them, manipulate them, make a point, make them conscious of something, make them do things they wouldn't otherwise do, but that they experience as natural. Technology is so important now because it's such a significant part of who we are, because it has so many mediating qualities. I also find it exciting because you can make things that are never finished, things that encourage interaction. A lot of so-called interactive art is not interactive; it's only responsive. Interactive means if you give the work a slap, it will slap you back. This is how you construct a story, and then you can stimulate social engagement.

How do you work with space?

I would like to create spaces that are not finished, spaces that have a sort of openness in relation to the user. Space is everywhere; we define space by erecting walls, doors and windows, but what is a wall exactly? Is it a mediator? A partition? Is it permeable? I am interested in the mediatory properties of space: then it is concerned with the relationship between humans and space and between people themselves. Architecture is frequently busy restricting human behaviour: there are requirements a building has to meet, and things that are not allowed. I am particularly interested in the opposite: what a building should generate in its occupants.

You also studied architecture...

I was one of the first non-architects to attend the MA architecture course at the Berlage Institute. At a workshop the architect Rem Koolhaas once said to me: 'Daan, you'll never be an architect'. I thought, 'Perhaps that's true, but it doesn't mean I can't make architecture!' I enjoy working at the interface between art, design and architecture and that I am embraced and vilified by all three of these disciplines. I'm convinced that within five years we'll create architecture, and that within ten years we'll grow architecture with self-generating materials; then there will no longer be a need for design.

On the same afternoon I also interviewed Daan Roosegaarde about the fashion project *Intimacy*. This part of the interview is published online by V2_ Institute for the Unstable Media as 'Fashion that Compels Intimacy' in a translation by Laura Martz (www.v2.nl/archive/articles/fashion-transparency-intimacy). Some parts of this text overlap with the V2_ interview. Re-used with kind permission of V2_.

The Diorama Revisited

Erkki Huhtamo

An abstract geometric line drawing consisting of numerous thin black lines that intersect to form a complex, multi-layered structure. The lines create a sense of depth and perspective, resembling a series of overlapping planes or a stylized architectural facade. The overall effect is that of a dynamic, three-dimensional space defined by two-dimensional lines.