neural

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> Scripting Green

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> interview
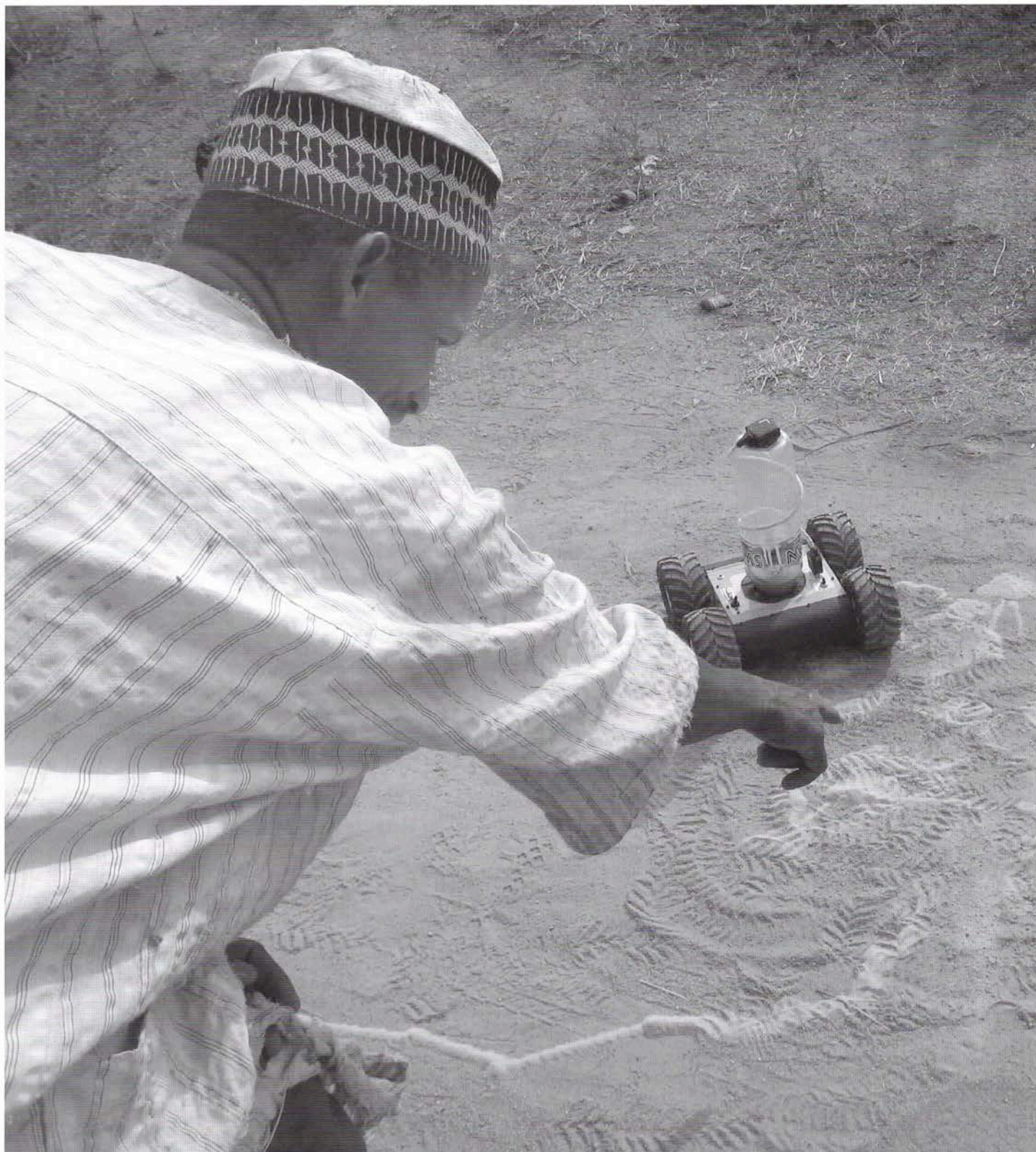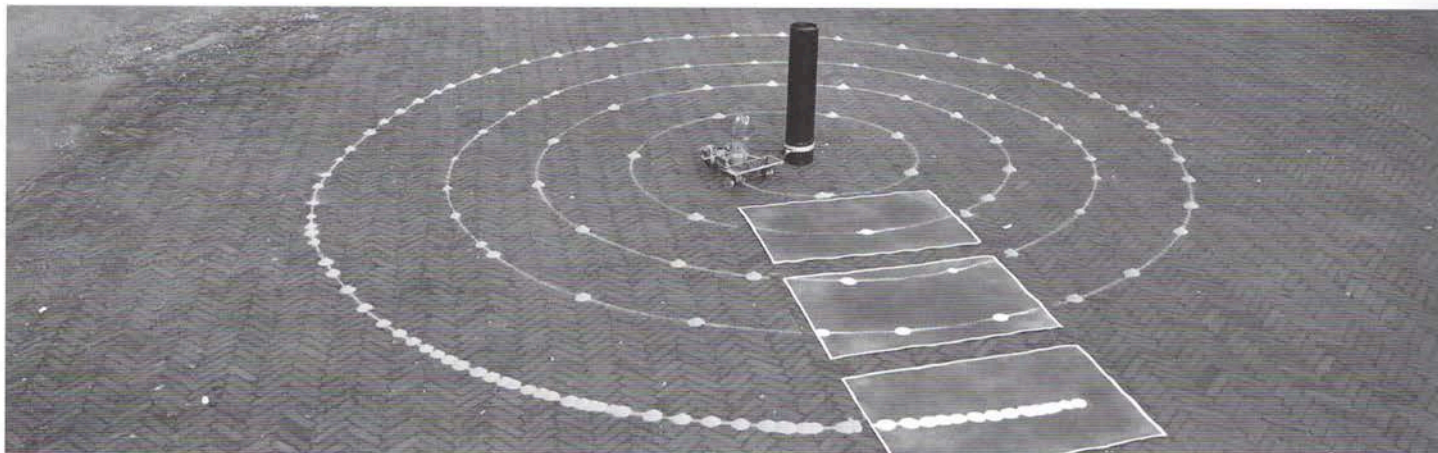
& One of your first projects was the seminal "Amsterdam Realtime", which revealed your passion for GPS-based personal maps. At the end of 2002, Amsterdam's residents were invited to be equipped with GPS devices that had been co-developed by the Waag Society and artist Jeroen Kee. Their calculated geographical positions were sent in real time to software that visualized these data as lines. From these lines a (partial) map of Amsterdam constructed itself. This mediation of territory generated as personal maps has already pervaded the mobile phones world, but there are very few critical approaches discussing how the experience of a territory largely depends on the map you're using. What's your approach to this mediation? What was the reaction of contributors when they saw their abstracted path?

For me, my fascination for maps stems from my own very bad sense of direction. I like exploring landscapes and cities very much – and having a reliable map is very important. What you say is very true: my experience of the place is very much determined by the map I use. Also, my decisions on where to go depend on the map I use. I find it always very interesting to change maps after a day or two; that is the best way to find out what a specific map does to me. So when we developed AmsterdamREALTIME it was for me a focus of interest on finding out how both participants and audiences react to a particular visualization. We designed the project so that the audience would identify with the

participants, more than "spy on them", so they would leave the exhibition and imagine themselves also drawing a line, being a pencil on the surface of the earth, rather than being in the surveying position. All the participants got a printout of their individual route after having been in the project. This worked very well. They experienced the maps as a portrayal of themselves, something they wanted to keep, to show to their grandchildren, as one of the participants stated.

The work that properly channelled your interest in GPS technology was undoubtedly "MILKproject". Developed with Ieva Auzina and the RIXC centre, it mapped the so- called "MilkLine", the path of milk produced by Latvian farmers, transformed into cheese by a local factory, transported to Netherlands, stored, and sold in Utrecht to Dutch residents. This milk track in what you call "Europe as Europe. No borders, just land with people and things that move" is unveiling the landscape of recent food economics beyond stereotypes (e.g. cheese as symbolic of the Netherlands). Milk has additional symbolic meaning being the first food that all mammals consume after birth.The resulting installations used custom developed software to track and map this unique process. Did you want to question food economy through a very symbolic case, or more generally to unveil a specific human intervention in natural feeding processes?

For me it was both. The socio-political setting, a context in which the project is often

positioned, is for me not relevant in the sense of "art for social change". It is basically a powerful artistic material to work with. The socio-political subjects you mention, like the food-economy or Europe, have a lot of layers of meaning and angles to look at, that I can work and play with. That's why this is a fruitful field for creating interesting work. After doing AmsterdamREALTIME, my priority was to investigate more deeply what happens when people are able to see their own tracks. The custom developed software was primarily designed to make it possible for people to recognize their own tracks in a very direct and intuitive manner. For example, the thickness of the line and the transparency were determined by the speed of movement, so places where the participants had stopped, stood out as thick nodes. The decision not to show borders, cities, roads or other features normally depicted on maps but "just land with people and things that move" was designed to keep the focus on people's movements. The aim was not so much to "question" food economy, rather to use it as an area that we are all related to and can identify with, as both participants and audiences.

"Nomadic Milk" was the next chapter, taking place in Nigeria. Here you used a very simple robot, able to "draw" a simple map (lines and dots) with sand on the ground. What were the most important differences from the MILKproject? How did people react to the unveiled paths? Why was mapping significant

in this context?

After doing MILKproject I was curious to work with people for whom mobility is an intrinsic part of their lifestyle. Both Nigerian nomadic cow herders and truck drivers depend on mobility for economic survival. So the country offered good opportunities for work. The decision to work with milk economies again was not really symbolic - it is now relatively easy for me to work directly with dairy producers because I have real experience and knowledge in the area. This is not to be underestimated. Another important reason is that I like cows. And I should also mention: from a Dutch perspective the cow is a logical artistic subject when dealing with landscape depiction. The GPS drawing robot I work with is an important innovation in the project. It was primarily developed out of the need for presenting GPS tracks in outdoors situations, independent of power supply or shelter, but the robot became more meaningful and layered during the process. The robot draws GPS tracks directly on the ground by replotting the tracks to a chosen spatio-temporal scale. The sand drawings are used both to present the tracks to the participants, as well as to the audience in exhibition situations later. I found that the robot functions as a performative tool, making the GPS tracks very tangible and physically present. The approach brought interesting new problems to the field of drawing. The representation of both time and space had to be compressed, scaled, and deformed in order to make the robot draw a sand line that the

participants and audiences could relate to in a direct manner. In my projects I so far have totally respected the GPS-data and their visualizations as a form of realism. This started to shift when working with the GPS drawing robot: As it is impossible to zoom in and out on the sand drawing, I had to manipulate parts of the tracks by enlarging them partially, shifting the time scale relative to the total track and other manipulations in order to keep them recognizable for the participant. Relevant details would otherwise get lost with the lack of detail of the sand track. While adjusting the software to be able to perform these functions, I realized that we were actually building a basic editing tool for GPS data! I find this utterly fascinating. The manipulated tracks turned out to be something in-between drawn routes from memory and hard core GPS route registration. To my surprise the manipulated tracks became even more "real" for the participants - if being recognizable is a criterion for realism. So this robot and the software with which I manipulate tracks will keep me occupied for a while.

In "Souvenir | The Landscape as a place of work" you collaborated with Ivar van Bekkum to track farmers who work the fields for crops. Can you tell me more about the outcome of this project?

In this project we were able to test the robot to create tracks it wasn't designed for – very geometrical tracks of potato farmers. For the Nigerian project we decided to develop the robot Techno-African style, meaning that we

would develop it so that it was good enough for its purpose, and not one step further. Being able to draw parallel lines perfectly was not on the list. The Souvenir project was one big visual bug test of the robot's navigational skills. The beauty of the tracks is mostly determined by the unique lack of precision of the robot in the stage of development it was in by then. We also focused more on the relation between tracks and audiences than tracks and participants. Therefore we made blue mono-prints of the sand tracks, and offered them for a prize comparable with a pair of jeans (only for the duration of the project). The exhibition was in a very touristic village, and we tried to seduce the audiences of both the exhibition and website to at least be tempted to buy one. Notwithstanding the fact that the tracks are very similar, the audience really had a hard time picking out a print they wanted to buy! Maybe even because of that. After running the website for 3 days, I got an email from Australia, stating that the best prints were already gone and asking did we have more to pick from in stock?!!! I was utterly amazed. But for me it was proof that making art for sale can be a relevant way of making an audience really interact with the work.

In all these projects, more so than the modalities of documenting the process, it seems important to note how the local people got involved and also how the installation's spectators reacted. These two worlds (urban and the countryside) used to be almost

separate in the past. How do you think the natural environment is affecting the urban nowadays?

Wow, that's a difficult question. The truth is that this separation of the rural and the urban never ceases to amaze me. Food of course is the inevitable connection between the two worlds, and in particular the transportation of food, so I seem to be in the heart of the matter, no?

In "Radio Oostvaart" you performed 15 "vodcasts" in three completely different areas around Almere, in the Netherlands, showing how people from these areas (a natural reserve, the urban environment and the agricultural environment) interact with their animals. What peculiar traits did you note? And do you think that this very instinctive communication (between humans and animals) has some underrated characteristics that we're missing in our overcrowded information environment?

The project stemmed from my fascination in the totally different attitudes people have towards animals as soon as they encounter them in differed kinds of landscapes. In the overcrowded Dutch situation, these areas can be close together. I wanted to focus on the "tone of voice" with which people talk to animals. And see if there is another "melody" involved in different landscape situations. For me the recording of the birdwatchers in this small place was the most successful. They fly over the biggest Dutch flat-water area every

month and count all the water birds in about 3-4 hours. As they had to get the job done they were not distracted by my presence and continued counting in this professional monotonous tone as if I was not there. Very beautiful.

You wrote "In my arrogance I thought I could see... But during a period in which I regularly walked with bird-connoisseurs in woods and open fields, it occurred to me that I completely need to start learning to see again. My landscape was changed forever, now filled with bird names... Does everybody live in a world in which they do not see more than they do see?" Do you think then that a paradigmatic change in the perception of nature can be driven by information?

For me the experience was rather optimistic, from it I am now convinced that it is always possible to learn to "see more", but for a paradigmatic shift information alone is not enough. For me, hard core practice was also needed. I had to spend many hours "in the field" at horrible early hours and bad weather conditions (this is still The Netherlands, remember). The learning of "seeing more" is driven by another attitude of perception. And this also shifts your identity a little bit. That's what I like about it most. I have written an extensive essay about the subject that still can be downloaded from the Beelddiktee.nl website

More generally speaking, how does nature now contribute to a proper "ecology of sounds", given that our soundscapes are heavily polluted in urban spaces?

I always try to avoid coloured descriptions like "polluted" or "proper" for sounds. Even the word "ecology" I would never use, as if one sound depends on the other - which of course is not the case. I have to admit though that I personally strongly prefer situations where you can hear only one kind of sound at a time. For example bars without music where only the mixture of voices and laughter is to be heard. Or landscapes with bird sounds without traffic noise in the background. But this preference, attitudes of perception as you might call it, is

probably provoked by the practice of doing sound recording. I once tried to record the sound of grazing cows, and I was really annoyed by some birds, nightingales even if I remember correctly, that spoiled my recordings by never shutting up. I hated those sounds!

In "Spiral Drawing Sunrise" you visualized the sunrise by means of its increasing solar power in public spaces, through your small robot "writing" in the sand. It was driven by solar power and made a spiral pattern which represented the strength of the energy over time. What does it mean to talk about "balances of energy"? And how does this deal with the categories of time/light/energy?

The work consists of a performance that depicts one specific sunrise at a specific place and moment. The performance starts one hour before sunrise, and lasts for 3-4 hours, depending on the light conditions. This results in 3 mono prints of the sand-tracks and a video registration. At the moment I am conducting an experiment together with Noortje Marres to test the piece. Noortje moved from Amsterdam to London in 2007 and last April I did a sunrise piece close to her former Amsterdam home, and the resulting prints and video will be placed in her London house. During the process, as a commissioner of the piece, she decided where and when the performance was to take place. She described the experience of obtaining the piece and the (disputed) capacity of the work to actually translocate the sunrise from Amsterdam to London. Her texts are again part of the piece. This again is a more in-depth investigation of the process in which selling the work becomes part of the interactive process itself: the work offers the opportunity to art-collectors to personally relate to, buy and thus even own the normally very abstract and intangible reality of "time/light/energy categories" as you put it.