

## Episode 6: Art is going to incorporate other beings

**Yael Keijzer:** You are listening to Taking Art Apart, a podcast presented by West Den Haag.

**Rosa Zangenberg:** I am Rosa Zangenberg, visual artist and writer.

**Yael:** I am Yael Keijzer, philosopher and writer.

We're launching an experimental series of themes that one may come across when stepping into the artworld, whether as a young artist, established institution, or curious viewer.

Is art a forecast? In this extra long, final episode, we delve into possible futures of art and art spaces. What role does art still have to play and in turn, how does it adapt to possible near-realities? These days many artists connect their practice to sustainability and the anthropocene. Maybe art can offer a cure for the world, or rather the wake up call. How do we navigate this future discourse? This episode features visual artist Asad Raza, researcher and writer Katazyna Jankovska, who express their concerns for the art of the future in combination with the spaces in which we engage with art. Later, we hear Taconis Stolk, director and teacher at the ArtScience [inter]Faculty of the Royal Academy of Arts in The Hague, The Netherlands, on where he sees art education in the future. Before all this, however, let us close our eyes and imagine a possible future..

**Rosa:** Can you imagine yourself in a world without museums? At least, without the museums that we know of today. The museum of today is the result of years of experimenting with presenting and preserving artworks.

Ideally, a museum of today not only allows for the best experience of the work but also for the human observer to feel as comfortable as possible within the perfectly tempered and lit room.

A museum of today is optimized to avoid the least natural decay possible so that the artworks presented have the highest

chance of eternally staying true to how they looked when they were fresh. This is self-evident, of course, as these artworks are meant to represent the rich cultural heritage of the human species.

I guess we can see this museum in our head.. we know the canon all-too-well.

Imagine a future museum, completely unlike the museum described above.

Imagine you in such a museum, barely able to stay inside for longer than absolutely necessary because of an insufferable smell, possibly stemming from the rotten and moldy artworks presented. Artworks that probably once were supposed to resemble something more or less recognizable but, through time, have been consumed by bacterial molecules and other living species.

You feel the need to leave this museum immediately, not only because of this smell but also because your body starts to sweat in this warm, humid air the rooms contain. Yet another, and probably the biggest, reason to leave this museum as fast as possible, is due to an intense feeling of claustrophobia as you feel there are too many visitors. In fact, around 1 billion other visitors decided to visit the museum at the same time as you - most of which do not have the same intentions to visit the museum as you - most of which are not human.

This smelly, humid future museum considers any living species as their audience and participants. Any species that has something to benefit from this museum. Perhaps, the artworks presented are just as life-assuring as art can be for humans. But, maybe, they are species, who do not necessarily appreciate the preservation of artworks in the same way we humans do. In this future museum, preservation has obtained a new meaning - one that concerns the preservation of the earth's ecology. To a couple of the species, who decided to visit this museum, the value of an artwork, such as a painting, is not defined by how it looks but, rather, the air it creates, or the bacteria it develops through natural decay. Maybe, the artworks are very nourishing and have an exquisite taste.

Instead of imagining the future museum with even more high-technological equipment to preserve the artworks, where the interior is always meant to stimulate human needs most effectively, try to imagine a future museum that lives on by itself - where time is not artificially paused.

A museum that accepts the artworks as organic entities with a natural destiny of decline. Artworks become moist, fluffy, lumpy, smelly, unclear, fragile and contaminating. Their original purposes change, just like normal living things. Organic and nonorganic entities mix and create symbiosis, bacteria flourish and photosynthesis reproduces and generates new lives.

The determination of high quality changes. Deterioration becomes a quality.

Can you imagine a museum that is not only made for humans, even in the most literal sense?

**Yael:** What we heard just now is Rosa's essay called Museum of the Future. Rosa speculates on a possible future museum, one in which non-human agencies are not only allowed in, but are the main condition. Soon, Katarzyna Jankovska will directly reflect on this scenario in her essay. But first, some words by American artist Asad Raza. His previous show 'Coalescence' at West Den Haag stimulated us to connect him to our topic. How can museum spaces become more open to living conditions, and allow for things to grow?

**Asad Raza:** Something I think is interesting is there's a discourse about the idea 'worlding', you know, the idea of creating worlds. And a world is typically a game or a situation of interaction with different, with different entities, you know, different people, objects, materials, other beings and, and together they are operating some sort of a structure together or a game or a world. That's what a world is made up of. And I think that that's somehow more interesting and more relevant in the 21st century to operate in the sense of making it, of trying to make worlds, than to try to make things. And the experience of each of these entities is important, not just to the visitor, but also the caretakers and the cultivators, and also the institution and

the curator and, and other ones, and the materials themselves and the living beings that are part of the system, which aren't human. So all of those entities have their role and also have importance. You know, it's not only for the human. Lately in my work, I've been exploring more the idea of how works can become habitats for non-human living beings also. And I think that that's a relevant thing to do because to exist in the fully Anthropocene mentality of human beings are the ultimate source and, origin of meaning seems really like an artifact of the last couple hundred years to me where we've been enclosing ourselves more and more in sterile environments and less and less connected to this sort of symbiotic relations with all of the other kind of living and non-living beings. So, including the entire planetary system.

Rosa: I'm also a bit concerned about, or I'm curious about the future of the art museum, because you talk about works like this that can also... where other species and humans can benefit from this work, in a sense. It's not only made for our luxury contemplation and pleasure, it's made for other, just as important, living beings on earth to enjoy in a different way. And yeah, so I was wondering, um, and also because you have a quite deliberate relation to the space when you are working with art. So I'm wondering if you have considered how a museum could look like? An art museum could look like in the future?

**Asad:** That's an interesting question, I mean, one of the things I think has been interesting about working here in West Den Haag is the building. It's so specific, you know, because to me, the building really reflects the high 20th century period of modernism in architecture and also in the way that it structurally separates the different aspects of life. So it was originally built as an embassy by Marcel Breuer, an architect who I like, but whose work also is part of the 20th century in the sense that it's a space divided into many small rooms, and in each of these rooms, a different department and in each of these departments, a different role. You know, the worker of each office has their role and the roles are very well-defined. And so, all of this division of labor and structural separation of the domestic from work and other aspects of life from the workplace is something very characteristic of the 20th century. I'm kind of interested in coalescing and bringing together different parts of life, let's say, into something more holistic and more like a

unified fabric of experience. So, to me, a museum is a place where you can help to do that. Um, in this case, that's why I also separated the materials for the soil into different rooms but then combined them so that they kind of ... You sense the relationship to the building and the history of the 20th centuries' separation and division culture, um, being attempted to be integrated again. And in the museum, I think it's an interesting place to do this because the museum is a place where we model ways of behaving, ways of believing, ways of thinking, ways of experiencing the world. The art museum is a place where people go to, somehow, have an encounter with their own culture or the experience of their culture and maybe where it's going or where it was. So it's a place where we can kind of try to experiment on that a little bit as a sort of model system. What that would mean for the museum of the future is I guess that the museum can become more and more involved in these living processes and different modalities of experience. And I think that that's kind of happening, you know, to some degree or another. And I guess the fact that I'm allowed to fill museums with material and let people walk on them and take them and, and, and bring them home has been good for me to see that that's... you know, haven't yet been told I can't do that. Where, probably, you know, 25 or 35 years ago, maybe this would have been a difficult thing to convince an institution to allow.

**Rosa:** Yeah. So the formalities that used to be, and like this whole, the white cube era is, I would say definitely gone, but even to the extent of like how the air humidity has to be in a very specific way and the way the light has to be in a very specific way can potentially be more and more modified and played with and, to incorporate another type of visitor even.

**Asad:** Well, what I like about the idea of the white cube to use the, the term you, you bring up from, you know, these essays by Brian O'Doherty is that the white cube produces focus. It produces an ability to sort of distance the other sources of attention in life and focus on something. And I don't think that focusing and the capacity to focus is such a bad thing, but I think that what the white cube does, which is more difficult for me to handle, is that it really is a machine to produce focus on a discrete material artifact of a human technological process. And so, it's harder for the white cube to handle processes or worlds being constructed. It's not

impossible, but it's harder. And so I think that we need to adapt those structures sometimes. But that said, if the air conditioning needs to be set at a certain number, because, you know, in one room where you're displaying, say an oil painting, that's four or 500 years old, it's not like, I think that that's a wrong thing to do. It's just, it's not the only way to create experiences. And to me, the art museum will become more successful and more relevant the more it can delve into creating different kinds of experiences and not necessarily define itself in terms of the particular forms that visual art was being conducted in over the last 500 years.

**Yael:** As we just witnessed, artists, such as Raza, are in fact already accommodating non-human agencies in their work. Lithuanian researcher Katažyna Jankovska has scholarly and curatorial interests that include critical posthumanism. She specifically focuses on artistic research, new media art, digital technologies and worldbuilding practices. She sees productive qualities in the unstable posthuman condition. The quotes in Katažyna's reading along with the bibliography can be found in the transcript on our website.

**Katažyna Jankovska:** This illustrative description made me think about the work of the French artist Pierre Huyghe and his exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery presented a few years ago. The images shown on LED panels in the darkened room were constantly modified by the changing conditions of the exhibition space: the temperature, humidity, natural light, number of visitors in the space, and thousands of flies roaming over your head that had been born and were living there. The whole space turned out to be a mutating, pulsating ecosystem consisting of biological and meteorological actors affecting each other and creating this endless feedback loop within the exhibition space<sup>1</sup>.

That sounds like some sort of future, posthuman museum, doesn't it? But let's agree - this is not the image that usually comes to our minds when thinking about the art museum. Traditionally, the museum is an institution that is structured by human-centered protocols. It is a container that sustains the separation between nature and culture. It is a space

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<sup>1</sup>Pierre Huyghe: UUmwelt, Serpentine Gallery, London, 2018, <https://www.serpentinegalleries.org/whats-on/pierre-huyghe-uumwelt/>

through which speciesism was naturalised. Art historian Dorothea von Hantelmann made a great point by saying that: "the white cube is an almost Cartesian space, cleared and freed of all penetrations of reality. It is a space in which all natural processes—temperature, light, acoustics—are regulated"<sup>2</sup>.

The museum is a completely human establishment. And Chad Elias defines two major limits of the art museum: firstly, it is its gaze, which is implied to be human and secondly, its subject - implied to be other; and the hierarchies on which those categories rely.<sup>3</sup>

In the spirit of emerging posthuman narratives that among other things try to break down dualisms and acknowledge other ways of being, the question is not if or why but rather how can museums and exhibitions reconcile the newly emerging posthuman theories, and bypass the narrative established by museums and give the nonhuman a position in the art institution?

And I believe that this can take different forms: technology evidently plays a big role in it. With the help of technologies, we are able to temporarily reconfigure our perceptual systems, to adopt the nonhuman vision and see from the perspective of the dog or the whale, or access realms that are outside of the human gaze. This is actually something that I personally got interested in after reading a book by media theoretician Joanna Zylińska called *Nonhuman Photography*<sup>4</sup>.

But this mostly happens on a visual level. Just imagine us being able to temporarily reconfigure sensual capacities and to have for example a dog's sense of smell? How differently we could perceive the world then?

Also, in the past two decades, there has been a rise in

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<sup>2</sup> Dorothea von Hantelmann, *Thinking the Arrival: Pierre Huyghe's Untilled and the Ontology of the Exhibition*, <https://www.on-curating.org/issue-33-reader/thinking-the-arrival-pierre-huyghes-untilled-and-the-ontology-of-the-exhibition.html#.Ykst4i8RpQK>

<sup>3</sup> Chad Elias: 'Between species: animal-human collaboration in contemporary art', *Burlington Contemporary Issue 2* (November 2019), <https://doi.org/10.31452/bcj2.animal.elias>

<sup>4</sup> Joanna Zylińska, *Nonhuman Photography*, <https://www.nonhuman.photography/introduction>

artistic works made in collaboration with nonhuman actors, with animals, plants, insects, and natural forces, in this way recognising both biological and technological agency and the creative input of nonhuman and this way rejecting the exceptionalism of the individual human artist.

The Art Laboratory Berlin, I think, is a great example of weaving together art and biotechnology, fostering multi-species collaboration, and incorporating other forms of intelligence. Just to name a few examples, recently they presented works by Theresa Shubert working with fungi, Robertina Šebjanič investigating agency and sentience of a jellyfish, and Špela Petrič exploring human-plant communication.

Another project I think is interesting is curated by Semâ Bekirović called "Reading by Osmosis", shown in Zone2Source in Amsterdam a few years ago. It is a collection of human-made everyday objects, such as a ball or a shoe, that were altered by wind, fire, rain, moss, etc. Nature becomes both the creator and the artwork, and in a sense, extends the idea of the artist. Yet the objects were put on pedestals, and the "exhibition ended up looking traditionally 'museum-like'". Although as the curator stated it was "an attempt to present works by non-human artists on an equal footing with works shown in a museum"<sup>5</sup> I believe that there is another point worth noticing.

The presence of a particular kind of viewer is always a part of the artwork because it addresses the sensory faculties of the individual human viewer. The depictive culture and systems of representation are indeed very human. This foregrounds Carlo Salzani's thought: "the turn to the animal brings to the fore the necessity of bypassing language, of exiting the representational cage, in order to make sense of animals"<sup>6</sup>.

And it is again something that your anecdote, Rosa, made me think about. If we would ever share a museum with nonhuman actors, how would it possibly look like? This is a very

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<sup>5</sup> Reading by Osmosis: Nature Interprets Man. In Conversation with Sema. Bekirovic en Gijse Heemskerk, 2019, <https://moed.online/reading-by-osmosis-nature-interprets-man/>

<sup>6</sup> Carlo Salzani, From Post-Human to Post-Animal. Posthumanism and the "Animal Turn", *Lo Sguardo - rivista di filosofia*, N. 24, 2017 (II) - Limiti e confini del postumano, <http://www.losguardo.net/it/from-post-human-to-post-animal-posthumanism-and-the-animal-turn/>

interesting area, I believe. Because, obviously, sensual experience and value systems are not the same amongst members of different species. Nonhuman animals have completely different perceptual skills, so the same media that works for humans will not raise the same interest of non-humans.

What if, rather than addressing the needs of the human viewer, curators and artists would be tasked to address the perceptual systems of animals and see them as participants in art? What new questions and forms of knowledge might emerge? In what way it could possibly redefine the idea of what art is? There were actually some quite interesting attempts to make art for other-than-human beings. A great example is the first edition of Blowup presented by V2\_Lab for the Unstable Media in Rotterdam which is primarily aimed at animal audiences. Invited speakers included artist Amy Youngs, who has created new habitats for hermit crabs and a lounge space for crickets; Wilfried Hou Je Bek translated the Epic of Gilgamesh into the lexigrams that scientists use to teach language to apes; Elio Caccavale designed a TV for pigs and there was even a play zone for cats if you would want to bring it along<sup>7</sup>.

Another work that comes to my mind is the immersive VR gaming closure created by Drew Thornton, in which humans can engage in an arcade game with flies. The project is grounded in the actual behaviour of flies, first understanding how flies perceive the world and then creating a game environment where fly behaviour is aligned with a human experience<sup>8</sup>.

Even though humans orchestrate these human-animal interactions, they in the end decentralise humans from the position of the creator and the viewer. It is, of course, still difficult to imagine where the trajectory of posthuman ontology might take us in terms of exhibitions and museums. This path is definitely not obvious, and probably there is no way to completely step outside of the human gaze but such projects exemplify how museums can widen conversations surrounding whom museums are for and incorporate nonhuman entities as participants.

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<sup>7</sup> Blowup: Wild Things Reader, V2\_ Institute for the Unstable Media, 2011, <https://v2.nl/archive/articles/wild-things-blowup-reader-1>

<sup>8</sup> Régine Debatty, TAKE me BACK to JUPITER! An arcade game played by humans and houseflies, 2020, <https://we-make-money-not-art.com/take-me-back-to-jupiter-an-arcade-game-played-by-humans-and-houseflies/>

So, maybe one day museums will turn from controlled cultural containers to multi-species establishments, posthuman ecosystems sharing space with animals, plants, insects, and microbes, where prevalent conservation practices are replaced by natural and unpredictable conditions.

**Rosa:** Hi Katażyna, thank you very much for your essay. I really liked it a lot. And, I wanted to talk about it now, but first I think it'd be nice if you could explain a little bit about how you arrived at this research.

**Katażyna:** Yeah, thanks for having me. I think the starting point was the book that I mentioned in my text just a few minutes ago.

**Rosa:** The Nonhuman photography?

**Katażyna:** Yes, by Joanna Zyliniska, and in this book, she introduces the theory about the technological agency and how we perceive the world through technologies. And how, for example... I'm not sure if it was mentioned in the book, but how, for example, we ever saw the image of Mars only through the camera, right? So the technological input and how it structures our perception of life made me think about how else we can use technologies to see something that is beyond the human vision and beyond human gaze and beyond what we are able to perceive. And then I started researching, um, artistic works that use technologies that are not intended to be used for artistic purposes to, for example see from the perspective of a, of an animal or, to detect signals that are happening inside of a plant and to see that plant is a sensual being, not as we usually tend to see, right? And then I think another reason why I started that - it was my concern about the environmental crisis that is going on and how it, it stems from actually the humanist perception of the world and the division between nature and culture, human and animal, and the hierarchies: on how we put human needs and human being on top, and then how we exploited nature and other than human beings and how it, in the end, turn out to be an environmental disaster. So, my idea was to see how art can actually contribute using those technologies and looking to nature to maybe somehow change people's perception of what's going on

**Rosa:** What, to you, is the function of the museum?

**Katażyna:** Well, actually, before coming here, I was a bit stressed about talking about museums because I didn't finish any museum or curatorial studies, you know? But for me personally, art is a form of knowledge production. I see it as something that you can learn and change your perception of... not necessarily non-humans, but in general, art always touches on important and relevant questions at that time. And artists address really important issues through very interesting forms that, sometimes, are really incomprehensible on, on people, you know? So for me, a museum is a space where you can get that alternative kind of knowledge.

**Rosa:** It is also, it becomes a bit like the, the school for this, in a way, or?

**Katażyna:** You can put it like that.

**Rosa:** Why do you think that museums of today or the traditional museum has to change?

**Katażyna:** Yeah, the thing is that we need to emphasize the fact that the white cube is a Western concept, which started to dominate the art world. And maybe we need to think outside of the cultural format of the exhibition and instead of exposing and removing objects from the original context, for example, to do the on-site exhibitions. And this is actually something that Pierre Huyghe - the artist that I just mentioned before - made before the show, at the Serpentine Gallery. He set up a biotope in a park, in a compost facility in Kassel and the work's description originally said "Alive entities and inanimate things made and not-made dimensions variable" So basically it was this compost facility. He put a hive of bees on the head of the human nude sculpture. It was a replica of Max Weber. Then there were, I think, two dogs with pink painted legs walking around this muddy dirty path. And there were hallucinogenic plants growing. So in the whole space, he de-centralized the exhibition and it was obvious that it's still an exhibition. It's an interesting attempt, I think. And what was happening there. It wasn't controlled, you know? And when there are no viewers, the thing is still happening there, you know? So, yeah, maybe that's one of the ways. I believe that interactive and experiential participatory works... There are some studies that prove that these interactive artworks engage people more than just looking at the object on a pedestal, you know, so maybe

engaging more than visual senses, which is like touch - touch is almost forbidden and museum, right?. So if we engage, if artists engage more than visual senses, including, I don't know, smell and sound and touch. It's also something different that can have an influence on our experience in a museum. Right?

**Rosa:** In general, in your texts, you are also mentioning the senses as, like, as something that is really good to bring in other forms of sense. And I think that you are completely right. That if we are, if we start bringing in the touch, we also forget about this dualist way of thinking about one and the other, because we start interacting. And the art where you just can look at it, just distinguishes the viewer from the object and creates, yeah, this sort of hierarchy.

**Katażyna:** Yeah, actually, now I remember I was reading this paper by the author.. I cannot recall his name, but I'm gonna say it to you later. In his paper, he discusses the role of the traditional Western landscape paintings that basically located the viewer outside or represented nature as a sacred space, separated from the profane. So these historical representations of landscape and art actually created this perception of the world as a distanced spectacle and influenced the human egocentric attitude towards nature.

**Rosa:** Would you think, and if so, to what extent could traditional mediums such as painting or sculpture - mediums that were part of forming this hierarchical, humanist approach, the separation of culture and nature. Do you think that they could still be part of a new approach, like a more compassionate and relational approach to the art discourse?

**Katażyna:** Well, I think there's this kind of misleading understanding of posthuman being related only to technology-based art, only digital and only enhancing people with some sort of technologies and making us all cyborgs. I think the art that addresses this question, doesn't have to necessarily be obviously posthuman in the form you know, to involve nonhuman actors, as I mentioned in my text. And you also mentioned that. I think just the conceptual thought of going beyond this dualism or putting humans as an exceptional being is already opening up a conversation and challenging these established notions, you know?

**Rosa:** Yeah. It makes me think of something, my friend told me the other day, she decided to make a painting in her house and because that she currently has the moth problem - or problem, I don't even know if it's a problem, but she has a moth in her house, these moth would start actually eating up the painting, which I found really cool because it, somehow... It proved my idea about the fact that maybe artworks can also have other functions for other-than-human species that maybe it would not be necessarily for the... This painting would not be for the moth to look at and to enjoy and say, "oh, this is a great painting", but it is actually some kind of nutrition for them. And I found that really nice that even such traditional mediums, such as painting, can also contribute to this - if you would allow us, because of course, in a museum now you would never allow, eh, any factors to change or to "destroy", in quotation marks, the work, by having insects, living on it and eating from it. So do you think that this could be an approach?

**Katažyna:** Yeah, I think the idea of definition and purpose of art was changing through the course of history. And I'm quite sure that it's going to change in one way or another in the future as well. Maybe it will incorporate completely different functions rather than a static experience or alternative kind of knowledge or any other purposes that art has now. Maybe it's going to incorporate other beings. And of course for them it will make a completely different sense.

**Rosa:** But then would it still be art? For instance, this class that I'm holding. If I saw this as art, but other like millions of other species would see this as something else, could we still allow it to be art, would it still be legitimized as an art work, If, if it's only ,00001% of the living entities on earth that would consider this art?.

**Katažyna:** I think not every human will agree with you that this is art. So this is a question, you know? The definition of art is it's really an ephemeral idea. So I think no one can actually answer the question "what art is".

**Rosa:** Thank you for coming.

**Katažyna:** Thank you for having me

**Yael:** So, what do you think? Can art still be art, if its purpose is no longer to be art in the first place? If we would truly share our museums with all other living species on our planet, is it even possible to stick to our current notions of art practices, art mediation, art education and the art market?

Before we end this final episode of Taking Art Apart, let us hear some words from Taconis Stolk, whom Hendrik went into conversation with. The name "Art Science" evokes intriguing ideas about a study that is more than art for arts' sake. What exactly does ArtScience mean and what relevance does the faculty aim to express - how do they express their concern for the future of art - and the education of art?

**Taconis Stolk:** Well, the ArtScience interfaculty originated in 1989 as a brainchild of composer Dick Raaijmakers and music psychologist Frans Evers who both realized that, you know, in the future, artists would be working much more interdisciplinary and cross disciplinary and developing new disciplines. So they started this interfaculty. Yeah, in '89, it was called Image and Sound interfaculty. And later in the beginning of the 2000s, we realized that actually everybody was by then doing all kinds of interdisciplinary things. Also, we saw an increase in interest between the arts and the sciences. So that was all kinds of meetings back then and symposia and stuff about the fact that, you know, the arts and sciences were really close together until they separated in the 18th and 19th century. And now with all kinds of developments, it might be interesting to see how these two instances of society can learn from each other again and maybe merge or find common grounds somewhere. So we noticed that, and we also noticed that for the arts, it's actually interesting to see how scientific knowledge or scientific skills or technologies can actually help to create new types of artworks that might also create more insight somehow on an experience level on what the knowledge of the, then, late 20th century, now the 21st century actually means for our lives. When it was called Image and Sound, it was much about the interdisciplinary nature between the different artistic disciplines. So that means, you know, visual arts, music, theater, literature, the strange blob that you call new media arts or whatever. There are different disciplines with different appeal to different senses sometimes, but mostly

they also have different discourses. You know, a fine artist has many ideas that are quite different in relation to how, what it is to create a work of art than, for instance, a composer. There are many similarities too but, you know, there's many things in which there's just a different way of thinking, which is partly because of historical reasons and partly because of physical reasons of the medium, you know, we perceive sound differently than we perceive images, for instance.

And so, the idea of the inter faculty is to.. if you arise above all these different discourses, you also have developed this kind of metaview on how these can interact, how you can remap things for instance.

So in that sense, you'll get to the idea that, you know, we can take some aspect for, say, composition in time from a musical discourse and put that to something in visual arts. And of course, there are visual artists who work with video or film or sound or performance or whatever. But, you know, just to give an example, that you can pick something from one thing, put it to another, see how that works and what new possibilities that gives.

At the same time, in the sciences, you see the same kind of things happening, you know, if you look at, for instance, biology, and then you have physics and, you know, physics that go to nanoscales and then, you know, biology goes to nanoscales and then there's neuroscience and that comes, you know. While all these different disciplines in the sciences were very, very handy to clarify nature, but at some point you see that all these sciences are actually also slowly merging into fields of research where you actually can't say anymore directly, is this, is this biology or is it chemistry or is it physics or is it..

**Hendrik Hohlfeld:** Does it even relate to my everyday life?

**Taconis:** Or, how does it relate to my everyday life? I come to that in a minute, indeed. So, you know, so you see in the sciences, you see in a different direction, you see the same thing happening. So at some point, you can also imagine that the arts and the sciences themselves also start to realize, "Okay, maybe there is some more between us than we actually thought for the last 150 years." And then we realized that

apart from the fact that there's a huge amount of knowledge, technology and ideas that are used in science to reveal the truth in a certain way. I mean, I'm not going into the philosophical debate of postmodern things and what is truth or whatever, but you know, it is a true or false kind of system. Then you can imagine that the same kind of knowledge that you actually use to get to some kind of truth or verifiable truth or whatever you can also use for artistic purposes. So, you know, say biology or biotechnology. Um, that was one of the first things that actually emerged from that kind of thinking, led in the, in the beginning of the millennium to bio art or something that was trying to see, okay, if we can work with biological material, can we also make artworks with that? Back then, it was extremely controversial, the idea that you would make living artworks or something like that, but actually, that also points towards why it is interesting to do these kinds of things. But anyway, you know, the thing is that if this technology is there and we have to rethink what we are in relation to what is life, is this subject to only scientists or philosophers to think about? Uh, you can wait until, you know, the companies and businesses start to do things with this. If they are going to lead the discussion at some point, might it not be interesting also to have artists think about how you can deal with these kinds of things? So, you know, there is a relationship between, you know, what we, as society, think of certain knowledge that comes to us and how we deal with that to actually re-find our place in the universe. So these kinds of things are actually explored by philosophers and they're explored in the media. And actually as a result of the knowledge that science, mathematics and, you know, quantum science all develop. And the question is, okay, "how do we do that?" It's about understanding, which is the cognitive side of it to say the logic side, then you have, of course there's a moral side. "What can we do?", "What can't we do?" What is allowed and what is not allowed in dealing with biological material, for instance. And then there's the most complex thing to explain and that's, you know, "what does it do on an experiential level of feeling to us?" And that's where artists actually come in most of the time, you know, what we create is... If artists start to work as explorers in science. But then with the aim, not to clarify knowledge, sometimes it's hybrid, but not necessarily knowledge that is understandable. I understand how quantum mechanics works, but, you know, you make works that actually make it experiential to

live in a quantum mechanistic world. Then you add something and then you add something to a society because I believe in, and I think I'm not the only one, that all societies in all times in the world everywhere have something that you can define as art. And one of the main reasons for its existence is to unify this society in relation to the universe, in a sense of feeling at home, you know, having a placement for where you are. And that's, I think, where this relation to the sciences helps. Um, and that's an interesting period of, you know, defining those kinds of ideas.

**Taconis:** And then lately if you would talk about change, you see that world problems have been emerging. Problems that were there already for a long time and maybe not recognized so much or acknowledged so much. Issues of diversity, inclusivity, decolonization, all these kinds of aspects that relate a bit more to society as such and not how society relates to quantum mechanics in the universe, but, you know, what do we do in society to make a better future for everybody? That's a thing that I saw coming in, in the latest period, so to say.

**Hendrik:** And I feel like even in my 28 years of existence, like the world is changing very rapidly. Technology is changing rapidly and you mentioned this feeling of home, but home needs typically some sort of continuity and almost, we are now at home in a constant state of flux where the new technology is just around the corner and I'm not even adjusted yet to the, let's say, you know, where the new one came from and how do you see this part of the future and how artists or people will interact with it? What does it mean for people that actually innovation seems to be more important than maybe tradition or the things that the forefathers or whoever people used to do?

**Taconis:** You know, in a way... If we make it anyway, I mean, with the climate and stuff and wars, I think we are in a transition phase and that's for artists as well as for society in general. It's a bit like, you know, when the industrial revolution happened in the late 18th century, there were a lot of things happening and changing all the time.

**Hendrik:** And no one was there to say, "Hey, maybe we don't need to mass produce everything".

**Taconis:** No, there was no one to say, you know, you are having people working for you as slaves. That is not an ethical thing to do." It's horrible, but yeah, that these things reoccur also in a way, but you see that there is a growing development and society needs time to adjust. And it took until the beginning of the 20th century, until for instance, the labor organization became slowly powerful enough to really make a change. And then you see that slowly and slowly, you see that that develops into a society that actually is a bit better on many aspects than the society before. And we need, and we have learned, as humanity, how to deal with the structure of such a world in which you have all these industries and whatever.

Um, now you see, since some decades, that there's this new revolution going on, which has to do with, you know, the technolization and you see that there, the same, in completely different fields. The same type of problems are apparent. You know, we need to learn how to deal with, you know, the production of so much stuff that it affects a global environment. Media that are so ubiquitous everywhere that it's not clear anymore what is actually real and what is fake, that people don't believe in many aspects of reality anymore, that everybody is polarizing into little bubbles in which they exist. It costs time. First of all, it costs time to get used to that. Secondly, the role for artists there can just be as I described it in the role of how to deal with the scientific knowledge - to clear paths in experimenting, how we relate to that, how we can make different types of realization and experience of this complex communication world that actually makes sense. And that makes us feel kind of grounded. And for artists, there is a huge potential to help build this collective understanding and collective acceptance and experience of this world in such a way that we feel at home in it.

Okay.

**Hendrik:** Very nice talking to you.

**Taconis:** I enjoyed it very much too. Thank you for asking me. Well, we will continue our conversation in the future.

**Yael:** That was it, everyone.

Special thanks to: Asad Raza, Katazyna Jankovska and Taconis Stolk for taking part in this episode.

This concludes the main episodes of our podcast Taking Art Apart. Hopefully this theme will linger on in your minds for a long time, just as the future is always beginning now.

If you want to know more about the guests and their practices, as well as extra source materials, please have a look at our description box. This podcast is made possible by West Den Haag.

**Guests in this episode:**

Asad Raza, <https://berlin.bard.edu/people/profiles/asad-raza>

Katazyna Jankovska, <https://v2.nl/archive/people/katazyna-jankovska?searchterm=kata>

Taconis Stolk, <https://www.kabk.nl/docenten/taconis-stolk>

Hendrik Hohlfeld, <https://krea.today/hendrik-hohlfeld/>

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