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INTERVIEW KNOWLEDGE UTILISATION IN THE HUMANITIES

The Landscape of Affordances: Situating the Embodied Mind by Erik Rietveld

Philosopher Erik Rietveld (University of Amsterdam) is developing a philosophical framework for cognitive scientific research into intuitive expertise and is applying this to architecture and psychiatry.

What is this project about?

'I am fascinated by our ability to perform everyday tasks that are partly determined by specific circumstances, such as traffic situations, without having to think about these. However, the actions of experts such as doctors or architects are also prompted by specific circumstances. With this research I want to demonstrate that due to the skills acquired, this "acting competently" is often just as intuitive as our everyday actions and that environmental factors influence our ability to act competently far more strongly than philosophy and the cognitive sciences recognise.'

Why is this relevant for other disciplines?

'This research increases our understanding of how to handle situations competently. One subproject is studying Deep Brain Stimulation in psychiatric patients. Their experience of their surroundings can strongly change in the case of a successful treatment. Through patient interviews we are investigating how the environment influences the ability to act competently. Thanks to this input my conceptual framework can contribute to a more effective treatment, for example by enabling psychiatrists to pose better questions to their patients. Another subproject at an architect's studio is studying the interaction between architects and their environment during the design phase by means of a participative observation. The purpose of this is to see how experts acting competently works in practice.'

How did you establish connections with other disciplines?

'I sought and found excellent research partners close to home. Psychologist Nico Frijda was in my PhD defence committee. Psychiatrist Damiaan Denys at the University of Amsterdam is working on the same research focus area as me. Together with my brother, architect Ronald Rietveld, I designed the installa-

tion Vacant NL for the International Architecture Exhibition in Venice in 2010. It was a call for the temporary use of thousands of empty public buildings for innovation. My Veni project mapped that usage potential in the Dutch Atlas of Vacancy. That resulted in the new specialism Vacancy Studies as well as a book. I also gave a workshop about the design of public spaces to students from the Rietveld Academy and the Sandberg Institute. Vacant NL is now on the Knowledge and Innovation Agenda of the top sector Creative Industry. From various sources we are learning more about how architects can help to solve societal problems.'

How has knowledge utilisation benefited you as a scholar?

'An awful lot. One major advantage is the rapid and good feedback from experts to my philosophical framework. That provides a different type of input than exclusively publishing in journals for fellow researchers. I also consider that feedback to be a reality check for my philosophical ideas.'

Tips for fellow researchers?

'Keep your eyes and ears open and then you will see far more opportunities for collaboration with other faculties and worlds. It is good that knowledge utilisation has been included in the application forms for the Talent Scheme. It forces you to take a better look around you. Start from the perspective of shared fascinations and select your partners carefully. I usually start on a small scale and close to home with people I have a click with and who are very good at something.'

Website:

Research: <http://erikrietveld.wordpress.com/about-2/>
RAAAF (Rietveld Architecture-Art-Affordances): www.raaaf.nl