Editorial – The affordances of art

Julian Kiverstein

Abstract
This special issue on the theme of the affordances of art is organised around a lecture Erik Rietveld presented at the University of Twente on the occasion of being appointed as Socrates Professor. In his lecture, Erik describes three affordance-related aspects of the making practices at Rietveld Architecture-Art-Affordances (RAAAF), a visual art and architecture studio Erik and his brother Ronald Rietveld founded in 2006. The special issue includes 22 reflections on Erik’s lecture written by commentators from a broad range of different fields including art history, architecture, ecological psychology, dynamical systems cognitive science, anthropology, archaeology and the philosophy of 4e cognition. Erik and I provide a response that reflects on what it means to make philosophical art installations. The special issue also includes an interview conducted with art-historian Anja Novak reflecting on the potential of ecological-enactive cognitive science to further our understanding of experiential engagement with art. Finally, Erik has written an opinion article in which he sets out the next steps in his research programme of developing a conceptual framework for understanding ‘change-ability’ – skills for coordinating with a rapidly changing world. The key insight behind the framework is that changing the affordances of the living environment can contribute to changing otherwise rigid and undesirable patterns of behaviour. Erik reflects on the role that artworks can play in inviting reflection on how the practices that organise and shape human life could be different, a task that is increasingly urgent in a time when removing obstacles to change is necessary.

Keywords
Visual art, affordances, Skilled Intentionality Framework, ecological-enactive cognitive science, change-ability

Handling Editor: Tom Froese, Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology, Japan

I. Editorial
This special issue is organised around a lecture Erik Rietveld gave in spring 2019 on the occasion of being appointed as Socrates Professor at the University of Twente (Rietveld, 2022a). Socrates Professors are appointed with the aim of promoting humanistic thinking about societal challenges within universities around the Netherlands. Erik was appointed to a position at Twente with the objective of using philosophy to reflect on the making and embedding of technologies within society. This is a task Erik is uniquely well placed to perform based on his experiences of working in an art and architecture studio. In 2006, Erik and his brother Ronald Rietveld founded an art and architecture studio Rietveld Architecture-Art-Affordances (RAAAF) operating at the intersection of visual art, architecture, embodied cognitive science and philosophy. RAAAF specialises in the making of site-specific artworks that aim to materialise philosophical worldviews that imagine how people could live in ways that are different from those that are commonly accepted. Their art installations invite visitors to reflect and question practices and conventions people ordinarily take for granted both in the artworld (such as heritage practices) and in everyday life (e.g. our work and life practices organised around sitting). Erik’s challenge was to translate from his experiences of working in an art and architecture studio, insights for making technologies that are embedded well in shared living environments.

The key idea Erik develops in his inaugural lecture, through reflection on the practices at RAAAF, is that processes of making visual art engage skills and affordances that point the way to improved societal embeddings of technology. Affordances are the possibilities for action provided by an environment that, in the case of humans, has been shaped over time by sociomaterial practices. Erik describes three affordance-related aspects of the making

Amsterdam University Medical Centres, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Corresponding author:
Julian Kiverstein, Amsterdam University Medical Centres, Meibergdreef 9, Amsterdam 1105AZ, The Netherlands.
Email: j.d.kiverstein@amsterdamumc.nl
practices at RAAAF: skills for working with layers of meaning that artworks can afford; the creation of material playgrounds that offer the possibility to explore and experiment with materials and the potential of new technologies; and openness to unconventional affordances, and to the possibility, more generally, of reorganising socio-material practices.

We were fortunate to receive 22 excellent commentaries from a wide variety of disciplines including art history, architecture, ecological psychology, dynamical systems cognitive science, anthropology, archaeology and the philosophy of 4e cognition. The result is an extraordinarily rich set of responses and reflections that critically engage and highlight future research possibilities inspired by Erik’s lecture. In our reply, Erik and I have used the excellent questions raised in the commentaries to reflect on a variety of aspects of making philosophical art installations (Rietveld & Kiverstein, 2022).

The special issue also includes an interview Erik and Geertek van Lierop conducted with art-historian Anja Novak (Novakvan Lierop & Rietveld, 2022). The interview explores, from the perspective of an art-historian, the potential of the Skilled Intentionality Framework for making sense of experiential engagement with works of art. The Skilled Intentionality Framework is a conceptual framework Erik and his team have developed for ecological-enactive cognitive science that aims to investigate human cognitive processes at the organisational scale of the whole person in their skilled engagement with a living environment of affordances (Rietveld et al., 2018). The special issue closes with an opinion article in which Erik outlines the next steps in his research investigating the affordances of artworks (Rietveld, 2022b). Erik provides an overview of the Change-Ability Framework (CAF) – a conceptual framework that analyses skills for coordinating with a rapidly changing world. The CAF shows how changing the affordances the environment offers can contribute to shifting rigid and undesirable patterns of individual and collective behaviour. Erik reflects on the role that artworks can play in inviting reflection on how the practices that organise and shape human life could be different, a task that is increasingly urgent in a time when removing obstacles to change is necessary.

Declaration of conflicting interests
The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding
The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This work was supported by the Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschapelijk Onderzoek (VICI awarded to Erik Rietveld) and H2020 European Research Council [679190 (StG awarded to Erik Rietveld)].

ORCID iD
Julian Kiverstein  𝖑  https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3428-8367

Note
1. For descriptions of RAAAF’s past interventions visit: https://www.raaaf.nl/.

References
Novakvan Lierop, A. G. & Rietveld, E. (2022). Engaging with art skillfully: First steps towards an ecological-enactive account of the experience of art. Oxford University Press.
Rietveld, E., Denys, D., & Van Westen, M. (2018). Ecological-enactive cognition as engaging with a rich landscape of affordances: The skilled intentionality framework (SIF). In A. Newen, L. De Bruin, & S. Gallagher (Eds.), The Oxford handbook of 4E cognition. Oxford University Press.
Rietveld, E. & Kiverstein, J. (2022). Reflections on the genre of philosophical art installations. Adaptive Behaviour, this issue.
Rietveld, E. (2022a). The affordances of art for making technologies. Adaptive Behaviour.
Rietveld, E. (2022b). Change-ability for a world in flux. Adaptive Behaviour.

About the Author
Julian Kiverstein is Senior Researcher in the Department of Psychiatry at Amsterdam University Medical Centre. His research is concerned with the ecological and enactive nature of cognition and experience in humans and other organisms.