

# IMAGINARY MEDIA & DESIGN(ED) FICTIONS

A proposal for the NEARCH programme at the  
Jan van Eyck Academie,  
by Amy Suo Wu.

30 April, 2014

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## B. PROPOSAL: IMAGINARY MEDIA & DESIGN(ED) FICTIONS

What interests me about the similarity across archeology, science, technology, media studies and art is the vital role that imagination plays within discourse. Missing gaps of information is an experience commonly shared by archaeologists, scientists, technologists, artists, and designers. For these moments of uncertainty, the imagination is invoked to reconstruct or speculate possible narratives (image1,2). This is what attracts me to the NEARCH project, the possibility to focus and reflect on how the unstable space of fiction is instrumentalised and how that affects the material world. As such, central themes as an artist, designer and critical researcher are underlying mystical currents, esoteric beliefs and the unconscious as a way to investigate and question the process of knowledge production.

One important idea for me is Eric Kluitenberg's *Archaeology of Imaginary Media*<sup>1</sup> (AIM). Shifting attention away from technological constructions, it focuses on the imaginaries of both realized and unrealized media machines that occur, disappear and reoccur throughout history which reveal thematic patterns often clouded by the novelty of new media. In excavating humankind's dreams of the ultimate communication medium, it explores the imaginations of media that are expressed in cultural artifacts such as stories, drawings, prints, films, songs and advertisements. It deals with potential or possible media: dreamed media, fantasized media; visions of how human communication can be reshaped by means of machines. Imaginary media are polysemic in character, for example, Siegfried Zelinski outlines three categories of imaginary media. First are untimely media, machines designed and realised too early or too late before their invention (image3). Second are conceptual media, which are artifacts only existing as models or ideas on paper but never actually built. Third are impossible media. These are hermetic machines, that literally cannot be built but have impact on the real world.<sup>2</sup>

One recurring theme that Kluitenberg finds is the dream that communication technology could compensate for human deficiencies, for example promising to transcend the confines of time, abolish physical/emotion distance and even to reach the divine. As such he introduces the notion of the 'compensation machine', that refers to technology as sites onto which irrational desires are projected.<sup>2</sup> The lesser-known story of the birth of the telephone explains how imaginary media mediate impossible desires and dreams. It can be speculated that Alexander Graham Bell, credited to have invented the telephone, conceived of the device as way to transcend disability to connect with his deaf family members. He desired to have a "machine with a transmitter and receiver that would send sounds telegraphically to help deaf people hear"<sup>3</sup>, and in this way Bells' incentives were to find a way to speak to the unspeakable. What this demonstrates is how immaterial dreams are eventually materialized in media that have concrete affects and consequences, for better or worse.

As a continuation of my previous work, I would like to further the study of AIM to one 'case study', however hopefully more will organically develop during the NEARCH project. The Singularity movement and its 'university' (image4), is a technocentric ideology headed by Ray Kurzweil believing the prediction that the exponential acceleration of technologies (genetics, nanotechnology, AI..etc.) will lead to a technological singularity in the near future. They believe that people who live until that time have the possibility to become immortal as technologies will be so sophisticated as to preserve human health forever. As a technology that tries to transcend biology, it is a good example of Zielinski's third example because although imaginary, it still affects the world to the extent that such corporate giants such as Google, Nokia, Cisco and Genentech support and invest in this movement.<sup>4</sup>

With the aim to get insight into what imaginaries are projected onto the Singularity movement and in today's technological unconscious in general, I would like to map out how personal, political, discursive and economic factors influence



Image1: *The Museum of Jurassic Technology* in Los Angeles, USA. The MJT is a project that challenges and plays with the idea that museums/institutions/discourse produces coherent truth by deliberately crossing the line between fact and fiction, reality and imagination. Source: <http://we-make-money-not-art.com/archives/2008/08/the-museum-of-jurassic-technol.php#>. U2DrSK2SxMY

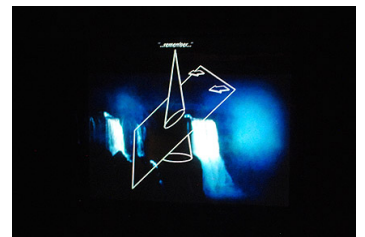


Image2: *The Sonabend Model of Obliscience*, part of the permanent exhibition at MJT focusing on the fictional neurophysiologist 'Geoffrey Sonabend'. Source: ibid

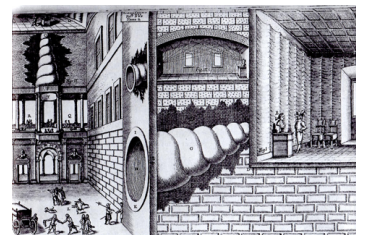


Image3: *Panacousticon*, Athanasius Kircher's design for a surveillance system of courtyards and public spaces where every word can be overheard. Source: *Deep Time of the Media* (2006) by S. Zielinski.

the imaginations of such technology/media and therefore how does this influence its development? What agendas do they have? Perhaps it is the colonisation of the mind and the future that is the next frontier after the desire of colonising space?

I propose that 'design fiction' could retell and reveal these patterns of dreams and fears based on research as a way to critically engage in more subtle approaches told through allegorical worlds. This can be done by simultaneously employing 1) design research and the study of AIM as ( visual and theoretical ) methods of analysis, and 2) communication design as a way visualize and shape my findings in the form of design fiction. Through this process, I would focus on tracing how these media imaginations are carried and instrumentalised by deconstructing corporate objects (advertisements, brands, campaigns, videos, products, merchandise, identities and services) as well as material found in science journals, future/techno-oriented blogs and online communities e.g wired.com, gizmodo.com, iO9.com etc. Whether it is of a fictitious nature (e.g fictitious corporate identity that refers to actual deeper layers of mythologies and ideologies), or comment on conceptual or impossible machines through the design, the outcome will be informed by the (visual and theoretical) research and design experiments conducted in NEARCH. Tactically (though not necessarily conceptually) similar to the work 'Nike Ground' by artists *Eva and Franco Mattes*<sup>5</sup> and work of media activists *The Yes Men*, I hope to not only uncover imaginaries in context of today's expectations of technology and the future, but also on how design and advertising play a role in exploiting irrational desires within the (technological) unconscious. Previous works combining fiction and technology as commentary on today's techno-scientific discourse are Prediction TV, Moodradar and Benji, shown in my portfolio below.

Lastly, I would like to end with an anecdote from Florian Cramer that he brought up in a recent conversation:

*"Singularity is based on speculative claims that are not actually backed up by science or available technology. It reminds me a lot of my childhood in the 70s when we grew up with books that described how we would fly to Mars by 2000 and to Jupiter by 2010, and settle there. Only that this time, the Science Fiction is projected onto computing instead of space travel. So one could argue that we're dealing with conceptual machines that might well end up being impossible machines."*

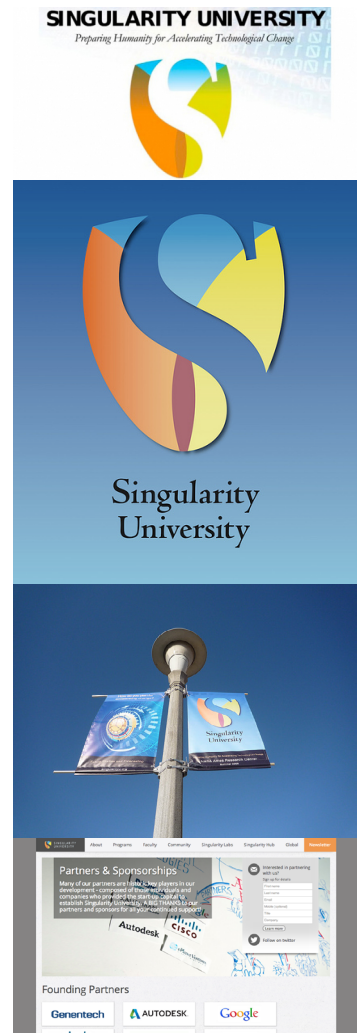


Image4: An array of 'corporate objects' of the Singularity University and screenshot of the 'Partners & Sponsorship' page on their website.: <http://singularityu.org/community/partners/>

- 1) The Archaeology of Imaginary Media positions itself within an emerging field of study called "Media Archaeology". According to Jussi Parikka, it is an untraditional historical approach to media studies characterized by a desire to uncover and circulate repressed or neglected media technologies that have been sidelined during the construction of totalizing histories of popular forms of communication. It does not follow a set of lineages, but rather studies across different and discursive settings and contexts. "This includes tracing unconventional genealogies of present-day communication technologies, believing that the most interesting developments often happen in the neglected margins of histories or artifacts." Jussi Parikka in <http://www.ctheory.net/printer.aspx?id=631>
- 2) Detailed in: Book of Imaginary Media, Rotterdam, NAi Publishers. (2006) Edited by Eric Kluitenberg & Media Archaeology. Approaches, Application, and Implications. (2011) Edited by Erkki Hutamo and Jussi Parikka.
- 3) Black, H (1997) Canadian Scientists and Inventors: Biographies of People who made a Difference, Ontario, Pembroke Publishers Limited
- 4) Singularity University. <http://singularityu.org/community/partners/>
- 5) <http://0100101110101101.org/home/nikeground/index.html>



## C. DOCUMENTATION OF RECENT WORK

### DE BEL, A VERY HARD COVER BOOK 2014

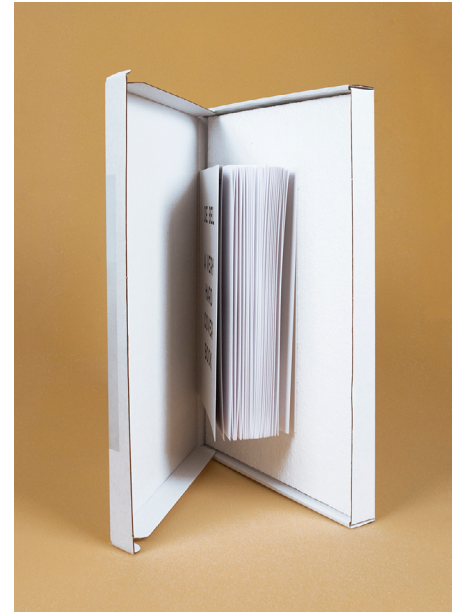
PROJECT MANAGER, EDITOR,  
PRODUCTION, GRAPHIC  
DESIGN, ARTISTS' BOOK

"De Bel, A Very Hard Cover Book" is a monograph containing a selection of work by Rotterdam based artist Dennis de Bel, (NL, 1984). According to Hajo Doorn director of WORM and initiator of this project, De Bel work lies on the "fringe of art, new media art, design and anti-art". Richly illustrated with images, this monograph is also supported by texts from Hajo Doorn, Florian Cramer, Josephine Bosma and Régine Debatty.

Graphic design studio, Eyesberg and De Bel collaborated closely towards a book that doesn't simply 'showcase' his work, but also serves as another manifestation of his ideas. Since this monograph was intended to validate De Bel, we studied the medium of the book as a traditional form of legitimization and the way authority is executed in the use of hardcovers, luxurious paper, heavy weight, etc., historically exemplified by the Bible. In the realm of cultural books, Phaidon publishers play a leading role in validation by publishing luxurious self-appointed design and art 'Bibles'. Despite our limited budget we had biblical ambitions. From both a practical and absurdist gesture, we artificially created a presence of authority by incorporating an oversized box in the design. Thus the box becomes the hardcover to the softcover book mounted inside. From this perspective the book playfully challenges the idea of authority. Furthermore, the box we used was a standard mailing box, making it ready for delivery, reducing further packaging costs.

From another perspective the design serves to apply the tactic of intervention through the use of the ZXX typeface in titles and page numbers. Developed by Sang Mun, as a response to the extensive information gathered from spy centers such as the National Security Agency (NSA), this typeface is designed to confuse OCR (optical character recognition) scanners, but is still readable to the human eye. Thus, like De Bel's work, the object and the design of the book playfully apply the tactic of intervention (disrupting systems) as a way to expose underlying structures.

<http://averyhardcoverbook.com/>





# PREDICTION TV - PARA-RATIONAL RESEARCH STATION, 2012

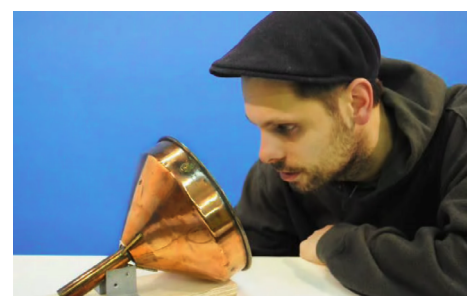
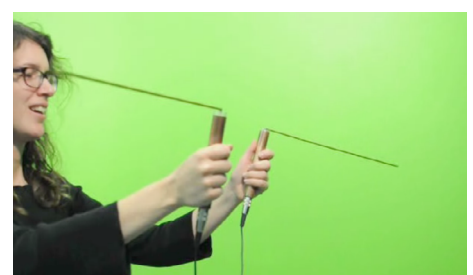
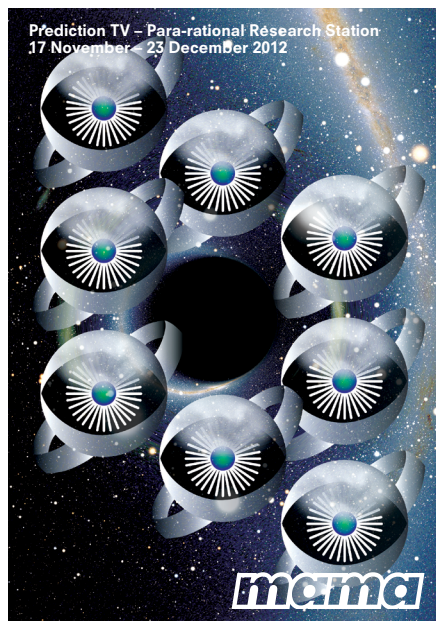
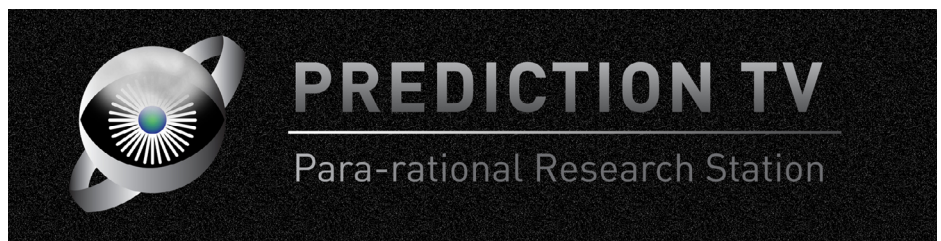
**INTERACTIVE INSTALLATION,  
LIVE BLUE-SCREEN, VIDEO,  
DIVINING RODS, SPEECH  
ANALYSIS, PURE DATA, FICTI-  
TIOUS CORPORATE IDENTITY.**

Prediction TV is a television station where the visitors of MAMA have the opportunity to become news reporters for weather and economic predictions. This project is an extension of a re-research on the role of prediction and the mechanism of self-fulfilling prophecy in modern society. Think of the affect of strategic voting on the elections and the manic anticipation surrounding the Eleven cities tour in Friesland.

The program of Prediction TV focuses on predicting two chaotic systems: the weather and the economy. The first channel reverses common sense understanding of the causal relationship between mood and weather. The second channel is premised on the reversal of the statement 'economic crisis affects depression' to 'depression affects economic crisis' as a way to trigger discussion on topics such as the inquiry of knowledge and irrational versus rational methods of predicting the future.

Maps were drawn based on interviews and bodily information collected from para-rational technologies to be further interpreted for predictions. Presentations by the visitor using blue-screen technique turned them into reporters of their own predictions which was aired on the [website](http://www.predictiontv.com/). During the show, artists and researchers, Darija Medic, Danny van der Kleij and Freek de Haan, gave presentations on various aspects of the relationship between the imagination and reality.

<http://www.predictiontv.com/>





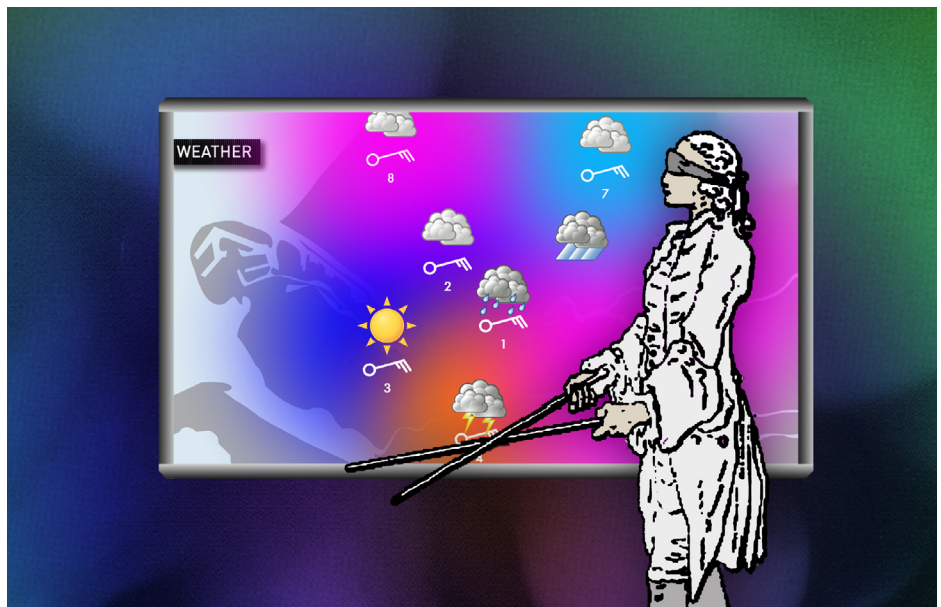
MOOD RADAR,  
VENICE - 2013  
GRONINGEN - 2013  
ROTTERDAM - 2012

INTERACTIVE INSTALLATION,  
 LIVE BLUE-SCREEN, VIDEO,  
 DIVINING RODS, PURE DATA,  
 FICTITIOUS VISUAL IDENTITY.

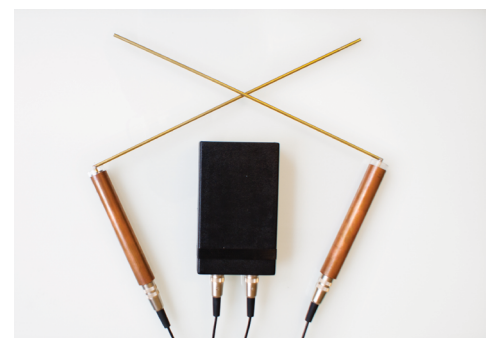
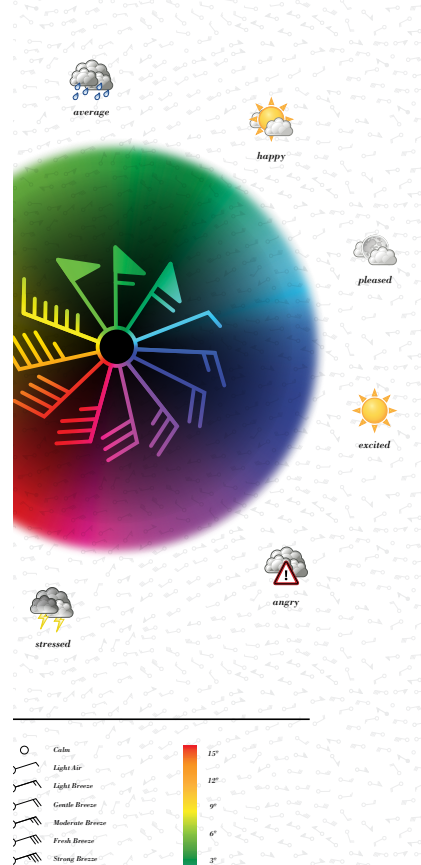
Mood Radar, a PZI graduation project, is a personal weather forecasting system based on your mood presence. On the opening night, visitors received a personal reading in a semi-autonomous space resembling both weather station and gypsy caravan that was parked outside of TENT on the Witte de Withstraat. Inside the Mood Radar lab-caravan a divining rod specially designed using a para-rational approach measured the body's unconscious movements and bio-electric signals to draw up a map of the visitors mood. Acting as a personal weather forecast chart, a map generated by the reading revealed how one would experience the weather for the next day. Afterwards, visitors got the chance to become a weather reporter and present it using the same blue-screen technique as on television.

By reversing the common sense statement 'the weather affects your mood' to 'your mood affects the weather', I flipped the linear understanding of causality, of subject and object, in an attempt to offer a space to contemplate upon causal factors that do not necessarily subscribe to a scientific paradigm. This work aimed to question how information is inquired in the face of uncertainty. It also tried to playfully rethink the idea of uncertainty as a negative event while metaphorically alluding to discourse regimes which shape reality. This project evolved to Prediction TV at Showroom MAMA, where economic predictions were also made from speech emotion analysis.

<http://www.amysuowu.net/moodradar>



## d Weather Chart



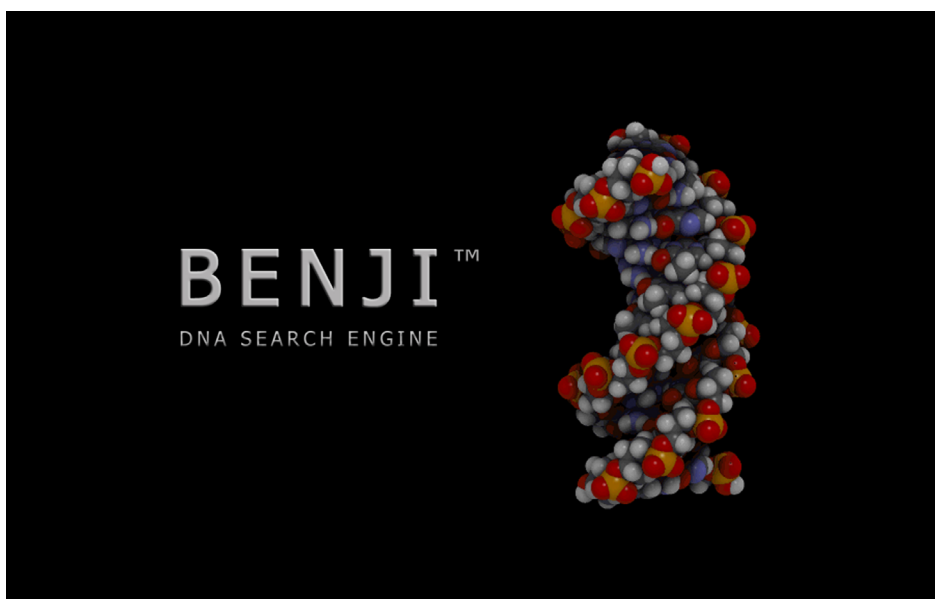
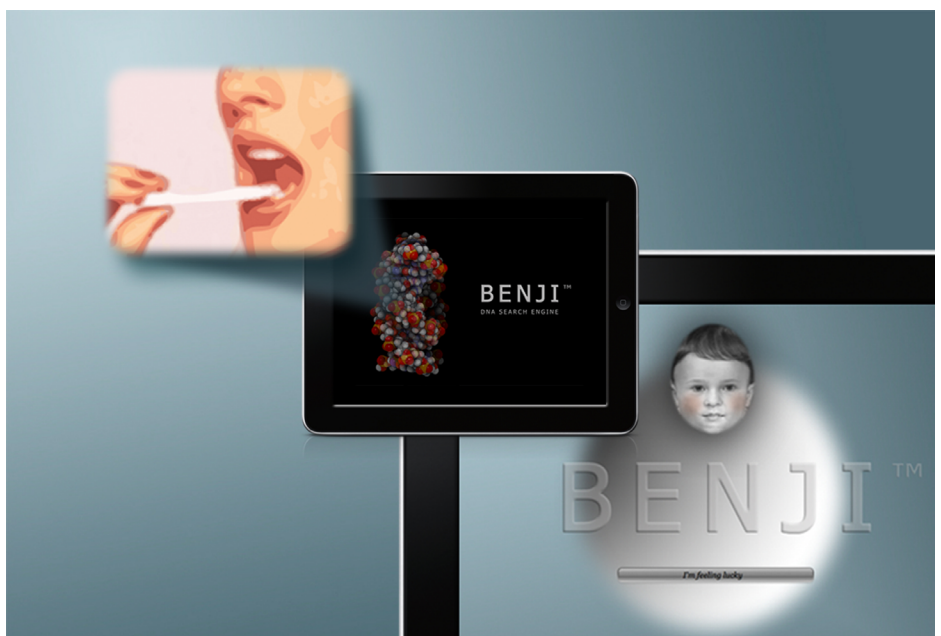
## BENJI 2011

### FICTITIOUS SEARCH ENGINE AND CORPORATE IDENTITY.

Set in the near future, Benji is a fictitious entity that journeys into the world of bio-information as a commodity and consequently envisions the prospects of genetic discrimination and the increasing personalisation of marketing strategies. Named after the child of Sergey Brin, co-founder of Google.com and Anne Wojcicki, co-founder of 23andme.com (a privately held personal genomics and biotechnology company), Benji represents the ideological and economic union as historically practiced in royal political marriages and commonly witnessed in corporate mergers.

Inheriting strands from both parents, Benji's mission is to be the world's leading DNA search engine. Using state of the art technology, Benji matches you directly to personalised advertisements based on your class rank which is determined by an advanced analysis of your genetic code. So revolutionary is it, that even behavioural patterns can be detected to predict and preempt every decision so that your consumer cravings may be satisfied. This narrative also touches on the supernatural powers that users imbue in search engines or perhaps technology in general. Reflecting on the irrational and yet convincing mechanisms of belief experienced in fortune telling and horoscopes, a certain willingness to believe is perhaps key in creating more possibilities to discriminate.

[http://amysuowu.hotglue.me/start\\_benji](http://amysuowu.hotglue.me/start_benji)





## WHERE NO FLAG HAS GONE BEFORE, 2011

**INTERACTIVE INSTALLATION,  
LIVE BLUE-SCREEN, PURE DATA,  
VIDEO.**

Where No Flag Has Gone Before exhibited in 'No Such Thing as Repetition' was a live blue-screen studio installation set up enabling visitors of the exhibition to reenact their own glorious moment of the first planting of the American flag on the surface of the moon. The participant had 20 seconds to perform this act as it was being recorded and composited in the computer program Pure Data. The background image of the very first participant's video was the iconic photograph of Buzz Aldrin standing next to the American flag on the moon, taken during the 1969 Apollo 11 mission. The only difference was that in this video, the participant replaces Buzz and becomes the national hero. Consecutive video recordings of people reenacting the planting of the flag serve to become the background footage for the next participant. Gradually accumulating, the final video graphs the episodes of reenactors as colonisers on the moon.

Whether the 1969 moon landing event was real or staged has been at the centre of much debate. Shifting focus away from its contested reality, I decided to rather scrutinise the very moment that has inscribed itself so deeply into the collective global consciousness: that of the planting of the American flag on the moon. I selected to render this iconic image as a political symbol of colonisation in the name of technological progress. The moon landing is one example that clearly reflects the grand story of ideological motivation driving technological progress, more specifically anticipating the ongoing US program of outer space colonisation as an incentive to preserve self-serving powers.

[Watch video:](https://vimeo.com/31929749)  
<https://vimeo.com/31929749>

[http://amysuowu.hotglue.me/where\\_no\\_flag\\_has\\_gone\\_before](http://amysuowu.hotglue.me/where_no_flag_has_gone_before)

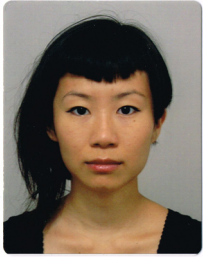


### 'NO \$UCH THING AS REPETITION'

AMY \$UO WU (AU/██), DIANNY VAN DER KLEIJ (NL),  
GUS\$AN BAROK (\$K), FAKO BERKER\$ (NL), INGE HOONTE (NL),  
LAURA MACCHINI (IT), LAURIER ROCHON (CA),  
LIEVEN VAN SPEYBROECK (BE), MIRJAM CUSSEL (NL),  
NATA\$A \$IENČNIK (AT)

CURATED BY INKE ARN\$  
ARTI\$TIC DIRECTOR OF HMKV, DORTMUND (DE)

# D. CURRICULUM VITAE



My name is Amy Suo Wu and I have a hybrid practice as a media artist, graphic designer and educator currently teaching design research and research methods to graduating students at the Willem de Kooning Academy. In 2012, I graduated from Master Media Design and Communication: Networked Media at the Piet Zwart Institute, Rotterdam. In 2013, I co-founded Eyesberg, a graphic design studio motivated by experimental and conceptual approaches. More recently i'm working for Rotterdam-based knowledge center, Creating 010, as organiser of Zine Camp, a festival on DIY publishing and as text editor at research project, Digital Publishing Toolkit initiated by Institute of Networked Cultures and Creating 010.

## Personal details

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Date of birth	17/11/1985
Place of birth	Guangdong, China
Nationality	Australian

## Education

2010-2012	Piet Zwart Institute, Master Media Design and Communication: Networked Media, Rotterdam. Graduated with distinction for the thesis component.
2007-2009	Willem de Kooning Academy, Bachelor of Graphic Design, Rotterdam, the Netherlands. Graduated Cum Laude (Honors).
2006-2007	Exchange semester to Willem de Kooning Academy, Rotterdam.
2004-2006	University of New South Wales, College of Fine Arts, Bachelor of Design, Sydney, Australia. Majoring in Graphic Design, Textile Design and Environment Design.

## Employment

03/2014 - present	Organiser & programmer of Zine Camp, part of the underground publishing month at WORM, Rotterdam.
03/2014 - present	Text editor at research project, Digital Publishing Toolkit initiated by Institute of Networked Cultures and knowledge center, Creating 010.
08/2013 - present	Co-founded (graphic) design studio, Eyesberg.
02/2013 - present	Teaching Design Research, Concept and Image, and research methods of Hacking minor at Willem de Kooning Academy.
2009 - 2010	Graphic designer and illustrator for Studio Renate Boere, Den Haag
2009 - 2010	Part-time work at Tag, a platform for contemporary audio/visual art, Den Haag
2007 - 2008	Graphic designer for artist, Boris van Berkum.

## Selected art exhibition

2014	Frames of thinking, Poortgebouw, Rotterdam, NL. Group
2013	The Venice Process, Maldives Pavilion at Venice Biennale, IT. Group De Nacht van Kunst & Wetenschap, SIGN, Groningen, NL. Group
2012	Prediction TV, Showroom MAMA, Rotterdam, NL. Solo Exception Handling, TENT & V2, Rotterdam, NL. Group TLANSATLANTIC OLACLE MUM at International Film Festival Rotterdam in WORM. Group
2011	No Such Thing As Repetition, Roodkapje, Rotterdam. Group Speed Show: Rebelhuis, Rotterdam, NL. Group
2010	Holy Crap, Work-In-Progress at Roodkapje, Rotterdam. i.s.m. Alina Parigger

### Selected design exhibition

- 2010 Certified Copy at Verbeke Foundation, Belgium. Group  
CopyClash at Roodkapje, NL. Group  
Exploded View at Graphic Design Festival Breda, NL. Group  
Views on the West, Theater Zeebelt, Den Haag, NL. Group
- 2009 Gogbot Art Media Music Technology Festival, Enschede, NL. Group  
Strijp-X, Eindhoven, NL. Group  
Best of Graduation at Blaak10, Rotterdam, NL. Group

### Text

- 2013 Uncertainty in Post Slack publication #1 by Roodkapje
- 2012 Benji in Sniff, Scrape, Crawl... {on privacy, surveillance and our shadowy data-double}, published by Piet Zwart Institute

### Presentations

- 2014 Book design 'De Bel, A Very Hard Cover Book' @ Crosslab Event WORM, Rotterdam
- 2012 Talk 'techno-fanaschism' @ Prediction TV, Showroom MAMA, Rotterdam
- 2011 Talk 'Benji' @ Sniff, Scrap, Crawl panel at ISEA2011, Istanbul

### Grants

- 2010 Huygens Scholarship Programme, NL  
Van Beek-Donner Stichting grant, Rotterdam, NL  
Cultuurscout Rotterdam Centrum subsidy, NL
- 2009 International Exchange Scholarship from University of New South Wales, Sydney, AU

### Nominations

- 2009 Nominated and exhibited at Gogbot Art Media Music Technology Festival, Youngblood Prize, Enschede.  
Nominated for ArtOlive Jong Talent '09, Amsterdam.  
Nominated for Dremelprijs, Rotterdam, NL Shortlisted as top 5.