SYMPOSIUM: RETHINKING THEORY AND PRACTICE THROUGH EAST – WEST DIALOGUE
THURSDAY 14TH JUNE 2012 – 13.00-17.30 HRS

This afternoon is about seeking the borders of theory and practice. What do we learn about ‘theory and practice’ from our understanding of that part of the world that was formerly called “EAST”? An anthropologist, a philosopher, an art expert and two performance artists venture out to explore this question. Intended results: reflection, clarification, inspiration and presence.

Registration before June 10th via accordamsterdam@gmail.com
€ 12 fee payable upon arrival.
Venue: Kerkzaal, 16th floor main building VU UNIVERSITY; take the elevator to the 15th floor and walk up the last stairs.

PROGRAM IN BRIEF (See verso for more)

13.00 WELCOME AND INTRO
By ANNEWIEKE VROOM (COORDINATOR ACCORD) and KATJA BEEKMAN (DIRECTOR FILOSOFIE OOST-WEST)

PART I: EXPERIENCING THEORY AND PRACTICE
13.15 “If you want to understand, you need to quit your PhD!”: encountering theory and practice through anthropology and Falun Gong - TALK BY SCOTT DALBY, PHD, DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY, VU UNIVERSITY. With Q&A.
14.00 ART PERFORMANCE BY ANET VAN DE ELZEN: Practice and Theory, Experience and Plans, Reality and Poetry.
14.15 break

PART II: RETHINKING THEORY AND PRACTICE
14.30 “If Practice Isn’t Opposed to Theory, What Is It?” Rethinking the relation between practice and theory in Western philosophy through Chinese and Japanese thought - LECTURE BY JOHN MARALDO, DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR EMERITUS, DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY, UNIVERSITY OF NORTH FLORIDA. With Q&A.
15.45 ART PERFORMANCE BY DANIELLE VAN VREE: Act of Thinking 1.
16.00 break

PART III: PRACTICING BORDER-CROSSING

17.00 CONCLUDING NOTES and 17.15 DRINKS
ON THE ORGANISERS

ANNEWIEKE VROOM (ACCORD) is a philosopher of religion working on East-West dialogue. She met the Maraldo’s in Japan, and became a committed fan of John Maraldo, one of the top scholars worldwide in east-west philosophy. It is still very rare for a philosopher to be specialized in both eastern and western thought, and John also is analytically and conceptually very clear. Mary-Jo knows eastern and western art inside out, so Annewieke asked her to share her lecture to make visible the mixing of east and west that has been going on. Scott Dalby is a young gifted scholar who acquired a thorough knowledge of East and West, so this seemed a great match. It has been a long dream of Annewieke to mix art and philosophy, and working together with KATJA BEEKMAN (FOW) made this possible. Katja is the director of Stichting Filosofie Oost-West, that since 1994 has provided a nation-wide forum for a comparative approach to non-western and European philosophy, in order to promote intercultural dialogues in which both maintain their identities, and neither is annexed by the other. In the FOW approach to comparative philosophy, the various philosophical views are not regarded as competing visions, but as complementary perspectives that may contribute, on an equal footing, to the formation of a meaningful orientation on life in the era of globalisation, both on the individual and on the social levels.

Many thanks go to the Dialoog Academie and VISOR for their financial support and enthusiastic endorsement.

ON THE CONTRIBUTIONS

SCOTT DALBY went to Hong Kong to collect data on a politicized Chinese spiritual-discipline he found fascinating and felt compelled to understand. Inspired by French sociologists and philosophers he participated in Falun Gong practices using his own bodily experiences to better understand why and how practitioners became a part of the movement, which since 1999 has been persecuted by the Chinese government. Falun Gong emphasizes refining body, mind and character through ‘cultivation practice’, a process requiring ‘giving up attachments’ so as to attain higher levels of knowledge and merit, ethics and power. After immersing himself in a powerful field where Falun Gong was shared, authorized and enacted through every day practices -Qigong exercises, repetitive study of teachings, and public contestations- and media technology, the anthropologist collided head-on with Falun Gong when Wang (a mainland Chinese practitioner) disclosed “If you want to understand [Falun Gong], you need to quit your PhD!” This talk shows how various philosophical forms, epistemologies and identities emerged in the context of interactions between Western-Europe and East-Asia and how through Dalby’s research experience they came into intimate contact and competition.

ANET VAN DE ELZEN responds, in art, to Scott’s talk. She invents images and uses performance, sculpture and photography to communicate them. Her live work was shown in Tokio (Surge and ICEE), Cape Town (in the street), New York (Abraham Lubelski, downtown Manhattan), London (South London Gallery and LADA), Rouen (Academie des Beaux Arts), Girona (Centre Cultural de Mercé) and also in the countryside in Sissimiut in Greenland. About her work: ‘The making of a performance always starts with the image. The images I make derive from a different reality than everyday reality. By the use of archetypes I find new, related images which attach to the memory. A performance is a situation where two realities are rubbing against each other, I investigate the moments of contact, the moment when a image starts to communicate’.

JOHN MARALDO specializes in Comparative & Asian philosophy, 19th & 20th century continental philosophy.

John summarizes his lecture If Practice Isn’t Opposed to Theory, What Is It? as follows: This question already holds half an answer: it sets up an expectation of a notion of practice that is not part of the pair, theory and practice. Now the theory versus practice distinction has been a pretty powerful tool both in analyzing philosophical problems and in solving everyday ones. But sometimes the distinction gets in our way in seeing things or doing something better. Sometimes seeing -supposedly the theory part- and doing -the practice part- can’t be easily separated. To understand many activities, ranging from everyday actions to social and distinctively religious activities, we need an alternative to the traditional distinction. The alternative I develop supplements, but does not replace, other notions of practice. I inquire into a notion of practice as bodily activity done for its own sake; it is either not goal-oriented at all, or oriented to an internal goal whose fulfillment continues the very same kind of activity. I develop this notion by drawing upon parallels in and contrasts with Plato’s and Aristotle’s notions, and referring to several Chinese and Japanese artistic practices.
DANIELLE VAN VREE responds, in art, to John’s talk. Danielle van Vree, Visual artist, makes performances and video works. She graduated at the Theatre school in Amsterdam in 1995. In 2003 and 2004 she got a grant for two years at the Rijksakademie, Amsterdam. Her work moves on the edge of theatre and visual art. About her work: ‘My performances are clear and transparent concepts, which gives the spectator space to become aware and keep thinking about what is really happening and what is manipulated. A work arises through the equivalent relationships between performer, audience and space, in which I research the tension between fiction and reality. By focusing on the role of the body, shame and desire, private space and public space, I try to understand our inner mental world’.

MARY JO MARALDO is a certified teacher of Ikenobo, the oldest school of Japanese flower arrangement, and a practitioner of 書道, “the Way of Writing” based on Chinese characters. Her calligraphic art and three-dimensional installation pieces go beyond traditional Japanese calligraphy and intersect with abstract expressionism and contemporary sculpture. Her lecture with slide illustrations teaches us a way of seeing the new forms of vision discovered by this cross-cultural movement that still continues today. It starts in 1952, when the Japanese artist Morita Shiryû exhibited his calligraphic works in Brussels. This exhibit made visible, for the first time outside Japan, the amazing interchange of images and techniques that have mutually influenced Japanese calligraphers and Western painters. Japanese calligraphers were inspired by abstract expressionism to create works that playfully abstracted pure images from linguistic texts and the ancient Chinese characters used to write them. Western painters like Miró and Paul Klee also created texts of pure images; and others like Kline, Motherwell and Alechinsky created calligraphic-like texts that mimicked Sino-Japanese characters. Painters used contrast and space in new ways shared by contemporary Japanese calligraphic work.