

Radical Hospitality

Tanja Karreman

Listen to river spirits, wash yourself but use only what you need and treat it like it is not yours!

Black soap

When the weather is fine and the front door and the sliding door at the back are open wide, bringing some coolness, that's when Nieuw Dakota is at its best. Then it is a home away from home, an open ground-floor space offering access to one of the NDSM Wharf's best kept secrets: the back garden, sheltered on one side by a corrugated steel wall, with a view of the NDSM's crane and, off to the other side, a small garage business, obscured by Maze de Boer's art work *InsideOutside*, a gazebo constructed from garage doors that gives shelter from rain and sun. It is the paradisiacal home to swaying reeds, home-grown veg and a table-tennis table for anyone who feels like a game. Inside is outside, and out is in.

This summer, during the hottest weeks of the year, Suzanne Bernhardt and Didi Lehnhausen showed work they made during their residencies in, respectively, Moengo in Suriname and at Ruang MES 56 in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The visitors wandered in from both sides; tourists, festivalgoers, and even our regular winter audiences were pleasantly surprised by the light and space. They refreshed themselves at the huge gourd filled with cold water in the back garden. Using a large wooden spoon, Bernhardt splashed water over the hands of visitors making the black soap, with its irresistible burned-wood aroma. The Kwepi tree is found in the ancient forests of Suriname, and its charred bark, the residue from the making of clay objects using the traditional indigenous method, is used to make the soap.

Space for art

Six thousand homes are going to be built at the east perimeter of NDSM shipyard. The organic snack bar will have to make way for expensive apartment complexes, and the shipping containers that housed students and successful asylum seekers will soon follow. In the meantime, artists are spraying all the walls of the Street Art Museum in the former welding shed. In this magnificent display of parallel worlds, of tourists posing for photos in front of the gigantic Anne Frank mural and models posing for photos against the ever-changing backdrop of graffiti, slowly but surely the empty plot of land on the other side of the street is being smoothed out so that orderly newbuilds can rise from its surface.

While we watch on, a threat is looming over the wharf. But what is it, precisely, that is under threat? The site itself? The people? The space to play and share? The light? The unconventional, oppositional voice? The key question for the fifth edition of the NDSM OPEN artists' paper is this: What can art and cultural spaces/zones mean for the liveability of an area, and of the city?

The threat to the extent of openness and shared use is greater, it seems, even than the threat to the physical 'open' space itself. In recent years, public space – including the shipyard's public space – has been sacrificed to the capitalisation and 'festivalisation' of the city. Rather than being designed and used as accessible places, public space is now a mere conduit – a transit zone – planned to ensure as

many people as possible can get from A to B in the least time possible, and to 'process' them in highly impermanent fashion.

This gives rise to the need for other types of space, a cultural fabric that is a counterforce to what Jappe Groenendijk calls the 'aeroplane bubble'; places where anyone who wishes can (literally and figuratively) pause and reflect; places that are open, non-enclosing. Through the medium of this essay, Nieuw Dakota wants to start the discussion about what such places could look like, about how they could relate to the open space and to one another, and for whom they are intended.

Nieuw Dakota was founded 10 years ago by a bunch of art lovers from North Amsterdam. Their ambitions were grand. The name was a nod to the pioneer spirit of the American Midwest, and the global art world beckoned. Nieuw Dakota was viewed with suspicion – within the art world and on the shipyard itself – because the white cube – synonymous as it is with the art trade, big money, and international museums – did not chime with the shipyard's anarchistic spirit. But the tide turned. It was in precisely these past 10 years that a new type of art space came to the fore, all over the world, out of a latent need for a different kind of intimate, non-commercial space in the city – spaces where consumption and entertainment were not the order of the day, and which offered an opportunity for encounter and contemplation, a view of the world from a trans-local perspective.

Public space as inclusivity

For a cultural fabric to be present in the city, serving as a parallel world – a base of operations, a safe zone – the nature and degree of its accessibility is at least as important as the content and quality of its programme. This kind of place has the potential to extend the public space, to broaden it, and to intensify its use. Not just with respect to quantity, but also to quality and intimacy.

Public space is traditionally a space of encounter. Art has an important part to play in it, and the Netherlands has more art per square metre than any other country in the world. Art is what makes the space. Art tells the story of the city. Art forms the collective memory. Art makes people connect with place, whether they choose to or not.

Many urban environment designers refer to the Nolli Map, a minutely detailed plan of Rome drawn 250 years ago by Gianbattista Nolli. Rather than distinguishing between built and unbuilt space in the map, his map contrasts the private (black) and the public (white). The public space in this historical city includes not only the streets, alleyways and plazas, but also the churches, monasteries and other public buildings. The evenness of the distribution of the map's black and white zones is striking.

In the Netherlands of today, the black areas would surely predominate. The Nolli Map is a prism through which to view the city in our pursuit of liveability, inclusivity and a more even distribution of public and private functions. As a thought experiment let's take a closer look at the NDSM Wharf. There's plenty of open space, alright, but is the NDSM Loods public or not? And what about Nieuw Dakota and Beautiful Distress House, both of which are open four days a week? Is Sexyland public or private? The festivals held here last a day and are only accessible to a public paying for tickets and refreshments. It would be worthwhile to conduct research into a Nolli Map of the NDSM. We could expand the legend with a contemporary shade that falls somewhere between black and white; less a grey than a shade of blue. Although zones of brilliant blue would be nominally public, they would not

always be accessible. The blue would manifest itself in various shades of temporariness.

Radical hospitality

On 5 July 2019 in Nieuw Dakota the chair of the Amsterdam Art Council Felix Rottenberg presented the institution's 'nominations' for organisations (known by the acronym A-Bis) that it would offer regular funding for the upcoming four-year period. He took the opportunity to call upon these organisations to take radical measures to prevent further polarisation between the city and its outskirts. Finger raised and speaking with an ominous, almost condescending tone, he proclaimed that what was needed was more than a just a project. I had to think of author Massih Hutak and his Defend the North (*Verdedig Noord*) initiative, and of Chris, Joop, Marcel, Fatima, Mazen, Marisca, Sarah, Judith and all the others who for many years have been making connections with the schools, the community centres, and the people of North Amsterdam. Amsterdam's councillor for arts and culture Touria Meliani hasn't yet resorted to a quota system, but her message is clear: the policy on assessment and granting of funds to plans will be guided by their degree of inclusivity.

We share these ambitions, but when at the end of the afternoon it was my turn to speak, in my role as host at Nieuw Dakota, I felt compelled to use different language: I decided on the spur of the moment to add a new dimension to the call for radical solutions. There and then, I came up with the term 'radical hospitality'. It's what we've been doing for the last decade: creating a space that is welcoming and accessible to everyone, with attentiveness and continuity.

Open up the doors and make space! This is an appeal to everyone who makes the city what it is: the artists, the planners, the architects, the area managers and the developers. What will this new space look like? How should we go about safeguarding spaces to expand the public dimension of the city, and what resources will we use? As they arise out of organic connections with the immediate surroundings they will, ideally, form a strong and vital fabric woven by radical hospitality.

Radical hospitality operates in two directions: inwards and outwards. Next year, we will be celebrating our 10th anniversary, with a revamped Summer Show focusing on talent in North Amsterdam and at the shipyard; a design competition to transform the facade of Nieuw Dakota's building into a beacon in the city, and a mobile studio that will visit centres for the elderly, schools, community centres, libraries and hospitals (culminating in a book titled *750 jaar Noord*) and a rolling public programme of events with speakers from near and far, so that, together, we can fill in the detail of an inclusive, trans-local cultural fabric of the future.

Temporality lasts longest, like a relationship that, in the awareness of its enduring impermanence, can be so much more thrilling and loving. Meanwhile, however, gradually and imperceptibly, a bond is forged, a bond of trust, continuity, attention and presence in different shades of blue. This is radical hospitality.

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1. The bars of soap sold at Nieuw Dakota in a wrapper printed with the following words: 'Listen to river spirits, wash yourself but use only what you need and treat it like it is not yours! Soap made with Kwepi charcoal from Suriname. Kwepi is a special tree whose bark is used in the ceramic process of Kali'na Amerindian pottery.' riverinreverse.hotglue.me
2. 'Losgezongen van Tijd en Ruimte', in: *Zeven jaar Geleden*, Motley book, June 2019. Jappe Groenendijk is a philosopher, writer and theatre dramaturge, and programme coordinator of the Master of Education in Arts programme at the Amsterdam University of the arts, where he also teaches art philosophy. He is also a music theatre and dance dramaturge.
3. In 2018 Nieuw Dakota commissioned Maarten Doorman to write the essay 'Far-off and nearby' on translocality in the arts: https://nieuwdakota.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Maarten-Doorman_Far-off-and-nearby_On-translocality-in-the-arts.pdf
4. Analogous to the term 'radical autonomy' that Jeroen Boomgaard introduced ten years earlier as a recipe for art in the public space. At the time, radical autonomy appeared to be appropriate for confronting the complexity and especially the corrupting political dimension of commissioned art (art in times of process management). Now it is no longer enough. Process management was but the harbinger of a far more dramatic shift. In a sense Felix Rottenberg is right, because now something more fundamental is amiss: the public dimension itself is under serious threat. The lack of inclusivity and the appeal for radical measures are consequences of that phenomenon.