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01.09.2019 - 01.09.2021

Contemporary Commoning Newsletter #2

Investigating the role of art and design in creating spaces for public action

Contemporary Commoning is a two year research project investigating the many ways in which 'commoning' can contribute to new forms of public space, in the physical as well as the digital realm, and new spaces for public action. This research takes the potential contribution of design and art in these processes of 'commoning' as the main point of departure. The research is a collaboration between the Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Sandberg Institute, Waag: Technology and Society, University of Amsterdam's Center for Urban Studies, Casco Art Institute and Studio René Boer. The research project is grounded in Amsterdam's Zeeburgereiland, an island on the city's eastern fringes currently being developed, and will result in a toolkit of 'recipes for the commons'. René Boer gives an insight into the process of Contemporary Commoning via his biannual Newsletters.

16 December 2020

Hello,

As we're nearing the end of a tumultuous year I would like to give you all a quick update on the current state of the *Contemporary Commoning* research project. As you might understand, it wasn't perfect timing to start an intense, collaborative, on-site research on the relation between art and forms of social convergence and public action in the spring of 2020..!

Despite these challenging circumstances I can only congratulate the team of researchers and all others involved in the project for what they still managed to pull off. Over the last few months, the group's discussion evolved from a conversation on the discrepancy between the 'Mediterranean' representation of the Zeeburgereiland and its everyday reality during lockdown, into an exploration of people's need to rediscover their senses when public space is increasingly smoothened and zoomlife has come to dominate domestic space.

Ronald Rietveld from RAAAF has developed an interest in the historical build-up of the island, including the 3km-long 'smeerpijp' extending on the island's eastern side, and the three, concrete silos in between the housing blocks. According to Ronald, these locations have the potential to recalibrate our senses by relating ourselves (and the island's inhabitants) to 'mud', the material that has been designed out of urban life but remains the base the island has been made of.

In the meanwhile, UvA's Suzanna Tomor has developed a detail model on how to analyse the relation between art and commoning, and will soon start to apply it to three cases on Zeeburgereiland: the fantastic new urban sport zone, which brought a lot of joy for kids from all over the city but also irritation among nearby residents, the Zeeburgertuin, a collective garden project that was recently resurrected, and a new art project that that has recently been commissioned by bpd as part of the collaboration with Sandberg.

Finally, Socrates Schouten from Waag has explained how besides 'the commons' current ecological challenges remain important in his work. These challenges, he argues, are increasingly being 'blackboxed' into consumer choices, which decreases our sensorial awareness of these issues. The ideals of permaculture might offer a way out, which Socrates plans to take as a starting point for a series of interventions he is working on. An inspirational example is the Louis Le Roy's Eco-cathedral, an ongoing 'collaboration' between nature and humankind.

The researchers will be continue to collaborate in the new year, and, as soon as corona permits, also take their work and ideas into the actually existing urban spaces of Zeeburgereiland. We will of course keep you updated on any news. For now, we wish you all the best for 2021 and hope to see you all in real life soon!

Also on behalf of Jeroen Boomgaard,
René Boer

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