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Etonnée de se retrouver ensemble

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Artist in Residence at SC Buitenveldert

My contribution to this volume is a collage of short and highly diverse texts. It is a preliminary progress report on a period of work and a production process that runs from the summer of 2004 to the present. This collection of texts serves as a prelude to a longer and more detailed collection of texts that will be published to mark the completion of my research for the Lectoraat Art & Public Space.

(From a report text 2005)

Since the beginning of 2004 I have served as artist in residence at the football club SC Buitenveldert in Amsterdam. In 2004, Free Spaces Zuidas invited artists and researchers to move in as artists in residence 'at the Zuidas' in Amsterdam for a period of several months. The idea was to produce work in and about this huge urban development project from within existing institutions such as the Vrije Universiteit, the Nicolaas Lyceum, the school gardens and the water company.

Influenced by my recent teaching experiences with architects/urban designers and 'landscapers', I now see this district and its urban development with very different eyes. I have also found a unique guest institution in SC Buitenveldert: like a little David on the priciest land in the Netherlands – right up against the A 10 motorway – it manages to manoeuvre amazing well in the interplay of forces among the various Goliaths.

The landscape of my childhood

(written in 2004 as a 'voice over' for a short film *Tijdens de vooruitgang schijnt de zon* ('During progress, the sun is shining'), my contribution to the Free Spaces Zuidas. In this film, I formulate my plan to take up residence at the football club for longer than the planned period of six months).

Past a moss-clad Emma on her pedestal, I cycle through poplar cathedrals.

The Valeriusplein.

The poplars of progress and reconstruction.

Under the 'Potius Deficere Quam Desperare' of the Amsterdam Lyceum.

Past Hildo Krop's stalwart family.

Like straight-backed gatekeepers the children stand on the bridge,

still the prelude to Van Heutsz's Denkmal. I cycle through gems of urban renewal. Should I turn right or left?

French friends wax lyrical about Plan Zuid, Plan Zu-weed, they say.

The squares, the quays with their red brick, they find it all equally beautiful.

Today I keep cycling past De Groot en Compagnons

and 'spacious 2-, 3- and 4-room apartments regularly up for sale.

Poelwijck en Zweers Makelaardij OG'. Under Houthoff en van Buruma, Camex

the courthouse after the viaduct the landscape has been dug up.

The birth of a New City Centre

proclaims a huge billboard.

Housing – Shopping – Lunching – Working Strolling – Sports – Lounging – Dining

I'm travelling inside a renewed Droste effect. In the distance still BP green

and the Vrije – italics – Universiteit.

My grandma used to talk about cPN rallies in the Olympic Stadium

Citroen C5

I can't wait to meet you

The new Citroen

The urban sports car

My father told me they used to play on the dredged-up ground.

And I ...

I'm also on my way to the landscape of my childhood:

Breathless I would look from the back seat, at the advances

of the big city.

At the Floriade, the PTT tower, the hotels,
the office buildings.

Our summer Sunday drive to a boat that never seemed to be finished. Along the Boelelaan.
On the left the university under construction, on the right the playing fields.

I couldn't wait for the constructions to look like the architectural projections that were promised
on the billboard at the entrance of the building site.

Actually it was always a letdown.

Further along, past the hospital, later under it. Aunt Hilda lived on the left on the Amstelveenseweg
and on the right was the Water Tower. There you had to turn into a lane with reeds on either side,
across some railroad tracks
and then you reached the marinas.

My childhood disappointment about the gap between the grandeur of the perspective drawings
and built reality is over.

The architectural Droste pictures are more perfect than ever.

The towering structures themselves seem Photoshopped.
Products of the latest versions of 3-D software.
Technological marvels. 'The sun is shining,
the sky is blue
and the grass green ...

That amazed smile ...
(from a project document, summer 2006)

... The relationship between the world of football and the press has always been an intimate one. Huub Wijffjes and Eric Smulders had good reason to describe the relationship between the sports world and the (audiovisual) media as a symbiosis. This might be the result of various factors. Public sports and mass media are both pastimes that began to take up an important place in everyday life once the Industrial Revolution had firmly

token hold. Attending sports events become popular in the some period as the advent of the technology of the motion picture. Both television and big-time sports have evolved into advertising vehicles for business. What's more, for the Netherlands in particular, the breakthrough of television more or less coincided with the introduction of professional football ...

I came across the above quotation, from the article 'Een lockere gaed-nieuwsshow – het persbeleid van de KNVB tijdens het WK van 1974' by Jan-Willem Navis while leafing through the Tijdschrift voor Mediageschiedenis (a periodical on media history). It outlines the relationship between football and urbanity in a few strokes. Football as an 'urban experience' that is further reinforced by television and the inevitable adverts.

This quotation also made me realize that the territory of the Zuidas and the phenomenon of football – in more than one regard – are part of the landscape of my childhood.

We used to live near the Ajax stadium. As a child I would gape at the masses and masses of people decked out in red-and-white scarves and hats, brandishing banners and armed with 'fog horns' who streamed across the Kruislaan on their way to the De Meer stadium. Practically every week. The homeward march of the Ajax supporters could be really sinister. Lots of shouting and carrying on, and the certainty that that one tram-stop shelter would be demolished.

Similarly, I remember watching TV on Sunday nights, in the late '60s and early '70s as 'sitting through' Studiosport – as a family. In addition to the intense boredom, I can almost still feel the experience of great alienation: those excited, almost hysterical commentator voices, the incomprehensible rules of the game, the images of stands full of collective swaying and bellowing – what was supposed to be fun about it all?

I have to admit that I didn't figure it out until some time after I took up residence with SC Buitenveldert. Gradually we got used to each other, got closer to one another, got an insight into each other's 'tribal rituals'. And oh yes ... I turned out, to our mutual astonishment, to have the proper credentials! My family, on my mother's as well as my father's side, has consisted of true 'Amsterdammers', born and bred, for generations. Once that was made clear, I was definitively accepted.

Why go into such detail here? Because I recognize the amazed smile or the grimace on the faces of my conversation partners outside football as well, and remember their attitude. Admit it: an artist, and a woman at that, in residence at a football club is ultimately a strange and abstract idea. Now that I use it as an absurd joker, when I meet fellow artists or other art or culture professionals, playing this card never fails to be effective. Guaranteed attention, here and abroad!

Something similar happens in reverse: the clichés and stopgaps about art and what it is to be an artist are legion, and often get in the way. To avoid such preconceptions and expectations, I asked not to be introduced to the

club or to individual members as an artist. For a long time I was referred to as a photographer, the club photographer – much later I became ‘our artist’ or sometimes jokingly ‘the artist on duty’. My role and my position at the club have always been kept deliberately vague, and that is actually still the case. What is clear is that I belong there. I’m one of us.

BUT WHAT DO YOU DO THERE?

first an orientation:

It turned out I’d ended up at the secondlargest amateur football club in Amsterdam. Including the largest number of girls’ and women’s teams in the Netherlands, perhaps even in Europe.

Like all amateur football clubs, SC Buitenveldert is a volunteer organization, but one, thanks to its history and its playing venue, that can rely on an intricate and professional network. Above all, however, ‘Buitenveldert’, as members call their club, is a community, so diverse in age distribution – the average age of those who produce the club newsletter is well above 70 – and so diverse in social and ethnic backgrounds that many social organizations might envy it.

Yet it is perhaps most important that SC Buitenveldert is a club with a social agenda. ‘Buitenveldert’ wants to be an affordable football club for young and old, for boys and girls, in a venue safely accessible to all by public transport. Not a spectacular ambition, at first glance. This changes, however, when you weigh it against the scale of the Zuidas developments and the interests involved in them. For SC Buitenveldert plays on the most expensive land in the Netherlands ...

‘We’re a club for regular people,’ I kept being told in the beginning

At the time I was getting acquainted with the club, it was not at all certain that they would be able to keep their venue, a stone’s throwaway from the VU, the university medical centre. Planning development up to that point (2003/04) provided space for one football club, AFc, the prestigious Amsterdam Football Club. In keeping with the principle of dual land use, they will be playing in their sports complex on a motorway overpass.

When I arrived at SC Buitenveldert I found a selfassured organization that eschews victimhood and instead acts proactively and tries to influence decision making on as many fronts as possible simultaneously. Including submitting proposals focused on the essential integration of the club as a facility in the ‘new urban fabric – to be’. One example is the commission the club, along with their main sponsor, has given to NL Architects for several sketch designs in which the club can continue to play at their own location, on the overpass spanning the A 10 motorway.

This same thinking led the club to agree to host an artist as part of a project of the Virtual Museum Zuidas. I was inducted into the ranks as part of their strategy. And they were open and honest about that. It quickly

became clear to me that I found myself at a focal point of ‘urban history in the making’ ... which I would not be done with in six months.

A question of endurance:

(from a report text, 2005)

In my short film *Tijdens de vooruitgang schijnt de zon* (2004), made for the Free Spaces of the Virtual Museum Zuidas, I formulate a question: How is the evolution of the city of the twenty-first century being put into effect and who has the wherewithal to influence these processes? And I announce my intention to follow the club for at least two years and adopt their dance as a sight to track this future development of urban history.

...

In working with architects and urban designers, I have learned that in urban development processes such as these, entirely different chronologies apply. In comparison, the development time of art projects, even those for public space, is extremely shortwinded. The chronologies may be slow, but hundreds of details change every day, as does the social dynamic, which I want to track closely. Since I live 10 minutes by bike from the Zuidas, I want to seize the opportunity to operate ad hoc: to be discreetly present with the minimum logistics necessary to produce high-quality shots.

With the ambition, and the question of whether a process of such magnitude can be recorded in its ‘everydayness’. And with as an expected by-product a form different from documentary film. My ‘toolbox’ remains of course differently oriented from that of a documentary maker. The label ‘documentary’ is meaningful, however: it now serves as a pass key that makes possible contacts and exchanges that were previously difficult to come by ...

I presented my proposal to the club to stay on board, and I still am. Gradually we have found and formed my role at the club together. Visibly, for most club members, I have documented parties and events. Within a smaller circle I have been increasingly involved in the strategy and representation of the club.

I have produced a booklet about the club’s identity, outlining its history, its demographics and its ideals, as well as the value and the importance of the club facilities for physical education classes, other school activities and after-school activities in their metropolitan region. With my sparring partner at SC Buitenveldert, Tjarda Gerlof, I have also developed several pictorial narratives for club presentations to the authorities and other decision makers involved in the planning of the Zuidas.

In part I have become the chronicler of celebrations and special events: I have recorded the Saint Nicolas festivities and the annual girls’ football day. Or, very aptly, I have filmed the annual Zuidas Tournament, in which the football teams of the organizations and businesses involved in the Zuidas development face one another on the turf. One year at host SC Buitenveldert and the other year at competitor AFc, the other football club in the Zuidas. But I have also produced the commemorative book for Mr Henk Voskuilen’s 25 years as

club chairman. Over time I have thus compiled a pictorial archive (in photos and video) of life at the club as well as of the daily changes in the Zuidas landscape that surrounds it.

Another angle:

Because I am in residence with one of the stake-holders, I have a different perspective; I can look at the development process of the Zuidas from another position. To put it in organizational terms, the football club works from the bottom up (and working with or from within the football club is from the bottom up). The other possible positions of the designer (for the sake of the argument I count myself as one as well) are from the top down, or alternatively that of the cultural critic or the (cultural) critical commentator. I am not comfortable in either position! In the end, of my own volition, without commission (and without pay) I decided to stick with the club. In football association terms I have become – for this project a volunteer.

The future is not what it used to be either! *‘What is this place,’ Turner asked the cabby, leaning forward to thumb the SPEAK button beside the steel speaker grid, ‘the address we gave you?’*

There was a crackle of static. ‘Hypermart. Not much open there this time of night. Looking for anything in particular?’ ‘No,’ Turner said. He didn’t know the place. He tried to remember that stretch of Madison, Residential, mostly. Uncounted living spaces carved out of the shells of commercial buildings that dated from a day when commerce had required clerical workers to be present physically at a central location.

Some of the buildings were tall enough to penetrate a dome.

‘Where are we going?’ Angie asked, her hand on his arm. ‘It’s okay,’ he said. ‘Don’t worry.’ ‘God,’ she said, leaning against his shoulder, looking up at the pink neon HYPERMART sign that slashed the granite face of the old building, ‘I used to dream about New York, back on the mesa. I had a graphics program that would take me through all the streets, into museums and things. I wanted to come here more than anything in the world.’ ‘Well, you made it. You’re here.’ ...

From Count Zero (1986)

Author: William Gibson

Gibson describes a view of the future I subscribe to in part, although I only became aware of this when I recently came across the above quotation again. Considering the current level of information and communication technology, you would expect that the new urbanity being proclaimed, or at any rate its business/commercial component, would be able to adopt different architectural forms.

What intrigues me is that the edifices being built at the Zuidas up to now seem to differ so little from the edifices of the modern city. The dimensions and the scale of the business buildings, including their pedestals

still easily satisfy the iconography of Modernism ... although ... There are also edifices that you might more readily described as Nouveau Corporate Kitsch.

I thought of this label when I was making a tour of the United States with fellow artist Erik Weeda. A visit to Atlanta had long been high on my wish list, because it is one of the few American and perhaps Western cities with a large black middle class. I was curious to see whether this fairly unique demographic feature had an impact on how its urbanity had evolved.

From highways and turnpikes we saw the skylines of many cities rise up and vanish behind us. Most displayed a more or less identical composition: clusters of new, not so new (and 'old') high-rises, skyscrapers, large-scale industrial edifices, residential complexes and, last but not least, shopping and entertainment malls, the new typology of which seems to consist of large, blank (light comes from above!), linked boxes of dark-brown ceramic blocks with verdigris tapered gabled roofs.

Atlanta was different: We drove toward a skyline that was booming. Mega-sized projects were under construction in various locations. The majority of the existing buildings had been built in roughly the last 10 years. Huge office buildings and other structures. What stood out, however, was that these high-rise complexes, without exception, featured 'classical' ornamentation, glittering in the sunlight.

On closer examination the buildings turned out to be fusions of different architectural periods, styles and concepts. I realised that this blending of visual idioms, in every instance, was intended to suppress the image of 'the office building' and evoke the image of the 'prestigious edifice', of the 'headquarters' and of 'landmark architecture', as a sign of corporate success and to be broadcast as a brand.

Much of the information being disseminated about the development of the Zuidas – take for instance the public information published by the Zuidas Project Bureau – focuses on what is being constructed on as well as under the ground to accommodate this city centre of the future.

Large billboards show artist's impressions featuring cross-sections of underground strata containing great conduits, tunnel systems almost, in which all basic utilities are housed: high-voltage wires, fibre-optics and every other technological hardware imaginable, to facilitate high-speed data transfer, for instance. In other words, this new city is indeed being built, but we can't see it! See, THAT is what interests me.

I want to know WHAT it is we can't see ... and then I wonder whether there really are things we can't see ... perhaps we can't identify their forms yet... could this be an instance of steampunk aesthetics? Or perhaps of a horselesscarriage problem ... or ...

*see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steampunk>

Count Zero is a science fiction novel written by William Gibson, originally published in 1986. It is the middle volume of the Sprawl trilogy, which includes Neuromancer, Count Zero and Mona Lisa Overdrive and is a prime example of the cyberpunk sub-genre: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Count_Zero 17.09.07

The New City as Poster Fence

– on the proclaimed new urbanity and the new urbanite

(from a lecture from the Studium General programme ‘Het verlangen naar de werkelijkheid’ (‘Yearning for reality’) at the AKV/St. Joost, Avans Hogeschool, ‘s-Hertogenbosch, February 2006)

...

When we direct our gaze toward the representations of the future, the new urbanity in the public space in the Zuidas, what do we ‘read’? What do these visual and textual scenarios of the future tell us? What do these images and texts, generated by businesses, authorities and other stakeholders, say about their perceptions of this future city? Or how can we explain the simple fact that the billboard advertisements in this part of the city are clearly aimed at a particular audience – often an audience in transit, no less.

...

I am also interested in the demographic forecasts, perhaps rather the demographic fantasies expressed by these images. And I insist in posing the obvious question: Why does the proverbial ‘other’ remain underrepresented in these images – non-white people, the elderly, children, the disabled, for instance? Bringing this up may seem a gratuitous exercise in political correctness, but believe me, it must be done.

On the many billboards, temporary poster façades and other advertising constructions, you mostly see lots of good-looking – not extremely beautiful, mind you, but realistically attractive – professional women between about 28 and 38 years of age. White, focused ... well, you can fill in the rest. A remarkably high number of multi-racial feminine beauties, too.

What concerns me as an artist/researcher, as the resident of a football club, and what I also try to portray in my work, is the complexity, the juxtaposition and interaction of different worlds and ‘worldviews’ – within a single area. On the one hand there seems to be a world ruled by an enormous faith in technology, by self-evident mobility and in continuous connectivity > technophile, hardware- and progress-oriented. In this worldview, it is more or less assumed that this ‘technology’ naturally generates interpersonal communication. On the other hand, there seems to exist a day-to-day life of people who have not explicitly chosen one another but have nonetheless decided to band together – after all they are playing a team sport – and that form a community, sometimes in spite of themselves. In which it is precisely the dynamic that is of paramount importance, in which details count in communication and in which you must repeatedly ‘re-tune’ yourself to the other.

I'M NOT HERE TO BRING ANYTHING, I'M HERE TO PICK UP SOMETHING

prelude to a research project

The relationship between art and the Zuidas is a difficult one. In the recent past, statements have been made, declarations of intent have even been issued about the active contributions of artists to the development process of the Zuidas district (see the Vision for the Virtual Museum Zuidas).

Perhaps this is the origin of the yearning, the expectation or the faith I detect in the attitude of my art-professional conversation partners when we happen to talk about my residency at the Zuidas. Have I found 'something' yet, have I figured it out? Have I discovered a way or a form to cope with this complex problem? What I am going to bring, what can I contribute to the Zuidas with my artist's alchemy? What am I going to DO?

After a long period of time, I have decided that I am not going to bring anything; instead I am there to pick up something ... and that I am going to turn this – which has not yet been specified – into the focus of my investigation for the Research Group. As time has gone by I have come to realize that 'the Zuidas project' is a research subject par excellence, particularly at this moment in my practice and my career.

The complexity of the project: the simultaneity of countless processes coming under equally countless domains, disciplines and interests. The very scale and chronology of the Zuidas project make it an optimally multifaceted and effective research subject for me as an 'author'. Not to investigate it as a whole, but to scrutinize elements that, however divergent, nonetheless relate to a single greater subject area.

For some time, I have been looking for ways to form an art practice situated more between a design practice and a scientific practice in terms of research and authorship. This is not, incidentally, a 'manifesto-like' attempt to redefine what it means to be an artist today. It can best be described as a process of emancipation of my identity as an artist. I may call myself a visual artist, but because of my personal qualities and shortcomings, accumulation of knowledge, hangups and fascinations, my range of action has long extended beyond the domain of visual art. Even more significantly, the audiences I address are often not specifically art-oriented.

The results of my works, research projects, therefore require a different 'dramaturgical approach' as well ... At the same time, for me, this research project is a search for sparring partners and a search for conceptual and work models. The assumptions and presuppositions upon which the processes of the Zuidas development are based, the adjustments to these, etc. – THAT is what it's about for me. I admit it: I want to have my cake and eat it too ...

Post-script

At the end of the construction of the textual structure for this volume, I realize that I actually just keep coming

back to the notion of ‘new’ (or ‘the new’): the new city centre, the new urbanity, the new urbanite, a new concept of art, a new approach to art and public space ... een nieuwe lente, een nieuw geluid ... 1

It’s not so much the urge to demonstrate that what is called ‘new’ is not new ... that the designated methods, concepts or approaches have been used before. Nor do I seek to unmask or dethrone the proclaimed new urbanity in all its potential aspects, or qualities. Nor do I want to reveal the ‘true’ face or the genuine provenance of this sloganeering as, for instance, the product of integrated

communication strategies and neo-liberal power plays among various stake-holders. I am far more preoccupied by what ‘the new’, the different might be ... might become. What are the strategies and concepts to develop substantive new forms and conditions of urbanity, that deliver substantive surplus value? Why else, after all, would you bother? What elements are part of the witch’s brew that is being cooked up into urbanity anyway and must therefore be part of this proclaimed new urbanity in every case? An urbanity and an urban area that resist demographic, cultural, economic and functional monotony and monomania. An urban area – a New City Centre – that operates in a truly metropolitan way. Including neighbourhoods where ‘like knows like’ still applies, as well as major transit zones for people, goods and information. With a turntable function for the Randstad Metropolitan Region as well as for international travel. A public domain in which all permanent and temporary residents and users must relate to that which is other than themselves, with all the positive and negative aspects this entails.

1. ...a new spring, a new sound... (from the poem Mei (May) by Herman Gorter)

With thanks to Tjarda Gerlof, initially my contact and later my sparring partner at SC Buitenveldert and to my colleague Karin Arink, for her always critical yet perceptive feedback on my texts.

And last but not least with many thanks to my young colleague Pieter Wackers who has been assisting me on countless filming sessions at the football club, and who has become a member of SC Buitenveldert along the way!

Renee Kool is or has been affiliated with a number of academic programmes for art and design in the Netherlands and in France. Since September 2005, she has been teaching Film & Media Literacy as part of the CMD (Communication & Multimedia Design) programme at the Academy for ICT and Media in Breda. Her work is regularly exhibited in museums and other art institutions in the Netherlands and abroad.

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