

The foreseeable future will be like this. It is interesting to think of these lands as temporary landscapes. When things get finished up and levelled out there is little space for imagination left. OK, that's it – but is it exciting?

SEVEN DAYS OF SPECULATIVE
CONTEMPLATIONS ON THE NOW
AND THE NEXT OF ROTTERDAM AS
A PORT CITY.

PORT CITY SAFARI, ROTTERDAM



[SCENE 1]

Being here feels like a clandestine operation, it's as though we're not meant to be here. On the quay, 23 gigantic cranes are moving, making beeping alarms. Finally, a public road! We're officially allowed to stay here. This landscape is made for machines and survival nature. So many seagulls! There's a strange kind of freedom for machines and selected species here. It's an extra-territory of sorts, an artificial land not

made for humans. A territory ruled by efficiency and effectiveness. It's a highly controlled, guarded, specialised, gigantic mono-functional landscape. A human being looks like a Lilliputian amidst the machines. These kind of constructed landscapes are becoming more machine and less human. In the future, these landscapes will have the lowest density of humans of any man-made assembly. The seagulls get more aggres-

sive the further we encroach upon their territory. They fly low and in large numbers. They squawk. It looks like they could attack. The logistic of the containers is impressive. Each container, coming from somewhere, arrives on the back of one of the trucks. Every single container looks like a different coloured pixel as it lands into an immense sea of containers. It then gets picked up by a boat and gets transported somewhere else. Amazing

how many things are transported this way, how many things are no longer local. The container landscape is very different from the city itself. Yet perhaps cities are coming to resemble these sorts of mechanic systems. The similarity: a specialised, efficient, regulated area – an enclave. It's a kind of gated community. Harbours are pushed further and further from the city; you are not supposed to see how we are fed, how products come

to us. The flow of goods is separated from us as citizens – even in Rotterdam whose livelihood depends on the transport and distribution of goods. In Rotterdam you barely think about the harbour. While here, in the harbour, the city of Rotterdam doesn't even enter your mind. Is this a territory that operates without the city? A territory that operates globally? Is this a territory that doesn't need the city?

Its slowness is striking too. There is noise and movement – but the movement is only slight in proportion to the vast expanse of the landscape. At the same time, everything is in motion. Nothing is stable here! Cranes move, containers move and boats remain put. But the moving pixels are small and it's difficult to see the affect of the change. We've been here for two hours now and they still haven't fully filled the two cargo boats in front of us.

The ground here is black. Everything is covered with a black coal dust. Only the bright whiteness of the seagulls stands out. The camper slowly becomes covered with the same layer of dust. Gradually you become aware how unhealthy this environment is. I get a headache. A conveyor belt transporting coal starts running every now and then with the sound of alarm. After being here for more than four hours, the boats are still not filled. I just

found out that each of these bridge cranes can load 25 containers an hour. Our German companions return to take some more photos. Two older British men with strange red binoculars also stop by. Is this landscape gaining in size simply because of the self-propelling laws of economy? Amazingly, it's still quite low-tech with steel boxes and cranes and a couple of drivers. It's all about raw power, the

power of bulk. In an era of immersive technologies, it's interesting that there is still a need for this 'raw' side of society to propel so much. It's just that stuff is hidden from the talk of people, absent from your awareness; contained in such a way that you cannot picture it. As long as people believe that the future is in material goods, this is the future of Rotterdam. The foreseeable future will be like this.

It's interesting to think of these lands as temporary landscapes. What would be the apocalyptic science fiction story here? The water level rises, the harbour's activities come to an end and all that's left are the cranes stuck in the water. Although someone would probably dismantle them to salvage and re-use the steel. At some point it will become barren and empty, all the steel gone.



ECT TERMINAL MAASVLAKTE
51°56'45"N, 04°03'21"E



[SCENE 2]

Looking from a distance, the sheer scale of the shipping terminal renders the movement between the cranes, boats and containers almost unnoticeable. On the other side of the terminal a constant stream of the trucks – entering and exiting the terminal – looks, in this context, more like a ‘human’ movement. Going in – going out. Most of the trucks carry one large container – each filled with invisible goods that will be distributed to other places. Some

trucks, however, leave without a load. At the Maasvlakte, trucks are the ultimate kings of the road. All other traffic is less present. It's 7 p.m. and the drivers are crossing the fields of the ECT terrain to the restaurant De Maasvlakte. The restaurant serves as a gathering point, dining place, toilet, shower, safe, P.O. Box, fax point, TV room, and a parking place to sleep over. No one really lives here permanently although people

inhabit this area on a daily basis inspite of the fact that there's no hotel, housing, hostel, or camping. The truck drivers are the inhabitants of the restaurant's parking lot. They sleep in their trucks with the curtains at their driver's seat drawn shut. If this is still considered part of Rotterdam, then this is the part where architecture is of the tiniest relevance. I like that there are so many people here staying with such a minimum of provisions, cluttered around this

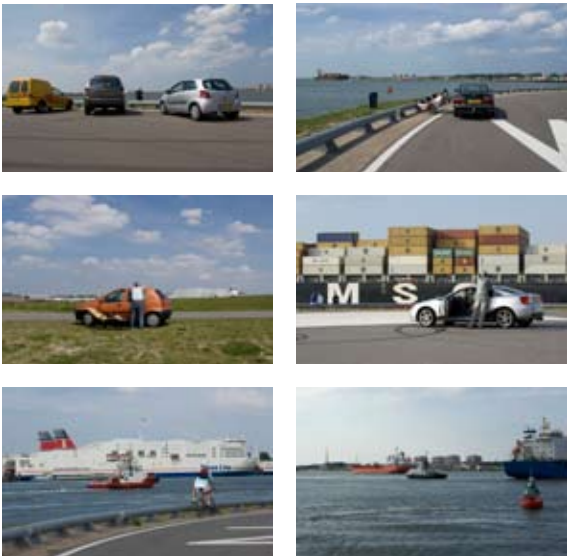
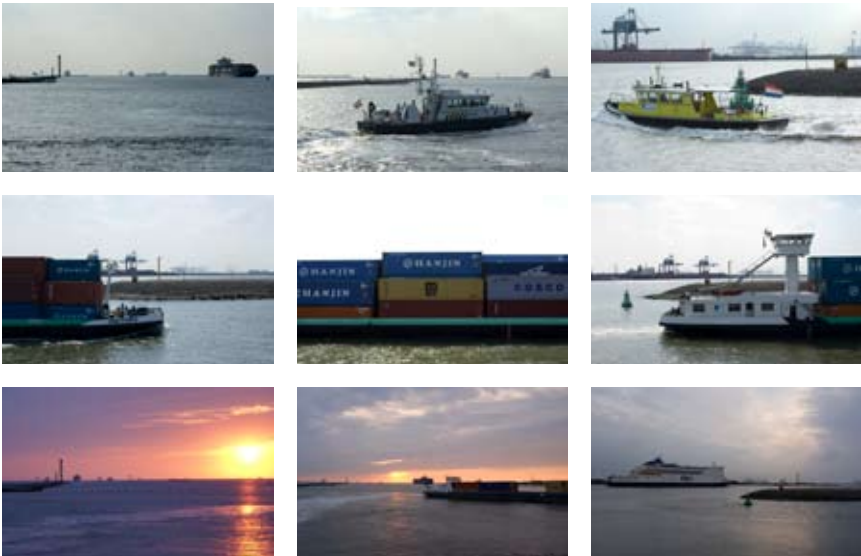
one restaurant! For sure many of them come back several times a month. It's a society without many facilities – its public space is sand and road. The truck drivers are mainly men, although this morning the female shower is in use. Many truck drivers are of Polish, Czech or Slovakian origin, driving for Dutch companies. The first truck leaves around 5.15 a.m. And at 7.30 a.m, when we get up, only about a quarter of the trucks (a dozen of them)

are left in the parking lot – the rest has already gone.





N15 EXIT TO ECT DISTRICENTER
51°57'10"N, 04°01'14"E



[SCENE 3]

This nine-kilometre road is also a nine-kilometre long dam in the form of an oddly narrow peninsula (landtong). Boats are passing on either side. Whereas yesterday everything looked brutal, made from heavy steel, today the boats look like toys – so silent. The most amazing feature here is this very narrow and long island in front of us which resembles a future highway waiting to depart from the peninsula, complete with street poles on both sides

and parking places! There are also two lighthouses. As you cannot cross the water to get there, it looks like someone has forgotten it. Only seagulls occupy this stretch which points in the direction where the harbour wants to extend. In the distance to the south, it's possible to see the dust above the industrial land – the terminals we visited yesterday. There is no reason for people to come here other than for the view and to observe the passing

boats, the ferry departing and the containers coming and going. On nice days like this (although it's still rather windy and sand flies are everywhere), quite some people come to watch the boats pass by – mostly elderly couples who combine watching the horizon with catching a sunbathe. An older man sits with a pair of binoculars and listens to the 'marifoon', the communication radio used by boats to contact the port authorities and the harbour traffic controllers.

As we stand here, gazing out onto this weird strip of unapproachable land in front of us, we realise that both the urban side to our right and the harbour side to our left are doomed to disappear. The 'urbanised' northern side at the Hoek van Holland is very different from the harbour – mediocre Dutch housing featuring replicas of fisherman's houses and behind them loom recently built apartment blocks that are strangely reminiscent of 1980s

Structuralism. While this 'urban' side looks, if anything, regressive, the southern side, with its skyline of brutal coal and ore 'hills', will also not last forever. If we were to imagine a science fiction movie set 20 years from now, what would we see around us? Seen from where we are standing, the wind turbines look as though they are carried by the boats. Imagine the boats really being propelled by these wind turbines – very futuristic!

The harbour certainly makes one thing very clear: processing massive amounts of raw material, energy and goods is a monstrous operation. To think about the future today would require a new phenomenal procedure. Right now we're still hesitating as though before a pool of cold water. The city of Rotterdam and the harbour have competing areas of interests: the market, environment, industry and inhabitants. They keep each other

entangled, but offer each other no breakthrough. Thinking future requires thinking bold: planting forests of wind turbines en masse as vast as the current petrol harbours. An airport on a strip of man-made land next to it. A hydrogen plant or biofuel processed from algae in a massive refinery. If we still need industrial agriculture, put it there. Somewhere around 6 p.m. the sea tide rises, colliding with the flow of the river.



SPIT OF LAND AT ROZENBURG
51°58'14"N, 04°07'24"E



[SCENE 4]

We are here already for two days, staying on the top floor of the Maritime Hotel – an example of the tourist industry, one of the new industries of Rotterdam. The hotel is literally stacked on top of a modernist monument which accommodates the Seamen's House – a legacy of the city's old industry. Somehow this situation reflects Rotterdam's switch from a city of labour and industry into a city of leisure and service.

Dominating the view out the window is the iconic bridge that spans towards and embraces Rotterdam's infamous southern side. An icon that has made it onto almost all postcards you can buy in Rotterdam. Celebrating the Year of Green, the bridge is 'dressed' in plants and flowers. In a similar fashion last year, the bridge was illuminated with purple lights to celebrate the Year of Architecture. Whatever.

The only boats docking in this part of the city are carrying tourist and commuters. A multitude of tourist boats pass under our hotel window. The Spido terminal is nearby. The Spido boats and other boat services bring visitors to different parts of the harbour. There is also a Fast Ferry that goes to Dordrecht, a Pan-nenkoekenboot (Pancake boat), waterbus, water taxis, party ships and various other shapes and formats of water

leisure. The transport of goods has moved away from the city centre and is replaced by the movement of services. While the new land at the Maasvlakte is created for industry and 'new' nature, the derelict industrial land here has been transformed for contemporary urban use.



ERASMUS BRIDGE
51°54'33"N, 04°28'56"E



[SCENE 5]

From the same square window, we look out towards the newly developing Wilhelmina pier. The transfer hall of the Holland America Line is visible in the foreground, announcing itself as Café Rotterdam – a styled cafe with styled people. The larger part of the building is now used as a space for presentations, conferences, etc. One of the six sections of the building has been regenerated as a cruise ship terminal. A Scandinavian shipping house, sailing under

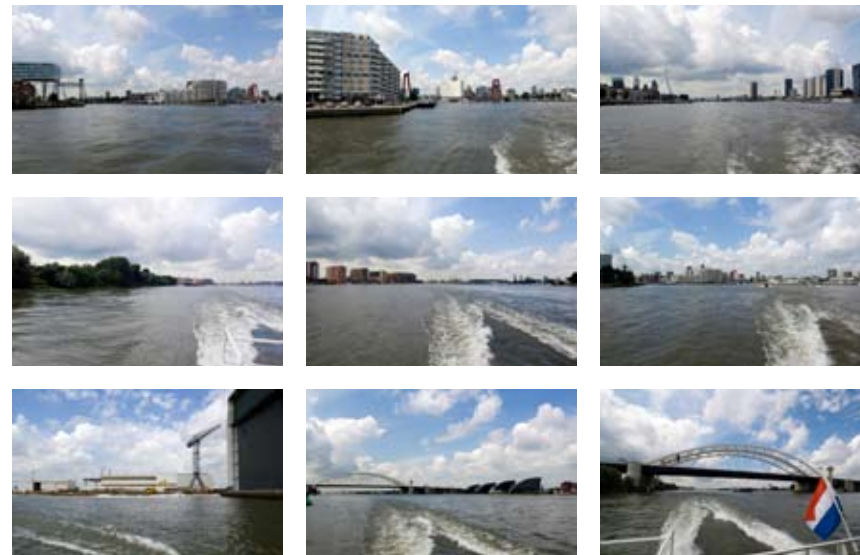
the flag of Nassau, drops-off a bunch of middle class elderly tourists for an afternoon in Rotterdam. The former workshop building of the Holland America Line has recently been converted into a cultural centre. It now features a 1960s-style 'space-age' extension which houses a real-estate development company. This somehow appears remarkably contemporary compared to the flood of high-rises that surround it; mainly abstract

office towers for telephone companies, lawyer firms, the harbour authority or residential apartments. There is a difference in orientation between the original buildings and the newly introduced ones. The new buildings face different directions and have a kind of flatness and abstractness, they look like king-sized models. Alongside the tourists, there is something synthetic about the buildings in front of us – it has a very different feel from the

boats, river, sea... It is a quality difficult to place. The future here is plastic. In three years from now the view from here will have dramatically changed. By that time, most of the view will be taken by one massive building made up of corporate and residential units. When things are finished and get levelled-out there is little space for imagination left. OK, that's it – but is it exciting? Muah...



WILHELMINA PIER
51°54'22"N, 04°29'13"E



[SCENE 6]

The harbour is turning into a prime waterfront location. When you previously thought about Rotterdam you would think of its low and stretched, oversized space. This is something that is changing as well – the city is getting denser and much higher. The city of Rotterdam seems to be more ambitious for the population it actually has. It sets high standards. At the moment it probably requests more from its citizens than what its citizens are realistic-

ly able to participate in. (Keep in mind that even a proposal to introduce a level of minimum income necessary to be able to come to live in Rotterdam was raised a few years ago.) Although Rotterdam is not such a big magnet, there's a lot of effort made to set these developments into motion. Everything is made – pushed forward by the drive of the city authorities. Yet, on the other hand, this forced 'progress' also demands its population to upscale.

Architecture is one of the main means to reach this metropolisation dream. However, scaling-up does not automatically come with metropolisation. Maybe over time the necessary level of liveliness will be achieved. The only future, it seems, is to upscale.



RIVER MAAS WATERFRONT
51°54'50"N, 04°29'26"E



[SCENE 7]

We are parked near the beach next to our previous parking neighbours – a German truck driver and his truck, and his Austrian colleague in a van with a sign saying “heavy road transport”. They’ve been hanging around here already since Thursday night, probably waiting for a load to arrive at the ECT Districenter. With their vehicles they have formed a T-shape to protect themselves from the wind. In the evening they improvise a barbecue

outside. From time to time one of the engines is switched on to charge the battery – so that they do not use up all the power watching dvds and playing cards on the laptop. Although neither parking nor sleeping is allowed here, in the morning we hear voices of some other people who are also parked nearby. It’s raining today and it’s nice to sleep longer! We are standing on new land and looking out onto the newest land to come: a new harbour.

The construction of Maasvlakte 2 starts this September. By 2013, the first phase of the project is supposed to be ready. In 2033 it should be completed. This is the first large polder construction since 30 years. When completed, this new harbour is to enlarge its container capacity by four times, from 9 to 37 million TEUs (‘Twenty-foot Equivalent Unit’ is the size of a standard shipping container). In a few years, the sea on the horizon you now see will be

replaced with a horizon of sand and containers. It is also the border between old energy, new energy and newer energy. To the back of us, a gigantic coal powered power plant spews its exhaust fumes through two gigantic chimneys into the sky. In front of these smokestacks are two huge heaps of coal, their dust spreading in the wind. It’s doubtful whether breathing the air here is healthy. The power plant has created its own ar-

tificial ecology. Water used by the plant to cool the exhaust fumes enters the sea beneath a concrete dam (5-6 metres high), bubbling like a hot spring. Warm water enters a shallow basin that has been bordered with man-sized concrete blocks. In this pond fisherman are fishing. Tropical fish? We are parked along a ‘new energy’ frontier between a row of huge slow turning wind turbines. Once in a while, one of the rotating blades chops a

seagull. Two days ago the radio news reported that the Dutch find the wind turbines ‘visually disturbing’. A consultancy firm advised to group and place the turbines by the sea or around oil platforms along the most un-attractive parts of the coast. I guess this is one of those sites. In front of us are the ‘newest’ potential sources of energy: the sun and the sea’s hydrogen power. Come back in about 50 years from now to see what’s been developed on this front. If

you can succeed in using solar energy to efficiently split water into hydrogen and oxygen, then you have the largest inexhaustible power plant at hand. Other researchers try to replicate the nuclear processes that’s taking place on the sun and apply this as a source of energy. Behind us, the coal is still burning and will probably continue to do so for another century. Next to the power plant is an oil refinery. Certainly

the first source of energy to disappear is oil. Some say that within the next 30 years there’ll be no economically profitable supply of crude oil available anymore. Despite this, the plans for Maasvlakte 2 propose two new petrol refineries and some petro-chemical industries. Rotterdam has eight enormous petroleum harbours. What will happen with them and with these huge storage drums in 30 years from now? This vast supply of drums and millions of

cubic metres could house the soups of algae that will produce the bio-fuel. It could become the world’s largest post-oil energy harbour! The upcoming extension of the harbour, however, is based purely on market demand. There is no larger vision behind it. It’s still unknown who exactly will use this newest harbour extension. There is no vision connected to it in terms of what our future society will need. The only urgency and

reality is economy. Doesn’t look like a very well considered future. Thinking about our local futures should not only rest in the hands of internationally operating actors precisely because their relation to the local context is one-sided and one-dimensional. Is this new land necessary? Who is benefiting from it? The large, large, large shipping companies and terminal operators such as Maersk and Sealand.



What's the connection between this new land and Rotterdam? Who pays for this extension in time, space and financial resources?

It's a co-investment between the Harbour Authority and the shipping companies that have procured the terminals. The Harbour Authority is a company of the city of Rotterdam (and is largely privatised, although part of the money for investments still comes from tax payers). It's

commonly believed that 'we' need it. If you don't grow, you shrink, if you shrink, you die.

A few years ago, Rotterdam harbour lost its position as the world's largest harbour to Shanghai. It's tough to be one of the largest.

In the United Arab Emirates, citizens basically do not have to work. Income from oil is distributed to the population. Rotterdam, on the other hand, has the lowest average income

per inhabitant in the Netherlands. When compared with the UAE, you can imagine that the profit margin distributed between the population of Rotterdam must be relatively low or non-existent.

The sun is going down, and the three surfers who appeared after the rain are now gone, motocross bikers who had been criss-crossing in front of us have disappeared over the dunes, some fishermen in their

long boots are still standing in the water, and the last car – an old Mercedes – with people who came to see the beach for a few minutes, has also left. Today we saw volunteer beach watchers, police and some security guys here. We start to cook, and while in the distance the sky clears, we see some large boats come into view.

BEACH DOBBELSTEEN - MAASVLAKTE 2
51°57'36"N, 04°00'53"E

Rotterdam is one of those places still connected to the iconic image of a port city with its flows of goods, people, cultures and ideas. During the city’s period large-scale expansions in the 20th century, Rotterdam had a bold futurist image, constructed around the entanglements between the city and its harbour. Today, however, what lies ahead is less clear – the question now is how the future in this port city can be conceived.

For seven days we became guests in our own city. A room in the Seamen’s House (a hotel for the ship crews), right in the city centre of Rotterdam, as well as a temporary trailer-home in Rotterdam’s new industrial harbours at the Maasvlakte became at least familiar enough to achieve a sufficient level of boredom to open the mind for some light speculations.

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| script and images | Ana Džokić and Marc Neeleu, STEALTH,unlimited www.stealth.utd.net |
| text corrections | Wierske Maas |
| graphic design | Ajdin Bašić |
| thanks: | Nat Muller |

Made in the context of the project “Going Public ‘08. PortCitySafari”, a project by aMAZElab, Milano, in collaboration with Arnolfini, Bristol - curated by Claudia Zanfi, supported by EU Culture 2007.

Rotterdam, May – August 2008

Printed by FORMATISK, Ljubljana, Slovenia
Limited edition: /

ARNOLFINI

