AIR Jeanne van Heeswijk is revitalising the public space and unleashing the potential of people who have been left behind in the scramble for global urban identities. Here she sets out her theoretical approach and shows how she put it to practice in Rotterdam's Afrikaanderwijk.

Inclusive urban strategies for radicalising the local

Jeanne van Heeswijk

1
Founded in 1998 by Jeanne van Heeswijk and Herve Paraponaris. Further developed in 2008 by Jeanne van Heeswijk and Dennis Kaspori. www.freehouse.nl

2
Derived from 'Radicalizing the Local' (2009), the brochure accompanying a workshop in the Afrikaanderwijk with Berlage students led by Teddy Cruz, Miguel Robles-Duran and Jeanne van Heeswijk.

3
Henk Oosterling's Rotterdam Vakmanstad (Skill City) concept concerns developing the potential of existing skills. www.vakmanstad.nl

The public space is the domain we inhabit collectively. In a time of accelerated globalisation and changes in our environment, city-dwellers are increasingly feeling excluded from their own space. I believe that creative cultural production is crucial for a lively public domain. The Freehouse foundation engages with the relationship between cultural production and public space, initiating projects aimed at redressing the balance in public space.[1]

We are presently working on a project in Rotterdam's Afrikaanderwijk (Afrikaander district). It has a plaza for a huge twice-weekly market where people from many cultures come to buy and sell. One would expect it to be the vibrant heart and soul of the area, but when we first got there it was a dreary place, bound up in a web of overregulation. So Freehouse started a process of tiny interventions, pinpricks in the urban fabric, to bring life back to the area. Some interventions have been successful, others less so, but they have all fed into our experience and practice, so we can inject humour, highlight frustrations or provide opportunities for people to reconnect.

We are engaged with the question of how one can connect formality and informality to arrive at a situation that is neither overly regulated nor overly chaotic. The key question is: how can we redress the balance of public space?

The city can always be transformed, but how should we go about it?
The current economic crisis and the shifting of geopolitical boundaries and socio-cultural demographics produced by global urbanisation all call into question traditional methods of artistic and architectural interventions in the city. The complexity of the intensified geo-economic and political forces continue to generate global and local zones of conflict. The territory, the city and the neighbourhood become sites of contestation where different conditions of power are inscribed. Ultimately, it is in the city that the politics and

economics of privatisation, control, labour and migration are manifested, splintering it into sectors of mega-wealth and marginality. There is an urgent need to re-engage the invisible vectors of power that shape the territory, to reorganise systems of urban development and to challenge the political and economic frameworks that produced the crisis in the first place.[2]

The development of a city should be a collective process. There is a growing faith in the potential of greater community participation in developing models and instruments for city-building. However, this faith is largely blind to the naivety of the notion of transformability based on harmonious togetherness. Enabling the individual or the community to participate in building the city means more than merely presenting them with a few choices and allowing them to communicate through public comment channels, demonstrations or standard procedures. In fact it is precisely these conditions – the notions of how we wish to and are able to live together – that we should be able to question again and again within this process. Offering a range of choices is a last convulsion of the idea of supply-side transformability that still treats the citizen as a consumer.

Are we capable of creating a place – a public domain – where we can debate, face up to the confrontation and address one another as co-producers of the city? Can we make this area of tension visible and develop instruments to enable intervention in that area? Can we collectively develop a narrative about the city in which everyone has a place? And can we then develop instruments that enable people to fill in this place and deepen, sharpen or question that narrative?

Creative City vs. Skill City[3]
Cities are increasingly seeking to differentiate themselves on the global market by developing attractive urban environments where culture is the distinctive factor. In line with this trend Rotterdam is attempting to position itself as an

attractive global location for industry by transforming from a workers' city to a creative city. Plans include the replacement of approximately 20,000 dwellings in the coming decade.

In order to succeed, however, these external physical and economic goals must be matched by internal social cohesion and cultural infrastructure. The rapid developments have taken a narrow global economic view that seeks only to attract a select a largely wealthy, well-educated and white population. Rotterdam has a relatively high low-income population that does not belong to this group, and the city. The urban infrastructure and socio-cultural structure have been ignored in the vigorous transition from worker's city to creative city. The 'creative city' project will be no more than a marketing strategy if it does not take into account the education, development and unrealised entrepreneurial and creative potential of other sectors of society.

As Richard Florida explains: 'Creativity in the world of work is not limited to members of the Creative Class [...] I strongly believe that the key to improving the lot of underpaid, underemployed and disadvantaged people lies not in social welfare programs or low-end make-work jobs [...] but rather in tapping the creativity of these people.'[4]

Surely the qualities of city dwellers are best developed when they are taken seriously in their creative contributions and addressed as co-producers of metropolitan society? Co-producers are stakeholders and interested parties who connect, formally or informally, with others and in the process create public space and communication. It is crucial to find ways to initiate and stimulate these interactions to foster co-production of the public domain.

The idea of co-producers is inextricably linked to the idea of the public domain. *In Search of New Public Domain* by Maarten Hajer and Arnold Reijndorp defines the public

domain as those places where exchange between different social groups can and does take place:

The shift toward a cultural-geographic approach implies letting go of the idea of a single way of determining the value or meaning of spaces. The core of a cultural geography in fact consists of analysing the multiplicity, or in more political terms, the struggle that takes place among different meanings. Shaping a public domain can then be a question of eliciting unconstrained manifestations of diversity and avoiding interventions aimed at making this impossible.[5]

The public domain, then, is primarily a cultural perception. We must stop seeing the public domain as the outcome exclusively of economic and legislative factors, and begin to see it – and use it – as the performative basis for a city under development.
First and foremost, inclusive urban design should mobilise the existing local physical and socio-cultural capital. The public domain provides a platform for exchanges, for participation and communication, and underpins a broadly supported and integral idea about living together in the community.[6]

Freehouse, a model for radicalising local production
Freehouse sets up spaces where local shopkeepers, young people and artists can come together to exchange knowledge, experience and ideas. This exchange leads to a form of cultural production that can reinforce the economic position of those involved and make tangible the cultural process of conceptualisation and realisation, thereby stimulating cultural self-awareness.

We took as our starting point the model of the medieval free house, a place where 'outsiders' who did not possess the social, cultural and economic infrastructure to participate in formal political and social life were nonetheless able to operate within the informal economy.

4
Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002) p.10.

5
Maarten Hajer and Arnold Reijndorp, *In Search of New Public Domain* (2001) p.37.

6
Open 15 – Social Engineering, 'Marketplaces for Cultural Collaboration', Jeanne van Heeswijk and Dennis Kaspori (2008).

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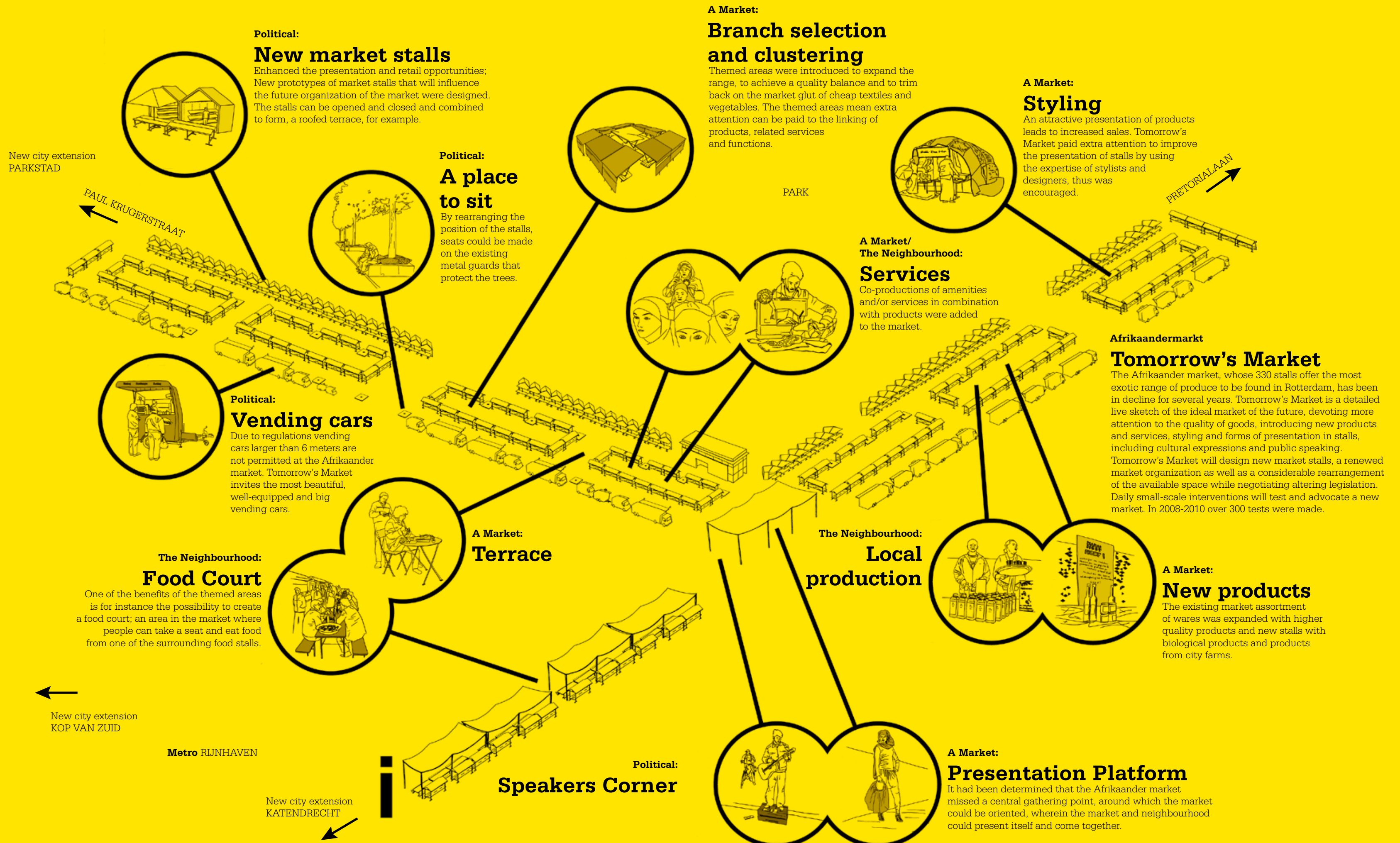
Political:

New market stalls

Enhanced the presentation and retail opportunities; New prototypes of market stalls that will influence the future organization of the market were designed. The stalls can be opened and closed and combined to form, a roofed terrace, for example.

A Market:

Branch selection and clustering

Themed areas were introduced to expand the range, to achieve a quality balance and to trim back on the market glut of cheap textiles and vegetables. The themed areas mean extra attention can be paid to the linking of products, related services and functions.

A Market:

Styling

An attractive presentation of products leads to increased sales. Tomorrow's Market paid extra attention to improve the presentation of stalls by using the expertise of stylists and designers, thus was encouraged.

New city extension PARKSTAD

PAUL KRUGERSTRAAT

Political:

A place to sit

By rearranging the position of the stalls, seats could be made on the existing metal guards that protect the trees.

PARK

PRETORIALAAN

A Market/ The Neighbourhood:

Services

Co-productions of amenities and/or services in combination with products were added to the market.

25

Political:

Vending cars

Due to regulations vending cars larger than 6 meters are not permitted at the Afrikaander market. Tomorrow's Market invites the most beautiful, well-equipped and big vending cars.

Afrikaandermarkt

Tomorrow's Market

The Afrikaander market, whose 330 stalls offer the most exotic range of produce to be found in Rotterdam, has been in decline for several years. Tomorrow's Market is a detailed live sketch of the ideal market of the future, devoting more attention to the quality of goods, introducing new products and services, styling and forms of presentation in stalls, including cultural expressions and public speaking. Tomorrow's Market will design new market stalls, a renewed market organization as well as a considerable rearrangement of the available space while negotiating altering legislation. Daily small-scale interventions will test and advocate a new market. In 2008-2010 over 300 tests were made.

A Market:

Terrace

The Neighbourhood:

Food Court

One of the benefits of the themed areas is for instance the possibility to create a food court; an area in the market where people can take a seat and eat food from one of the surrounding food stalls.

The Neighbourhood:

Local production

A Market:

New products

The existing market assortment of wares was expanded with higher quality products and new stalls with biological products and products from city farms.

New city extension KOP VAN ZUID

Metro RIJNHAVEN

New city extension KATENDRECHT

Political:

Speakers Corner

A Market:

Presentation Platform

It had been determined that the Afrikaander market missed a central gathering point, around which the market could be oriented, wherein the market and neighbourhood could present itself and come together.

Freehouse in Rotterdam focuses on the micro urbanisms – such as non-conforming spatial and entrepreneurial practices – that are emerging from small communities across the city. These alternative forms of urban and economic development thrive on social encounter, collaboration and exchange. Freehouse fosters them by setting up workshops and carrying out interventions.

The Tomorrow's Market project is a perfect example of how Freehouse addresses the public space as a performative basis for a city under development. The foundation advocates a radical review of the policy and regulations that apply to the market and local shops in Rotterdam in order to help residents and shopkeepers alike to reclaim their own environment. Freehouse's primary aim is to foster new roles for art as part of the community, as an added dimension to the city and as a strategic component of urban life.

The Freehouse approach to public space practice
It is central to my practice that I become part of the whole process of change that the community concerned – in this case the Afrikaanderwijk – is undergoing. This means that once processes have got started, they can also work through into larger socio-political contexts. Because once a community has started to shape itself, to articulate its own voice and aesthetic, and to self-organise, it quickly becomes apparent that people know what they really want. By facilitating this process of maximising the potential within communities potential for open dialogue, communication and collective action, we seek to provide tools for re-shaping their worlds, so that the energy generated through people acting out in their own environment will lead to a network of support, a critical reading of their surroundings and an involvement in the changes taking place. And for this you need to repeatedly go back, to sir again and again to create an understanding of the public domain as a shared space, a space that everyone can contribute to and change.

Freehouse in action
Throughout an extensive research period in 2008 and 2009 every Wednesday and Saturday, Freehouse worked towards a new design of the Afrikaander market, together with stall-holders, local residents and policy makers, who all brought their energy into the process. By definition that meant bringing subjectivity into the mix, which is bound to lead to confrontation. If successful, however, it will be possible to start changing legislation as well as the situation on the ground.

The Afrikaander district was one of the first in the Netherlands with a population mostly of foreign origin. In the 1970s, inter-ethnic tensions in this former working class area led to race riots. In the 1990s, the Rotterdam City Council started a major urban development scheme adjacent to the area, and while one architectural feature after another rose up around it, economic activity in the Afrikaander district itself died out. In order for the Afrikaander district to survive the expansion of the 'creative city' – and to thrive from it – Freehouse helped set up small-scale projects to regenerate the area and its market. The aim was to retain its intimate local character and cultural diversity, as well as improve products, services, market interactions and social integration.

At the twice-weekly Afrikaander Market about 300 stalls offer the most exotic range of products to be found in Rotterdam. The market has been in decline for several years: turnover is falling, product range is narrowing and trader numbers are decreasing. Part of the reason for the decline was the impenetrable jungle of regulations applying to market stall holders: products and services are not allowed to be combined on the same stall, meaning that activities such as operating a repair service at a clothes stall or preparing food at an outdoor seating area is not permitted.

Freehouse's 'Tomorrow's Market' encourages market vendors to differentiate their merchandise by using the community's informal and culturally diverse potential. We demonstrated how the regulations was stifling the area by instigating more than 300 acts of 'civil disobedience' ranging from handing out soup made from leftover vegetables to decorating stalls or customising clothing on the street.

Operating from vacant stores in the Afrikaander district Freehouse's strategy was to first map out and then team up local shopkeepers, residents, market vendors, cultural producers, social welfare organisations, policy makers and implementers in an array of cultural economical co-productions. Then, each week for the last two years, we have helped showcase the needs, concerns and ideas of the stakeholders in a series of interventions. They include expanding the range products on offer at the market, working with locals to make clothes they could sell themselves, developing locally produced drink and snack production, creating new stalls with organic produce, starting a clothing repair service and organising a fashion show featuring articles from the market alongside clothes designed by young local designers.

In collaboration with residents, artists and fashion designers Freehouse has also created new sustainable infrastructures such as a neighbourhood workshop for making and designing clothes, a communal kitchen area and a neighbourhood shop selling local products and offering a small-scale delivery service. Now that our regular weekly involvement has ended, we hope that these local co-ops will develop further independently, bringing even more life and prosperity to the community. Freehouse currently provides 40 jobs and various internships in the community. Freehouse currently provides 40 jobs and various internships in the community.

Jeanne van Heeswijk is a visual artist. Since 1993 she has worked on socially committed art projects for public spaces.

What's in the AIR?

AIR in the world

Here at the AIR programme, we are very keen for the results of residency projects to circulate in the public sphere. In the six-month period covered by this issue of ON AIR, our AIRS produced a great deal of work that reached into the world beyond the academy: Jeanne van Heeswijk's residency formed the framework for the intensive lecture series Radicalising the Local, which will also be used for publication; Ann Liv Young presented her SNDO performance *37 Sherrys* at Something Raw festival at Frascati, Amsterdam; John Clayton concluded his five-year project with a major concert at the Blue Note in the Conservatorium van Amsterdam; and as part of Paul Koek's AIR project Into the Polder with Koek, we organised three public meetings and published *Zij aan Zij, Rug aan Rug, produceren in de podiumkunsten* (Side by Side, Back to Back: Producing in the Performing Arts).
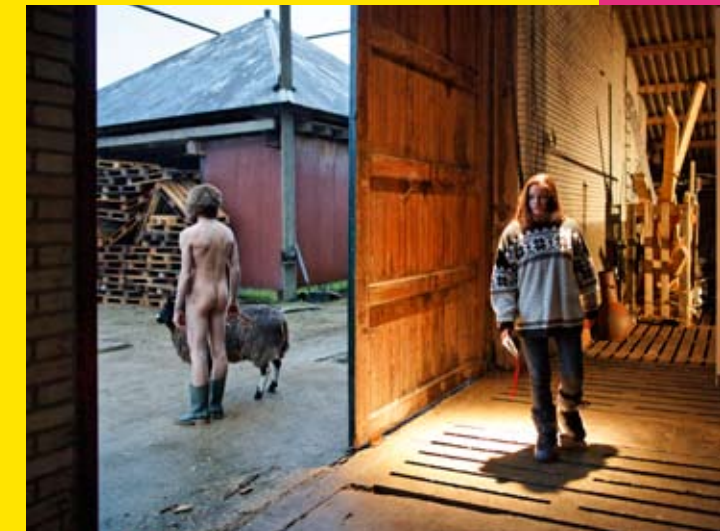

AIR and research

The AIR programme is run by the super-faculty Art Practice and Development research group, which initiates many research-oriented activities, some of which overlap with AIR projects. The two-year interdisciplinary research project Inside Movement Knowledge, for example, arose from the AIR collaboration with Emio Greco | PC. It is now being followed up with two new initiatives: the *(Dance) Notation Series* and an international network of teachers who use media tools in education. Steve Paxton's residency AVE NUE prompted student research carried out by the Amsterdam Master of Choreography, culminating in a special issue of our research journal *RTRSRCH*. Our AIRs are continually experimenting with alternative forms of schooling and testing the boundaries of education. In a response to the challenges they set, the Art Practice and Development research group joined forces with partners from the professional field to co-organise a new edition of the alternative learning environment An Academy: WE LIVE HERE.

AIR in the future

The AIR programme continues to foster innovation by providing host AHK faculties with the opportunity to benefit from the experience of respected artists, breathing new life into the educational and artistic structures of the academy. The format of the programme is flexible, and it is accessible across the faculties: it can be implemented at those moments and locations that call for it.
Following up on the success of the Into the Polder with Koek project, the Production and Stage Management department of de Theaterschool is set to extend its commitment to hosting renowned visiting artists by collaborating with the Dutch conductor Ed Spanjaard from the Nieuw Ensemble. And the SNDO has invited back the contemporary Canadian choreographer Benoît Lachambre to realise a unique site-specific collaborative piece with the entire student body.

In the upcoming spring 2012 issue of ON AIR we will take a closer look at AIR Jeanne van Heeswijk's performative research and bottom-up strategies in architecture and urban planning. We will also report on the outcome of Anthony Heidweiller's interdisciplinary work as part of his AIR project at the Conservatorium and de Theaterschool.

Follow us on
www.air.ahk.nl.