

Ph 7, 0

Niemandsland/No man's land

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Transitory, nomadic, temporary, transient, ephemeral, itinerant, migratory, fugitive, migrant, erratic.

All these adjectives can be associated to the situation many inhabitants of the contemporary city find themselves in. These inhabitants, who make up an increasing part of the urban population but are often not recognized as full citizens, are international migrants. The mobility of the labour force seems to be one of the most powerful elements contributing to the global transformation we are experiencing today.

While an increase of moving, migration and increased mobility is seen as a consequence of the expansion of the capital exploitation of the labour, it might also contain the immanent force capable of subverting the power and the sovereignty of the established. The lines of passage for these moving masses are crossing the globe, connecting nodes that coincide with major political and economic capitals and ancient cities. As a consequence, these cities are undergoing significant social and political changes.

Immigration and renewal have always been an undisputed condition for the proliferation of the capitalist city. The city is the place where capital

concentrates and materialises, and it needs labour flooding in from its surroundings which produces the necessary surplus for its survival. nevertheless the new functions and directions of migration in the current global economy have replaced the Weberian symbiosis between city and citizenship, "polis" and "civitas", by a new one, where urban space is just a temporary setting for the transient settlements of passing workers.

Redesigning the cities, reinventing the use of public and private spaces, injecting new energy into the urban **organisms** of the continent, contaminating and hybridising traditions and **customs**, people moving towards the city in search for better conditions of life, are contributing to the collapse of boundaries and of all stable and fixed configurations within the city. It is therefore impossible to speak of autochthonous and allochthonous, of the 'established and the outsiders' in the contemporary city: all inhabitants are transformed into migrants, affected by the same migratory condition.

Antwerp, Europe's second largest port, likewise functions as a node in contemporary international migrant movements. Yet historically too, Antwerp city life has been largely affected by its international relations and by its flows of immigration. Just as the development of Antwerp is strongly determined by its port and its position on global trade routes, so the heydays of Antwerp have always been connected with intensified immigration, and demographic and spatial expansion. During its three major growth phases, immigration thoroughly reshaped the city's social and physical structure.

In its first phase of growth in the sixteenth century, when Antwerp succeeded Venice as the leading European centre of global trade, the city attracted immigrants from the surrounding **duchy** of Brabant as well as from the Netherlands, France, Germany and other European countries, causing Antwerp's population to grow to more than 100 000. After a long period of decline resulting from the seventeenth century wars of religion between Holland and Spain, Antwerp experienced a second major growth phase in the second half of the nineteenth century, connected to colonial trade and early Belgian industrialisation. The harbour became a major distribution centre for the busy trade in products between Western Europe and the rest of the world, and was also a major transition point in the transatlantic migration route to the Americas. Masses of paupers, attracted by the American dream, came to Antwerp from Germany and Eastern Europe to cross the Atlantic. Some of them found refuge in Antwerp after being refused passage to America, contributing to the large poor labour force that was arriving from the rest of the country. They were housed in monotonous working class neighbourhoods with badly equipped houses in the old medieval centre, but also in the rapidly growing nineteenth century city expansion. In the twentieth century, large social housing estates outside the former city wall would relieve some of the demographic pressure on these areas and offer modest, yet far more liveable housing conditions. A small part of the immigrant population consisted of rich traders attracted by the rapid expansion of the port and by the newly established diamond trade. These richer populations chose to live in the more spacious southern part of the city, far from the port and industrial area.

Antwerp's third growth phase started in the second half of the twentieth century. After the Second World War, Antwerp experienced massive international industrial investment and grew not only to the status of a major port, but became the world's second largest concentration of petrochemical industries as well. The developing Belgian welfare state created a massive middle class that spread over a second, higher status suburban belt around the 19th century city. Nowadays, the Antwerp metropolitan area is more than 150 km² wide and numbers more than 900 000 inhabitants; 460 000 people live within the administrative city boundary. New immigrants from Mediterranean countries such as Portugal, Spain, Morocco and Turkey were attracted to the city from the seventies onward to fill dirty and poorly paid jobs, and settled in the poorly appointed central city working class neighbourhoods. This first post-war immigration wave was succeeded in the 1990s by an increasingly global migrant population from a variety of post-communist and third world countries struck by the foes of global trade, looking for and finding a place at the bottom of the Antwerp urban labour and housing market. At the same time, growing international investment is attracting a global business elite, adding to the richer suburban and inner city gentrifying population, and creating important concentrations of temporary Dutch, German, Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon high class inhabitants. Antwerp, once again an important global trade centre, is once more experiencing a significant shift, becoming a point of passage, a temporary container for different cultures and communities. The inhabitants of Antwerp, like all inhabitants of all

places, cannot be divided into locals and immigrants. All inhabitants are immigrants, as we all are in the same migratory condition.

Since the early writings of Simmel and Wirth, diversity has always been seen as one of the traditional core elements of a city. Yet nowadays, it is imposing itself more directly on all inhabitants of the contemporary global city. Whereas the nineteenth century '**flaneur**' could still wander the streets and seem untouched by the wide variety of urban life, contemporary inhabitants are inevitably affected by the increasing diversity in urban space.

As a reaction, people are rejecting public life and retreating into private worlds to avoid the disorderly view of diversity¹. The safety of the small circle of look-alikes is preferred to the confusing outside world of others. At best, the 'other' can be 'tolerated' and observed from a distance: the other is being familiarised into a knowledgeable object in rituals of multicultural consumption and exoticism in a way similar to the presentation of the fascinating wilderness in a National Geographic documentary. At worst, the other is being rejected and refused access even to the public sphere in a withdrawal to nationalist and racist fantasies.

Both cases boil down to an anxious denial of otherness. Seldom, is the 'other' given the right to be a differing, yet autonomous subject, only very rarely is any effort made to understand the other in his/her otherness. Though privatisation is an understandable attempt to cope with the new urban configuration, it cannot be a definitive answer to related political and social questions. Increasing diversity

continues to affect the social and political constitution of the city as people are claiming recognition of their diverse needs. The simple denial of variety does not support a satisfying organisational solution in this respect.

Instead of multiculturalism or the hard-headed refusal of it, both denying diversity and refusing open contact, recent debates on the concept of interculturalism might contribute to a solution:

In contrast to multicultural consumerism, intercultural debate requires equal power relations and mutual recognition as a starting point. Under the condition of equality, the other can no longer be an object of study or consumption, but is able to speak up for himself within an egalitarian atmosphere. Intercultural exchange does not eliminate conflict, as the model of multicultural tolerance does. So, intercultural exchange may put some things at risk, but is inevitable and enriching. An intercultural society requires the mutual recognition of the right to be autonomous and different as well as the admission of the need to cooperate, as Ludo Abicht, one of the leading contemporary Belgian philosophers, states in his latest publication:

'Als we het hebben over een 'interculturele samenleving', bedoelen we dat we alle deelnemers aan die samenleving als autonome subjecten en volwaardige partners beschouwen, dat we anders gezegd tegelijkertijd het recht op eigenheid van elk van deze culturen én de behoefte tot samenwerking voorstaan' ²(Abicht, 2001: p. 129)

¹ See Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, Norton, New York 1992 (1976)

² See Ludo Abicht, *Intelligente emotie*, Houtekiet, Antwerpen, 2001

Intercultural interaction is necessary on an intellectual and philosophical level, trying to understand the other from his/her own point of view, but also in practical daily life, given the inevitability of interaction with others. Yet in practice, equality is hard to obtain because in everyday interactions, power relations are seldom equal or absent. This is the case in macro-social relations -for instance most immigrants do not count equally when it comes to political decision-making because they are denied full citizenship- as well as in micro-social relationships.

Interactions in the public domain seldom occur on an egalitarian basis as the means to enforce control over public space are unequally distributed among its users. Some groups are able to appropriate a place to a certain extent and exert control over it for different reasons. Local residents for instance are more powerful in comparison to one-off visitors, because of their knowledge of the place, because of the solidarity they can expect from the neighbours, and because the area is respected - also by outsiders- as a prolongation of their private sphere. Between different groups of local residents power imbalances exist as well. Some groups are more united than others, some groups outnumber others, some groups have better contacts with the authorities, who in the end have the final right of control.

The pH 7,0 (Niemandsland/No man's land) project sees the recognition of otherness as an essential urban condition. By an intervention in the public **space**, we want to provoke intercultural confrontation in the everyday life of the many different Antwerp inhabitants. pH 7.0 wants to create a laboratory-like situation where power

relations are as much as possible absent in order to let interaction start from an equal base. pH 7.0 will be a neutral architectural object, a small pavilion, which will be placed in a public **space**. Its main feature being neutrality (as is suggested by the reference to the neutral value on the pH-scale for measuring acidity), pH 7.0 creates a no man's land that will function as a prerequisite for intercultural interaction, much like the function of a no man's land or a neutral space for delicate interstate negotiations.

A neutral architecture, avoiding any symbolical language in the design of the pavilion, will make it accessible to as many different Antwerp inhabitants as possible. pH 7.0 will be an a-cultural monument, open to all communities.

pH 7.0 should not be seen as yet another attempt by planners and architects to steer people's behaviour by the design of the physical milieu, a 'representation of space' to echo the French thinker Henri Lefebvre. pH 7.0 is a space that, in its formal architecture, is loose and light enough to allow the free development of diverse uses and practices, an abstract space to be turned into 'lived-in' space. We imagine using a clarity and simplicity of expression derived from the experience of early modernist architecture that is indeed founded upon notions of egalitarianism.

It is devised as an active monument, not an art-installation to be looked at, but simply a comfortable indoor public **space** to be used and experienced, available to the city dweller to be temporarily occupied and transformed. The pavilion must be seen as an interesting neutral starting point that will soon be covered by layers of uses and signs as a testimony to everyday interaction. This interaction will soon do away with the initial utopian neutrality of the space. Yet planting a fresh and initially

neutral space into a space as loaded with meaning and power structures as the age-old city of Antwerp might open up new ways of dealing with each other and might usher in new practices that would not have been possible before.

The monument should provoke encounter and dialogue as well as confrontation and conflict through its usage, without preliminary imposing a specific model of interaction. So pH 7.0 will also avoid any explicit or symbolic reference to tolerance. pH 7.0 is not meant to teach people tolerance from above, but to make people experience in a Socratic way their own interest in intercultural interaction. pH 7.0 is a temporary covered and heated public space that may be used for any purpose. No particular usage is attributed to it, or rather every possible usage is allowed. As it is located in a public space, any use will provoke some kind of interaction. As it is a temporary stop where movement and trajectories might slow down and take a rest, we imagine a limited architecture whose presence and consistency would not be mimetic of the urban scenery, but rather distinguishing the pavilion from its context. As recent research suggests, it is not the public or private sphere that enables inter-group interaction, but what lies in between, the semi-public domain that is publicly accessible but offers an opportunity of limited control and comfort³.

pH 7.0 is a square pavilion, raised almost 1,5 metres from the ground but reachable by a gentle slope. The four walls of the pavilion are made of transparent coloured glass. The structure consists of steel columns and steel beams, with no supporting elements inside.

An electric heating system and a series of cupboards containing small stools, pillows and a moveable table hidden in the floor allow for some comfort, while a curtain hanging from the ceiling can shade the inside space on three sides. The glass walls are sliding to bring air in from the outside in summer.

A tap and a basin inside the pavilion provide the visitor with hot and cold water, while an electric cooker and sockets offer the opportunity to prepare a small dish or hot beverages. The pavilion is 4 metres high inside, and lights are **worked in** the ceiling. Outside the pavilion, there are shelves to leave shoes before entering the space.

Access to the pavilion will be controlled by handing out keys to different inhabitants in the area, to associations and to public institutions, so that these keys can be requested for temporary use by the public. The pavilion can be locked from the outside, but not from the inside. When someone is inside the pavilion, access is possible for everyone else. It is conceivable that the person who is inside the pavilion first will have a decisive impact on the use of the pavilion. Yet by distributing keys to different groups, the power to determine the use of the pavilion will be redistributed every time someone else decides to open up the pavilion. The decision as to who will use the pavilion at what time lies in the hands of those with keys. This way, simply distributing the keys to different communities in the neighbourhood will provoke conflict and negotiation between different groups with equal power relations.

³ see Maarten Loopmans, [Sociaal kapitaal, territorialiteit en ontmoetingsplaatsen: lessen uit een interculturele vergelijking](#), in *Cultuur en Migratie*, 2002 (forthcoming).

When left empty the pavilion should be closed. The pavilion should be available for use 24 hours a day. The pavilion will be cleaned daily by municipal cleaners like every other public **space**.

The whole pavilion can be easily dismantled and transported. pH 7.0 will tour across Antwerp like a circus, pitching its tent in particular locations, and points of passage and transit, where passers-by and inhabitants might use it.

The locations for the project are chosen for their interesting opportunities to provoke intercultural dialogue. In our choice, we have taken into account the historical background of the area and the contemporary cultural mix. The relevance of the historical background relates to the continuous contributing and layering of symbols and practices in urban space through history, which will cause older areas to be loaded with more, but also more diverse symbols, while more recently built-up areas will have a less rooted, but more one-dimensional meaning. The implantation of a fresh, clear public **space** will have different effects in both types.

The contemporary cultural mix determines the possible variety of uses and practices that can be introduced by the new public **space**.

We have selected five different places where the pavilion should be located, in a line from the north of the city to the south. These are: Kiel, St-Andries, Central Park-Kievitsquare, Central Station area and Ekeren.

pH 7.0 will start in the Kiel neighbourhood. This is one of the oldest neighbourhoods outside the former city wall (now replaced by the Ringway) and has its origins in an independent medieval village. Nonetheless its main development was connected to the

end of the second growth period of the city of Antwerp. The Kiel area was the location for the World Fair as well as for the Olympic Games in the 1920s and was subsequently redeveloped as a mixed working-class and residential neighbourhood. The Kiel neighbourhood is centred around a shopping street and the still-existing Olympic football stadium, attracting a strange mixture of shopping fanatics and football fans at weekends. The neighbourhood is split in two by a broad **thoroughfare**, the Jan Devoslei. West of it, you find a predominantly working class area with a relatively high number of poor immigrants (originally mostly of Spanish, but now mainly of Moroccan origin). On the Jan Devoslei, the Kielpark-project borders this area. It is a large modernist **council** housing estate designed in the 1950s. East of the Jan Devoslei, the so called Fair neighbourhood is a relict of the World Fair. It is home to a more affluent, relatively older Belgian population. Since many of the problematic intercultural relations are closely related to problematic class relations, locating the pavilion right by the Kielpark project, on the boundary between rich and poor, Belgian and foreign, old and established and young and newcomer, promises interesting intercultural contacts.

The St-Andries neighbourhood forms a very specific thread in the Antwerp urban tissue; from the sixteenth century on, it was the traditional poor area of the city (which explains its nickname 'Parish of Misery'), with its disorderly space of small streets and passages; during the nineteenth century **boom-period**, the St-Andries neighbourhood was **infamous** for its terrible living conditions, serving as a place of passage for the above-mentioned transatlantic migrants, who found a temporary refuge in its many hostels and inns of ill repute.

Since the 1970s however, the neighbourhood was one of the first to be affected by gentrification, to the extent that most of the area (especially near the waterfront) is currently occupied by the well-to-do, often Dutch immigrants, with the exception of a few **social** housing estates that serve as a last straw for the poor in the city centre. This interesting mix means that the St-Andries neighbourhood shows us both sides of the coin of international migration, poor and ultra-rich. Locating the pavilion in the centre of this area on St-Andries-square will introduce an interesting clash between these two worlds.

Moving away from the old medieval city centre, we shift to the contemporary urban core. The central station does not only attract international businesses in the surrounding **CBD**, but also functions as an end final destination for international migrants. The area is the most vibrant and metropolitan, yet at the same time the poorest of Antwerp, where poor Mediterranean, African and Asian transnational migrants struggle to survive. Living in dilapidated nineteenth century working class houses, these immigrants survive by informal self-employment or selling their labour in the most miserable conditions. The De Conincksquare functions as the intersection for all these different cultures and, with its many pubs and bars, is not only a place for meeting and gathering for some, but also a place of transit for others. This square will be the location for the pavilion in this neighbourhood.

Antwerp is also renowned for its large Jewish community. Occupying a key position in the city's diamond business, some 16,000 Jews live (mainly) between the Central Station and the City Park. They form a very secretive community that avoids contact with the outside world. On the east side of this neighbourhood, just across the

railway, Jews live intermingled with a Muslim population of mainly Moroccan origin around the Kievitsquare. But in 2005, a new station built for international High Speed Train passengers will give onto this square. The rising land prices resulting from this development threaten both communities with displacement in favour of an expanding CBD. The pavilion will be located here in the now more or less empty space of the Kievitsquare.

The last neighbourhood pH 7.0 will visit at is Ekeren in the north. Ekeren only became part of the Antwerp cityscape during the latest developmental phase in the second half of the twentieth century and consequently makes up a conglomerate of suburbs around an old rural centre. Ekeren is an Antwerp district inhabited mainly by high class Belgian or international, predominantly Dutch, suburbanites with international management jobs dependent on the nearby port of Antwerp.

Yet Ekeren is also the location of one of the most recent spatial expressions of Belgian immigration history. The old abandoned hospital of St-Lucas is now the location for a refugee camp/asylum centre, where asylum seekers are obliged to wait either for their eventual residence permit or for expulsion. Most asylum centres are located away from the central city, scattered across suburbia where they provoke a lot of controversy and opposition from suburbanites, anxious about a drop in real estate values.

Interestingly, the location of asylum centres in the midst of what are among the richest neighbourhoods in Belgium brings the top layer of society in direct contact with the poorest of the poor who have left even their scarce possessions behind. This class contrast adds to the enormous diversity in cultures and backgrounds of the

inhabitants and reveals the big difference between the two most fluid strata of contemporary urban population, the international footloose business elite and the equally footloose migrant proletariat. The pavilion will be placed at the front door of the asylum centre, offering an opportunity to camp dwellers as well as surrounding suburbanites to occupy the place.