

# THE NEVER- ENDING STORY OF COMMONING



A

Het oneindige verhaal over het commonen van  
een boerderij in een verloren landbouwgebied

# FARMHOUSE IN THE LOST FARMLANDS

Edited by Binna Choi, Asia Komarova & Rosa Paardenkooper

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# FOREWORD: LOOKING BACK AT *ERFGOED* (AGRICULTURAL HERITAGE AND LAND USE)

Center for Ecological (Un)learning (CEU) is a studyline by The Outsiders and Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons, initiated to build a sustainable platform for ecological practices that conjure art, agriculture, and the commons in the area Leidsche Rijn, a sprawling new residential neighborhood in the Dutch city of Utrecht. The first official phase of this collaborative endeavor was *Erfgoed* (*Agricultural Heritage and Land Use*), a project that took place at the dilapidated Terwijde Farmhouse. This was once part of a large tract of farmland called Terwijde but is now surrounded by the Terwijde shopping-residential complex (named after the farmland) and its namesake train station. This farmhouse is emblematic of the changes that have taken place in lands around the world during the last decades – colonization, urbanization, and ecological destruction. We approached it with the hope that we might cause another wave of change to counter these processes already set in motion.

It took a while, but through numerous encounters, conversations, and moments of silence we gained the trust of the family of the farmer who owned the farm. Eventually they allowed us to use it. The Outsiders and the Casco team then moved into active work to open up the farm to the neighborhood, drawing inspiration from the many questions and stories that surround it. Why is the farmhouse empty? Where has the farm relocated? If the farms in the area are gone, then where does the food for the residents of Leidsche Rijn come from? Where and how are the farmers who left? We

opened the questions further to the community: What are the future possibilities of this farmhouse and how can “we” – in common – make it happen? This initial premise of openness was a way to investigate ecological practices that our highly urbanized and industrialized societies urgently need to engage with. An agricultural growing cycle was the framework of time we put forward, from winter preparation to sowing time in spring to autumn harvest in 2018.

What follows is an assemblage of stories from some of the neighbors and artists who were active in animating the farmhouse and turned it into a site of what we call “commoning” – a collective process of opening up private or public domains with new dynamics proposed with, for, and by the communities around them. At the time of writing, Terwijde Farmhouse is now in the ownership of a developer and will be renovated into a restaurant and crèche. Our stories shall continue around it, and the recent memories from the time of cohabiting that farmhouse will nourish the soil for our growing together.



Fig. Welcome to Erfgoed during the launch day of Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons, 9 June 2018. Photo: The Outsiders

# TERWIJDE FARMHOUSE IN LEIDSCHER RIJN THROUGHOUT THE YEARS

Txell Blanco

## 1900s

In 1992, many farmers lived and worked on this land east of Utrecht, now known as Leidsche Rijn. They provided their produce to the direct environment as well as companies like Campina and other milk and dairy suppliers. A farm with 100 cows was the norm, Hof ter Weyde was one of those farms.

However, since the fifties the number of agricultural enterprises in the Netherlands decreased by 80% due to upscaling of agriculture and continuous modernization as well as a lack of young farmers who were willing to take over the work.

Farmers faced difficult choices; what direction do they take with their company? Will they become big, bigger or the biggest? Will they specialize? Do they choose a different path for their company, or will they move into social practices on their farmland?

Kees van Vuuren, owner and farmer of Hof ter Weyde, was one of those farmers faced with this choice. From 1965 onwards, when a new Masterplan for the development of Leidsche Rijn was accepted by the municipal councils of Utrecht and Vleuten de Meern, the van Vuuren family together with other farmers had to sell their land to make space for a new residential area with approximately 100.000 inhabitants.

Farmhouses such as Terwijde Farmhouse - now without land - ended up in the middle of modern housing areas, without an opportunity to farm.

The van Vuuren family is looking for a secure future for their farm; who would be able to live in it? And what would the purpose of the farmhouse be?

## 2018

In 2018, more than half of the world's population lives in cities. We hardly consider the immense quantities of food that flow into a city on a daily basis to stock our supermarkets, cafes, restaurants, business, healthcare facilities and schools.

Supermarkets are now the most important supplier of food. Dutch people - on average - reach one within 600 meters from their house, providing them with quick and cheap food.

But this luxury has a price tag; poverty and malnutrition prevail and a third of the food produced is wasted. Ideally, as the world's population grows, food production grows with it, but this is not the case.

Global warming impacts food production by making fertile land scarce. As a result of all these changes, we are remarkably vulnerable when other obstacles should arise, and a food crisis or waste disposal issue are well within the range of possibilities.

Should we stay on track and continue to upscale agriculture? Or are there other ways of relating to food and agriculture? "Smart cities" prepare for such alternatives, for instance by strategically limiting food waste or by creating community gardens in the city.

*Erfgoed (Agricultural Heritage and Land Use)* was a project that looked into these questions in the area of Leidsche Rijn. In this project, local residents got involved in the cultural heritage of their homes, based on art and ecology. We ask you now: How do you imagine the future of a farmhouse like the Terwijde farmhouse, a neighborhood like Leidsche Rijn and its relation to the city?

## 2050

In 2050, 130.000 people will live in Leidsche Rijn, the neighborhood is almost a city in itself. It is self-sufficient when it comes to sustainable energy, organic food production, and water management. We live a little closer to one another due to the influx of new inhabitants in the area. We don't spread further but build higher to maintain the ecological value of the land around us. Pheasants, hazes and other native animals live in harmony with the

"vinexmens". Our society is formed by people and animals. We adapted our neighborhood to heavy rain falls caused by climate change by softening our pavement and creating ponds and lakes in former oversized infrastructural areas such as shopping malls and highways. The Terwijde farmhouse is now producing algae and mushrooms. Supermarkets no longer exist, we have food hubs around the neighborhood where people exchange food, energy and knowledge.

# COMMONING THE TERWIJDE FARMHOUSE

Asia Komarova

## **Part 1: Erfgoed (Agricultural Heritage and Land Use) as part of Center for Ecological (Un)learning**



Fig. Terwijde Farmhouse during the launch day of Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons, 9 June 2018. Photo: Angela Tellier

At the beginning of 2018, my organization The Outsiders started a collaboration with Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons on the long-term studyline Center for Ecological (Un)learning. We called this collaborative project *Erfgoed (Agricultural Heritage and Land Use)*. As part of it, we occupied an abandoned farm, the Terwijde Farmhouse, located in an area called Leidsche Rijn on the outskirts of Utrecht, The Netherlands – a historical farmland turned *vinex-wijk* (suburban neighborhood) – and made the place a location for the commons to happen.

Through our occupation, we aimed at turning the farmhouse into a space for gatherings of neighbors, diverse practitioners, and other beings – such as animals, plants, bacteria etc. – for exchange and collaboration, especially towards (un)learning ecological practices.

Before we delve into the occupation and activation of the farm it would be smart to take a step back and answer the following questions:

Who are these two organizations of different scales and natures and how do they operate? How did they work together on a fruitful artistic intervention in this abandoned farmhouse?

The Outsiders is a union that implements services to people, the environment, and to society. We create sustainable alternative contexts through emergent forms of social engagement. The Outsiders believes that sustainability has no definitive meaning. Playing together is the best way to learn! Through public art and architecture we construct spaces in order to understand the city and its shared existences. Learning by doing is the motto. The Outsiders intervenes, in collaboration with different organizations and citizens, on long-term and temporary projects, indoors and outside. Public space, in our minds, begins from your dining table and extends to your neighborhood. A civic dialogue can be opened between anyone, in any place, at any moment, with or without conscious participation.

Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons is a small-scale art institution founded in 1990 in Utrecht. Casco offers a bold, daring, and affective vision of the ways in which society can be formed and shaped differently with its varied artistic program. This consists of an exhibition program, an annual public Assembly, a School in Common, and site, time, and medium-specific extramural projects. The program evolves around a curious and critical exploration of the commons and contemporary artistic languages in development and in-situ. Casco makes a unique repository of art practices that mix artistic genres – artistic research, archival practices, public art, community art, relational aesthetics, performance, institutional critique, cooking, farming, speculative fiction, comics, carpentry, architecture, design, digital art, sound art, art pedagogy etc. – with a broad range of civic practices including self-organization, trans-disciplinary study, cooperation, community economies, assembly, and coalition building. As such, Casco aims to become an institution not just about, but for and of, the commons, where the modus operandi and ethics of working together are consciously practiced and collectively-examined.

In response to the drastic ecological disasters we were witnessing and continue to witness, and with the understanding that these are a product of capitalism, colonialism, and industrialized agriculture, Casco and The Outsiders came together to engage in the following efforts through artistic interventions:

- Practice in the rural. The most fundamental commons are the earth, our planet, and the natural commons it hosts. Commit to studying and analyzing the interactions among organisms and between organisms and their environment.
- Sustain and recycle resources for the construction of a more equitable and healthy territory.
- Reveal the past and imagine the future; self-awareness helps when practicing in the rural.
- Practice healing rituals.
- Communal conscience. Social networks are the most important infrastructure of the city.
- Cook. Explore the systems that organize the world through food and nutrition.
- Create alternative contexts. Experiment through management of public resources and engagement with policy making.

We were commoning against increasing modes of privatization and decreasing collective power over common lands and food sovereignty. Therefore, we wanted to experiment with this farmhouse and build up a common space which we named after our collective study: the Center for Ecological (Un)learning in the context of the project *Erfgoed (Agricultural Heritage and Land Use)*. Together, we decided to make the farm function by seasons, as it used to, by adapting our lifestyles to ones from the past.

Winter: December–January–February  
(incubation time)

An incubation moment, the moment where we start thinking about the future use of the farm and the potential to make a stable program. Accepting invitations, talking to the neighbors, making proposals on the question: What do we want to happen?

Spring: March–April–May (planting and explosion of blooming)

It's the blossom period, here is where all the ideas we collected start to breathe and have a young life. They are full of energy and hopefully will grow during summer, to be harvested in autumn. The soil outside has to be prepared to be used, we can start planting. Who is there to help?

Summer: June–July–August (work)

Let's Work! Small animals are born, pumpkins are blooming, and there are a lot of bees around.

Autumn: September–October–November  
(harvest)

We have been working all summer! Now is the time to harvest and after the harvest we can have a big party.

Over the course of all these activities we questioned: Why is the farmhouse empty?

Where has the farm relocated? If the farms in the area are gone, then where does the food for the residents of Leidsche Rijn come from? The project opened by asking the community: What are the future possibilities of this farmhouse and how can “we” – in common – make it happen? This initial premise of openness was a way to investigate ecological practices that our highly urbanized and industrialized societies urgently need to engage with.

As a result, departments were formed, which each brought different activities: workshops for children by artist and pedagogue Merel Zwarts, and for a wider public by neighbor and artist Avan Omar; an occupation of the farm kitchen by neighbor and chef Kessouwa Yaboah; a second-hand shop by neighbor Dounia el Ouardani; two vegetable gardens by neighbors Yong Xiu and Nen Lin, and Malek and Fatima; a group of enthusiastic beer brewers from the area who brewed and produced the farm's own beer Terwijde Terror Triple (initiated by Roel Meeuwssen and Marieke Dubbelman); four chickens Emma, Angela, Judith, and Belle; and daily maintenance by The Outsiders (Txell Blanco, Asia Komarova, Leonardo Siqueira), supported by the Casco team including Staci Bu Shea, Binna Choi, Yolande van der Heide, Patricia Jiménez López, Rosa Paardenkooper, Marianna Takou, Erik Uitenbogaard, and engaged visitors and passers-by.

In a shared effort, we galvanized our collective imagination to real effect and took on an initiative to reanimate the farmhouse and open it up. All these neighbors of different cultural backgrounds and generations, neighboring artists and artists elsewhere, animals, insects, and so on started dreaming to enliven and “common” the farmhouse, for learning and unlearning ecological ways of cohabiting in the long-term, creating a strong and durable ecosystem. Together we slowly became urban farmers.

## **Part 2: Exhibiting *Erfgoed (Agricultural Heritage and Land Use)* and Evolved in shared relationships**

The final stage of our collaboration blossomed into an exhibition at the Casco headquarters in the city center. Here, we were all challenged to translate months of living and cultivating together on a shared plot of land into two exhibition rooms of approximately sixty square meters each. How to tell such a complicated



Fig. Opening weekend of Erfgoed (Agricultural Heritage and Land Use), posters designed by Dohee Lee, April 2018. Photo: The Outsiders

story in two rooms when we didn't yet know the future of the farmhouse but at the same time needed to stop following our schedule? What could we transmit to the public? Our frequency and tuning as a group, the story of the place, the artworks that had been made, the presence of the inhabitants as insects, chickens, vegetables, and flowers. We also focused on historical and present day agriculture. If small farms – like our farmhouse – are subject to a fate of culturalization and urbanization, then where does our food come from and to which companies do our salaries go when we purchase food? The stories on food, ecology, and farming were urgent and interwoven with our story of commoning the farmhouse; together they flowed through the exhibition.

We decided to work communally, with neither a traditional exhibition format, nor a traditional curatorial process, instead using a collective build-up as a way to harvest and think together. We cleaned up the farm, trying to dismantle the traces of our activity and interventions, and we brought these traces, as much as we could, to Casco. In just two days of production, using our traces of our many days of preparation, we built up an exhibition, reactivating the objects that we used at the farm. Whilst we were in the middle of this process, another artist, invited by the Casco team to exhibit alongside us in the headquarters, also intervened in the farmhouse with a temporary farewell ritual in several corners of the space. The Finnish artist Alma Heikkilä, part of the Mustarinda collective, added fungus-like sculptures to the farmhouse's structures, which looked as if they had been growing out of the beams for many years.

In October 2018, the exhibition closed. At the same time we learned that the owner of Farmhouse Terwijde had won a court case, a consequence of which was that he was now allowed to sell the building, meaning we were

likely not to return. Yet, even while the farm still remained the property of the farmer, the land around it was no longer arable and was instead hyper-urbanized. There was no more space for planting or grazing animals, leaving him with nothing to work with, but we, collectively, had managed to blow life into the remains of a vital past. A building which served as a nutritional center for more than 500 years was absorbed by the city, but still we were able to give it a revitalizing shake, bringing the urban and rural one step closer to each other.



# CULTURELE COMMONS: VORMGEVEN VAN GEDEELD CULTUREEL GOED

Janna Reinsma in gesprek  
met Jeroen Boomgaard en  
Erik Uitenbogaard



Fig. De Groeiafdeling, workshop door Merel Zwarts, 2018. Photo: Merel Zwarts

Een Nederlandse kunstinitiatief ontvouwt een artistiek project waarbij *commons* centraal staan. Wat hebben kunst en *commons* met elkaar te maken en hoe komen kunstzinnige onderzoeken naar *commons* tot stand? Een gesprek met Erik Uitenbogaard (Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons).

In de Utrechtse Vinex-wijk Leidsche Rijn staat dit voorjaar een project op stapel waarbij in, door en met kunst onderzoek wordt gedaan. Het project komt voort uit nieuwsgierigheid naar nieuwe vormen van gemeenschappelijkheid of verbinding. Het vertrekpunt staat vast, de uitkomst is nog ongewis. Kunstenaars en *artistic researchers* gaan de wijk in en creëren ter plekke nieuwe gemeenschappelijke ruimtes

en ervaringen. En daarop reflecteren – want hoe doe je dat eigenlijk, een gedeelde plek of iets anders gezamenlijks creëren?

## Samenwerkplaats

Het project in Leidsche Rijn draait om wat je culturele *commons* kunt noemen. Of eigenlijk: om de vraag hoe je een gemeenschappelijke culturele plek of dienst of ander gedeeld goed kunt vormgeven.

Erik Uitenbogaard van Casco Art Institute merkt op dat het woord *commons* in het Nederlands helaas geen goed equivalent heeft. Om de betekenis van het soort *commons* waarmee hij werkt inzichtelijker en begrijpelijker te maken, bedacht hij de term samenwerkplaats.

‘Samenwerkplaats heeft het aantrekkelijke dat je weinig hoeft uit te leggen; iedereen weet wat een werkplaats is en wat samenwerken is. Het gaat over samen aan iets werken, zonder dat er meteen bezit geclaimd wordt en iets direct economische waarde toebedeeld krijgt.’

Uitenbogaard is *head of diverse economies* bij Casco Art Institute, het Utrechtse kunstcentrum. ‘Wij zijn geïnteresseerd in kunst die zich verhoudt tot dingen die ertoe doen.’ Casco’s kritische blik op de maatschappij gaat gepaard met een kritische blik naar binnen – aan onderzoek naar hoe de kunstwereld en het eigen kunstinstituut functioneren. ‘Van oudsher geven kunstmusea en galeries kunst een podium in een expositieruimte. Dat is belangrijk, maar daarnaast kun je je afvragen: past het afdoende bij de veranderende samenleving?’ Uitenbogaard vindt dat kunstinstellingen te vaak top-down werken, waarbij niet de vraag maar het aanbod de programmering bepaalt. Hoewel er in de hedendaagse kunst veel aandacht is voor thema’s als inclusiviteit en diversiteit, bereikt die maar een select aantal mensen. Een gemiste kans. ‘We weten dat er nog steeds veel publiek is dat categorisch niet in aanraking komt met kunst en zelfs denkt: dat is niets voor mij.’ Hij denkt dat *commons* in de poging dat te veranderen ‘een betekenisvolle rol’ kunnen spelen.

Een goed voorbeeld is het Casco-project rond Hof ter Weyde in Leidsche Rijn, dat in 2018 plaatsvond en dit voorjaar een vervolg krijgt. Hof ter Weyde is een ietwat vervallen boerderij, ingeklemd in de Vinex-wijk. Delen ervan gaan terug tot de 15de eeuw. Toen Leidsche Rijn werd gebouwd, werd de boer uitgekocht door de overheid. ‘Hoewel de buurt en het NS-station Terwijde hun naam eraan ontlenden, leefde de boerderij zelf niet meer.’

Casco Art Institute en kunstenaarscollectief The Outsiders namen hun intrek in de boerderij en gingen vanaf midden 2017 op onderzoek uit. Ze openden de deuren voor omwonenden, om kennis te komen maken, een praatje aan te knopen, ideeën en verhalen uit te wisselen. Wat is de betekenis van de boerderij op die plek, nu? Wie wonen er nu en wat is een boerderij nog zonder grond en boer? Waar komt tegenwoordig het eten voor Leidsche Rijn vandaan, nu het niet meer ter plekke geproduceerd wordt? Mensen uit de omgeving werden bij dit onderzoek betrokken en organiseerden zelf en samen met de kunstenaars van alles. 'Wat er precies ging gebeuren, was een groot raadsel. Maar laat kunstenaars los en er gebeurt iets,' aldus Uitenbogaard. Er kwamen workshops, markten met biologische producten, een tweedehandswinkel, een werk- en een tentoonstellingsruimte. Er werd een moestuin aangelegd, vee gehouden, hop gekweekt en bier gebrouwen. 'De boerderij werd een vorm van gezamenlijk bezit dat gezamenlijk gebruikt werd. Dat maakte ook zichtbaar dat er aan zo'n gezamenlijkheid behoefte was, of dat die in elk geval goed beviel.'

### Mede mogelijk gemaakt door...

Het vervolgproject van Casco Art Institute op Hof ter Weyde is spannend en open. Hoe krijg je de financiering rond als van tevoren zo weinig vaststaat over vorm en inhoud?

Casco Art Institute bestaat dankzij steun van de gemeente, het Mondriaan Fonds en projectsubsidies van fondsen en andere partijen, zoals Stichting DOEN. Hoe stel je subsidieaanvragen op voor projecten als Hof ter Weyde, waar de uitkomst nog compleet openligt? En hoe verantwoord je uitgaven waarvan het resultaat misschien niet zichtbaar of meetbaar is? Uitenbogaard beaamt dat dit lastig is. 'Aan de gemeente en fondsen moeten we vaak uitleggen hoe kunstinstellingen zoals Casco aan het veranderen zijn en dat er dus niet alleen geld moet naar bijvoorbeeld exposities, maar ook naar het onderzoek van de rol van kunst en kunstinstellingen in onze samenleving. Dat wordt uiteindelijk meestal wel begrepen.' Niet altijd: het Mondriaan Fonds wees eind 2017 een subsidieaanvraag grotendeels af omdat het 'onvoldoende vertrouwen in de resultaten had', aldus Uitenbogaard. 'De logische vraag naar hoe projecten rond commons zich tot geld verhouden ligt terecht op tafel. Voorlopig zijn subsidies nodig. Tegelijkertijd gaat het ons om dingen die zich niet in geld laten uitdrukken. Bij wat je wilt bereiken, is geld helemaal niet altijd

nodig. Ik ben niet voor niets head of diverse economies! Bij Hof ter Weyde waren ontzettend veel mensen betrokken, gewoon uit nieuwsgierigheid, uit persoonlijke belangstelling, uit de wens zich op een nieuwe, andere manier met hun omgeving te verbinden.' Ze stelden grond beschikbaar, werkten mee in de moestuin et cetera. Bij alle bezigheden, gesprekken en workshops leerden ze kunst, de burens en de buurt beter en anders kennen.

De wat saaie, praktische vraag naar financiën vindt Uitenbogaard zichtbaar op. 'We moeten voorbij dat monetaire denken raken. Het neoliberale systeem is knoerhard aan het vastlopen. De kunsten zijn een goede plek om alternatieven te onderzoeken en te pionieren, met vallen en opstaan. Dat klinkt heel idealistisch en utopisch, maar volgens mij is het werkelijk nodig en kan kunst een gidsfunctie vervullen. Kunstenaars zijn wat ik noem "onbewust bekwaam" in het onderzoeken en ontdekken van nieuwe mogelijkheden, dwarsverbanden en verbindingen.'

*Dit is een fragment uit het artikel "Culturele commons: Vormgeven van gedeeld cultureel goed" een gesprek tussen Janna Reinsma, Erik Uitenbogaard en Jeroen Boomgaard verschenen in Boekman #118.*



Fig. Easter at the Terwijde Farmhouse, 2018.  
Photo: Erik Uitenbogaard

# WOORDEN VAN HET LAND

## Sabrina Maltese met Binna Choi

### HET VERLEDEN

Hof ter Weyde is een voormalig kasteel in de Utrechtse wijk Leidsche Rijn. De vroegste historische vermelding van het gebouw stamt uit 1310. De oude boerderij die er nu nog staat is maar een fractie van de grootse kasteelhoeve die eeuwen geleden op deze plek stond.

Op vroege afbeeldingen van Hof ter Weyde is te zien dat het oorspronkelijke gebouw twee verdiepingen had en voorzien was van een traditionele trapgevel. Er was een kapel met gotische ramen aangebouwd en aan de westkant van het huis stond een toren met een uivormige spits.

Het uitgestrekte gebied waar de wijk Leidsche Rijn nu ligt, stond vroeger bekend als de "Stadsweide" van Utrecht. Destijds was het land dat schuilging onder de later aangelegde huizen, straten en winkelcentra van Leidsche Rijn overwegend landbouwgrond. De historische kaart aan de achterkant van deze folder toont de enorme landerijen die de stad Utrecht en de wijde omtrek konden voorzien van voedsel.

### HET HEDEN

Tegenwoordig staat de boerderij leeg en lijkt ze als het ware opgesloten te zijn in de tijd tussen het heden en het verleden. Je zou je kunnen afvragen waarom hier, te midden van Winkelcentrum Terwijde, een onbewoonde ouderwetse boerderij met een rieten dak staat. Hof ter Weyde is een Rijksmonument, wat inhoudt dat de plek niet mag worden gesloopt omdat ze deel uitmaakt van het beschermde nationale erfgoed. De status van Rijksmonument is echter maar een van de vele redenen waarom de boerderij maar leeg blijft staan.

De boerderij is al meer dan vijftig jaar in het bezit van de familie Van Vuuren. Tot 2007 was Hof ter Weyde in gebruik als melkveeboerderij en kaasmakerij. Toentertijd was de boerderij veel groter dan nu en werd ze omgeven door groene weiden en dichte rijen plantenkassen. De Van Vuurens hielden er kippen, varkens en melkvee en in de kaasmakerij aan de achterkant van het huis produceerden ze zuivelproducten als kaas en yoghurt. Er was ook een winkel waar melk en huisgemaakte zuivel verkocht werden aan de lokale gemeenschap.

Sinds 1995, toen het zogenaamde Masterplan Leidsche Rijn door de gemeenteraden van Utrecht en Vleuten-De Meern werd aangenomen, wordt de familie voortdurend door de gemeente onder druk gezet om hun land te verkopen. De aanschaf van de grond van de Van Vuurens was van cruciaal belang voor de uitvoering van het masterplan, omdat de beoogde aanleg van de gloednieuwe wijk Leidsche Rijn uitgerekend op de landbouwgronden van het gebied zou moeten plaatsvinden. Hoewel de gemeente erin slaagde om het land van de familie Van Vuuren te bemachtigen, zag de overheid af van het kopen van de boerderij zelf. Er werd besloten dat het onderhouden van het pand vanwege de monumentenstatus te ingewikkeld en te duur zou zijn. Toen het bestemmingsplan van de omgeving van de boerderij werd aangepast van woongebied naar winkelgebied, om zo de bouw van het winkelcentrum mogelijk te maken, werd de situatie nog moeilijker. De familie Van Vuuren kon door de statuswijziging niet langer in Hof ter Weyde blijven wonen en moest noodgedwongen verhuizen naar een andere boerderij verder buiten de stad.

### DE TOEKOMST

De boerderij Hof ter Weyde belichaamt onopgeloste en onduidelijke kwesties rond stedelijke ontwikkeling, de aanleg van nieuwe nederzettingen, voedselvrijheid en – zelfbeschikking, en veranderingen in levensstijl. Hof ter Weyde is een van de vele historische boerderijen in de omgeving van Leidsche Rijn. Dit geval doet een beroep op onze verbeelding, om met de familie Van Vuuren mee te denken over de toekomst van deze boerderij. Wie zou deze kunnen bewonen of gebruiken? Met welk doel en op welke manier zou dat mogelijk kunnen worden gemaakt?

Een van de ideeën die The Outsiders voorstellen is Erfgoed. Het woord 'erfgoed' betekent 'nalatenschap', maar verwijst ook naar het boerenerf: naar de open ruimte direct rond

de boerderij en misschien zelfs naar de graslanden eromheen, waar voedsel verbouwd wordt en vee kan grazen. Met dit project hopen de initiatiefnemers de bewoners van Leidsche Rijn aan de hand van eten en landbouw te betrekken bij het culturele erfgoed van hun woonplaats. Ze organiseren regelmatig een boerenmarkt en scheppen zo een non-commerciële ontmoetingsplek op basis van samenwerking. Casco ondersteunt dit initiatief van harte, omdat ze waarde hechten aan experiment en radicale verbeelding op het gebied van vergemeenschappelijking, als een tegenhanger van de toenemende privatisering en afnemende gezamenlijke controle over gemeenschappelijke grond en beschikking over voedsel. Wat denk jij ervan? Wat vertelt de boerderij ons? Hoe verbeeld jij je de toekomst van de boerderij?

*Deze tekst maakte origineel onderdeel uit van een folder ontwikkeld in juli 2017, geproduceerd in een samenwerkingsverband van The Outsiders (toen: Txell Blanco, Michiel de Roo, Asia Komarova, Irina Kroeze en Manja Rijken) en Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons (samengesteld door Sabrina Maltese, curator-stagiaire, met Binna Choi, directeur), in de zomer van 2017.*

# WORDS FROM THE LAND

Sabrina Maltese with  
Binna Choi

## PAST

Hof ter Weyde was a former castle in the neighborhood of Leidsche Rijn in Utrecht. The earliest recorded history of the building dates all the way back to 1310. The ancient farmhouse that exists on the Hof ter Weyde site today is only a small portion of the grandiose estate that once stood here centuries ago.

Early depictions of Hof ter Weyde show the original building as having two floors, with a traditional Dutch *trapgevel* (stepped gable facade). There was an attached chapel with gothic windows, and a tall tower with an oval-shaped spit on the west side of the house.

The sprawling neighborhood of Leidsche Rijn used to be known as the *Stadsweide* (city meadow) of Utrecht. Back then, the lands beneath the homes, streets, and shopping centers of Leidsche Rijn were traditionally agrarian, cultivated for agricultural use. The historical map shows the expansive plots of farmland that grew and produced food for the city of Utrecht and beyond.

## PRESENT

Currently the farmhouse sits empty, arrested in time between the past and present. You may wonder why this old-fashioned farmhouse with a thatched roof stands here unoccupied, surrounded by the Terwijde Shopping Center. Hof ter Weyde is a Rijksmonument, which means that it is a certified and protected national heritage site and cannot be demolished. However, the Rijksmonument certification is only one of the many reasons why the farmhouse continues to be unoccupied.

For over fifty years, the farmhouse has been owned by the Van Vuuren family. Until 2007, Hof ter Weyde operated as a dairy farm and

creamery. The farm was much larger and completely surrounded by expansive green farmlands and rows of glasshouses. The family raised pigs, chickens, and dairy cows, and made cheese and yogurt in the cheesemaking room located at the rear of the farmhouse. There was also a store that sold milk and homemade dairy products to the local community.

After 1995, when the Leidsche Rijn Masterplan was adopted by the municipal councils of Utrecht and Vleuten-de Meern, the family sustained persistent pressures from the municipality to sell their land. The purchasing of the Van Vuuren's land by the government was essential for the execution of the Masterplan which sought to construct the brand new neighborhood of Leidsche Rijn directly on top of most of the area's farmlands. Although the municipality succeeded in acquiring the Van Vuuren's land, the farmhouse itself was not purchased because the government deemed it too difficult and too expensive to maintain the building due to its Rijksmonument status.

Further complications arose when the area surrounding the farmhouse was rezoned from residential to commercial to accommodate the construction of the shopping center. This shift in status made it impossible for the Van Vuuren family to continue living at Hof ter Weyde, and they were forced to relocate to a farm further outside of the city of Utrecht.

## **FUTURE**

The Hof ter Weyde farmhouse embodies the unresolved and tenuous issues around urban development, new settlements, food sovereignty, and lifestyle changes. Hof ter Weyde is one of many historical farmhouses situated in the Leidsche Rijn area. It calls for our imagination, next to and with the Van Vuuren family, for the future of this farmhouse. Who could inhabit this place, and what would be the purpose and process to make it happen?

One of the ideas proposed by The Outsiders is Erfgoed. The Dutch word *erfgoed* means both heritage and the area of land that surrounds a farmhouse: the green space where food is cultivated and animals graze. Erfgoed aims to connect the community of Leidsche Rijn to the cultural heritage embedded in the land on which they live through agriculture and food – by organizing a regular farmers market and creating a non-commercial and cooperative meeting place. Casco supports this initiative, as they value experimentation and radical imagination for commoning against increasing

modes of privatization and decreasing collective power over common lands and food sovereignty. What do you think? What does the farmhouse tell us? How do you imagine its future?

*This text was originally produced as a pamphlet made in collaboration between The Outsiders (then: Txell Blanco, Michiel de Roo, Asia Komarova, Irina Kroeze, and Manja Rijken) and Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons (Sabrina Maltese, curatorial intern, with Binna Choi, director) in Summer, 2017.*

# OP STAP MET RIEK BAKKER

## Documentatie van een fietstocht met stedenbouwkundig architect Riek Bakker

Op 18 mei 2018, ter gelegenheid van het twintigjarige bestaan van Leidsche Rijn, nodigden The Outsiders in samenwerking met buurtbewoners stedenbouwkundig architect Riek Bakker uit voor een fietstocht in de buurt.

Bakker is al meer dan veertig jaar een leidende stem in de Nederlandse stedenbouw en ruimtelijke ontwikkeling, en staat aan de wieg van deze nieuwbouwwijk. Tijdens een fietstocht nodigden we Bakker uit om twee decennia later terug te kijken op 'haar creatie'. Welke elementen had Bakker toen al op de tekentafel bedacht en welke had ze niet voorzien?

Hier volgt een impressie van de fietstocht met Riek en een aantal van haar bevindingen terwijl zij opnieuw kennis maakt met de wijk die zij twintig jaar eerder bedacht:



Fig. Riek Bakker at Berlijnplein in Leidsche Rijn, 2018.  
Foto: Richard Draaijer

“Je denkt [de wijk] toch abstracter [dan als je het nu in het echt ziet]. We dachten in systemen, van hoe moet dat gaan werken; moet iedereen [de wijk verlaten]? Laten we iedereen erin? Laten we ook het groen erin? Een soort strategie van; hoe krijgen we het voor elkaar? Want je kan wel de wereld bij elkaar

fantaseren en tekenen, maar als je het niet voor elkaar krijgt dan vind ik het niet leuk.”



Fig. Op stap met Riek Bakker, 2018. Foto: Richard Draaijer

“Toen hebben we het park groter gemaakt. Nog groter. Want we dachten, nou dan gaan ze de randen eromheen maar bebouwen, dan kunnen ze daar geld mee verdienen, en dan kunnen we daar een park aanleggen. Toen dat besluit genomen was heb ik dat opgeschreven in een brief aan het college; “als jullie te bedonderd zijn om daar [het aanleggen van een groen in de wijk] geld voor uit te trekken, dan doe je het maar op deze manier. Opgelost!”



Fig. Op stap met Riek Bakker, 2018. Foto: Richard Draaijer

“Mijn vriendin zei tegen mij je moet alle plannen uit de kast halen die nooit gebouwd zijn maar die heel mooi waren. Dus we hebben een Albert Heijn tas meegenomen met allemaal plannen van Nederland met daar dit, daar zus, daar zo, een hele tas vol. En toen ben ik naar die collegevergadering gegaan, en toen heb ik al die boeken, die prachtige boeken op tafel gelegd en gezegd; “kijk eens, een heel mooi plan, en nog een heel mooi plan, nou dit plan is geweldig. En toen zei iemand: “waarom doe je dat?” Dus ik vroeg: “wat denken jullie dat de overeenkomst is tussen deze plannen?” Dat wisten ze niet, dus ik zeg: “nooit gebouwd. En nou over Leidsche Rijn.” Toen heb ik het masterplan op tafel gelegd en gezegd: “Jullie hebben allemaal je eisen en jullie verlangens op tafel gelegd, al die eisen zijn ingewilligd, nu

is het aan jullie, nu moeten jullie besluiten.”  
Toen begon het natuurlijk over het geld, dus zei ik: “mag ik het nog even over het geld hebben, ik heb een groot schip met geld in mijn zak dus dat kan het probleem niet zijn.” Dus ik ben er hartstikke trots op! Ik vertel dit verhaal overigens nooit ergens, want politici vinden het niet leuk als je deze verhalen vertelt.”



Fig. Op stap met Riek Bakker, 2018. Foto: Richard Draaijer

“Een wijk maak je met zijn allen, een wijk komt niet uit één hoofd! Een stad komt niet uit één hoofd! Een stad maak je samen! En dat hebben jullie geweldig gedaan. Dankjulliewel!”

*Op stap met Riek Bakker werd mede mogelijk gemaakt door: the Outsiders (initiatiefnemer), Inna Massop, Gemeente Utrecht; Marit Overbeek, Utrechtse Ruimtemakers; Alan Lauris, muzikant & architect; Maureen Baas, Metaalkathedraal; Meneer & Mevrouw Lin, vrijwilligers; Avan Omar, vrijwilliger; Leonardo Siqueira, vrijwilliger; Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons; Johan de Boer, Vrienden van het Maximapark; Jan-Willem & Andrea, buurtbewoners; Richard Draaijer, fotografie; Iris Wijngaarde, video; Picnic with Asia, catering.*

# ALLES WAT LEEFT VIND IK MOOI

let van Vuuren in gesprek met  
Marc Hijink



Fig. Boerderij Terwijde temidden van Leidsche Rijn in aanbouw, c. 2000. Foto: The Outsiders

Een vinexzee overspoelde de afgelopen twintig jaar Vleuten en De Meern. De nieuwbouw verdreef de natuur en daarvoor in de plaats kwamen de vinexhuisdieren.

De baasjes van Peppi en Kokki, zo kent ze ons. let van Vuuren runt kattenpension Den Hoet in de Utrechtse woonwijk Leidsche Rijn. Van elke logeerpoes weet ze de naam – ‘onze klanten’, noemt ze hen. En als let hoort dat Peppi een aanrijding met een auto niet overleefde, is ze oprecht ontdaan. „Zo’n lief beestje.”

„Als je later geld wilt verdienen”, troost ze mijn dochter, „zorg dan gewoon dat je een grote schuur vol poezen hebt”. Zelf verzorgt ze zo’n vijftig katten. „Eerst had ik er meer dan honderdvijftig. Maar ik ben 62, het is tijd om af te bouwen.” De logeerprijs ging van tien naar elf euro per dag. „Ik blijf ondernemer – in die laatste euro zit de winst.”

Den Hoet is een monumentale boerderij, een van de laatste groene eilandjes in de vinexzee die de afgelopen twintig jaar Vleuten en De

Meern overspoelde. In 2030 wonen 90.000 mensen in de grootste nieuwbouwwijk van Nederland.

Iets vader kocht Den Hoet in 1989. Een goede investering, want in de overbevolkte Randstad blijven de huizenprijzen stijgen. De waarde is sindsdien verachtvoudigd, schat Iet.

Ze werd geboren op de witte boerderij Hof ter Weyde, even verderop. Die is nog eigendom van haar broer Kees. Samen zagen ze de stad komen: de Haarrijnseplas werd afgegraven voor bouwgrond, de leemlaag gebruikt voor dakpannen.

Tegen de nieuwbouw heeft ze nooit geprotesteerd. Behalve tegen de brandweerkazerne, een betonnen zerk van tien verdiepingen die sinds 2005 zijn schaduw over Den Hoet werpt.

„Op mijn oude TomTom staan de wegen van vroeger”, zegt Iet. Als meisje liep ze met haar oma naar de streng gereformeerde kerk in Utrecht – hoedje verplicht – langs weilanden en een paar boerderijen. De veehouders verkochten hun koeien en land, de hoeves werden restaurant, bezinningscentrum, kunstwerkplaats of idealistische bierbrouwerij.

Den Hoet verkopen was nooit een optie. „Niet zolang mijn moeder leefde.” Iet slaagde erin haar moeder, die 94 werd, tot op het laatst thuis te verzorgen. Makkelijk was het niet.

Dit jaar verrees pal tegenover Den Hoet Leidsche Rijn Centrum, honderden appartementen en winkels. Het heeft allure, vindt Iet, maar de nieuwbouw verdreef de natuur. De patrijzen en fazanten vlogen weg, de hazen werden doodgereden.

Ervoor in de plaats kwamen de vinexhuisdieren, in overvloed. In vakantietijd worden de konijntjes over het hek gekieperd bij de dierenweide. Ook katten zijn er te veel; verwilderde beestjes mogen in de provincie Utrecht worden afgeschoten. Dat is niet leuk, zegt Iet. Maar misschien beter dan dat ze aangereden worden en gewond rondzwerven.

Een deel van de boerderij verhuurt ze aan een zorginstelling. Mensen met een lichamelijke handicap helpen met de katten. Daaruit ontsproot een plan: eigen nieuwbouw. Er staat nu nog een grote loods op haar terrein en het zou mooi zijn om daar zorgappartementen te bouwen. „Dit gebied is het waard om door meer mensen gewaardeerd te worden.” Het zou een plek zijn waar Iet ooit zelf kan gaan wonen –

beter dan die veel te dure appartementen in Leidsche Rijn Centrum.

Maar eerst wil ze weer wat natuur terugwinnen op de stad. Iet legt op Den Hoet een tiny forest aan: een privé-oerbosje, ter compensatie van al die betegelde stadstuinen. „Het bos trekt vogels en egeltjes aan. Er zitten nu zelfs weer molletjes in het gras.”

Sommige mensen zien mollen als een overlast. Iet niet. „Alles wat leeft vind ik mooi.”

*Dit artikel verscheen op 17 augustus 2018 in het NRC onder de titel “Oerbewoners van Leidsche Rijn”.*



Fig. Kees van Vuuren naast de melkmachines in boerderij Terwijde, c. 2000. Foto: The Outsiders



# DE ECOLOGIE OPGEVAT ALS GEDRAG HEEFT HIER GEEN TAAL MEER NODIG

Carla

## Een impressie van de opening van het Center for Ecological (Un)learning op 31 Maart 2018

Tegenover station Terwijde in stadsdeel Leidsche Rijn in Utrecht, ligt een oude witte boerderij. Er zijn hier geen dieren meer en gewassen worden niet meer verbouwd. De boerderij als bedrijf voor voedselvoorziening heeft zijn tijd gehad. Nu opnieuw ingericht, is het voedingsbodem geworden voor het verzamelen van ideeën over hoe je maatschappij meer ecologisch kan inrichten. Binnen op de oude deel, laat een tafel met geïmproviseerde instrumenten zien, hoe je door hergebruik van wegwerpmaterialen een eigen vorm van muziek kunt maken. Op een podium van stobalen wordt je verteld over de achtergrond en geschiedenis van de boerderij. Simultaan in Koerdisch en Nederlands gesproken, mag je kiezen of je luistert naar de woorden die je kan verstaan of dat je luistert naar de klanken van een taal die je misschien niet begrijpt maar die je zowel je eigen betekenis kan geven.

Iedereen is welkom aan de grote tafel. En terwijl er aan de groenten wordt geschraapt, gesneden en geschild, komt een gesprek op gang. Het gesprek gaat over de oude functie van de boerderij en hoe direct het contact met de natuur was in zijn werkzame tijd. Hoe de mensen nu steeds meer levend in stedelijk gebied steeds meer afstand lijken te nemen van dit directe contact met de natuur. Er groeien al kinderen op die alleen het voedsel herkennen uit de supermarkt. Melk komt uit een pak en

een koe woont in een plaatjesboek. Je hoeft tijdens het gesprek alleen maar uit de ramen van de boerderij te kijken om te zien hoe de stad Utrecht hier zijn nieuwste uitbreiding, de wijk Leidsche Rijn, heeft neergezet. De boerderij is de afwijking in verder een gebied met alleen nieuwbouw. In het gesprek gaat het over gezondheid, over eigen voedselvoorziening, het biologische voedsel in de schappen van de supermarkt. Alle gesprekspartners aan tafel lijken hun eigen balans te zoeken. Sommige verdiepen zich in de monocultuur, anderen in de Ayurveda en soms wordt er even geklaagd over het gebrek aan aandacht van mensen. Verdiept in hun smartphone of facebookaccount lijken de mensen hun aandacht niet te kunnen spreiden naar de waarden van hun leefomgeving. Het gesprek zweeft van het ene onderwerp naar het andere. Ecologie is een ruim begrip waarbij iedereen wel een aanhaakpunt heeft.

Voor mijzelf is gezondheid niet zo belangrijk dat dit een voortdurend streven voor mij is. De fixatie die ik soms om me heen zie van mensen die leven volgens een regime van gezond eten, gezond bewegen, gezond denken is voor mij weinig verleidelijk. Het lijkt vaak zo op zichzelf gericht. Ja dat we samen zo goed mogelijk leven op deze planeet dat vindt ik wel belangrijk. Zo gezond mogelijk voor iedereen is daarvan natuurlijk onderdeel. Belangrijker vindt ik het besef van samen verantwoordelijk voor een betere wereld. Dit betekent in eerste instantie dat ik kijk hoe ik met de mensen om me heen om ga. Mijn vrienden, maar ook mijn buurvrouw, de mensen achter de kassa of de vreemdeling die in Nederland veiligheid en rust zoekt. Voor mij is ecologie gedrag dat goed is voor de mens, zijn milieu en de natuur.

Het tafelgesprek dwaalt lang verschillende onderwerpen. Bijna alle generaties lijken vertegenwoordigt. Luisterend naar ieders inbreng zit in de taal en de onderwerpen de geschiedenis van het ecologisch bewustzijn als maatschappij verborgen. Iedere generatie zal zich op een eigen wijze tot het onderwerp moeten verhouden. Vooral wanneer de gevolgen van ecologische onverschilligheid of onwetendheid steeds harder aan de deur klopt.

Na het tafelgesprek gaan we naar buiten en is er een rondleiding om de boerderij. We zien nog andere projecten. We verzamelen hout en maken ter afsluiting een vuur. Als de muziek aangaat wordt er door een groep mensen een Koerdische dans gemaakt. Schouder aan schouder zetten zij hun stappen, brengen hun eigenheid en temperament in, lachen als het even mis gaat en sturen zachtjes bij om weer



Fig. Een Koerdische dans tijdens de opening van Boerderij Terwijde als Erfgoed, 2018. Foto: The Outsiders

samen in hetzelfde ritme te komen. De ecologie opgevat als gedrag heeft hier geen taal meer nodig.

Ik vond het erg leuk om te zien waar jullie mee bezig zijn en ik vindt en zeker ook een heel goed initiatief!

# THE DURABILITY OF BLOSSOMING

Merel Zwarts

From seeding time to harvest season 2018, I was part of a wonderful team maintaining an old farmhouse in Utrecht. Being an artist with an interest in using alternative pedagogical methods and as a person maintaining a low environmental impact, I felt immediately intrigued by the concept of using the Terwijde Farmhouse as a center for the neighborhood where collective gatherings and actions regarding ecology, farming, and sustainability could take place. This common space with its rich history and relationship with rapid urban transformations seemed like the ideal location for people from the neighborhood to gather. Relating to the context of the transformation from farmland to residential area and to the demographic inhabitants of the area – families – I initiated a special “children’s department” within this Centre for Ecological (Un)learning, called De Groeiafdeling [The Growth Department]. I felt especially drawn to work with children in this particular context because I grew up in the “rural” village area Rhijnduinen and Bunnik on the opposite (east) side of Utrecht. I have warm memories of growing up on the border between neighborhood streets and rural lands.

My wish was to work with children from the neighborhood to explore how they, as the new generation, look at their relationship with their surroundings in a conscious way. To be honest, getting children to participate in the project didn’t go effortlessly. Parents didn’t come so easily as they couldn’t find their way to the farmhouse yet. It was through other institutions and organizations that groups of children came to know about the farmhouse and its activities. So even within this open structure for common use, I felt pushed into the direction of asking educational and pedagogical organizations operating in the neighborhood for help, while my ideal had been to start a new bottom-up



Fig. De Groeiafdeling workshop serie door Merel Zwarts, 2018. Photo: Merel Zwarts

collective with neighborhood kids. I couldn't break from my dependence on already-existing formats of organization as I collaborated with schools and childcare centers. Nonetheless, with their help I managed to work with different groups of children.

During a range of eight workshops and activities, we explored the farmhouse and its direct surroundings together. The results were collective playful actions and explorations: dancing with plants, building an adventure playground, making new plant fossil-bricks illustrating the layers of history of the farmhouse. I discovered how lost from the roots and origins of their food some children were. A lot of them didn't know where their food came from other than from the supermarket or plastic packaging, as if vegetables and fruits are factory made. Additionally, their idea of what a farmhouse is or should be was very interesting. Their main vision was that of keeping livestock: cows, chickens, pigs, or sheep. Apart from the chickens, those animals were clearly absent from the current farmhouse. For me, as a person maintaining a vegan lifestyle, this was also a very restricted idea of farming. This strengthened my belief in unlearning or relearning the ecological awareness of new generations; it's an urgent matter that the next generation doesn't get too urbanized and detached from both where our food comes from and how much we take from nature and the environment.

For me personally, being part of the core maintenance and activities team made me experience how strongly sustainability and ecology are not solely related to nature and the environment. The social relationships among us as a team, the curious neighbors, and all the

others involved contributed especially to the atmosphere of the place. This led to magnificent transformations. How a little barbecue could evolve into a garden rave, how left-over materials were made into chicken shelters, how borders were getting crossed by slides or doors, how I felt I became part of the "farmhouse family." Everything was growing.

As we continue the Centre for Ecological (Un)learning, I would like to go into the neighborhood and talk to people on the street. Actively see what's happening and make connections. From which perspectives could the projects I'm initiating help give people a platform to learn, unlearn, and take control of their ecological environment? And from there, I would like to invite people to explore common ground not only in the farmhouse but also in the neighborhood. Eventually, which could be contrary to the idea of doing things together, I would like to take more lead in actively constructing new objects, models, or actions instead of merely waiting for the participation of the neighbors. Working together in common still is a core element, but if people see what's already being done or how it responds to their needs, it's perhaps easier for them to hop on. In other words, I wouldn't host workshops per se, I would take on a more explorative and flexible approach.

Next to the Centre for Ecological (Un)learning, I will continue to have conversations with the next generations about food, the environment, and nature. Things like the recent Fridays for the Future protests from high schoolers demanding politicians and corporations take action for climate change make me feel hopeful for future generations. I see it as my task as an artist with a pedagogical practice to help children and youngsters to make new imaginative and critical models visible, without losing a sense of playfulness. Let's exchange, let's play, let's grow.

# DOING IN THE GREEN

Avan Omar



Fig. Openingsweekend boerderij Terwijde, 2018. Foto: The Outsiders

My participation in Center for Ecological (Un)learning / *Erfgoed (Agricultural Heritage and Land Use)* was a quite challenging and enjoyable one. The old farm that remained, among new buildings and people who come from diverse cultural backgrounds, was the space of the project and actually influenced the concept of my work. It gave lots of inspiration to build ideas to work towards the central concept of the project: ecology. My input was generally building connections and I did that by organizing several workshops, making gatherings, sharing time and knowledge together, practicing direct contact with nature and the environment around us. Doen in het Groen [doing in the green] was one of the projects I developed in collaboration with my husband, the composer Ali Authman, and was conceived for children aged under eight years old. The project was divided into six different workshops, each composed of three different activities: making sound; concentrating on body and movement; and making objects with everyday materials and recycled things. Thinking together, we helped children to become more aware of the relations between the body and their natural surroundings. We involved them in nature and used natural materials, for example painting with paint made of food scraps. In a playful, funny, and ecological way children could investigate the relations between their bodies and nature, they learned what they are capable of achieving with natural and recycled materials, and about the

history of the farm and farming nowadays and in the past.

Beside this extensive project for children there were other events and workshops I came to organize more spontaneously. For example, I invited people at the table in the old farmer's kitchen for a dialogue around the question: **How do we choose our food three times a day?** People could join the conversation in a performative way by making food together, whilst others listened and watched us cook in an informal way. People of different generations and nationalities participated, made an intense and fruitful dialogue, and cooked delicious food that we all ate at the end.

Through this event and the conversations we had, I realized that some of the ideas could be taken further into more events. For example, one of the participants Bart van Weerden, suggested a workshop on foraging the city. Bart knows the edible plants in our neighborhood; plants growing on the sidewalk can be a good source of minerals and historically were used in our kitchens until we became completely dependent on supermarkets. Through this event, during a walk in and around the farm, we learned from him the names and shapes of edible herbs and ways of preparing them.

*Take a picture in nature* were workshops where I invited two neighbors Andrea School Naphegyi and Johan G. Hahn to co-host. With Andrea, we took pictures of the natural environment around the farm and after the workshop showed them in the farmhouse. Johan, who is also a photographer, gave another workshop where we walked together to take pictures on our phones of the neighborhood and later exhibited them in the farm. Everyone could participate, it was shared time for families to do something together and with others.

I also temporarily installed two objects on the farm. One was, out of a collective idea, a slide that people could use as a gate to enter the farm. It was initially installed above the fence to show people that they could enter in another way, by sliding in. After this, I installed a wooden spiral on the ground; children, and even adults, could walk on it and they had to use their balance so as not to fall while they walked. With the help of Leonardo Siqueira and Asia Komarova these two interventions went very well and participants enjoyed their time.

Through feedback I got, I realized how participants enjoyed and needed this togetherness and encounters with others. This kind of project is important in our days, in a

place like Leidsche Rijn and in the rest of The Netherlands, because the system takes our time and energy and make us more and more apart from natural ways of living and being together like there were in the past. That is why I think it is relevant and crucial to look back to the past, not in a nostalgic way but in a pragmatic way, to resist these issues in today's era.



Fig. Avan Omar and Ali Authman, Spiral, constructed as part of the workshop series Doen in het Groen, 2018. Photo: The Outsiders

# FARMING AND HELPING BEYOND THE LANGUAGE BARRIER

Yong Xiu and Nen Lin  
interviewed by Asia Komarova  
and Sun Chang  
Translation and transcription  
by Sun Chang



Fig. Nen Lin at work in the vegetable garden, 2018. Photo: The Outsiders

**Asia:** We think it is important that nowadays people are conscious about food and farming, something which has disappeared from our surroundings. We would like to interview you two, who are still cultivating in the neighborhood and contributing to farms. Could you tell us the

stories about why you grow food? Where do you find land? Why are you some of the few people still working with food in this suburban area?

**Mr. Lin:** We moved to the neighborhood thirteen years ago. The reason why we grow our food is because of biology and hygiene. We do not use pesticides. Farming is our hobby too.

**Asia:** Where did you gain the knowledge of farming? Because nowadays people mostly go to the supermarket. The knowledge and skills are lost.

**Mr. Lin:** We have known farming since we were young.

**Mrs. Lin:** Back to the past, when I was living in China, my family were farmers. For me, I was helping my family from my mid-teen years until my twenties when I got married. So the knowledge is saved in my brain.

**Mr. Lin:** I used to be a builder back in China but also learned and knew about farming, such as the harvest season of different vegetables and which plants will take more space among the others.

**Sun:** Have you kept on farming in your life?

**Mrs. Lin:** No, we had not farmed until we moved to Leidsche Rijn. Mr. Lin has been living in the Netherlands for more than thirty years. We started to farm when we heard of a project initiated by Asia around six or seven years ago [De Halte, an urban garden in Leidsche Rijn].

**Asia:** We don't have the Terwijde Farmhouse any longer and your garden there is gone. But I heard you are still working on a free garden, where is it?

**Mr. Lin:** Yes, we have two vegetable plots in this neighborhood, on a small scale.

**Mrs. Lin:** It is from an organization that has a piece of land. The people there do not know about food cultivation. We got involved after I asked if we could farm there, about five years ago.

**Mr. Lin:** The plots are given for free from the Voedselbank [foodbank]. We are not paying anything.

**Asia:** Every garden has its own style. Some grow small and young vegetables, but yours always has ones in a huge size. What do you do with the overload? Because when you have

a garden you always grow more than what you can consume.

**Mrs. Lin:** We always give the extra food to our friends and neighbors, and we usually grow zucchinis, pumpkins, *snijbonen* (string beans), and potatoes, which are easier to grow than green leaves.

**Asia:** I am really surprised that you share, because normally people cultivate for their own use. You then do not only cultivate, which is already a lot of work, but also give food to others and do volunteer work at the same time at the Voedselbank (foodbank). One more question, do you have any recipes for preserving food for longer use? Because I remember you Mrs. Lin once made a red wine.

**Mr. and Mrs. Lin:** We make dried beans, tofu, and *zuurkool* (sauerkraut). We also steam pumpkin cakes sometimes.

**Asia:** Are you interested in teaching, like a group of ten people? For example, I would love to learn the recipes from you.

**Mrs. Lin:** Yes, depends on what kind of recipes. Tofu is complicated to make in terms of its process. Pickles are relatively easy. But we normally make them after the harvest. Now is the winter season; nothing is ready in the gardens. It will not be very economical to make pickles from the food bought from markets.

**Asia:** May I ask you when you were working on farms in China, was the weather different than the Netherlands? Was it colder or warmer? Because you may need a lot of knowledge to adapt the farming from China to here... about weather and soil.

**Mrs. Lin:** We learn it by trying. It does not work well if we plant seeds before April, mid-April is usually great, especially for pumpkins and squashes. The soil here is pretty sandy and without much sunshine in general so we keep farming as a hobby and go active in summer and spring.

**Sun:** Have you tried to plant any Dutch vegetables, like kale?

**Mr. Lin:** We still prefer the oriental vegetables according to our recipes. For the Dutch ones, even if we cook the same as the Dutch people do, it will not taste as good as them. That is why the seeds we plant are almost all brought back from China.

**Sun:** What is your experience of the farmhouse

project? What is the difference from the Voedselbank, for example?

**Mr. Lin:** It was great helping with the farming and the other building works. We volunteered when we had the time, shared the food we cannot consume. Giving away and making others happy makes us happy as well. In that sense, it's not hugely different from the Voedselbank.

**Asia:** Do you have any questions for us?

**Mr. Lin:** [laughter] We cannot speak much in Dutch. It is difficult for us to enjoy Dutch life because of the language barrier. We would like to help as long as you need our hands. Even though we cannot fully understand what the project really does and is trying to tell, we still can help and enjoy. We like that.



Fig. Seeds brought from China, 2018.  
Photo: The Outsiders

# SOUNDING FARM LIFE

Ali Authman

To live on a farm means to be in direct contact with nature and the natural environment. Not only because of the origins of farming in history as an activity of hard work on the land, but because life on a farm – even now when nothing grows – still has a memory of living in natural ways, being together, seeing things grow in front of your eyes, and living amongst animals.

Today we witness how humans are further removed from the natural ways of living and from farming itself due to industrialization. The body of the farmhouse we occupied in Terwijde, that today is surrounded by busy new housing and markets, paved a good way for me to work through this understanding. I have experienced both ways of being – with nature and in the urban environment – and I think there is no need to compare them but rather to build things on what we have and live in today's life. I like to work with children, and when I had a chance to work with them on the farm, I wanted to use everyday objects of today that were not common a hundred years ago, like plastic bottles. With the children, we gave another function to these things which are usually thrown out, and worked hard to build playful musical objects out of those plastic bottles. Through sound, we made new musical objects to play, enjoy, learn, and make contact with each other and the environment around us.

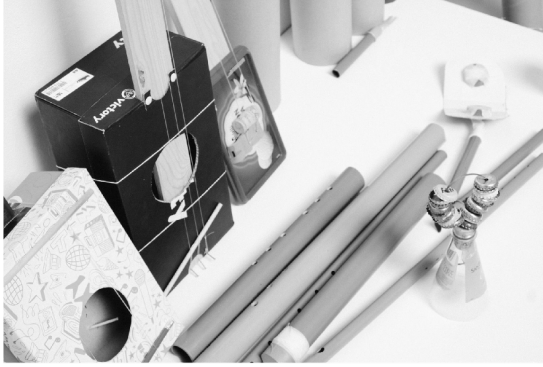


Fig. Ali Authman and Avan Omar, Sound instruments made from recycled material, from the workshop series "Doen in het groen," presented in the exhibition Erfgoed (Agricultural Heritage and Land Use) at Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons, 2018. Photo: Rachel Moron

# TURNING INTO AN OUTSIDER

Leonardo B. B. Siqueira



Fig. Leonardo Siqueira showing the chickens at the Terwijde farmhouse, 2018. Photo: The Outsiders

The first time that I heard about *Erfgoed* (Agricultural Heritage and Land Use), or the Center for Ecological (Un)learning) was during a presentation that Asia gave at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro where we were both studying. A year after then, I moved to Utrecht. After my arrival here in Utrecht, Erfgoed was one of the first places I visited and occupied. What I experienced here made my first impressions of this country. I was coming from one of the most important professional experiences in my life which was my position at Museo de Arte do Rio (MAR), Rio de Janeiro as coordinator of the educational department, focused on contemporary Brazilian art and trying to engage the neighborhood and the wider general public. Creating a culture of museum visits is so limited in Brazil. Here I was, on the contrary, getting out of this experience with a big institution and turning myself into an outsider. Outside of my country, my language, my customs, my culture, but also wanting to think the practice of the outside, daily, together with my neighbors in this new life.

The first impact was made on me by seeing the farm building where cattle were grown, probably even before the country of Brazil was colonized. This unique building was standing, right in the middle of the new commercial center, being claimed by us as a communal meeting spot. Yes, some people entered and asked if it would at any time become a pancake house, or if we were squatting the space, and other curious



questions and suggestions. We, in the meantime, tried to create a communal space, where living together was open. Nobody made pancakes, but we did have lots of food, parties, music, workshops, meetings, and even an insect occupation. Nen Lin was one of the neighbors that I met and got close with. I remember arriving to the farm while he was watering his garden and waiting for the volunteer of the Casco team Patricia Jiménez López to come to finish the chicken shelter.

With few words he showed us what had been done before and what was still to be done. During the conversation I noticed that we were using signs to communicate more than words – the sound of a hammer, the one of an electric saw, the one of a drill. In some small projects for Erfgoed in the following days, with these sounds, some Dutch, and the help of an online translator, Lin and I became friends. The idea of need and necessity came to my mind all the time that I was at the farm. In Brazil, the population is concentrated mostly in the big metropolises, despite the huge surface area of available land, somehow this is a continuation of colonization. As a consequence, extreme poverty, and absence of housing, access to food, education, health, and basic leisure are what we see in cities today. In Brazil, a project that proposes to common, as Erfgoed did, would mean a possibility for some of these in need. Land to plant and harvest, a place to leave your children when working, a source of free leisure and social visibility. Here in Holland on the contrary, these needs seem not so visible, the needs here seem to me, from my Brazilian point of view, more about a search for commoning and a new hobby to spend more time in the outdoors.



Fig. The chicken shelter by Nen Lin & Patricia Jimenez Lopez, 2018. Photo: The Outsiders

# A BEER DREAM COME TRUE

## Marieke Dubbelman / Terwijde Bier Club

The summer of 2018 was one we won't forget anytime soon. Thanks to The Outsiders, we, residents since the beginning (2005) of the new Terwijde neighborhood, got the chance to spend some time in its historical heart: the old farm of Kees van Vuuren, which nowadays is surrounded by apartments and supermarkets. The farm has been abandoned for many years now. Kees the farmer has left the building. And now it's slowly fading away. It is sad to see that one of the first settlements of this area seems nowadays to be an empty shell because of our "colonization." On the ground where Kees's cows used to eat grass, our houses were built. But it was inevitable. Cities grow and always have grown as long as there have been people. We purposely use the expression "seems" to be an empty shell, because one only has to look at the farm to know that in essence it is not. Not so long ago our ancestors were dependent on this. Whilst Kees has left, history still fills his farm and, even more so, it still reminds us of the fact that agriculture is still something we humans cannot do without.

Because even now we still depend on farmers. We can have iPhones, fly around the globe, and drive the most luxurious cars but at the end of the day, we have to produce and eat food to stay alive. And the better the taste of the food, the more joy. Attention makes this possible. Making food together is one of the most joyous things one can do. In our particular case it's beer :) with the Terwijde Bier Club.

We come together on a regular basis, to brew beer in our kitchens while we discuss modern daily life. The more we get into the process, the more we relax, oh yes drinking beer helps a little bit with that too. Making your own food and drink together, knowing the ingredients are really good, it makes all your regular worries go away. It brings you back to basecamp and as long as basecamp provides you with food and

shelter, then you can think, "I am alright, I am just fine." So when we heard of the farm being opened for the neighborhood activities, we did not hesitate for one moment; making beer in the historical heart of our surroundings, that is the ultimate basecamp. We organized workshops for anyone who was interested in making their own craft beer. The funny thing was, it drew mostly men.

Women in Leidsche Rijn are provided with a lot of activities. There is a mama-cafe, special work-life balance workshops for mothers, and if you look at the yoga classes in the park you will mostly see women. But this beer thing turned out to be a male bonding thing. It was fun, it was educational, it was relaxing. And the atmosphere in the old farm was magical. Being there and making beer made us feel timeless, connected to the past, the now, and the future. And that is a really good feeling. We would love the farm to be the heart of our neighborhood but we are aware that would really be a costly thing. Even so, we would love to be part of it again.



Fig. Terwijde Terror Tripple beer, brewed at the farm, Center for Ecological Unlearning / ERFGOED, 2018

# TRANSLATING THE FARMHOUSE ACTIVITIES AND SOCIAL LIFE TO THE EXHIBITION

Staci Bu Shea



Fig. Farmhouse neighbor children viewing Alma Heikkilä's ' /~` flashing decaying wood, / / ~ . \* √ \* \_ . . \* , at the exhibition opening of Evolved in shared relations at Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons, 2018. Photo: Rachel Moron

As curator at Casco, I actively joined the translation process of the farmhouse activities and social life to the exhibition form in the presentation *Erfgoed (Agricultural Heritage and Land Use)* at Casco's headquarters in the city center of Utrecht during autumn 2018. This means I got to have a bird's eye view on the project in the archival sense, finding ways to share evidence of the creative work done at the farm in a way that was accessible to new visitors to the project. Some of my treasured memories from organizing and opening the exhibition include trying to get the yellow children's slide up our staircase with Leo and Mr. Lin. The slide at the farm was much enjoyed by children, and was placed between the farm and the surrounding daily shopping complex

with the idea of transgressing the fence. Unfortunately, it wasn't possible to install the slide in the exhibition room but we didn't want to give up! Other memories include finding a way to transpose the wooden gate that originally connected the farmhouse and the shopping center to the entrance to the exhibition; dancing together with those who frequented the farm to loud music during broad daylight near the garden patio of the farmhouse; and enjoying Keesoua's delicious dinner and the Terwijde Bier Club's beer during the opening festivities.

I have the impression that the farmhouse and its close surroundings was like a plot of fertile soil that needed to be churned up, and many different kinds of seeds were either sown in straight lines or more energetically thrown on top, making a real mix of sense and wildness. It was a true pleasure working with everyone during the life of this farmhouse and I look forward to seeing how it takes a new shape.

# A "SCHOOL IN COMMON"? NOTES FROM THE FUTURE FARMERS

Rosa Paardenkooper with participants of the Study Meeting on the future of Terwijde Farmhouse hosted at Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons – Roel Meeuwssen, Pieter Veen, Gerda Oskam, Manja Rijken, Erik Uitenbogaard, Wapke Feenstra, Jan Hartholt, Binna Choi, Marianna Takou, Katja Fred, Nicole Horgan, Amy Gowen, Ana Flores, Seung-A Lee, Angeliki Tzortzakaki, Txell Blanco, Abhaya Mistry, Leonardo Siqueira, and Asia Komarova.

And then it was all over, or was it?

With the exhibition *Erfgoed (Agricultural Heritage and Land Use)* slowly nearing its end, and the news of Kees – the owner of the Terwijde Farmhouse we had been inhabiting – winning his lawsuit meaning he would soon sell the farm, a group of commoners from Leidsche Rijn and beyond came together for a moment of collective study on this building and its possible futures. In a so-called Study Meeting – since renamed and in the process of becoming a "School in Common" – art and commons are collectively studied by taking an existing site, question, or case of the two as a central point for conversation and future planning. Study in this context is a collective endeavor, a space for

criticality, questioning, speculating, planning, and non-disciplinary forms of learning and unlearning; a venture that enables and is enabled by artistic practices, and as such, a core form of commoning.

So this is what we did, sat around a table in the midst of remnants from the farmhouse times and explorations of the area's past, present, and future. At the center a table housing an architectural model of the current farm; the building blocks made to be picked up and moved around to imagine new futures, a conversation unfolded.

Gerda Oskam, chair of the historical association of Vleuten, de Meern, and Leidsche Rijn started us off with snippets of the past of the farmhouse and its original function as a convent – similar to the building that now houses Casco's exhibition space at Abraham Dolehof, a new connection between the two sites revealed. Gerda continued by explaining that this piece of land used to be a commons: "It was common ground! Later it became a hunting area of the noble families, the family van Haag Madrid, Haagsma."

With knowledge that the practice of commoning is deeply rooted in the soil, we move our conversation to its present, and other farmhouses like it in the area, which have all over the last years been redeveloped as social spaces, restaurants, churches, and care facilities. The question is raised about potential unity between these buildings which have changed function during their long existences. Manja Rijken, resident of Leidsche Rijn and former member of The Outsiders, points out that for the most part these places all "struggle by themselves" and making connections between them has proven to be difficult in previous years although they share common characteristics and are all subsidized by the same municipal government to support their redevelopment plans.

So indeed, what about money? As Pieter Veen, landscape architect and circular economist, says, the building can still carry out a cultural function or be of service to society but how do you fund the – very costly – renovation? What is the business case for this area? Artist Wapke Feenstra raises the potential of a structure with "bonds," making collective ownership of the building a possibility, "since it is the last farmhouse, in the middle of the neighborhood, there might be people who are interested in the building, food production, farming, they might want to preserve it." Roel Meeuwssen, responds that as a resident of the Terwijde area, he thinks

there may indeed be an interest for a legal form that would make this possible. The question amidst all of this is would Kees van Vuuren, the owner of the building, be willing to sell?

At this point, speculation on the possible futures of this building start bringing together its past functions as a commons, a place for food production and farming. The notion that this is a farmhouse – not a farm – is brought up again, a point originally made by Wapke who pointed out that only the house remains, the land is gone. Pieter asks, “Now that the connection to the land is lost, how can it be reconnected?” and adds, “There used to be a small garden, there is land in the wider range of it, there are farms around the city of Utrecht, farms that are looking for new ways of production, they look for ways to bring their goods directly to the consumers. Creating a space where they can deliver their goods but also speak about their work could be interesting. The exchange between urban and rural culture; the heritage and knowledge of farming might be lost in the cities, but it still exists around it. Could it be a hub that connects these worlds? There’s many people who are interested in food and making their own food. You see so many ‘food courts’ etc., but this would be something else, something that digs into the underlying system of food and the culture of food, connecting with that on a whole new level. What could a center for food culture look like? That would be the challenge?”

In brainstorming the future of this center, the notion of art is slowly kneaded and stretched like dough to include crafts and skills now long forgotten. How can theatre, cheese making, rope making, art, collective cooking, and pedagogy come together in one place? In all of this, food in relation to the city and the landscape or environment we have around remains a common concern. As Asia states, “Many of the farms have become cultural or social places and in the process their past is erased, it doesn’t show anymore that there used to be cows, that people were eating yoghurt that they bought directly from the farmer.” So how to involve the community in these processes again, so they feel as Gerda says, “that it’s their farm, that they have a connection with.” Txell enthusiastically adds, “We have a strong community, a beautiful building and the history, we need Kees to be next to us! Until now it has always been so uncertain, it was the main word we used when we started this project.”

With all of this said, Asia shares a final idea: “The travelling farm museum, a museum on

wheels, a small folk museum that shares stories around the farming land that used to be Leidsche Rijn. It can be parked everywhere and it connects to the farms around somehow, to show what the land used to be like. We want you all to collaborate!”

And with that, the first steps towards the future were made.

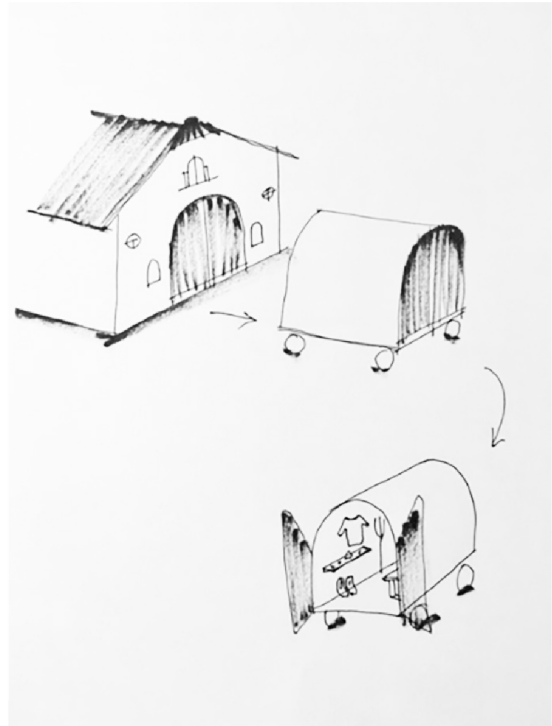


Fig. Asia Komarova, sketch of the Travelling Farm Museum of Forgotten Skills, 2019

# DE REIZENDE GLIJBAAN

Asia Komarova en  
Merel Zwarts



Workshop De reizende glijbaan met leerlingen van Basisschool de Ridderhof geleid door Asia Komarova en Merel Zwarts, 2019. Foto: The Outsiders

“Ik ben een glijbaan, en mensen kunnen me nog steeds als glijbaan gebruiken. Om op te klimmen en vanaf te glijden. Maar deze keer wilden ze me ook gebruiken om grenzen te overbruggen. Daarom stond ik over een hek heen.”

In 2018 belandde een tweedehands gele glijbaan in Leidsche Rijn, geplaatst over een heg om zo de eens verlaten boerderij Terwijde te verbinden met het nieuwe, omliggende winkelcentrum. Het kunstenaarscollectief The Outsiders installeerden de glijbaan daar met hulp van Casco Art Instituten en burens en vrienden die eerder dat jaar de boerderij tot leven hadden gebracht met verschillende activiteiten. Nu, twee jaar later, is de boerderij verkocht aan een projectontwikkelaar en is de glijbaan verhuisd naar het Muziekplein naast de boerderij waar hij allerlei spelende kinderen - en soms volwassenen - aantrekt.

Om het verhaal van de glijbaan vast te leggen besloten Asia Komarova van The Outsiders en kunstenaar en pedagoog Merel Zwarts - beiden al lange tijd betrokken bij het programma van Casco en de boerderij - om een boek voor en met kinderen in de buurt te maken. Ze werkten

hiervoor samen met leerlingen van Basisschool de Ridderhof. Door middel van verschillende oefeningen plaatsten de leerlingen zich in de schoenen van de glijbaan en beantwoordden met de kracht van verbeelding en tekenkunst vragen als; wat voor karakter heeft de glijbaan? Hoe voelt hij zich als hij steeds verplaatst wordt? En waar zou de glijbaan hierna willen staan?

# TRAVELLING FARM MUSEUM OF FORGOTTEN SKILLS

Txell Blanco, Corelia  
Baibarac, Binna Choi, Asia  
Komarova, Rosa  
Paardenkooper, Sun Chang,  
Leonardo Siqueira, Marianna  
Takou, Erik Uitenbogaard,  
Merel Zwarts



Fig. De 'embryo' van het Travelling Farm Museum of Forgotten Skills voor Boerderij Terwijde, 2020. Foto: Merel Zwarts

Hoe kunnen we samen luisteren naar de aarde, bomen, insecten en kinderen van Leidsche Rijn? En als we dat doen, wat leren we van wat we horen? Welke vaardigheden en verhalen zijn geworteld in dit land, het landbouwverleden en het heden als vinexwijk? Wat leren we van deze vaardigheden en verhalen voor onze toekomst?

Het Travelling Farm Museum of Forgotten Skills (TFM) is een rondreizend, participatief museum dat luistert naar de geschiedenis, het (im)materiële erfgoed en de hedendaagse inwoners - menselijk en niet-menselijk - van Leidsche Rijn. In deze gezamenlijke infrastructuur in ontwikkeling komen de

omgeving, bomen, kinderen, insecten, etc. samen om vaardigheden te ontwikkelen voor een eerlijke en duurzame wereld.

In de Covid-19 periode van *social distancing* hebben we een eerste mobiele installatie voor het museum ontwikkeld - een bouwwerk op een fiets met de bijnaam 'embryo.' De constructie, in de vorm van de Boerderij Terwijde, reist nu rond in de buurt rondom de boerderij, die op het moment van schrijven gerenoveerd wordt door een projectontwikkelaar. Het museum zet het commoning experiment voort dat eerder in Boerderij Terwijde in gang werd gezet. Gericht zich op het collectieve leren van acro-ecologie in de wijk, beweegt het zich voort en wisselt zo kennis en vaardigheden uit over het groeien en bereiden van eten, en het cultiveren van verhalen over het eens uitgestrekte landbouwgebied, nu een stedelijke woonwijk waarin we zoeken naar een nieuwe vorm van gemeenschap.



Fig. De 'embryo' van het Travelling Farm Museum of Forgotten Skills in gebruik in Leidsche Rijn, 2020. Foto: Asia Komarova

# HOW TO GROW TOGETHER? DE LEIDSCHER RIJN LUISTER ACADEMIE

Binna Choi and  
Rosa Paardenkooper



Fig. Soil exploring in Leidsche Rijn as part of Erfgoed (Agricultural Heritage and Land Use), 2018. Photo: Merel Zwarts

In the 1993 novel *Parable of the Sower*, Octavia Butler paints a picture of the United States in 2024; tormented by climate disaster, people live in gated communities where water and food are scarce and they protect themselves from the outside world with guns. Large-scale, drug-infused fires draw people out of their houses and onto roads which – they hope – lead to water, jobs and stability. The story sheds light on the increased isolation and aggression that humans find themselves in, both against each other and their natural surroundings: the destruction of the power of communality to make place for suspicion, fear, paranoia and individualism through an assertion of control over bodies, brains and places by means of a scarcity of resources. This '93 vision of Butler does not seem too far off from our everyday reality, and indeed we can say that 'our house is on fire', and in fact has been for the last five-

hundred+ years<sup>1</sup> a reality that comes with enclosures of collectively managed and maintained resources – commons, through colonization, privatization, extraction, and an upholding of class differences. As the protagonists in the novel do, some of us have been in search of other ways of living, working, or growing together.

Speaking from the field of art and organizational practice, everywhere around us we are in fact told we should be growing; a larger audience, more visibility, more program. Yet we should question what this call for growth means. The 2019 OECD report *Beyond Growth: Towards a New Economic Approach* argues for a redefinition of growth to ensure social wellbeing, cohesion and empowerment, and reflect the ecological limits of human activity. It questions how growth can be rethought as something sustainable, fair and collaborative, rather than extractive and competitive<sup>2</sup>. Whereas the notion of 'degrowth' is sought after in this light, at Casco Art Institute, a 'still' small art organization of on average six team members, we seek for this redefinition of growth and ask, how can 'we' grow together? Certainly we don't want to go smaller in size, we would like to grow our collective power, we want to be more impactful in what we are doing, we individually all enjoy 'growing' in our maturity. It is not simply that we want to have a larger edifice, fundraise more to have more money, organize more public activities and enlarge the team. Nor that we want to make one show after another on degrowth, the counter narrative of economic growth and so on. Then how?

A key to this is considering relationships as a fundamental basis for the institution by understanding it as an ecosystem, beyond a team of waged workers, the board and a few representative artists and including practitioners of diverse backgrounds, other organizations and non-human beings. It means working and relating to each other becomes a fundamental part of institutional practice and listening becomes a key skill to cultivate.

Listening is a simple yet complex answer to the question of how to grow together. Listening signifies a movement between receiver and sender, when done right it is engaged, active and unconditional. But listening is hard. It is a practice that requires effort as we are untrained. It is counterintuitive: the feelings, emotions and anxiety that comes with an increased sense of competition ask of us that we overpower, enclose and exclude other institutions, practitioners or even (natural) forces as they pose a threat to our own practice, not hear and



amplify what they have to say. But a skilled listener allows for relationships to shape and deepen by embracing what the other – in the broadest sense of the term, including nature, animals, objects – has to say, leading to mutual influence and interdependence. Taking this type of deep listening as a vantage point, we can reconceive our ways of individual growth to cultivate an art of growing together.

Artist duo Bik van der Pol, biotope for circular living Metaal Kathedraal and Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons started listening to one another towards the end of 2019 with the aim of developing a new movement for sustainable, fair, mutual growth through a practice of listening and broadcasting. In doing this they have committed themselves to a place where they can work towards the development of common grounds; Leidsche Rijn, a new neighborhood in Utrecht built within the context of the so-called 'vinex' – a mandate released in 1991 that assigned larger outer city areas for housing development. They have also committed to one another in an effort to bring their practices, knowledge and skills together in a new initiative: the Leidsche Rijn Luister Academie (LRLA).

Before the developments started, Leidsche Rijn was a vast farmland, providing resources for the city of Utrecht and surrounding areas. The heritage of this place as farmland, the agricultural skills and relationships with the land have largely vanished as the developments progressed over the last 22 years. Confronted with a contemporary moment of ecological crisis, this site, as well as others find themselves at a pivotal moment: will they operate based on the premise of business-as-usual and become yet another sleepy suburb with a lack of site-sensitivity, or can the area reinvent itself to become a model and example for how we can and want to live together in the 21st century? It is this question that we bring to Leidsche Rijn Luister Academie (LRLA), one that commits the three parties to listening to the area of Leidsche Rijn as well as each other. The composition is unique: two artists, a visual arts institution and an ecological laboratory and platform. What binds all three is the ground itself: Leidsche Rijn, a place that connects each organization in its own way – to a mission of ecological development and bottom-up collaboration. Together they connect growth and listening in a small but precise ecosystem of three practices. LRLA provides a fertile ground for non-competitive, cooperative practices whereby institutions and individuals

alike, of diverse backgrounds both human and non-human, become each other's teachers, supporters and mentors for collective growth.



Fig. Listening to Leidsche Rijn with the Travelling Farm Museum of Forgotten Skills, 2020. Photo: Merel Zwarts

So what does this new way of growing together through a practice of listening look like? It is in the first place a site of development of skills in listening and broadcasting we have forgotten. Leidsche Rijn Luister Academie builds different, nomadic broadcasting stations and spaces for encounters as a way to listen to difference; the different programs, activities, publics and networks of the institutions and initiatives as well as the ecological and cultural diversity of Leidsche Rijn are brought together in mutual recognition that only grows in a sustainable way by recognizing they are all part of one ecosystem. This means in particular listening to those who are often ignored; children, those who don't speak the local language, the land or what we would call 'nature' (soil, air, water, plants, insects and other animals and forms of life). A collectively developed and multiple-voiced infrastructure or platform shares skills, sounds, stories, voices and music that cultivate the skill of listening to each other – both human and non-human. This toolset must be built first, and offers a step in the direction of a collective program. To reverse this process would mean opening up to the risk of overshadowing one another's program and identity in an exhausting process of negotiation where each party tries to demonstrate its originality and authorship. Such processes are competitive and lead to unproductive compromises and collaborations.

Butler writes that all struggles are essentially power struggles, and not at all refined, intellectual ones, but mere muscle competitions or 'two rams knocking their heads together'<sup>3</sup>. Instead of leaning into those struggles, what if we take a step back and look at our surroundings not as potential competitors but through a lens of communing practices as an institutional ecosystem, and by listening to each

other build relationships based on mutualism where we exist, work and live together with our differences to amplify and broadcast all those things we hear from our surroundings and each other. This will not happen without building new skills and unlearning old habits, but it is a step towards a new way of coexisting outside of exploitation and competition. Instead we just listen.

1. In her 2019 World Economic Forum speech Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg exclaimed that 'Our House is on Fire' to which indigenous communities who are in constant struggle for their land and resources responded that in fact our house has been on fire for five-hundred years and it is only now that the West is waking up to this reality and acting upon it. The 2019 Assembly for commoning art institutions at Casco Art Institute took up this phrase as well as its implications to pose the question: What practical measures will art and art institutions take to care for our planetary commons with the power of imagination? Together with an

editorial team with members from Code Rood, Platform BK, Commons Network, Fossil Free NL as well as individual artists, we developed a draft version of a climate justice code for art and art institutions which was collectively edited over the course of two days with a group of hundred Assembly participants.

2. *Beyond Growth: Towards a New Economic Approach. Report of the Secretary General's Advisory Group on a New Growth Narrative*, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2019

3. Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower*. New York City (NY), Four Walls Eight Windows, 1993, p. 89

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**Riek Bakker:** urban planner who designed a.o. Kop van Zuid in Rotterdam and Leidsche Rijn in Utrecht.

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**The Outsiders:** an artistic union that implements service to people, the environment and to the society through public art and architecture. The Outsiders co-initiated the project *Erfgoed (Agricultural Heritage and Land Use)* the Travelling Farm Museum of Forgotten Skills with Casco Art Institute.

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**Carla:** neighbour in Leidsche Rijn.

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# Colophon

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