STROOM
THE HAGUE

WALKING SEMINARS 2021

BEYOND THE HUMAN

THE HAGUE'S SPECULATIVE LIVES

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we set to explore how the life in The Hague would transform if its urban experience had ceased to be human-centered. To do so, we conducted a speculative ethnography of a multispecies The Hague, where humans and non-humans co-create and co-habit the public spaces.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, human impact on the planet's ecosystem and climate has become apparent, and if we are to believe the predictions concerning climate change, the future is not looking bright. Take the city of The Hague for example. Located on the Dutch coastline, its predicted future consists of more torrential rains, more drought due to higher temperatures, and, of course, rising sea levels (*Gemeente Den Haag*, 2020). Numerous initiatives have already been taken up in response to these scenarios and, as a result, they have become powerful policy tools for contemporary ecological issues. "*Resilient The Hague*," for instance, is a local project that aims to make urban areas and its citizens resilient to the challenges that come our way. As urban areas become habitually understood as human-centered space, local ecologies become increasingly dismissed and natural resources are exhausted (Houston et al., 2017). In doing so, we placed ourselves on a pedestal and isolated ourselves from non-human living creatures, as if we are the only species having the right to the city. But what if we let non-humans in?

Date: 1 June 20xx	• Temperature: 26°C • Pollution: 107 AQI • Wave height: 0,7m
Place: The Hague	

In neighbourhoods further away from the centre:

boxes of diff. shapes & sizes
- Solid w/ single hole
- Rectangular (xylophon-like)
- Nest-like & oval-shaped
- Various hand-crafted

} Under roofs on the sides — hard to reach from window

+ lamps & soffits to attract animal cohabitants

→ Have humans adapted?
→ Have animals adapted?
→ Conflicts?

A number of houses have a curious type of bricks w/ fragile greenery growing from its pores. Small bugs and butterflies fly in between them + moss on the walls.

Soft buzzing & flapping of wings everywhere
↳ Difficult to locate

Overgrown gardens and lawns

House complexes opening up into larger open spaces - multiple birdhouses inside.

Bushes & flower fields — Any artificial attractors?

Every house has 1-2 plaques:

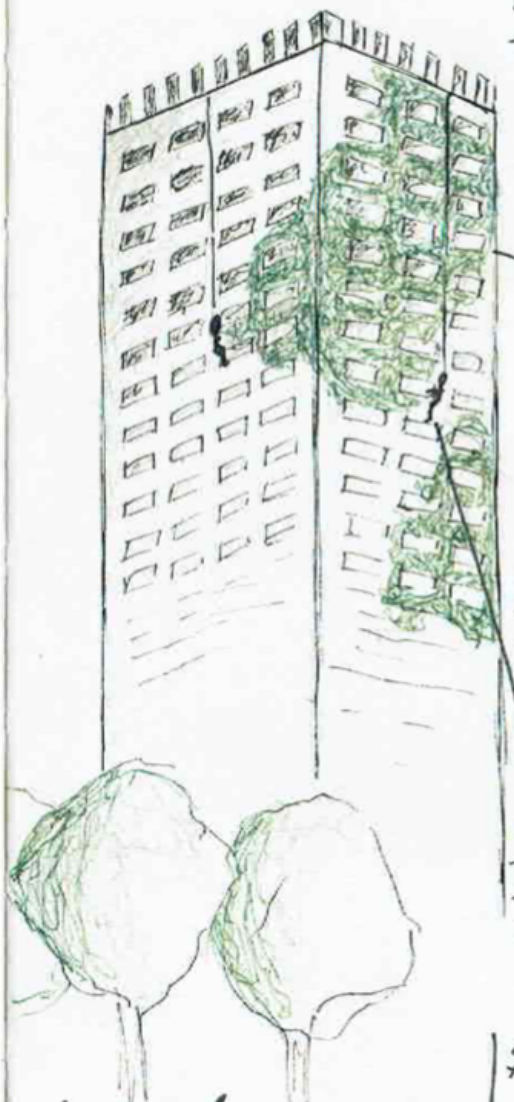
Who sees? How are they used?

1. Official standardized census of animals cohabiting w/ families
   ↳ zoological, ethological info.
2. Hand-made
   ↳ sometimes incl. cohabitants not listed in 1.
   ↳ personal names for mammals & birds

"Het Plein" - city centre of The Hague:

The houses surrounding the square are creating a green panorama
- Bricks with greenery
- Result: more insects

Terrace tables are placed further away from the green houses.
- People don't seem to be bothered by the flying insects.



Skyscrapers in the background:

Panels are covering the walls of the building - only the windows are still visible

Parts of the panels are colored w/ bright green organisms
- Plants?
- Moss?
- Algae?
  - What exactly is not desirable.

Humans are taking care of the buildings
- Seems like they are injecting the green organisms into the panels.

Animal presence: Birds are flying around the skyscrapers.

Patches of bright greens:
- Perhaps the entire building will turn green eventually.

Field Report: June 1, 20XX
The Hague: Laakkwartier - Het Plein

As we began to walk from our lodging in Laakkwartier, north-east of the centre, we could closely observe The Hague's peculiar houses. One outstanding detail of those houses were the boxes, attached under the roofs and to the sides of the buildings—big and small, of different shapes and colours. Some of them were solid boxes—a few of them warm to the touch—with a single opening that would fit some small species of birds. Oval-shaped nests located under the roofs' soffits possibly served the same purpose. What piqued our curiosity, however, were rectangular boxes, looking like a xylophone with a cavity behind each "key." From our readings we identified them as houses for bats, which are valued the most among the residents that wish to guest these rare species.

"The front of each house possessed a tablet with the census of the non-human cohabitants, which the family shares the house with [...]"

The front of each house, notably, possessed a tablet with the census of the non-human cohabitants, which the family shares the house with—dogs, cats, rodents, birds, insects, and bats being the most common. All tablets have an official symbol on them, as they appeared to be tended by the municipality. Apart from the inhabitants listings, they also included zoological and ethological data to prevent spaces of antagonistic species overlapping if the households would want to introduce another. It perhaps also allowed the habitats of non-human animals to be spread out evenly among the neighbourhoods. Some of the tablets looked freshly minted, suggesting that the record was being kept and data consistently updated.

Perhaps, even more noteworthy were the informal tablets made by the human residents that often included cohabitants that were not mentioned in the official lists (which might have not been yet updated or introduced temporarily). Curiously, often they contained personal names for the mammals and birds, whereas collective names were given for insect swarms. Despite the fact that the non-human houses were placed strategically to avoid unnecessary interaction of human and non-human cohabitants, the closer connection of both is exemplified by this phenomenon. While many of the animals living outdoors seemed to not yet occupy the status of pets, they still transcended that of pests.

As we moved towards the main square of The Hague, we noticed that most public buildings in the city centre were constructed of a very unusual type of brick. We decided to examine the architectural

materials in more detail and approached the Ministry of Defence. Just then, we discovered that the building was constructed of sponge-like, porous bricks that served as housing spaces for little insects. There were hundreds, if not thousands of them flying in and out the walls of the Ministry building. As we came closer, soft buzzing had become more audible. The sound that we previously paid no attention to, ascribing it to droning of conditioners and other domestic machinery, appeared to have a lively source.

To tell the truth, we could not help but think that it was an infestation, yet the reverse was true. In addition to the animal life, various kinds of plants grew out of the stones, turning the building green. We stood there, looking at the holed bricks with a magnifying glass, when a passer-by noticed our interest in the alternative construction material. As she started explaining, we came to know that the porous bricks performed two functions: on the one hand, they served as safe living spaces for insects, and on the other, they cooled down interior environments as its pores could contain water, stabilising the brick's temperature. In other words, while providing new and sustainable urban solutions, the bricks increased the biodiversity of the city.

We continued our walk and as we reached Het Plein, even more houses were covered with these bricks, colouring the city centre of The Hague green. The square was occupied by a crowd of people drinking and eating on terraces of the various cafés and restaurants. We noticed that the terrace tables were moved further away from the cafés' buildings—understandably so—to ensure a peaceful environment for both humans and the insects inhabiting the bricks. The lively porosity of the bricks also explained the commonness of eye protection worn by cyclists to avoid sudden collisions with the insects.

There was another novelty we could observe from the square. When we looked up, we saw a couple of skyscrapers covered with panels. Parts of them were coated with a bright green colour. Our readings uncovered that it must have been an algae gel. The humans who were taking care of the building were injecting the algae gel into the panels —perhaps, the entire building would turn green eventually. This algae gel transformed radiation into oxygen and biomass, creating sustainable ways for urban architecture. In short, it seemed that the city of The Hague turned into a biophilic space.

"When we looked up, we saw a couple of skyscrapers, covered with panels. Parts of them were coated with a bright green colour. Our readings uncovered that it must have been an algae gel."

IMAGINING A MULTISPECIES CITY

In a multispecies city, like the one we observed during our speculative field trips to The Hague, humans and non-human living creatures co-create and co-habit spaces. In order to design multispecies cities, inclusive approaches of urban planning need to be developed that allow a variety of agents to co-create each other through intertwined relationships (Van Dooren, Kirksey & Munster, 2016). In other words, human existence is determined by its connectivity with fellow species and vice versa. As such, the established binary between nature and culture is being destabilised, which implies that humans no longer occupy a superior position. Instead, people need to be considered as just one of a larger diversity of equivalent species, established through mutually beneficial interactions (Houston et al., 2017). Perhaps, the pandemic has brought us to an ultimate "multispecies moment": from a heightened awareness of our co-existence with adaptive, invisible non-humans that shape our ways of living, to our homes increasingly getting cohabited with miniature gardens and adopted pets. As a result, we may have become more attentive to non-human living organisms and their agency.

To model and even imagine futures as complex as the ones unfolding before us is an undoubtedly daunting task. Although urban planners have attempted to assign non-human organisms like plants, animals, bacteria and algae a more dominant role in the shaping of the city, the construction of multispecies

urban spaces remains speculative. That said, the word “speculation” often carries connotations of risk, abuse and manipulation. Yet, there is a type of speculation we tend to enjoy: science-fiction. From *Planet of the Apes* to *Annihilation*, fictional stories offer us contextual frameworks to contemplate our relationships with “nature” and to challenge our assumptions about where we stand in relation to it. The popular saying goes that an elephant can be eaten one piece at a time. Similarly, sci-fi reminds us that the future can be imagined bit by bit, scenario by scenario. Can we then reclaim speculation as a virtuous practice—with creativity at its core—that is able to actually address our anxieties? In a complex, heterogeneous world readying to technological singularity and climate catastrophe, can experimentation prepare us for the future and help us imagine a different (if not better) one?

Date: 3 June 20xx	• Temperature: 24°C • Pollution: 109 AQI • Wave height: 1m
Place: The Hague	

Scheveningen Woods:

Protective transparent fences around bigger/ seperately standing trees

= "Sentinels"

↳ Vines w/ audible flowers

↳ Soft crackling whirring.

Circular screen on the fence: Provides real-time data viz

= Ecophysical data.

↳ Vines grow thinner and connect the trees around.

- Some go underground
- They follow different directions: dead to a "flowershop"

Scheveningseweg at night:

↳ Trees along the road appeared to be luminescent, emitting bright yellow-green light.

Are intense green and red also in the spectrum?

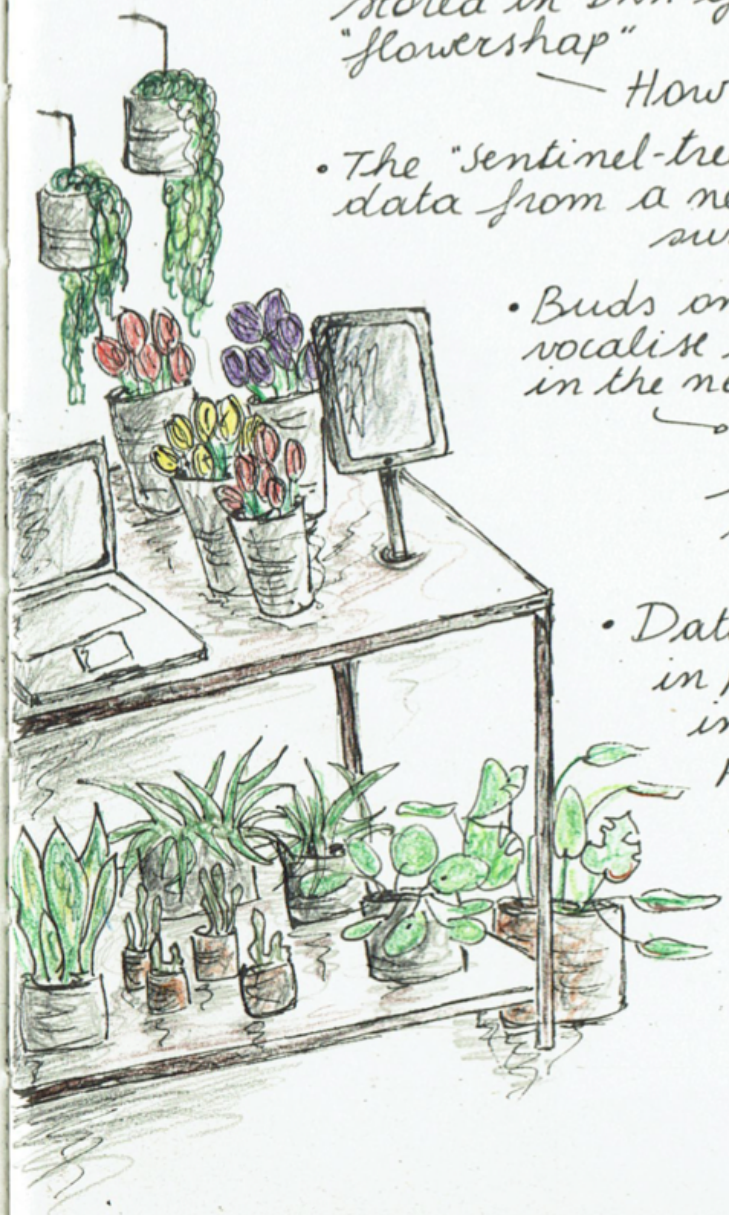
"The Data Garden" - Madurodam:

↳ Lab / shop / data centre?

Employees = Scientists are caretakers of the plants inside and outside.

From our conversation:

- Biodata collected from forest trees stored in DNA of plants in the "flowershop"
  — How sustainable?
- The "sentinel-trees" we saw, collect data from a network of surrounding trees.
- Buds on the trunks vocalise the state of the trees in the network.
  ↳ can go as far as screeching when upset / unhealthy.
- Datapoints contained in plants will be stored in archives, but it's possible to purchase a copy as a memento of a special day.



Field Report: June 3, 20XX
The Hague: Scheveningen Woods

To examine how the urban green spaces are taken care of in The Hague, we set off to the Scheveningen Woods and surrounding parks. Entering the forest from the south-east, we headed north. As we walked on the paths surrounded by the shady and dense thickets and reflected together on our experiences so far, we were becoming more aware of the sounds that did not belong either to us, people passing by or birds hiding in the trees. Soft crackling, chiming and clinking were reaching us from all sides—some seemed closer, others further away. The sounds had a tone to them and formed together something of a whispering gamelan ensemble.

"It turned out that those 'sentinel trees' were spread throughout the parks and collected biodata from the network of trees in the area. Being literally a 'speaker' for the collective of trees, the individual plant articulated their state [...]"

Moving deeper into the forest, we came upon an outstanding large tree close to the pathway that was encircled in a protective transparent fence. The circular screen attached to the fence lit up as we approached, displaying the ecophysical data of the surroundings. This particular tree was apparently chosen as a "sentinel," akin to sentinel species. The data seemed to be tracked real-time and showed various indicators from the sensors, such as CO2 transmission, solar radiation (PAR light spectrum), soil temperature and moisture levels, among others. While the interface information might have been too technical for the casual passer-by to grasp, the data visualisations were comprehensible enough to get an idea about the state of the tree. Graphics resembled the tree annual rings and moved slowly, mostly concentrated in the centre of the interface.

Leaning closer to see the screen, we realised that the sounds were emitted by the flowerbuds implanted onto the tree trunk with vines stemming from them. The tree responded to the touch, with digital "rings" almost slightly rippled, while the buds emanated a subtle vibrating sound. We got curious with the vines that grew thinner as they crawled closer to the ground and dug underground in some places. They lead in different directions, yet we decided to follow them further north.

The forest thinned out and opened up to a road and Madurodam attraction site. With people gathering at the exhibition, we got drawn in by the noises of activity. On the plaza in front of the visitors' centre we discovered a white container-type construction. We hurried to its entrance door reading "The Data Garden," eager to find out whether

it was the place that could provide some explanations. Its interior was almost indistinguishable from a simple florist's, however the computers and some lab equipment signaled that there was more to it. An employee was taking care of the various flowers and plants that filled up the room. We approached them, hoping that they could shed light onto what we had seen in the forest.

It turned out that those sentinel trees were spread throughout the parks and collected biodata from the network of trees in the area. Being literally a "speaker" for the collective of trees, the individual plants articulated their state through biosynthetic buds capable of sensing its changes within. The voices of all sentinels were also adapting to each other to sing harmoniously together. If something went wrong, like infestation, exhaust from the pipe of an occasional biker or bonfire, it would get louder. The volume could get to the disturbing levels of screeching. As the data gardener explained: "It's total chaos then—our screens flare up, visitors run up here worried and often confused, we get calls, messages. The trees will make themselves heard, one way or another." To avoid the creation of data server farms and subsequent pollution, the specialists at the data garden collected the ecophysical data produced by forest trees in the plants' DNA within the garden. Some "data points" are flash-frozen or desiccated and stored in the archives. It was also possible to purchase a petal, leaf, flower or any other part of the plant as a memento of a special day.

"[...] the specialists at the data garden collected the ecophysical data produced by forest trees in the plants' DNA within the garden."

As the day grew to a close, the data gardener suggested we walk to the Scheveningseweg or any similar roads when it gets darker. Intrigued, we spent some more time around Madurodam and slowly moved to the proposed location as the sun began to set. Apparently, the trees along the roads were also mobilised into urban activities. With no streetlights in sight, the trees served this role instead: their leaves emitted a luminescent bright light with different tones of yellow-green. Perhaps, the colour spectrum shifted between intense green and red, informing the public of similar indicators as those in the forest. Continuing to excitedly discuss further the novelty and potential of letting trees and plants be more "vocal" about their position in urban spaces, we retreated back home.

"With no streetlights in sight, the trees served this role instead: their leaves emitted a luminescent bright light with different tones of yellow-green."

SPECULATIVE SIDE ALLEYS

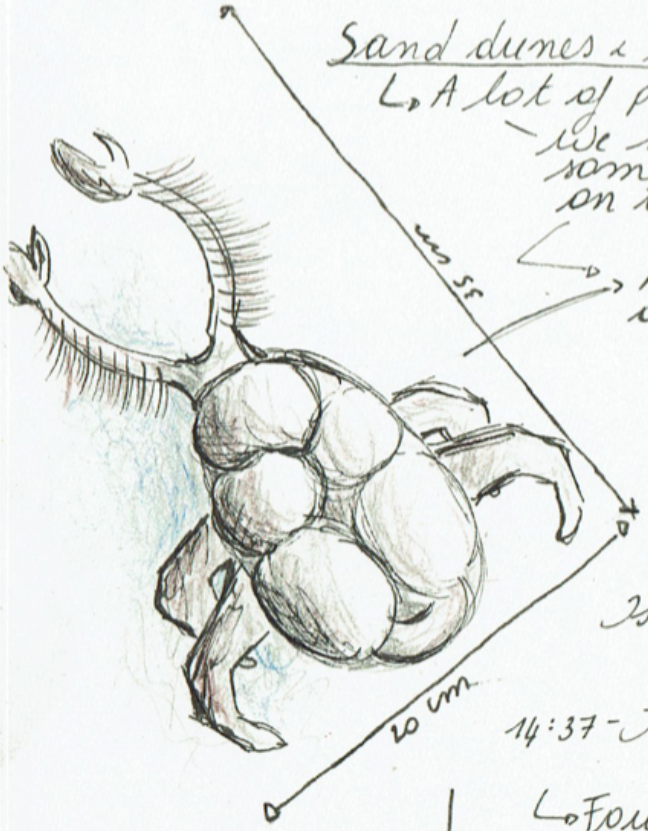
Similar to science-fiction, design can be "fictional" and tell tangible stories as it can create objects that could have existed in a parallel or future world. The familiar strangeness of the artefact would lure its spectator/user into its alternative reality of uncanny cultural practices and technological systems. The aim of speculative design is neither to predict the future, nor to create marketable solutions, nor to provide a sure progressivist way "forward." Instead, it attempts to point to a direction of a "side alley" that opens up into a multitude of "what-if" possibilities (Boym, n.d.).

So far, the idea of creating "smart cities" has been dominating the plans and visions of future urban spaces. However, designers and scholars warn us that imagining the city of ubiquitous technology without acknowledging its even more ubiquitous animal, plant and microbial lives could be detrimental to producing healthy and sustainable spaces (Clarke et al., 2018; Rupprecht et al., 2020). Meanwhile, so-called green-blue infrastructures tend to propose only incremental, human-centric, highly controllable and commodity-based plans.

To counteract this future vision, we envisioned a parallel reality where multispecies urban design has been a part of our shared imagination already for some time. When building this alternative world, we compiled and connected works of speculative design that assign nature a more prominent role. Without

aiming to provide solutions for global environmental challenges, this combination of existing projects intends to encourage us to think about possible ways of urban living. It provides a glimpse into what our world *could* look like.

Date: 3 June 20xx	• Temperature: 27°C • Pollution: 107 AQI • Wave height: 0.6 m
Place: The Hague	



Sand dunes + beach in Scheveningen:

↳ A lot of people on the beach

– We see a crowd looking at something that's laying on the beach

→ A stranded aquatic organism. Looks like a crab but is a bit bigger

Some curious features:
- Spines on its limbs
- Hard shell, partly transparent
- Plastic-like parts?

Is it still alive?

14:37 - Interview w/ a fisherwoman:

↳ Found similar creatures when fishing on the North Sea

↳ Partially consists of plastic
Result: not edible for humans and non-humans

Birds often try to eat it: they pick it up and drop it (dunes)

↳ The amount of these creatures in the North Sea has increased over the past years

↳ Fisherpeople call it "plastisphere insects"

The Plastisphere insect:

= Aquatic organism adapting to plastic Pollution in their environment.

= Survival mechanism

They digest micro-plastics

Helps the oviposition of aquatic insects.


Beach in Scheveningen:
↳ In the distance we see various platforms on the water
= Floating city
• Not attached to the mainland.
• Green buildings?
• Buildings rise high above the seallel
= consists of multiple structures (Maybe 8?)
↳ Who's living there?
↳ Why?
Access via a little port: floats transport people to and from the floating city.
Floating City
Buildings are covered w/ panels and algae gel.
= Similar to the skyscrapers in the city centre of The Hague
Large algae farms
Clears waste water and sanitation.
Production of algae gel used to cover the buildings.
transport

Field Report: June 7, 20XX
The Hague: Scheveningen - Floating City

As we stumbled through the sandy dunes in Westduinpark, we reached the beach of Scheveningen. There were a lot of people enjoying the good weather: they were sunbathing, swimming or taking a walk. Suddenly, we saw a crowd of people looking at a washed-up object. We approached the crowd to examine it ourselves. It took us a while to realise what it was: a stranded aquatic organism. It reminded us of a crustacean, yet it was a bit bigger and had some curious features such as spines on its limbs, while its shell looked like plastic.

"It reminded us of a crustacean, yet it was bigger and had some curious features such as spines on its limbs, while its shell looked like plastic."

Not long after, a fisherwoman joined the group. We noticed she was more familiar with this organism and we started conversing. The fisherwoman confirmed that the animal was partly composed of plastic. "Weird, isn't it?" she said, "we call them 'Plastisphere Insects' because they partly consist of plastic. To survive the increasing amount of plastic pollution in the seas, they had to adapt." Furthermore, we learned that these curious aquatic organisms digest microplastics as it helps their oviposition.

The fisherwoman encounters these creatures more and more often when she goes fishing in the North Sea. Just like fish, they get caught in the net, but fishers do not know what to do with them, since they are inedible—neither for humans, nor for non-human organisms. Yet, birds (e.g. seagulls and oystercatchers) regularly consider it a potential food source and take a chance. While most people had never seen such creatures before, some locals in the crowd told us they had found a few of them in the sand dunes as well. Perhaps, the birds picked them up on the beach and dropped them in the dunes, realising that it was not such a tasty snack after all.

"As we strolled along the North Sea shore, towards the Southern Pier, we spotted a big platform-like construction in the water. It was a floating city, a new experiment of living on the water."

After our conversation with the fisherwoman, we continued our walk. As we strolled along the North Sea shore, towards the Southern Pier, we spotted a big platform-like construction in the water. It was a floating city, a new experiment of living on the water. Given that it floated completely autonomously—with no connection to the mainland—we bought a ticket in the small port and headed towards this aquatic centre. When we entered the city, we noticed it was composed of eight autonomously floating constructions—placed in the shape of an octagon—that looked exactly alike.

When we left the boat and set foot on one of the floating surfaces, we

could observe the floaters' interaction with the sea, their houses, as well as their work affairs. The latter two aspects grabbed our attention right away. We immediately recognised the bright, green-coloured buildings: just like the skyscrapers in the city centre of The Hague, the housing on the floating city was covered with panels and injected with algae gel. Moreover, there were many algae farms in attendance. One of the inhabitants explained that the produced algae were applied for two purposes. On the one hand, the algae farms created algae gel for injection into constructions both on the floating city and in the city centre of The Hague. On the other hand, the algae farms were used to clean wastewater and sanitation—a difficult but valuable mission. In order to make the algae farms efficient, the floaters needed to learn how to collaborate with the algae as they required particular conditions for cultivation.

"We immediately recognised the bright, green-coloured buildings: just like the skyscrapers in the city centre of The Hague, the housing on the floating city was covered with panels and injected with algae gel."

COLLAGING A PARALLEL WORLD

Taking existing speculative designs as a foundation, we followed three principles lying at the core of science-fiction—extrapolation, intensification and mutation—to build a multispecies urban experience resembling the city of The Hague (Wolf-Meyer, 2019). "Extra-polating," we transported concepts into the future to imagine how they would change in relation to other social and ecological transformations. Through the process of "intensification," in turn, we increased the pervasiveness and potency of the concepts. Lastly, "mutation" allowed us to modulate the ways concepts are used in an unexpected and surprising fashion. After extrapolating, intensifying and/or mutating the existing works of art and design, we have situated ourselves within it—taking on the role of ethnographers—attempting to observe and make sense of the (im)possible spaces before us. Speculative ethnography is, of course, a devious and almost absurd method. As such, the question arises how we can observe something that has not taken place, something that is completely implausible? Our argument is that while it might be *scientifically* impossible, it makes sense *culturally*. The ethnographic sensibility and sociological imagination allows us to listen closely and to give form to the cities-that-could-be.

In the field trips, we focused on three general themes in relation to multispecies entanglements: urban

architecture, plant sensing, and aquatic cities. The speculative (1) urban architecture we observed during our field first trip is based on artistic and speculative projects in which organisms are integrated in building materials. To re-imagine the interplay between humans and animals, Sarah Gunawan's project entitled "*Synanthropic Suburbia*" proposes to build our homes within a framework of mutually beneficial human-animal partnerships that positively impact the city's ecosystem. These animal homes were implemented in The Hague's neighbourhoods with bureaucratic and DIY cultures developed around it. *"H.O.R.T.U.S. XL Astaxanthin.g,"* in turn, uses bacteria in urban planning. This project consists of experimental structures that were 3D-printed and injected with Photosynthetic Cyanobacteria. These Cyanobacteria transform radiation into oxygen and biomass. By adding these small organisms to the surface of skyscrapers, The Hague became a green panorama and the city's biodiversity was increased. Additionally, *"The Green Charcoal"* bio-bricks serve as new materials to build a multispecies city as well. Due to the porous surface of the bricks, plants and insects can inhabit it. As part of the speculative world in this paper, the bio-bricks represented an alternative construction material that covered a lot of houses in The Hague, allowing humans and non-humans to co-habitate.

The experience in Scheveningen Woods (2) was constructed through the

integration of five projects. The trees we called "sentinel" were devised through combining two projects: the data interface for the tree sensors stemmed from Thijs Biersteker's *"Voice of Nature,"* whereas the "flowers" emitting sounds in reaction to the surroundings was based on *"Audible Flora"* by the collective Nonhuman Nonsense. Brought together, those ideas manifest in creating a system that allows trees to communicate their current condition and encourage humans to listen to their needs. The plant data centre is a result of merging two projects by the Grow Your Own Cloud organisation: *"The Flower Shop"* and *"Data Garden."* Both of them experiment with creating an alternative data infrastructure, where digital data could be injected into the plant's DNA, making the data storage 'green' and open. Finally, a proposal of *"glow-in-the-dark trees"* by Daan Roosegaarde was installed throughout the city.

Lastly, in the speculative narrative of (3) the aquatic city we compiled three projects in which the sea plays a prominent role. Starting with the rare aquatic creature, we used Pinar Yoldas' project entitled *"An Ecosystem of Excess."* This project is based on recent scientific research that confirms the emergence of new bacteria that adapt to plastic environments. At the same time, the project closely relates to speculative evolution and fictional biology. Secondly, we used the well-established concept of "floating cities," taking as an example Vincent Callebaut's project *"Lilypad."*

combined this concept with the project *"EcoVillage Boekel,"* a self-sufficient village that uses algae to clean wastewater and sanitation. As such, the floating city we observed during our last field trip on the beach represented a multispecies way of living: floaters need the algae to clean the water, and the algae need floaters to exist, as they can only survive in very distinctive conditions.

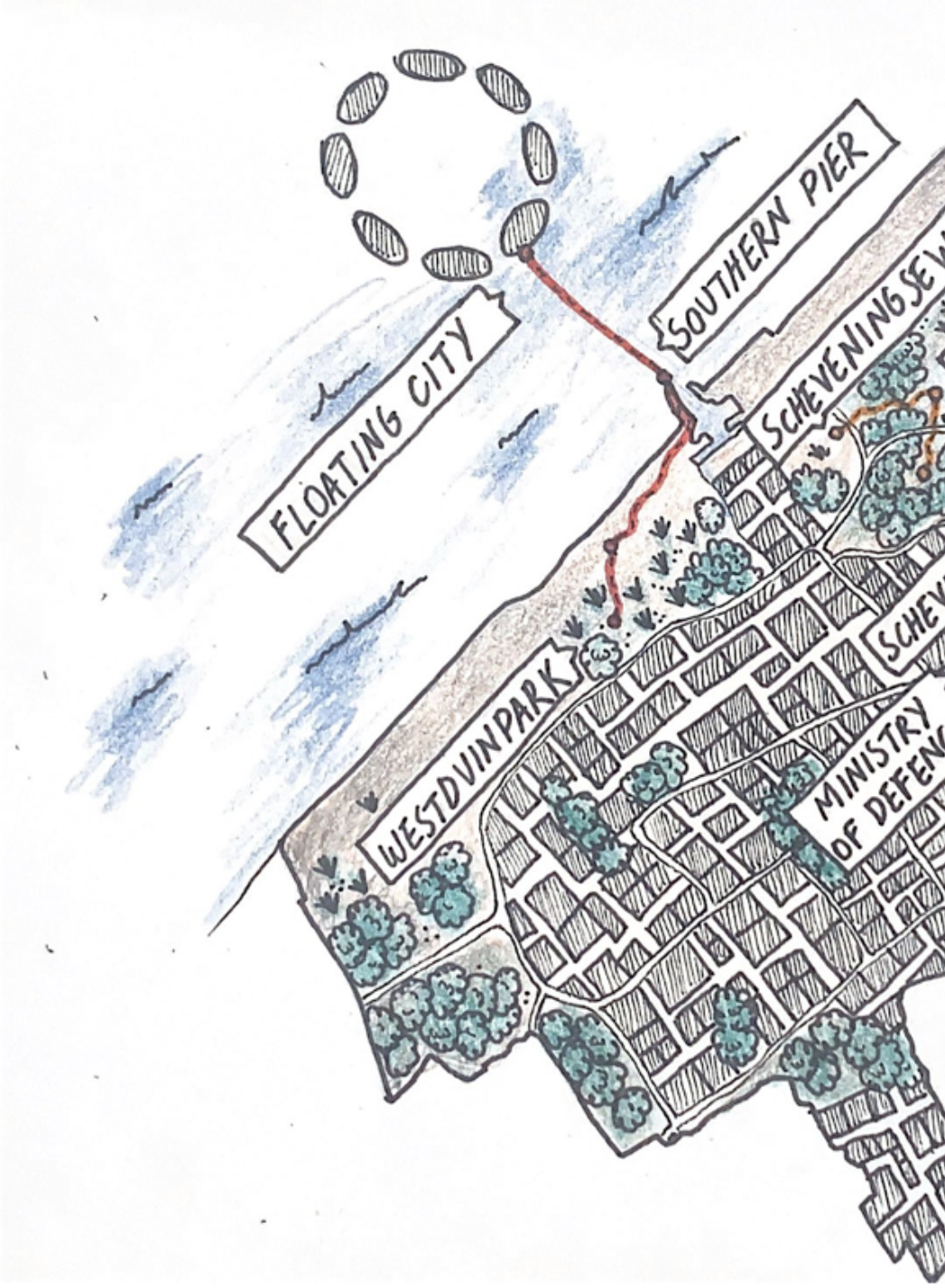
RETHINKING THE OWNERSHIP OF THE CITY

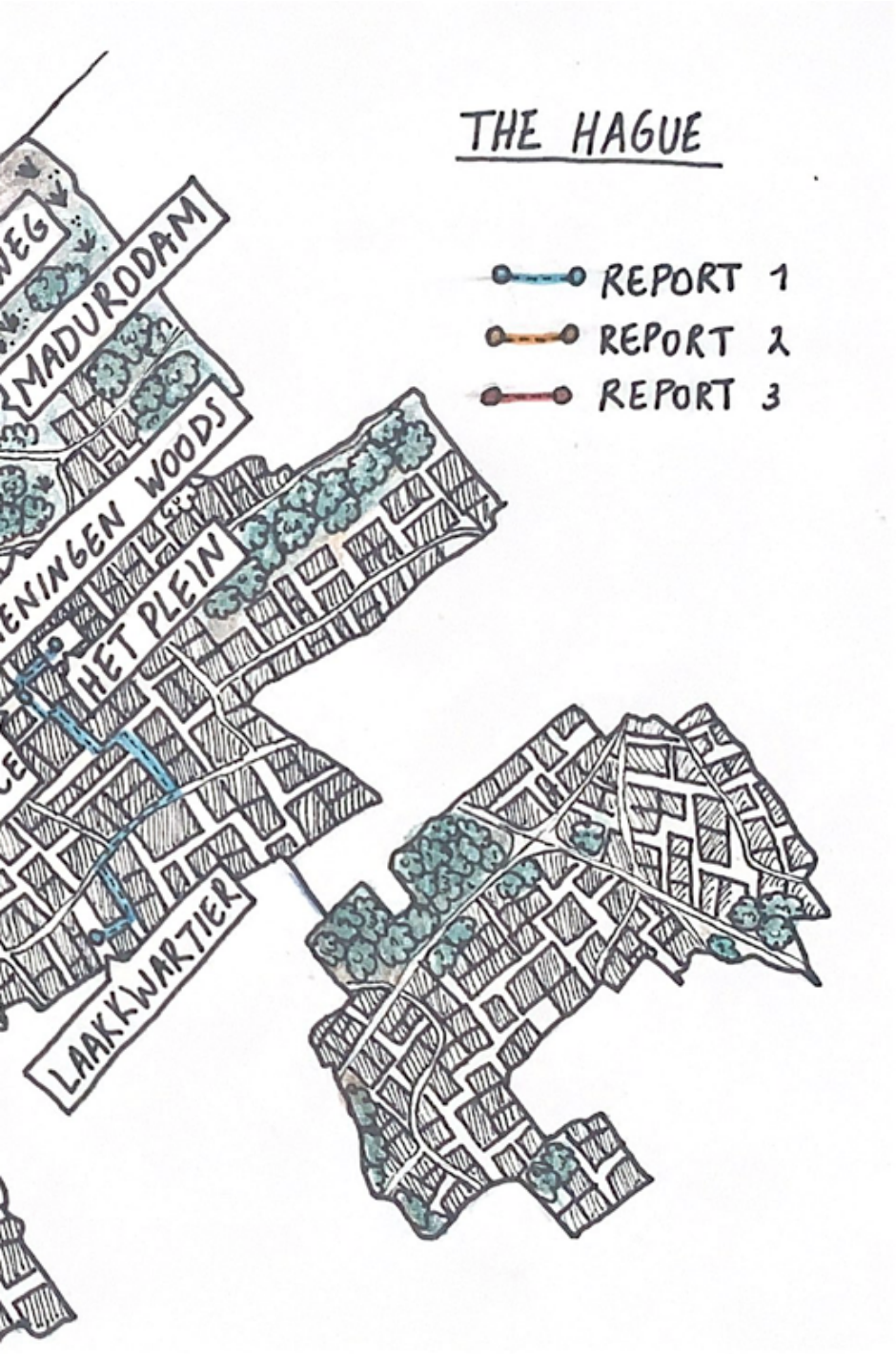
Since the 1980s, the neoliberal ideology has been dominating political and economic policies. Yet it has been contested for its role in today's ecological issues since natural resources are freely commodified and exploited for individual economic interest. Consequently, neoliberalism is considered jointly responsible for the current state of our planet. In order to protect nature and its biodiversity within the present political and economic climate, it is advocated that nature conservation should become part of the market, making it attractive for private investors. In other words, this so-called "neoliberalisation of nature" or "neoliberal conservation" believes that turning the environment into "natural capital" is the only feasible solution for pressing ecological issues (Apostolopoulou, 2020). However, these neoliberal means of conserving nature raise a number of concerns: it allows large, international corporations to gain more power over natural resources and to increase inequality—not only between large agencies and marginalised communities, but also between humans and non-humans. By generating private ownership of nature—even with the purpose of preservation—neoliberal conservation takes away non-human agency. In the end, the fundamental principle remains that individual interest is economic profit by means of privatisation (Fletcher, 2010).

Opening up "the right to the city" entails the radical reinvention of urban space, going beyond the ideologies that live today (Harvey, 2012). At this very moment, we are heading towards the strongly desired smart city. However, the above-mentioned art and design

projects can open up debate about other ways of urban living. By making us aware of socio-political and ecological alternatives, the artists and designers challenge our norms and values: they make us rethink the ownership of public spaces—or should we say "common" spaces. As we are reminded by Donna Haraway (1991), “we have never been human”—or at least “only human”—despite our attempts to put humans outside ecology, outside “nature.”

Speculative ethnography brings attention back to the liveliness of our cities. It puts forward the storytelling that foregrounds non-human lives and immerses those of humans within multispecies entanglements. It might seem that the scenarios and designs we drew on often focus on being aesthetically appealing and conceptually engaging enough to attract the human gaze. Yet, the slight strangeness of those projects is a catalyst to shift the perspective, become mindful of the assumptions of the centrality of our human needs in the urban experience and then get more accustomed to the possibility of alternatives. That might include cohabiting with animals that were traditionally considered pests, or using technology to “listen”—literally and metaphorically—to the needs of urban forests, and constructing mutual ecologies with marine life. Encouraging such leaps of imagination, we hope to foster more advanced visions of urban naturecultures to reconfigure rights to the city and find more “care-full” and inclusive forms of urban living. Collectively, we can change the course of urban planning and modify it to our current aspirations (Harvey, 2012). The projects that collage the parallel world reminded us that “the way things are now is just one possibility and not necessarily the best one” (Dunne & Raby, 2013). Therefore, art and design lend a hand to reconsider and redefine contemporary citizenship for humans and non-humans alike.


FLOATING CITY
SOUTHERN PIER
WESTDVIN PARK
MINISTRY


THE HAGUE
REPORT 1
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MADURODAM
WOODS
HET PLEIN
LAAKKWARTIER

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