

BALCONY SCENES | 15th October 2000

Dear spectators, dear listeners,

You are standing down there. I'm standing up here. This means nothing; tomorrow things could be completely different.

Your view is limited. I know because I have stood where you are standing now at some earlier point. Please, take a look around you. The main things you see are buildings, and a few trees. Everything you can see is planned, designed, and made by people. Everything you see around you is at the most twenty years old. Except, perhaps the people standing next to you. Some are even older than 70 years.

My view is wide. I like that very much. A wide view. What do I see? Do you have any idea what I can see? Imagine that all of you rise 15 metres high in the air, straight up, and are standing here before me. Or more accurately, are hanging in the air. And together we look around us at the mysterious woods in the distance. Misty pastures disappearing into infinity. At the houses, at the buildings. Full of expectations, full of possibilities.

This was the first part of my introduction.

The second part of my introduction is exactly the same but metaphorically speaking.

The leaflet of this project tells you that I am going to explain to you my line of thought. Do I have a line of thought? What is a line of thought? And how, in god's name, can I explain it to you? Apart from the question whether this is interesting. Why would you want to know my realm of thought anyway?

I remember that at the age of twelve I worried about whether I was able to think. What exactly was thinking? The process in which you consciously decide that you are going to the toilet, instead of saying it out loud, seemed to me too futile to call it thinking. In that period I read the works of the Danish philosopher Kierkegaard (in retrospect I presumably didn't understand a thing from what I read) but I could imagine that you would call that thinking. It was quite obvious to me: I hadn't reached that level yet. I could not think. Perhaps everybody else could, but I couldn't.

This was the second part of my introduction. The objective is pointed out. I would like to explain to you what I see.

I was alone in the room. Outside it was dark and deathly quiet. I had cleared my head of all thoughts. I wrote down key words on little sheets of paper. Words and sentences:

the mystery of the woods in the distance
the smell of honey suckle
clear nights

starlings in September
the soft hair of my beloved
the lullaby from Die Schöne Müllerin
space
the Zuidertoren, pink in the setting sun
the Canigou covered in fresh fallen snow
swifts
riding your bike when your hands begin to get cold

I will try to do it in a different way.

I have collected sugar bags for ever. I have got 114 different ones from Apeldoorn alone. Most of them are pasted, and have a small tab that could be opened if you were really careful. The bags are from the 50s, 60s and 70s. On some bags only a text is printed: Reimink's snack counter, restaurant upstairs. Or: Yes this is coffee from Apeldoorn. Or: liquor store Piet Bijlsma conference rooms available.

Others have images printed on them. Hotel De l'Europe in the Stationsstraat shows us a beautiful rustic villa, with a tower and a large bay window.



Or the terrace of Hotel café restaurant Suisse. Behind the windows the curtains are carefully draped in a curve. At Atlanta – also on the Stationsplein- seven flags joyfully flap, while the sunshades above the windows are put down. The Veluwsche Autodienst (public transport service) shows its then current bus. Hotel-Café City in the Stationsstraat has printed the skyline of a city full of skyscrapers, with large white clouds in the background.



I was curious how things were at present.

From the 114 objects only 5 are still operating under the same name and address. In the centre only Terminus is still there, at the Stationsstraat, the only old building in between ugly, unimaginative, new buildings. Sometimes the name has changed. Café De Tol is now called Jade City, Chinese Cantonese specialty restaurant. But the old neon letters from De Tol are still there.

Hotel café restaurant Drees on the corner of the Stationsstraat and the Korte Kanaalstraat is now called Anadolu café. A post card filed in the municipal archives shows us that it used to be called De Ster. It said Burgerlogement (Guest house) on the front. A horse and carriage plods quietly through the Stationsstraat. There are a couple of walking people. There is no other traffic.

It won't surprise you to see that almost everything has disappeared. The yellow curve of Atlanta is still there, almost completely demolished it is situated in a desolate no man's land. Suisse, the Grolsche Hoek, café Stoffels: it is an area of artimisia vulgaris and already quite a number of reasonably high trees are growing here and there. The fancy De l'Europe has made room for the newly built Piramide Shoarma Grillroom. Apeldoorn in the course of the nations.

Explanation of the panorama I see:

When I look back I see the big church, and the rooftops of the Beekpark that used to be a real park, once. On the corner was the Gemeente Bad- en Zweminrichting (Municipal Swimming Pool), filled with fresh natural water from the Sprengen.

Of course more to the east I see the new high-rise apartment buildings along the Apeldoorns Kanaal, and the Potlood (Pencil). A little bit further away is the former café De Tol, now called Jade City, on the crossroads of the Deventerstraat and the Zutphensestraat. If I were to follow the 52nd degree of latitude, I would first pass Enschede and Berlin, and would finally end up in the southern part of Kamchatka. But I cannot see it from where I am standing.

When I look over my shoulder in a south-western direction, I see the tall trees of the Veluwe. The radio tower of Kootwijk. In a straight line behind this lies Maarsbergen. And even further away, exactly along the same line, lies the island of Tiengemeten that I am making a film about.

I cannot see the station by an inch. But behind it, further on, between Beekbergen and Klarenbeek, there was once the last Dutch primary forest. It was over 8000 years old. The Beekberger Woud (Beekberger Forest). In the summer it was almost impenetrable because of its dense vegetation, in the winter it was flooded with water. It was a forest of alder-trees and ashes, while oak trees grew on the higher parts of the forest. Sometimes cowherds came, or a single botanic interested traveller who had heard how old and special the forest really was. "This forest is one of the most curious forests of our Fatherland and perhaps the only natural forest where nothing was ever planted", writes Van der Aa in 1840.

In the vicinity of the forest lived poor farmers and charcoal-burners in shabby sheds. Even the simplest furniture was not there, there was no drinking water, everybody was undernourished. The forest was sold in order to be cultivated. The Apeldoornse courant regarded it as "a most welcome job-creation programme". The NRC wrote: "the sale of the forest is a blessing for Beekbergen". The general foreman kept a diary and wrote down exactly how the digging up and the cultivation of the forest was carried out. On the 10th June 1871 the last tree of the forest was felled. Now the A 50 runs right through it. It is actually, quite beautiful there. There are pastures, where the ashes are still standing along the ditches – the same ditches that were dug all those years ago for land drainage. But it is no longer a forest.

You are born, so you are free, sings Laurie Anderson.

My keywords:

large white clouds
running in the park
my parents, my brother, my sisters
reading books
Monteverdi
Cabernet Sauvignon
looking at the surrounding landscape from the train
feeling soil between your fingers
the sound of the thrushes in early spring
standing on top of a small hill

No, no, nostalgia is not one of my keywords. This is not what I mean. I'm looking for what is called these days "readability". The landscape's "readability". A city's "readability". I want to find details that refer to other times, to other ways of thinking. Because it triggers something in my way of thinking, because it stimulates my imagination, because it makes me curious. I'm looking for a way to broaden my frame of thought.

Please look around you for a bit, while you are still hovering above the ground at the height of 15 metres, before you land with both your feet on the ground again. What could be better than blue distances promising unpredictable adventures? What could be more enchanting than organizing that which is unorganized? Than Atlanta's terrace on a summer's day? Than a railway station from 1876? Than thinking of the last forest?

It is our imagination, our way of thinking that makes all these things so beautiful, but there is one prerequisite: there has to be plenty of view.

Thank you.