

RAGGED DIALOGUES. ON COLLABORATION AS ESSAY



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1.

RAG

close >

2.

The frayed edge or raggedness refers to things unfinished and unpolished. The rag induces a radical openness. Frayed edges are about things that tend to escape control. Urban rags exist outside of the script or programme of architectural design. The programme, in architecture, describes a function: kitchen, this is the bedroom, office, this the corridor. Frayed edges explore the

The essay is all about the attempt, in fact can be seen as an 'ode to the attempt' – courtesy to an eponymous work of choreographer Jan Martens. Our collaboration is an ongoing series of attempts. An attempt involves certain orientations, desires and questions. We follow hunches, affinities and curiosities, yet without a pre-set goal or agenda. We deliberately embrace the openness of the dialogue. When time is scarce, and productivity and effectiveness have become ubiquitous norms, this attempt to create a free and open space without a fixed format or itinerary is a gentle act of resistance. #hard cuts #assemblage

INTERSTITIAL SPACES

Interstitial spaces are left-over spaces that are the result of infrastructural operations. Pieces of land and urban areas get intersected by roads, canals, power cables, railroads, or other spatial interventions that support the logistic operations by which we organize our numerous ways of transport. As a result of those interventions, there are left-over lands on both sides of the canal, road, cable et cetera. Areas that used to be one are now split in two, or even more sections. These separate pieces of land are unintentional remainders. Orphaned spaces. They are often not suited for urban planning, as they transgress sound norms, health guidelines or environmental regulations.

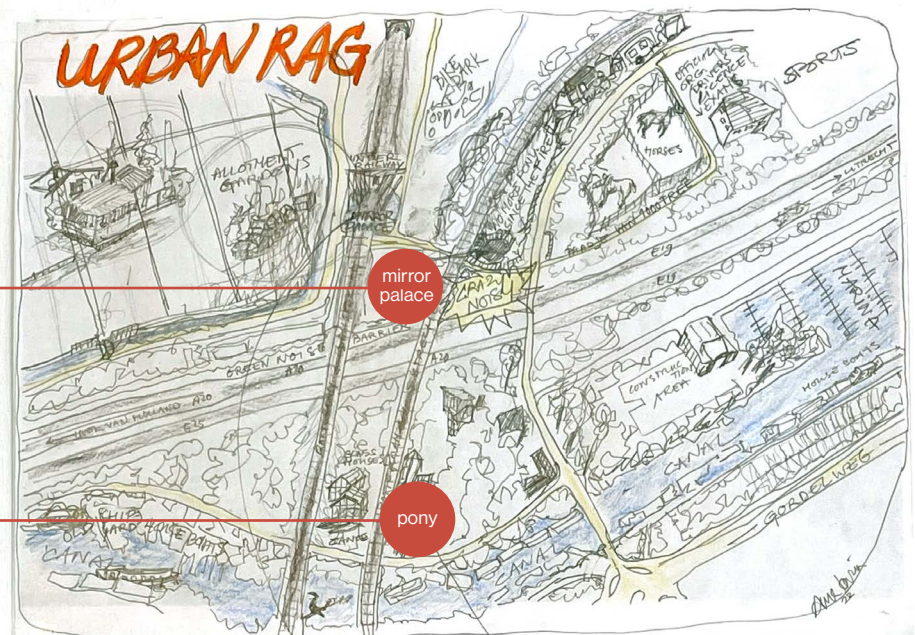
In his essay “Infrastructural Form, Interstitial Spaces and Informal Acts” (2011), landscape architect and urban designer Ed Wall describes how such spaces are newly used and appropriated, often moving beyond outside governmental law, leaving space for formal as well as informal use. Interstitial spaces are used for storing goods, construction materials, for private gardens, for keeping a pony, for taking shelter. Interspersing his essay with excerpts from J. G. Ballard’s novel *Concrete Island*, Wall invokes a space where human and other beings who seem to be lost find themselves to be in the proper place at the same time, as they cannot find their space in regular society. “Informality provides an opportunity for those excluded from formal processes to find presence in the city” (155). Every now and then local communities or groups ‘reclaim’ the lands and re/create and charge these spaces in a playful way.



DISCOMFORT

Frayed edges can generate discomfort or uncertainty. Ragged spaces may be non-legible, ugly, ‘average’, non-programmed. People often experience difficulty in dealing with unformatted spaces, as we are used to spaces that are formatted, formed and structured. Non-formatted, informal spaces accommodate diversity. Theatre and scenography embrace discomfort as strategy to open up.

#urban scenography #dingen die schuren #non-spectacular #niet alle stukjes zijn de moeite waard hoor!





STROLLING, SCAVENGING

In *Figuren/Essays* (1995), architecture theorist Bart Verschaffel refers to Adorno and Lukacs in pointing out that the essay starts 'outside itself'. In essence, the essay does not create new things. Things are not drawn from an empty Nothingness, but rather, the essay collects and energizes things that were already dormant somewhere and provides them with a new way of ordering or organizing. This ordering is regarded as a composition or figuration; this is where the 'figure' emerges.

The base layer of thought that sediments in the essay is the act of finding, storing, collecting, gathering, waiting, poking around - until a constellation of words or images emerges, a 'figura' in a theological meaning of the word: a preview or premonition of a thought or idea.

#scharrelen

THE ESSAY IN/AS COLLABORATION

In *The Hundreds* (2019), cultural theorists Lauren Berlant and Kathleen Stewart write about things on the edge of appearance, addressing affects and situations that are about to take shape due to the attention given to them.

The Hundreds is a book of conversations, and a book of collaboration as well. "Collaboration is a meeting of minds that don't match" (5). The book clearly presents two voices, the alternate texts are not direct responses but do resonate with one another. Berlant and Stewart produce in-between spaces, in writing. We do the same, in dialogue. They affiliate with things that are about to materialize, cherishing the being 'on to something', a "staying open to what is in the vicinity," to what resonates in a scene (34).

"*The Hundreds* is an experiment in keeping up with what's going on. Ordinaries appear through encounters with the world, but encounters are not events of knowing, units of anything, revelations of realness, or facts. Sometimes they stage a high-intensity tableau of the way things are or could become, sometimes strangeness raises some dust. [...] If our way is to notice relations and varieties of impact, we're neither stuffing our pockets with ontology nor denying it: attention and riffing sustain our heuristics" (5).

ON VALUE

What is the value of the essayistic?

*L: There is value in the quality of dialogue, in the open exchange, in the encounter of two autonomous yet affiliated minds - like in *The Hundreds*.*

AK: It is about openness and the possibility to fully engage with a place or space, to feel connected. For this, we need informal spaces. Yet the informal cannot exist without the formal.

How can one preserve this essayistic openness for the city, and resist the neat and smooth strategies of urban planning in which many things are flattened, fixed and standardized? A suburb with identical houses and streets throughout the area does not inspire long conversation. A slightly chaotic and obscure shop window, instead, sparks interest. This is where the stories are, here is where life emerges. Such ragged spaces can create a certain openness through which one can feel connected or build meaningful relations with other agents in the ecosystem. Spaces and things that are fully complete(d) do not easily allow for such connections, since they only refer to themselves, they say what they are: I am a suburb, I am a bench, I am a hedge. One does not easily avoid their functionality. One does not get seated on a hedge.

#diversity #cultural diversity

TAGGING ALONG

“So, you’re writing. You make a pass at capturing something or tagging along. It’s too fast for you, it doesn’t cooperate, but you get something, backing up at the hint of precision, muscling your way in. [...] Thought becomes a little surprised to latch on to something, to arrive somewhere, and still looks around, testing what flashes up a surround” (*The Hundreds*, 46).

REFERENCES

- Berlant, Lauren, and Kathleen Stewart, *The Hundreds* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).
- Verschaffel, Bart, *Figuren/Essays* (Leuven/ Amsterdam: Van Halewyck/De Balie, 1995).
- Wall, Ed, 'Infrastructural form, interstitial spaces and informal acts', in *Infrastructural Urbanism: Addressing the In-between*, eds. Thomas Hauck, Regine Keller and Volker Kleinekort (Berlin: DOM Publishers, 2011), 145-158.

