

De Ont/Moeting: Radical Contact and Collective Imagination in Amsterdam Noord

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Abstract

This contribution examines *De Ont/Moeting* — the (en)counter — as an artistic research method that activates social imagination through embodied, communal practices. Rooted in Amsterdam Noord, my work explores how art can function as a socially sustainable infrastructure that strengthens local agency and collective belonging. Two case studies form the basis of this inquiry: *The Imagination Neighbour House on Wheels*, a mobile space for listening, dialogue, and shared dreaming that travels through neighbourhoods to facilitate encounters between diverse residents; and *The Fabric of Us*, a textile-based co-creation project where quilting becomes a metaphorical and material act of stitching together fragmented social fabrics. Both projects investigate how artistic gestures can open spaces of radical contact, where care, imagination, and civic participation are practiced as everyday forms of resistance. Through these situated practices, I ask: how can socially engaged art cultivate infrastructures of empathy and agency amid urban transformation and commodified culture?

Keywords:

Radical contact: citizens encountering each other in a plural way: with space for dissensus, through creative practice, and embracing difference.

Social imagination: the power of imagination to help create trust and belonging, and with that social sustainability of artistic projects that can help increase social reciprocity and resilience.

Community art: an artistic practice that evolves with and from the community of, by, for which the artistic practice is meant. Methodologically this means working question-based instead of proposition-based.

Civic agency: the capacity of citizens to act collectively in shaping the social and spatial conditions of their communities.

Textile art: the use of fabric-based materials and methods as tools for storytelling, empowerment, and communal connection.

Art in public space: artistic practices that intervene in or co-create with shared urban and social environments.

Mini CV

Nadja van der Weide is a socially engaged artist and researcher based in Amsterdam. Her practice weaves together performance, dialogue, and co-creation to cultivate spaces for collective imagination and radical listening. She is a PhD candidate exploring methods for a socially sustainable *Imaginarium* in Amsterdam Noord — an experimental framework for community-led artistic research. Her work has been presented in Europe and beyond, engaging with issues of care, belonging, and embodied knowledge. Her current research asks how artistic

practices can act as infrastructures for civic engagement and social transformation.