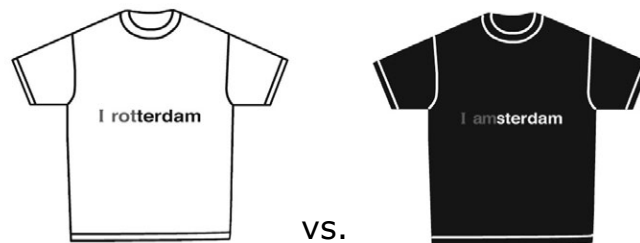


I rotterdam

A manifesto for a 2nd rate city
by Charles Bessard and Nanne de Ru

Rotterdam's promise - cheapness, unpretentiousness and decay - make it an excellent choice for business, education and living. Rotterdam's lack of a clear heritage, lack of a clear city-center, its spirit of doing-over-thinking and its abundant infrastructure and scarce green set it apart from other major European cities. Lets face it: Rotterdam is an urban compost heap, waiting to flower from its lingering fertility. But we all know that this will take a long time. Until that moment, Rotterdam should speak out for itself and make its relevance known in an unscrupulous, specific and realistic manner.



We are Rotterdam

Rotterdam has many advantages for business enterprises who make use of its harbor facilities. The Rotterdam harbor is one of the biggest ports in the world. It is also one of the main reasons why Rotterdam is the sickest and most polluted city in western Europe. (1) International industries find Rotterdam as a logical and convenient location for pollutive oil refineries, fully automated container terminals and factories. As the harbor is providing less and less work, it is also moving more and more towards the sea, away from the city boundaries, leaving its huge infrastructure abandoned.

Rotterdam's relative unimportance besides harbor activities smothers any international flowering of creative, intellectual and cultural contributions. Within the list of important European museums and cultural institutions, not a single Rotterdam based institution is featured, despite the splendor of their collections.



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The two museums that could make a difference are in perdition. The Boijmans van Beuningen, which new extension looks like an refurbished social housing block, has been subject to many hassles, and the Kunsthall, Rotterdams only genuine contemporary architectural masterpiece, is accused of over-commercialization and has left the building to fall apart. The only 'cultural' sector blooming in Rotterdam is

perhaps the architecture scene with its many famous offices, who now build everywhere in the world but in Rotterdam, while the Erasmus bridge is designed by an Amsterdam based architect.

Rotterdam has been incapable of giving shape to its multicultural population. The rise and death of Pim Fortuyn and the laws initiated by his party to ban poor people from moving to some of the poorest neighborhoods Rotterdam, has made the city one of the most intolerant in western Europe. Rotterdam actually has the most poor neighborhoods in the Netherlands and its people the unhappiest of the Netherlands. (2)

The importance of the harbor and the ignorance of nature, culture and beauty in Rotterdam are ultimately combined, of course, in the city's modernist planning. After the German bombardment in 1940, Rotterdam has been implementing infrastructure and architecture in an experimental, but blunt and brutal way. It has created a incoherent, hard-core and rough city surrounded by industrial infrastructure. Very few cities in the world can mix such global, technocratic and pragmatic competitiveness with a center that so unattractive and vacuumed of public life when it shuts down the tills of the shopping mall. It is a paved desert filled only with the lost echoes of the relentless parades of Rotterdam's festivals.

We Rotterdam

But, ultimately, Rotterdam's main asset are its people: the people who live here, the people who work here, the people who study here and the people who visit here. The people of Rotterdam therefore are Rotterdam. The singular harbour-focus of its business community, the poverty of its residents and the provincial narrow-mindedness that refuses to accept the genuine ugliness of Rotterdam is Rotterdam. We are Rotterdam.

Therefore we, the people of Rotterdam, wish to speak for the city of Rotterdam. Rotterdam is our city, and it's time for us to voice our true reasons for our disloyalty and carelessness to Rotterdam and express the real reasons why we ended up in Rotterdam: "Office space is cheap here. My parents live in Barendrecht so I can study here without having to live on my own. I failed as an artist in Amsterdam. Housing is cheap. I'm unpretentious. Moving here was an involuntary choice. Now I really Rotterdam." We Rotterdam!

I Rotterdam

I Rotterdam is the antidote for a brand for the city and people of Rotterdam. We don't need a brand. In saying or expressing I Rotterdam, we demonstrate our acknowledgement of the inherent qualities of Rotterdam. It Rots like an urban compost. Rotterdam is a composting pit that should clearly and proudly show all the ugliness, dirtiness, sickness, roughness and inappropriateness. Therefore I Rotterdam is our personal endorsement for our city, it is a speculative contribution to its process of elimination and decay as the positive phases of fertilization.



I rotterdam

And if once – ever – the city would again start to bloom from its rotten core we can proudly boast that we always knew...

Charles Bessard and Nanne de Ru are the founders of Powerhouse Company, an architecture, urban planning and research firm based in Rotterdam and Copenhagen.

Notes:

(1) See report 'Baten van schonere lucht in Rijnmond', 2005

(2) See 'Kadernota 'Gezond in de stad. Kadernota openbare Gezondheidszorg Rotterdam 2007-2010'. Many thanks to Studio Popcorn for providing these data.