

THE FOURTH WALL OF THE STAGE

draft

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The fourth wall of the stage

Exploring and revealing a backstage in Maastricht

Research transcript along with stop motions

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Choreography | Foreword

Cinema, script and screenplay are unique instruments when it comes to sharing a narrative as they use indirect communication and personal interpretation to influence the viewer. More often than not, in a movie or a play the statement of intent is usually a discoverable entity that comes across through a collaboration of space, set, characters, and an overarching theme that narrates the story. A similar methodology has been adopted here to demonstrate the qualities and stories within Landbouwbelang, a former grain storage located in Maastricht, near the Sappi industrial tissue.

Landbouwbelang, now occupied by squatters, is an interesting example of multiscaler gleaning, ranging from miniscule industrial equipment to finding a new meaning for the entire building. By exploring this range, the research looks to bring to light the untold stories that have been hidden within the confines of brick and concrete and have remained concealed from the public eye. Because of this concealed nature, Landbouwbelang can be characterised as a backstage, seeing as its activities of cultural production – rehearsals, making and practice – are happening behind closed curtains, away from the public eye and rarely attracting any magnetism.

The research, narrated as a play of 3 acts, tells the stories that take place in this backstage and showcases the ever moving and evolving character of the space and its potential performative nature as different activities occupy and transform it. The script and the stop motion technique work as collaborative and/or independent tools in communicating and illustrating this condition. Both require a touch of individualistic imagination while relying on some concrete visuals and words. When we combine these elements, we get unique ways of exploring and revealing the hidden story of a place, its backstage, in a way that speaks of its past, present and future. Moreover, the research bases itself on the stories conducted through interviews and visits and adds an emotional layer since the building could potentially be destroyed in a few months.

The structure of the play is divided into 3 acts that revolve around the ideas of living, work & play that underline different forms of appropriation and domestication of the spaces. Respectively, the script is set in three main spaces: the living spaces, the artist studios & the venue hall. In all, they show the process of inhabiting a leftover space and demonstrate how different uses and various typologies can happen by repurposing found objects. These props, that constantly shift in value and were gleaned from the previous use of the building become an indispensable layer to the understanding and transformation of the space and leave room to interpret what other future layers could be.

Conclusively, this approach attempts to show how Landbouwbelang is a city in itself, and aids in validating the freedom of expression by a user in the space. This freedom of expression and use is what allows the design to demonstrate freedom within existing confines while allowing some structure to seep in.

Act one

A space to rest your head

Fade in:

Characters in act: BJORN, JAMES & DENNIS

The scene sets in a southern corner of the plot of Landbouwbelang. A few lines mark the walls and structure of the existing building.

BJORN and DENNIS are looking for a roof above their head and come across an abandoned brick warehouse with some potential.

Two windows with layered brick impressions are set across each other. A green rusty metal door is open, and DENNIS is standing and gazing out of the room. DENNIS contemplates about the location and what these brick walls and existing structures can offer. A pile of rubble and grain waste lies in one corner. BJORN shuffles through the rubble looking for something valuable. The walls are thick, yet don't provide insulation, while the windows are broken.

DENNIS

Bjorn, check this out! This corner could be up for grabs. I like the view from this side also.

BJORN

I don't see any other choice, and the space seems big. We could call others also, if they are looking for a new place to crash in.

BJORN mumbles while he shuffles through the rubble and contemplates if this space could offer him something the previous squat couldn't.

BJORN has an idea. He arrives to the scene with his bike.

BJORN mumbles to himself as he cleans the room.

BJORN

I need to make it my corner, it just needs a bit of work. Nothing I haven't done before. I can convert the space into a place where I can comfortably work and live in. What could go wrong?

BJORN and JAMES arrive with boxes and start to clear out the space.

BJORN

James, lift the window up it is getting warm in here.

JAMES

Yep. But man, what a good find... I like the corner. Occupy it before anyone does.

BJORN

It's a bit of a first come first serve situation here. You find it, you take it. That's how we work. But also, everything is up for sharing. We are all in this together.

Things BJORN, JAMES and DENNIS picked up from nearby gathers around the space. DENNIS sits down on pallets, exhausted from the moving. BJORN picks up his camera and starts to take photos of the view and the others who are enjoying out in the garden. JAMES looks at the space and the windows and imagines what he could do out of this space for his art.

BJORN

Bro, I like the view every day. It's just the damn bridge. But at least others enjoy the front garden. How's the moving going?

DENNIS

Yeah, well, maybe if you could help, it would go faster!

JAMES stays quiet and thinks about his art and how the lack of convenient workspaces affects his flow, and he feels underappreciated since he is not a commercial artist.

JAMES

The bigger scheme is different boys.

The space starts to shape with a few furniture pieces. A wall out of construction waste divides the entrance and the bed area. DENNIS drags a mattress to help BJORN. JAMES contemplates yet again. He helps with the furniture while still wondering about what he could do with some open work space that he could make his own on his own terms.

BJORN

Ah, man... this could be a good place to sleep actually. The place is a bit cold though.

DENNIS

The broken windows don't help.

JAMES

We do the best from what we get. You just need to step out of your room to start working. Isn't that amazing?

The sun sets. The scene turns darker. Another day ends with the space starting to take shape. BJORN falls asleep and DENNIS and JAMES go to their quarters within the house.

Morning dawns and another day of domestication of the space begins.

JAMES

I found this shelf laying in the city centre. It's in good shape.

BJORN

It's perfect! I need some space for my art supplies.

The furniture starts to assemble. The space gains character. BJORN feels more comfortable and excited. DENNIS enters and BJORN shows him a new piece he worked on for his room.

JAMES

Looks great, are you selling it?

BJORN

Man, no access to that. If only I had an exhibition or a gallery where I could show my art to the world.

JAMES

One step at a time. I see a bright future here.

More furniture comes in. BJORN arranges his things as per his movement patterns and adds another partition with the help of DENNIS. DENNIS puts a couch in front of the door and sits and contemplates yet again.

JAMES

Man, it's taking shape, I like it.

BJORN

Yeah, the partition helps. I can make the side space as a small kitchen for myself and then people don't have to enter my bedroom when they visit. It's usually a mess.

JAMES

I wouldn't want to see what you do in there.

BJORN and JAMES laugh as DENNIS enters the scene.

BJORN, DENNIS and JAMES assemble and start working on art together. JAMES has an idea about using the broken windows as a canvas for more art.

JAMES

I have an idea for the windows. Let me get my supplies.

BJORN

You do what you like.

JAMES

It gives a personal touch to the space.

DENNIS makes a curtain out of a fabric he gleaned from a flea market while BJORN attends to his bed. BJORN jumps with excitement and starts to assemble different things in the corner.

DENNIS finishes his art works and the kitchen starts to take shape while they go out in hunt of more furniture. The corner becomes chaotic because BJORN starts to collect his work in a corner. BJORN shares his feelings with JAMES.

BJORN

I don't like this. I have to assemble things in my room. I want a proper workspace.

JAMES

We can assemble something outside of these walls. Let's focus on the room first.

More furniture enters as they assemble each bit and BJORN has an idea.

BJORN

Let's have a party in my domain.

JAMES

What are you thinking about?

BJORN

Well, I was thinking the 3 of us can have a few beers let's get some games together and ..let's go!

DENNIS

Sounds good.

The 3 collect in the space and play games while discussing their plans for Landbouwbelang while DENNIS moves out of the space for a smoke at the door.

NARRATOR

The space grows. The furniture, domestication now shapes the space. It shows a unique character. The space now talks about BJORN. It's his domain. It speaks of him. The personalised space now offers multiple uses. It offers a space of privacy and yet talks about different layers that assemble in there. Domestication or making a space - Your place is a process, and it stimulates with time and activity. The living conditions and routines shape the footprints in the space. Something that shapes out of existing fabric. Sometimes, all you need is a non-blank canvas, and a touch of gleaning and imagination can start to bloom a space into a personalised environment.

Act two

A space to nest your art

Fade in:

Characters in act: DENNIS, DAMON, KAT, GREG, NIELS, JOP & LEYLA. WORKER 1, 2 & 3.

The scene sets in in 1958. Landbouwbelang works as a grain storage and assembling industry. The grain storage function with a few workers. The demand is reducing, and people are terminated from their jobs. The last few remain as they use the slides and stacks to assemble the grains.

The stacks are assembled in the scene while some workers work in different quarters. The space is efficiently used.

Three workers assemble near the spiral staircase and talk amidst the sounds of directions and wheels.

WORKER 1

This job is getting tiresome now. The pay is going down and people are getting fired every day.

WORKER 2

Yes, this is an extreme situation.

WORKER 3

I heard from George, that they might shut down permanently. The boss is not happy with the demand, and they prefer the other grain storage down south.

WORKER 1

Maybe we should move there.

WORKER 2

Well, having a place of work close to my house is necessary. I have a baby girl back home.

WORKER 1

I understand, but who knows what the future of this place hold. They might just demolish it and make a posh housing in this place while people don't have spaces to work.

The 3 workers resume work and continue at slow pace.

Slowly the space is cleared and the grain storage shuts down. All that remains is the concrete ruins amongst slides, staircases and machines that speak about the stories of the past of Landbouwbelang.

FADES OUT

FADES IN

The scene sets with a group of squatters coming across an empty concrete warehouse. They gather and inspect as ideas start springing.

A few of them have already made this place a home. Different corners of the space are occupied as living spaces. Some seek comfortable workspaces to practice their craft, a few come up with an idea. Glimpses of silos can be seen on the side. The leftover machines hang on a suspended mezzanine on the side near some floating rooms that the gleaners have created themselves.

KAT

I feel this could easily be transformed into a convenient workspace. We anyways are outcasts, this could be a perfect domain for us.

DAMON

A cultural freezone!

KAT

I like that, a freezone.

DENNIS

A freezone where people could come practice, do whatever and if they can find a place to lay their head. This could be our community.

The group starts to glean things from a construction site nearby. The scaffoldings, small wood pallets and other things enter the space. The space seems chaotic and lost in the concrete labyrinth while the drive to make something of this space continues. The slides and the spiral staircases sit amongst the concrete column grid. They sit out like characters. Tiny plants can be seen growing on them. KAT has already placed planters on the slide that used to transport grains. She is true gleaner at heart.

KAT, DAMON and JOP assemble at the corner near the spiral staircase.

DAMON

I have occupied this corner. It suits well with the woodwork.

KAT

(From a distance) Sounds good. Just don't make too much noise.

DAMON

Can't promise. I am using machines.

The scene continues as people continue to work on their different crafts. The room starts to take shape with tools of different types. The different sounds and smells give the atmosphere a recognisable quality.

The group starts to personalise the space. The gleaning process begins small fragments of territoriality starts to appear.

JOP

I just got this shelf for free and it works so perfectly with the corner.

KAT

Nice, it's just I would like a partition in the middle. I think I'll do it. I'll get it, I think it will frame the space.

DAMON

Hey Kat, I'll help you.

KAT

Yes, collaboration is everything. Let's get the other to contribute.

The idea sparks and everyone starts to contribute. The value in sharing space while keeping individuality in craft is the shared expression of the open space plan. Multiple crafts co-exist while the art starts to become a part in shaping the spaces.

Time passes and the space swells. The space starts to show qualities of a combination of old existing articles of the industry with new props of the growing art forms that are practiced, produced and rehearsed.

The gleaners come across a collection of abandoned doors and windows. They collect and assemble them around the space. Something, that is used to open borders and walls starts to divide the spaces as per the needs.

GREG

The doors work perfectly. Good job everyone.

DAMON

I know, right? It's a refreshing sight to see everyone collaborate to make this collective space a haven for different artforms to represent themselves.

DENNIS

That's the spirit of this cultural freezone. It might not be for everybody, but I love the combination of characters, it shows everyone's value. Anyways, let's get some drinks on! It's actually nice to get different opinions from others of my art. I like the feedback and support I feel from you all.

KAT

I hope it continues like this, and hopefully the world can also see and feel this.

DENNIS

It's hard with the label of squatters. It's like we don't exist in the map for them, if only they could see our value and what we can bring...

KAT

Well at least, our niche clientele is there. Our supporters are there, and with some events and donations we will be able to keep going.

DAMON

And I am sure that will keep growing, just like this space grows with us.

Storage, workstations and tools start to tell a story of the kind of program each space demonstrates. Different corners express different styles while collectively becomes a mobile museum of art. Where alongside the finished products, the process of production becomes a display within the space.

The scene shifts as the group transforms the leftover spaces into seating and relaxation areas where they take breaks and chat over a coffee and a smoke.

JOP

I saw Kat's work this morning, her portraits are coming out great.

GREG

Yes. It's becoming an amazing collection and I like how Kat's end just speaks about her style. We don't need to ask where everyone is working, there art does it for them.

JOP

Indeed, also Damon's woodwork is also inspiring.

GREG

I think everyone's work is inspiring and look what the empty warehouse has become.

KAT arrives at the scene.

KAT

Hello guys, how's it going?

GREG

It's going well. We were just talking about how this workspace is shining and we were appreciating your work.

KAT

Thank you! But I feel it's all of us combined that form the gears of this space. Let's just increase our outreach and make this space a haven for anyone and everyone who needs a platform and is struggling like us.

The scene sets and the light focuses on specific dialogues in the area.

The scene sets towards the group sitting and having drinks along the couches at the end of a hard-working day.

NIELS

I usually would think that chilling along my workspace would not be comfortable, but this seems really nice.

GREG

Yeah, I think it's the fact that we are shaping it as per our needs instead of picking a defined desk in a corner.

KAT

Yeah, the personal touch does help.

GREG

Indeed, it's our cultural freezone. It's important to feel free. This freedom to shape our space, while keeping the collaboration alive is a breath of fresh air.

DAMON

(Taking a sip of his drink) I completely agree. The fact that I can just come and chill and customise my work life I something I value.

DENNIS

Being a squatter and representing something big is essential for me. It's more of an initiative that we have started here. We have to keep it going. As long as we stay democratic and resolve our conflicts we can continue to think on how we reshape art and get people interested in it.

The scene shifts to the wood working corner. DAMON, NIELS and BART work while having a chat.

DAMON

Can I share the table saw?

BART

Yes, I'll be done in 5 mins. Then it's all yours.

DAMON

Great, what are you working on today? It looks cool.

BART

Thanks man. Yeah, it's for the collaboration with Demotech, Tony discussed a few ideas with me and it sounds great.

DAMON

Interesting, now I realize why you've been working hard and how the space is showing a bit of Demotech. Great job.

The spotlight now shifts to the corner occupied by paintings.

KAT

Dennis, can you come have a look?

DENNIS

Yeah, what am I looking at?

KAT

Haha, the piece I am holding...

DENNIS

(Talks with a light giggle) I mean the space looks so great, the walls are literally your work, that is why I was wondering... But this piece looks great. I would work a bit on the composition in the bottom.

KAT

Yeah, that part is something I have been trying to imagine, but it seems like my mind is on low battery right now.

GREG and LEYLA enter the scene. They were overhearing the conversation between KAT and DENNIS and were intrigued by KAT's work. LEYLA suggests to have a closer look.

LEYLA

Kat, that's so good. But you don't look too happy with it.

KAT

Hey Leyla, you are right, I don't feel I have done enough with this.

LEYLA

It's nice to take a step back, it always helps me.

The scene fades and goes towards the making end. LEYLA, GREG and DENNIS work here. The platform is raised with wood pallets, while the spiral staircase becomes a storage shelf for tools. The corner is divided by sculpting works and paintings stored against one another.

LEYLA

Greg, stop stealing my tools every time.

GREG

(Laughs) I cannot resist Leyla. It's really working for me.

LEYLA

Fine, just nexttime update me when you do. I promised Kat to have a look at her work, but I would like to finish mine before I go to her quarter.

GREG

You and me both know, that is not going to happen Leyla. I will take your tools but you also should know that you can borrow anything of mine.

DENNIS

You two are amusing.

FADE OUT

The work in the artist studios continues and the collaborative environment thrives amongst the users. The light starts to fade from the scene and the voices fade out.

Act three

A space with turn of events

Fade in:

The scene sets with an overhead view of the abandoned fertilizer warehouse on the north side of Landbouwbelang. The area is occupied by storage equipment, water tanks and rubble from previous uses of the factory. The hall is about 15m high with large concrete trusses that make the space dramatic. There is not enough light in the room, tiny windows offer a sprinkle of day light.

The squatters enter the scene and begin to clear out the space. The space is an open floor plan and an appropriate venue for events.

The squatters assemble a few days before a music event and discuss the details.

RYAN, BEZ, THIJS, TOLGA, SIMON, MAIKA discuss the details of the events while the others of group start to clear out the space as per BEZ's instructions. TOLGA and BEZ are going to lead the performance.

They proceed in the space and try to imagine the space using the objects available in the hall.

TOLGA

I think the space can host about 100 guests. The event could shape up nicely, the acoustics of concrete could actually reverb well with the drums.

BEZ

Yeah, I particularly like the water tanks and the aesthetic of this space. Some lighting work in a few places and this place could be transformed nicely.

TOLGA

Indeed. I also want to know what RYAN and MAIKA could offer. They have done events in the past here.

TOLGA and BEZ head to MAIKA and THIJS who are speaking with others and trying to understand what could be used for the event. A few people assemble on the balconies from upper levels along the rest of the structure.

The scene shifts to different groups attending to different parts of the hall.

THIJS suggest using scaffolding and construction fences to shape the event.

THIJS

The fences look great as partitions, we could even control the entries in this way.

MAIKA

We need to send out the invites.

SIMON

I updated the websites, and the details are up.

MAIKA

Great Simon. Let's spread the word to other people of the community.

THIJS

We should let the entry be through within, it will be nice if people can shift to the bar afterwards. They'll get a sneak peak of our freezone.

MAIKA

Great idea, I think Tolga might like it too.

THIJS and MAIKA move towards TOLGA to discuss further details while MAIKA and SIMON get to organizing the space.

SIMON starts to organize the water tanks in the middle to craft a stage and focus point in the hall.

TOLGA

Looks great guys.

MAIKA

Yeah, Simon is leading the planning. He has some great ideas.

THIJS

Next would be to just get more things inside to shape the entry. We were discussing about spreading the word about the event around.

TOLGA

Sounds amazing.

The event planning continues, and the composition starts to show. All characters are involved while movement and sound testing keeps happening around the space. In the background, audio muffling and chatter of ideas can be heard. While space is taking shape, Simon consults MAIKA and BEZ about the space requirements.

SIMON

Drum set in the middle or the side?

BEZ

For now let's keep it on the side, not sure what Tolga might bring to the table.

SIMON

Cool, we can start with the general circulation around the stage till that point.

Water tanks now start to shape the stage and the scaffolding on the side. GREG climbs down the scaffolding steps on the corner. The wooden planks shake while he steps down. The thumping sound announces his entrance. Meanwhile, a faded figure is seen watching over the movements in a window on the top level. The lights in that room are on.

GREG

Woah, Bez is here!

TOLGA

Yeah, he is ever present.

GREG

How can I help? I heard an event is taking shape here.

TOLGA

Yes, we are excited to host people here.

GREG

Yes, that's how we imagine our spaces to be used.

BEZ starts jamming on the drums while other arrange the lighting and partitions. A few people collect around the stage with a few beers and start to enjoy the practice. The space lights up.

The feet are tapping, TOLGA starts to test out the audio of the DJ set and starts to collab.

An impromptu performance takes place and others of the community enter the hall and see what the space has become now.

SIMON discusses the finishing touches with TOLGA, BEZ and THIIJS while MAIKA is busy arranging the backdrop of the stage. Internal and external collaborations represent the cultural freezone.

TOLGA

The setup looks great.

SIMON

Agreed. The other really helped put everything together. Now it's onto the event.

MAIKA

Yes, I am super excited about tonight. I heard positive responses and RSVP's from people who will be joining.

TOLGA

Amazing. I am going to take a break before the event. I'll talk to BEZ and see you guys at the event.

MAIKA

Good luck! See you soon.

The scene sets as night falls and the space darkens. The setup is lit, the water tanks become a spectacle and the spotlights mark the stage. SIMON switches on the lights on the end and along the entrances.

Slowly, the guests arrive and start to surround the stage area sculpted by leftovers of the industry turning it into an environment that subliminally speaks of gleaning. The formal geometry and scale of the hall contains the crowd. The crowd looks around and notices the tiny artworks on the windows on top. The strong perspective of the space creates a nice backdrop for the performance.

More and more people enter and TOLGA picks up the mic.

TOLGA

Hello everyone and welcome! I hope you are feeling great tonight and let's get this started!

BEZ slowly starts to thump the bass and the vibe in the scene is set as the lights synchronize with the beats. People start to cheer, and the attention turns to the stage.

The event continues and VINEET arrives in the frame. VINEET stumbles upon SIMON and MAIKA and starts a conversation while the loud music plays.

VINEET

This is incredible. I am so impressed with what this space can offer.

MAIKA

Thank you, it's all a community effort from us. Everyone here wants to just produce and demonstrate culture to the world.

SIMON

Which is a bit tricky considering the squatter's label, we feel friction from a big part of society. But tell us, how did you find about the event? (To Vineet)

VINEET

I am a student of Architecture at TU Delft, and, I am interested in what this building stands for.

MAIKA

Interesting. Yeah, this building is in a weird phase right now. The future is becoming more and more uncertain for us.

SIMON

This new tender has got us a bit out of place, yet again. We work hard to get the energy of this place going, but now we are fighting a losing battle against capital investments. We have fought enough and some of us don't want to spend any more energy on it.

MAIKA

Yeah, we are like the dust under the carpet for them.

VINEET

Well, in that case it's not too long till someone stumbles on the bump of the carpet.

SIMON

Yeah, let's hope so. This was a great space for us. It offers us so much. We have taken responsibility of it now and have shaped it to suit us.

The crowd cheers and TOLGA raised the bass and shouts "How is everyone feeling tonight!". VINEET smiles and continues the conversation intrigued by the thoughts of SIMON and MAIKA.

SIMON

What is your project about, Vineet?

VINEET

Umm... We are doing this urban renewal of the sappi factory, but I felt it is this place that holds a lot of opportunity but is sidelined from any attention.

MAIKA

You are quite right. SO, what do you have in plan for us.

VINEET

Well, let's see what comes forth for this backstage...

The scene sets and fades.

NARRATOR

Landbouwbelang offers a variety of things to the people here. It's a shelter, it's a workspace, its, and event space. But soon that might not be the case. With a tender in place who knows what the future holds for them. In any of these cases, the identity of this building will completely disappear. And something that is and could be a platform for so many things might turn into a fresh capitalistic investment. This backstage of culture, something that is sidelined and underappreciated needs a bit of revival. Let's see what the future holds. Maybe all this backstage needs is a stage. The wall between the stage and the backstage needs to disappear and maybe the fourth wall is the answer to getting people to finally appreciate the backstage, appreciate the cultural production instead of just cultural consumption.

*Roll credits.