

of- factory

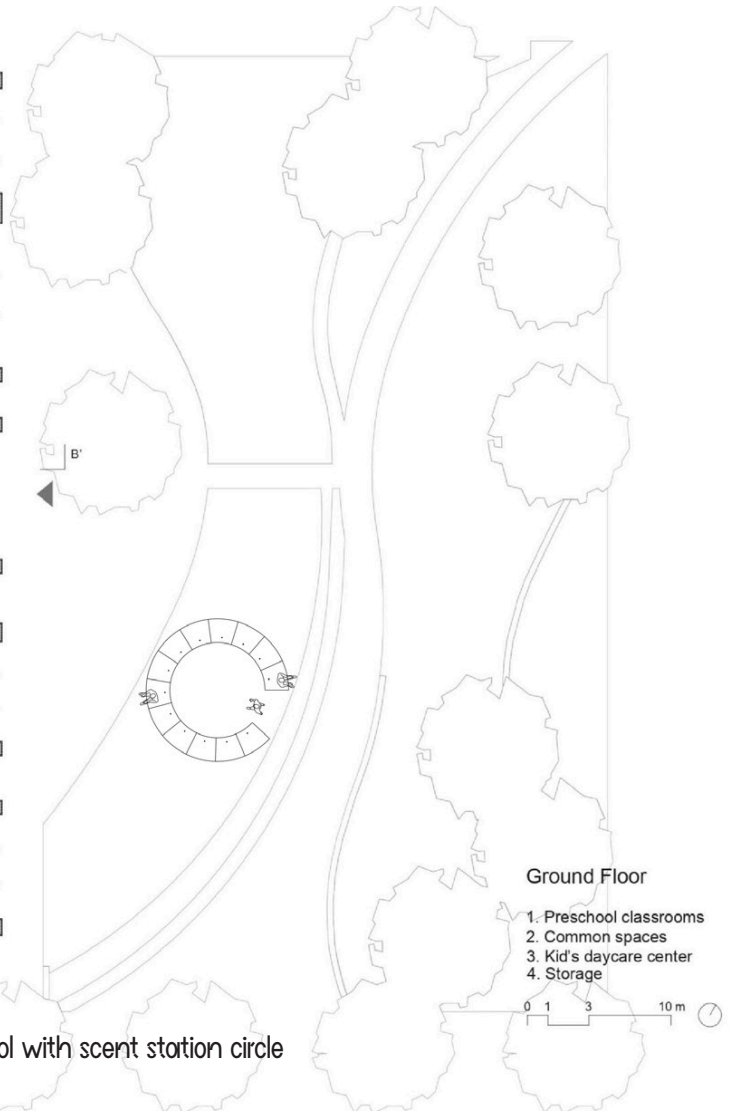
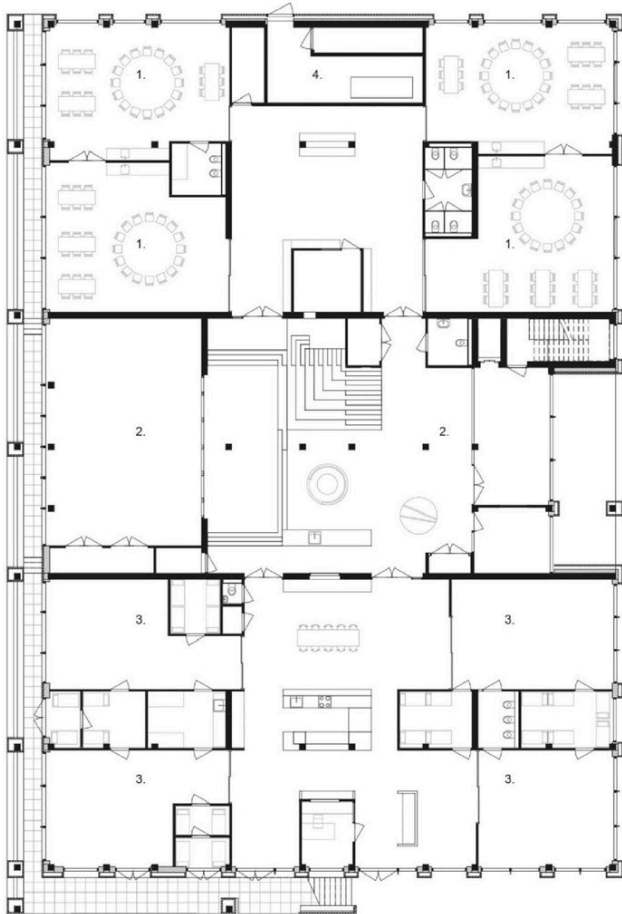


smell as a medium

artist aaro murphy and the (nelly&theo) van doesburg foundation propose a public art work in which the smell of a given place can act as an anchor, a tool for grounding the body in a particular place and time.¹

engaging the students, staff and neighbours of the primary school asko, planned to open in the sluisbuurt neighbourhood in 2023 and waste management builders marimetic through scent and an olfactory installation in or around the school. moke architecten has developed a building that is described as a learning factory, including green spaces that border each of the different classrooms. in addition to this connectivity with the outdoor view and landscape, the “olfactory” proposes smell as a medium for a public art work.

the passage of a ship, smell of diesel, whaft of sewage, a gentle breeze of seaweed, fresh laundry – a transient reminder of the industrial past and present. is there a way to tell a narrative of an urban location through its smell? a way to augment its olfactory reality through atmospheric technologies? the vibrancy of a neighbourhood is often echoed in its olfactory landscape. manhattan is notorious for its mix of industrial, subway, food, sewage and magnolia smells – a vibrant sensorial reminder of soul. familiar ephemeral language oozing through ventilator systems, mixing with the ambient gurgling and rumbling of the metropolis. cities without smell therefore become lifeless, posthuman sites of crystalline architecture – limited to encapsulated atmospheres controlled by computerised climate systems.



floorplan asko school with scent station circle

the modernist agenda has left many western cities to adopt a policy of deodorisation, removing unpleasant “polluting” smells. the idealised future architecture is therefore minimal, clean and generic, devoid of loud “industrial” smells that could be too intrusive or opinionated. indeed, there is a tendency with a new neighbourhood to eradicate and “clean up” existing olfactory landscapes. by blocking airflows, introducing new synthetic materials and removing distinctive odour producing sources.²

historically, western cities used to be highly odoriferous places. with the stench of sewage, spices, food, coal, peat and gasoline melting together to create an intense polyphony of smell. eventually through the 20th century, odour became a political symbol, dividing the wealthy into areas

with less stench; while the poor would live amongst industry.³ and as the city expands, factories and sewage sites move further outward to make room for the shiny new.

the dichotomy between existing urban smell identities, deodorisation and new olfactory place making is the starting point the public art work in amsterdam’s newest neighbourhood under construction which could be referred to as the “new manhattan” of amsterdam.

notes

1. in 2021, the city of melbourne recognised the former kraft vegemite factory as a “site of significance”, because of the “distinctive odour” of the iconic australian food which was produced there since the 1920s. “our campaign for the smell to be recognised is about acknowledging that the significance of this place goes beyond the bricks and mortar of the factory building.”
2. singapore for example, used to have a vibrant street food culture. but the city planners have eradicated these outdoor vending possibilities and moved them into sterile food halls “under the premise of hygiene”. which in turn has significantly altered the olfactory and sensory landscape of the city.
3. for instance in victorian london westerly winds would blow smells toward the east. meaning that the rich started living in the west, while the poorer in the east close to industry. a legacy that still shapes the olfactory landscape today.



prototype smell installation at sluisbuurt

school clock

the 19th century orange locks have been a starting point for this project. the site of the sluisbuurt sits on this major trade route. the locks have seen the olfactory histories of industrialisation and colonisation pass through its gates into the city. a passage of time and urban expansion unfolding as it opens and closes – day in day out.

for this project murphy proposes to develop an olfactory clock that tells time through smell. controlled by a computerised air system, the sculpture will release varying smells synonymous to the neighbourhood and asko school at different times of the day. paired together with weather data, the

sculpture will also respond to direct changes in the atmosphere, creating an ever changing olfactory landscape responding to the site it situates itself in.

the proposal includes researching the olfactory history of the area, from spice trade, industry, sewage and river-water to create a series of smells synonymous to the past of the area. together with amsterdam based perfumer niklaus metzler, we will create a body of smells that both replicate distinctive historical memories as well as reimagine new ones for the neighbourhood. this will be an attempt at bridging the past and future together to speculate a future smell architecture in this brand new neighbourhood.



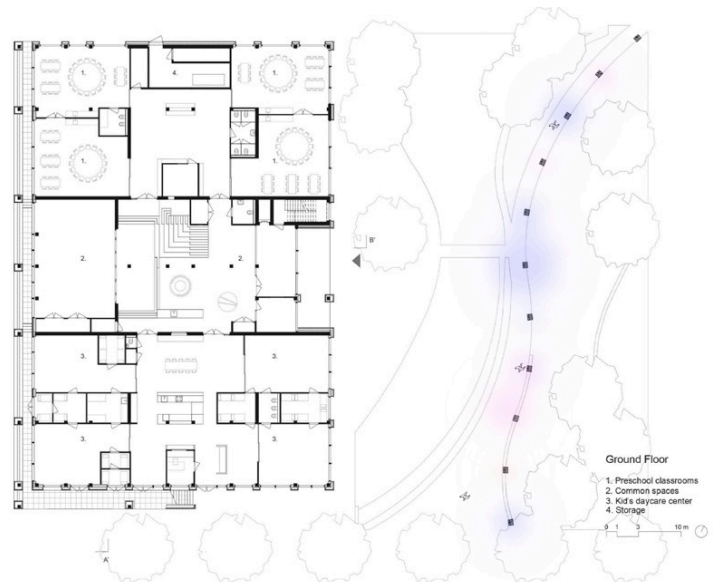
asko school section drawing with proposed scent stations

together with the asko primary school team and architects, as well as the municipality of amsterdam we want to better understand the processes behind olfactory policy and deodorisation in amsterdam. to understand the political and social implications of introducing or removing certain smells, and how much thought goes into this process when building a new neighbourhood in the city. this should ultimately lead to a new smell policy for the students and staff of the school and the sluisbuurt inhabitants passing by in general.

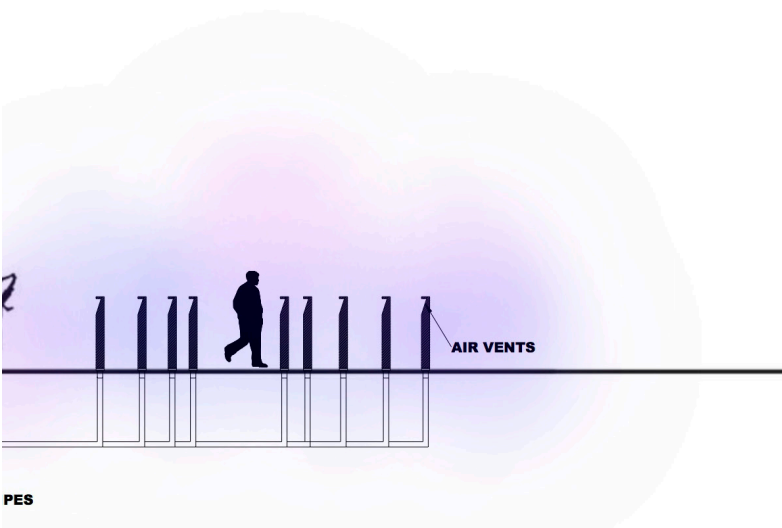
ideally the clock will be situated within an outdoor setting of the school, slowly releasing a delicate mix of aromas at different points in the day. passers may notice a familiar scent of earth in the morning on their way to work, or an industrial smell of heated tarmac when its +35. in turn Murphy questions how time based ephemeral media can be programmed to have a spatial autonomy of its own. a subtle sculptural gesture that works in symbiosis with the neighbourhood and learning environment.



location visit sluisbuurt



asko school floorplan with proposed scent stations





artist aaro murphy at sluisbuurt



testing scent as a material for public art work



visitors and team of public art work development programme at sluisbuurt, 2022

network

the (nelly&th)theo van doesburg foundation and aaro murphy welcome responses and ideas to further develop, prototype and finance the “olfactory” proposal. especially the expertise and interest of the following parties is required: perfumer niklaus metzler, municipality of amsterdam, asko primary school, marimetic, make architecten.

for more information visit
www.theovandoesburgstichting.nl

colophon

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