

THE SOFT  
ATLAS  
OF AMSTER-  
DAM



Jan Rothuizen

*The Soft Atlas of Amsterdam*  
Perspectives on everyday life

Nieuw Amsterdam

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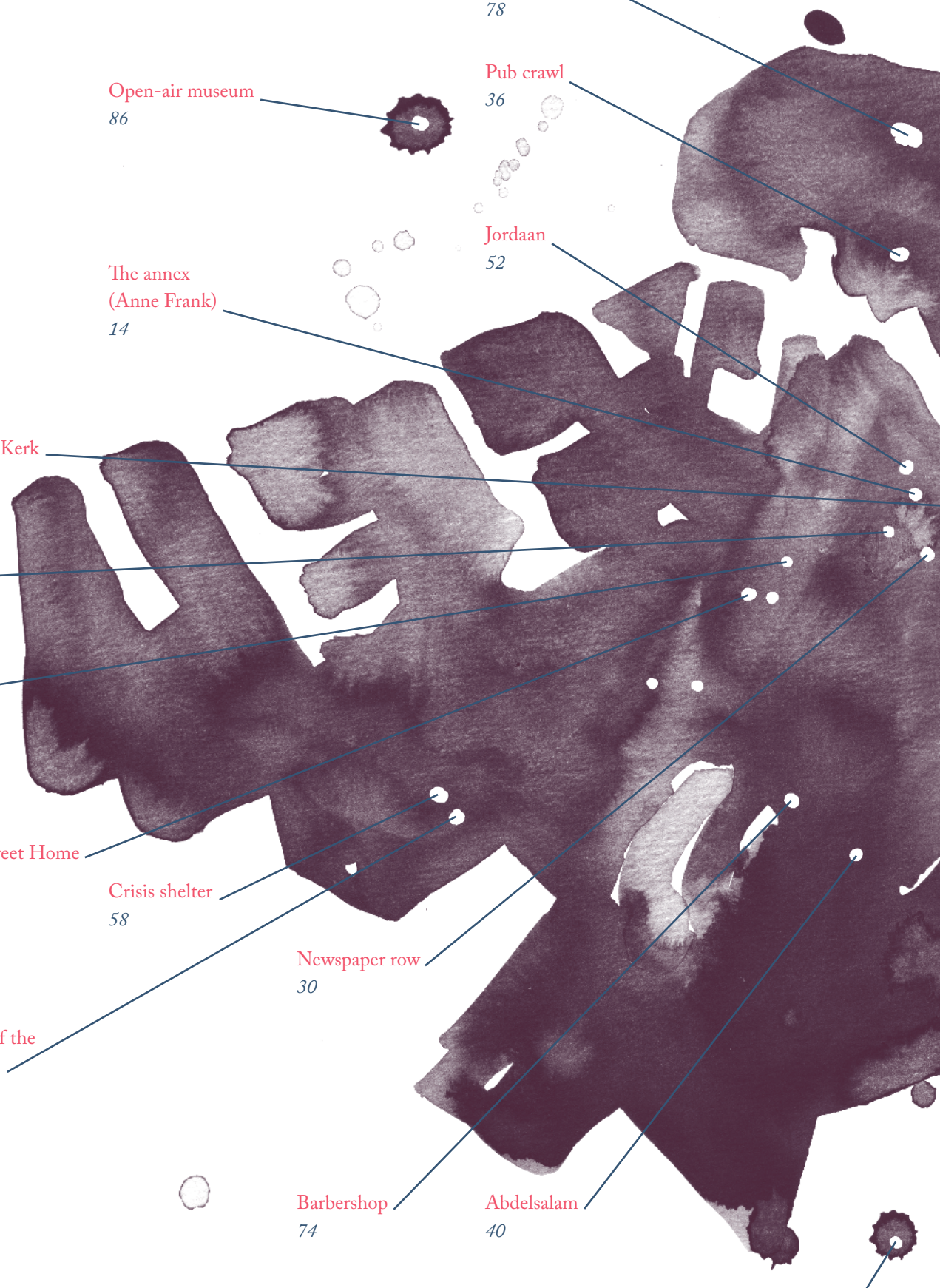
janrothuizen.nl  
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In memory of my dear friend and  
Amsterdammer Wendela Scheltema



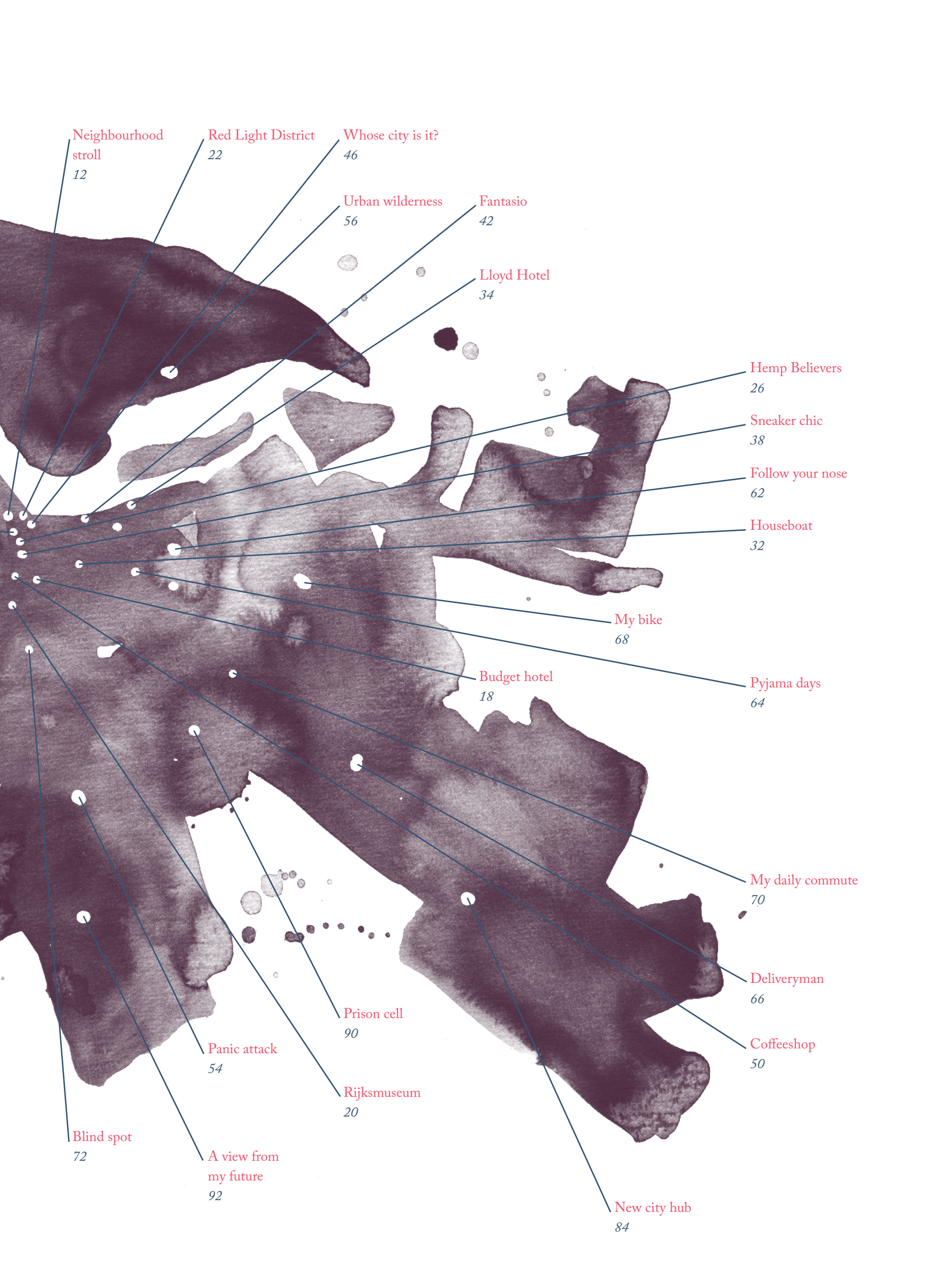


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# INTRO DUCTION





As an artist, I learned that the confined space of a studio was not for me. The ideal way for me to be an artist, I realised, was to walk around city streets and meet people. I wandered around faraway cities like Cairo, New York, Shenzhen and Beirut before making my first book of drawings about my hometown, Amsterdam.

This was difficult at first: the city was such an integral part of me that I found it hard to see what I was looking at. I realised that 'my' Amsterdam was just a small part of the city; my routes, people and places tended to be the same. Since then, I do my best to make sense of my city, seeing it not only as a local but also as an outsider or tourist.

All those years of drawing Amsterdam has made me see it as a city in flux. The Amsterdam of my youth was a like a set of bad teeth, with gaps and cavities where houses once stood. Today, all those gaps have been filled and people look for ways to expand upward or to build on former industrial zones.

The title of this atlas refers to *Soft City*, a book written in 1974 by the British author and travel writer Jonathan Raban. His idea is that the city is where the solid concrete reality of buildings and asphalt meets the malleable, subjective experience and expectations of the people who live and work there. When I chose this title for my book I had no idea how appropriate the word 'soft' was for the Amsterdam that I have come to know from seeing it with new eyes, while still calling it home.

Jan Rothuizen  
Amsterdam, 2023

ON



## We're open... aren't we?

Of course we're open – always have been, for everyone. But for how much longer? Amsterdam continues to search for a formula where everyone is welcome and can be themselves in an open-minded city.





IN 20 YEARS AMSTERDAM NORTH WILL HAVE 47% MORE RESIDENTS

# AMSTERDAM

I BUMP INTO A FRIEND WHO IS DECORATING

SEXYLAND WORLD A TUNNEL WITH 'UNITED PAINTING PROJECT'

CULTURAL CLUBHOUSE

THERE USED TO BE GALLONS HERE TO LUIS TWIN

DEAD PERSON

THE ERITREAN COMMUNITY MEETS UP IN THE HEATED 'AMSTEL PASSAGE' (NICE AND COZY?)

THEIR LOGO



THE PAINTING PROCESS IS PART OF THE ARTWORK ITSELF

(THEY WORK WITH LOCALS WORLDWIDE ITS A SOCIAL ART PROJECT)

THEY'VE GOT THIS SOFT ATLAS IN THEIR SHOP WINDOW

HOW MANY SALES CAN A PERSON TAKE?

FILM MUSEUM - (LOOKS LIKE AN ANIMAL, BUT I'M NOT SURE WHICH)

FERRY

HELLO? AAAAAH AAAAAH OOOOOHH?

AT THIS INTERSECTION ANARCHY CREATES ORDER!

PEDESTRIANS AND CYCLISTS FROM THE FERRIES AND BIKE PATHS WORK IT OUT FOR THEMSELVES SO KEEP LOOKING

WINGED WHEEL

CENTRAL STATION METRO

THERE IS ROOM FOR 7000 BIKES UNDER THIS WATER

SUPER-MARKET ENTRANCE

IN 2030 THERE WILL BE SPACE FOR 22,000 BIKES A WORLD RECORD!

NOW CLOSED MULTI-STORY BIKE PARKING

DANGEROUS CURVE

ISAW A DILDO & KAMILLE BAG (WHITE COTTON) WHERE THE NAME WAS CHANGED TO DILDO & CAMELTOE

THIS IS A WALK-THRU EXIT ALBERT HEIJN SUPERMARKET

CUYPERS THE 19TH-CENTURY CELEBRITY ARCHITECT, OVERPLAYED HIS HAND HERE, HE'D ALREADY STARTED BUILDING THIS CHURCH WITH AN 85-METER TOWER BUT THEN DIDN'T GET PERMISSION TO FINISH IT TOWER BE TOO

THE RAINBOW IS A HOMELESS SHELTER AND HAS ONE OF THE CITY'S LAST "USERS ROOMS" (FOR DRUGS)



PEOPLE LYING ON PIECES OF CARDBOARD

LUNCH: SANDWICH WITH SHRIMP AND SURINAMESE BEANS

BLEARY-EYED, SMILING TOURISTS ALREADY SITTING OUTSIDE THE COFFEESHOPS AT 9 AM

HERRING ON BROWN ROLLS

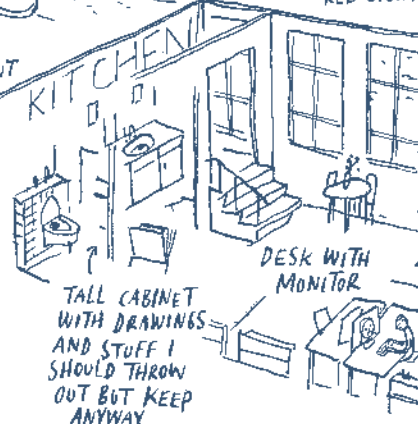
DILDO & CAMELTOE

UN-DUTCH BAROQUE DOMED CHURCH FROM THE 17TH CENTURY NOW A COMMERCIAL VENUE



CUSTOMERS ARE INSIDE FOR 10-15 MINUTES WOMAN RED LIGHT

THE CAT BOAT MORE LIKE A GIANT LITTER BOX



TALL CABINET WITH DRAWINGS AND STUFF I SHOULD THROW OUT BUT KEEP ANYWAY

I RENT FROM FOR A

RECENTLY I GOT A NEW STUDIO ON THE SINGEL SO NOW I WALK THROUGH THIS PART OF TOWN MORE OFTEN

TASTY & PRICY

STACH

HAARLEMMEPOORT

OLD BUILDING

UNDER THE TRAIN TRACKS IS REPRO'S WHERE I HAVE MY PRINTS MADE

POST.NL I HAVE TO COME ALL THE WAY HERE TO SEND A PACKAGE



DOES THIS FIT IN A LETTER SLOT? YOU TELL ME!

THE HAARLEMMEPOORT IS NICE ENOUGH BUT KIND OF DIRTY (SOMBRE)

# Neighbourhood stroll

Since remote working has become more common, most of us take some time to go out during the day to stretch our legs. This is one of my longer strolls from my workplace. I start at the Singel canal, amble through the city centre and head back to my studio.





# WHAT IS THE ANNE FRANK HOUSE? A WAR MONUMENT OR A WRITERSHOUSE?

"I BELIEVE I'LL NEVER FEEL AT HOME IN THIS HOUSE" SHE WROTE IN HER DIARY, ANNE LIVED HERE FOR TWO YEARS

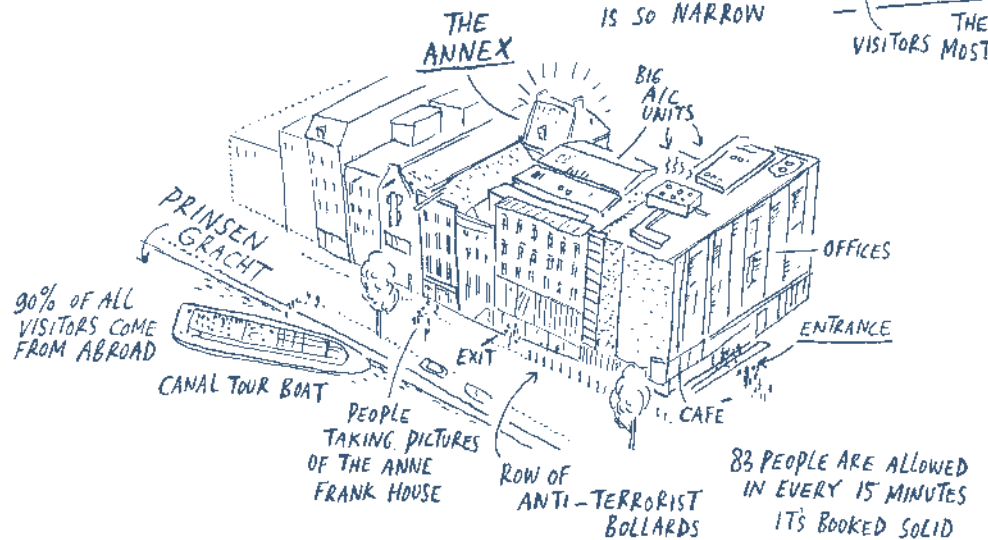
ABOUT 1.3 MILLION PEOPLE VISIT THE ANNE FRANK HOUSE EVERY YEAR

WHEN I'M THERE IT'S DEAD QUIET BECAUSE EVERYONE IS LISTENING TO THE AUDIO TOUR, AND MAYBE ALSO BECAUSE EVERYONE KNOWS HOW IT ENDS.

THERE'S OFTEN A BACKUP HERE BECAUSE THE PASSAGE BEHIND THE BOOKCASE IS SO NARROW

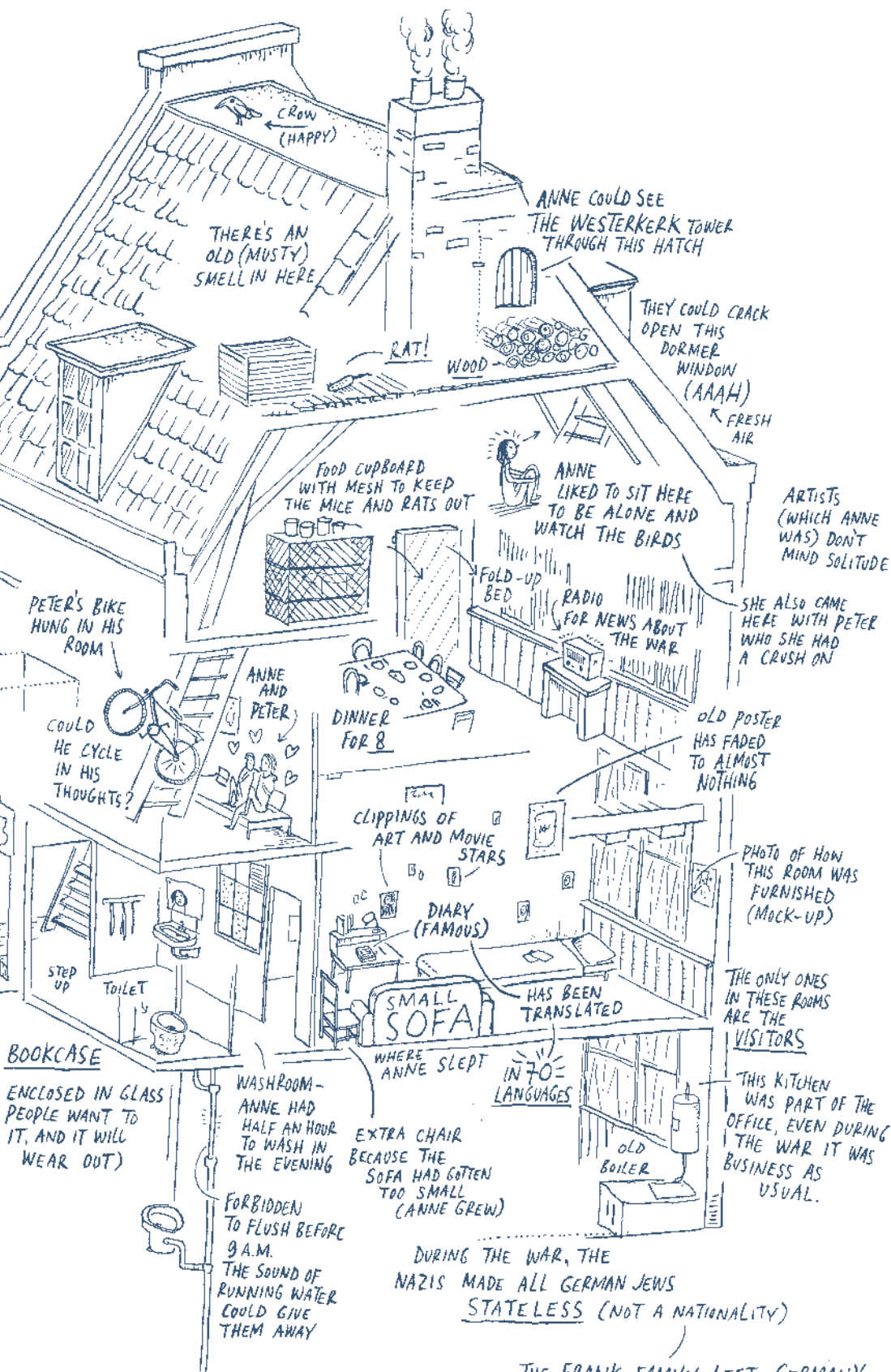
THE WORLD'S VISITORS MOST FAMOUS

(NOW IT'S BECAUSE TOUCH



# The annex (Anne Frank)

Reading Anne Frank's diary, when I was about 25, was a personal, intimate experience. I believe her diary – alongside the Bible and Harry Potter – belongs to the ten most-read books because it's so incredibly well written. Had she lived, Anne Frank would be 93 today.



DURING THE WAR, THE NAZIS MADE ALL GERMAN JEWS STATELESS (NOT A NATIONALITY)

THE FRANK FAMILY LEFT GERMANY IN 1933 BECAUSE ANNE'S FATHER FELT UNSAFE LATER, FLEEING NAZI GERMANY BECAME MORE DIFFICULT. MOST COUNTRIES TIGHTENED THEIR BORDERS AND LET IN VERY FEW REFUGEES

# THIS IS THE POINT

IT'S WHERE HOUSING SUPERVISOR PATRICK

PIERSON WORKS

HE IS THE LIFELINE BETWEEN RESIDENTS AND YMERE HOUSING CORPORATION. BESIDES PASSING ON INFORMATION HE ALSO CHECKS ON WHAT RESIDENTS DO WITH THEIR HOMES.

(WHICH IS ALMOST A FULL-TIME JOB)

MOST OF THE HOUSES HERE WERE BUILT IN THE MID-1960s THIS WAS TO BE A GARDEN CITY BASED ON LIGHT, AIR AND SPACE. ONE OF THE ARCHITECTS WAS

CORNELIS VAN EESTEREN

THESE DAYS THIS OPEN STRUCTURE HAS GONE OUT OF FASHION. IT HAS TOO MANY UNDEFINED AREAS AND IT'S UNCLEAR WHAT'S THE FRONT AND WHAT'S THE BACK

THE ARCHITECTS AIM WAS TO DESIGN A NEIGHBOURHOOD WITH A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

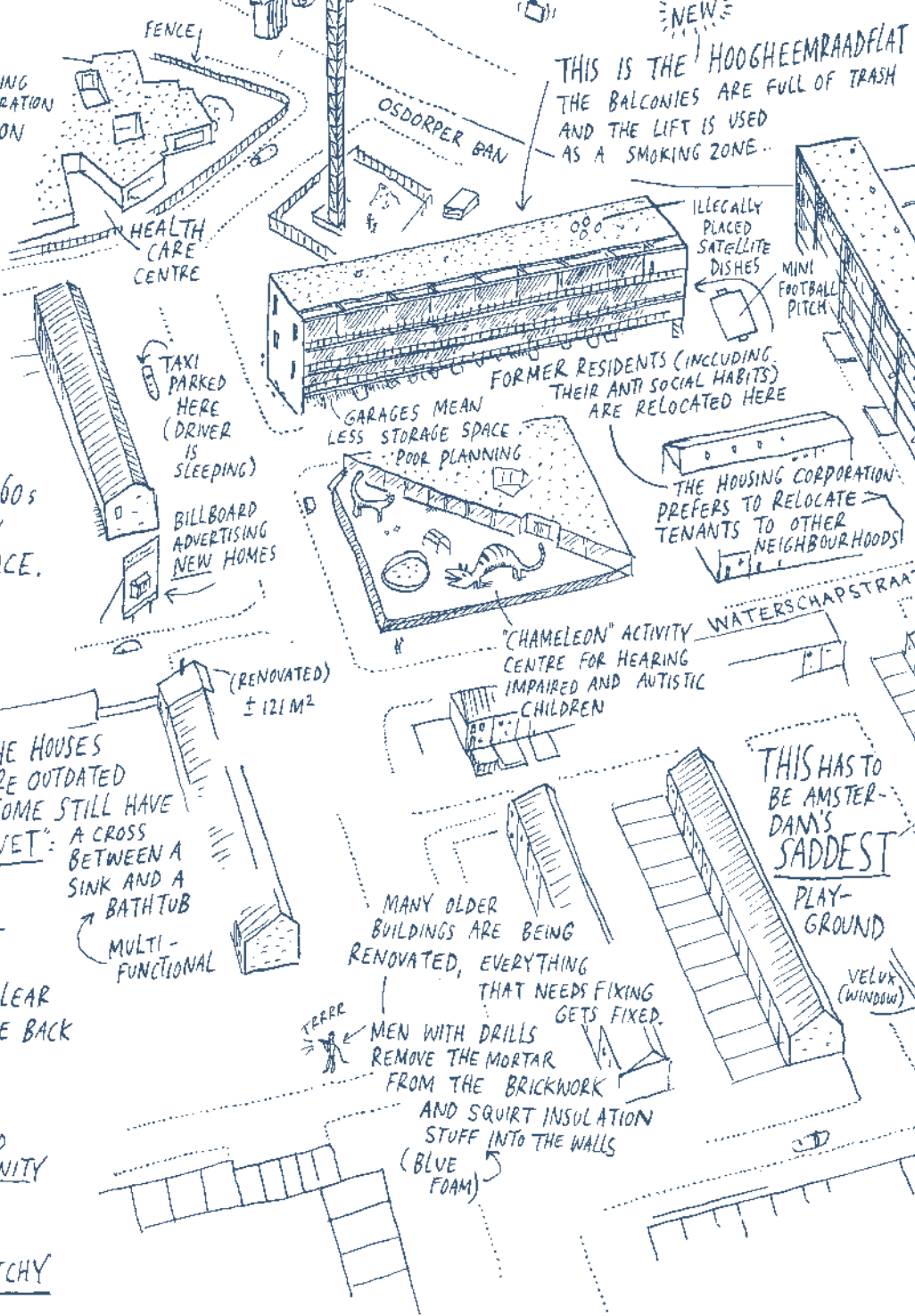
WELL THAT SOUNDS CATCHY

NEIGHBOURHOOD IN AMSTERDAM (WEST) OSDORP DISTRICT

43 YEARS OLD

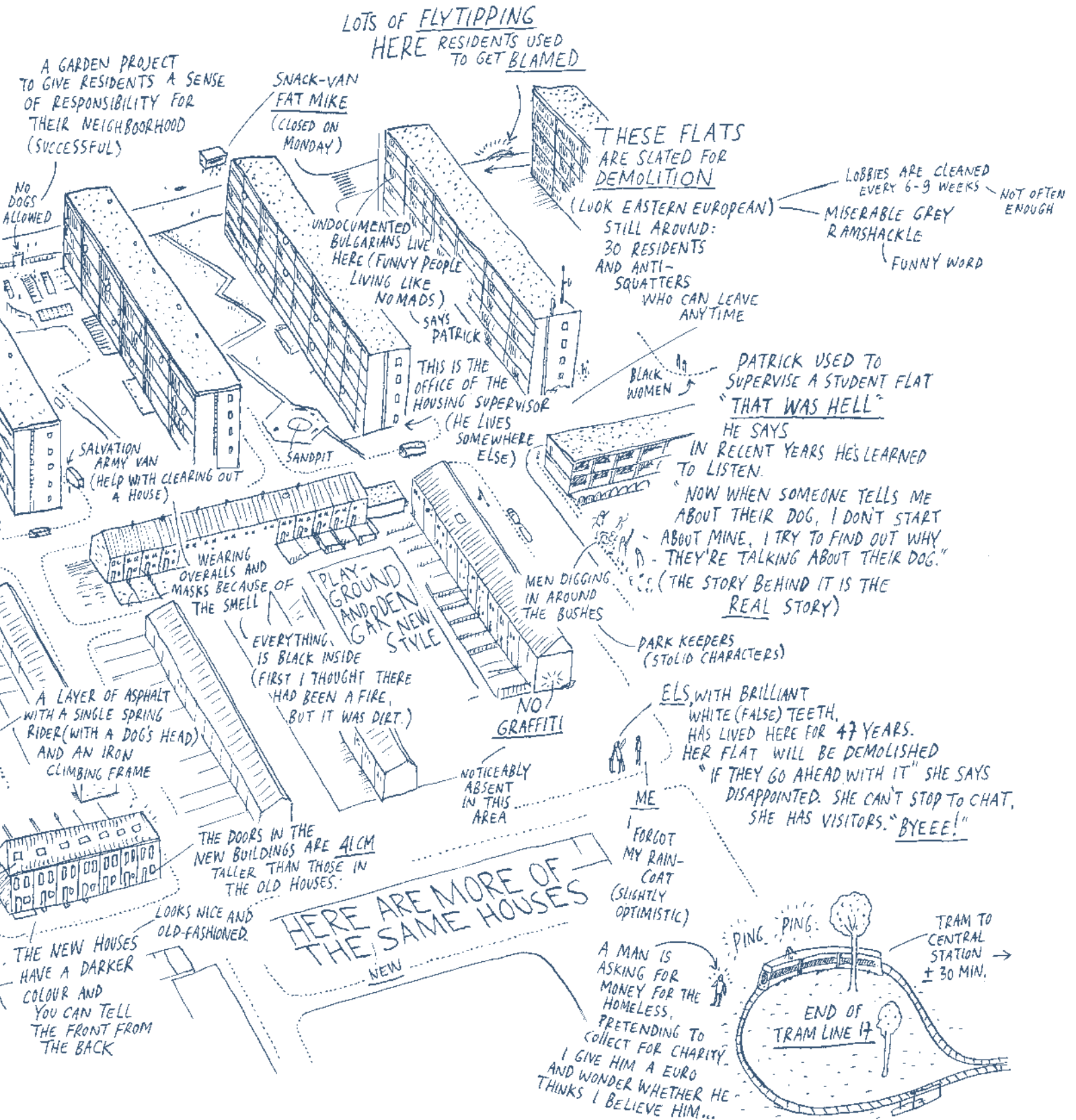
FROM THE LOOKS OF THIS CRANE A TALL BLOCK OF FLATS WILL BE BUILT HERE (WITH VIEW OF THE CEMETERY)

THIS IS THE <sup>NEW</sup> HOOGHEEMRAADFLAT THE BALCONIES ARE FULL OF TRASH AND THE LIFT IS USED AS A SMOKING ZONE...



# The end of the (tram)line

This is where the tram circles back towards the city. Osdorp is one of the garden cities built on the outskirts of Amsterdam in the 1950s and '60s. At the time it offered a green, spacious alternative to the crowded inner city. Now long past its prime, it's currently getting a makeover.



LOTS OF FLYTIPPING  
HERE RESIDENTS USED  
TO GET BLAMED

A GARDEN PROJECT  
TO GIVE RESIDENTS A SENSE  
OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR  
THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD  
(SUCCESSFUL)

SNACK-VAN  
FAT MIKE  
(CLOSED ON  
MONDAY)

THESE FLATS  
ARE SATED FOR  
DEMOLITION

LOBBIES ARE CLEANED  
EVERY 6-9 WEEKS  
NOT OFTEN  
ENOUGH

MISERABLE GREY  
RAMSHACKLE  
(FUNNY WORD)

UNDOCUMENTED  
BULGARIANS LIVE  
HERE (FUNNY PEOPLE  
LIVING LIKE  
NOMADS)

(LOOK EASTERN EUROPEAN)  
STILL AROUND:  
30 RESIDENTS  
AND ANTI-  
SQUATTERS  
WHO CAN LEAVE  
ANYTIME

NO DOGS  
ALLOWED

SAYS PATRICK

THIS IS THE  
OFFICE OF THE  
HOUSING SUPERVISOR  
(HE LIVES  
SOMEWHERE  
ELSE)

BLACK  
WOMEN

PATRICK USED TO  
SUPERVISE A STUDENT FLAT  
"THAT WAS HELL"

HE SAYS  
IN RECENT YEARS HE'S LEARNED  
TO LISTEN.

"NOW WHEN SOMEONE TELLS ME  
ABOUT THEIR DOG, I DON'T START  
ABOUT MINE, I TRY TO FIND OUT WHY  
THEY'RE TALKING ABOUT THEIR DOG."  
(THE STORY BEHIND IT IS THE  
REAL STORY)

SALVATION  
ARMY VAN  
(HELP WITH CLEARING OUT  
A HOUSE)

SANDPIT

WEARING  
OVERALLS AND  
MASKS BECAUSE OF  
THE SMELL

PLAY-GROUND  
AND DEN  
GARDEN  
NEW  
STYLE

MEN DIGGING  
IN AROUND  
THE BUSHES

PARK KEEPERS  
(STOLID CHARACTERS)

NO  
GRAFFITI

ELS, WITH BRILLIANT  
WHITE (FALSE) TEETH,  
HAS LIVED HERE FOR 47 YEARS.  
HER FLAT WILL BE DEMOLISHED  
"IF THEY GO AHEAD WITH IT" SHE SAYS  
DISAPPOINTED. SHE CAN'T STOP TO CHAT,  
SHE HAS VISITORS. "BYEEEE!"

A LAYER OF ASPHALT  
WITH A SINGLE SPRING  
RIDER (WITH A DOG'S HEAD)  
AND AN IRON  
CLIMBING FRAME

EVERYTHING  
IS BLACK INSIDE  
(FIRST I THOUGHT THERE  
HAD BEEN A FIRE,  
BUT IT WAS DIRT.)

NOTICEABLY  
ABSENT  
IN THIS  
AREA

ME  
I FORGOT  
MY RAIN-  
COAT  
(SLIGHTLY  
OPTIMISTIC)

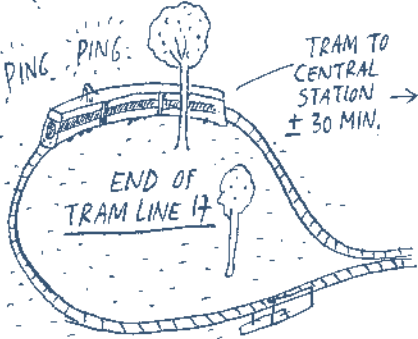
THE DOORS IN THE  
NEW BUILDINGS ARE 41CM  
TALLER THAN THOSE IN  
THE OLD HOUSES.

HERE ARE MORE OF  
THE SAME HOUSES

LOOKS NICE AND  
OLD-FASHIONED

THE NEW HOUSES  
HAVE A DARKER  
COLOUR AND  
YOU CAN TELL  
THE FRONT FROM  
THE BACK

A MAN IS  
ASKING FOR THE  
MONEY FOR THE  
HOMELESS,  
PRETENDING TO  
COLLECT FOR CHARITY.  
I GIVE HIM A EURO  
AND WONDER WHETHER HE  
THINKS I BELIEVE HIM...





INTERCOM

SUNDAY MORNING  
9:45 AM

MOST GUESTS ARE IN THE LOBBY DOWNSTAIRS CHECKING OUT  
THERE IS ONLY ONE EMPLOYEE ON DUTY...  
SO IT'S PACKED!

THIS IS ROOM 408  
OF THE: HANS BRINKER HOSTEL  
(HOW BUDGET?) 29 EURO P.P  
THIS ROOM COSTS 178.- EURO  
(FOR 6 PEOPLE)

SHE SPEAKS (ONLY) ENGLISH

(DRIED) SCOTCH TAPE

CHECK-OUT TIME  
10:00 AM

EVACUATION PLAN OF THIS 4TH FLOOR  
(IT'S A COPY OF A COPY) WITH BALLPOINT SCRIBBLINGS...

IN CASE OF FIRE...  
YOU ARE HERE SOMEWHERE

SOMETHING ABOUT HAPPY HOUR AND BREAKFAST BOTH IN THE BASEMENT

PRIVACY!  
THIS LOCK IS A BLESSING WHEN SHARING YOUR ROOM WITH FIVE OTHERS.

LEFT BEHIND IN THE BATH ROOM:  
1 BOTTLE OF LISTERINE TOOTH PASTE (ORAL B)  
2-IN-1 SHAMPOO "FRESH BLUE"  
PANTIES (BLACK COTTON WITH WHITE DOTS)  
2 TOOTHBRUSHES (REGULAR)

TERRY'S CHOCOLATE COOKIES

MUSHROOMS (STILL A LOT LEFT)

18+

THE BUNK BEDS HAVE LETTERS INSTEAD OF NUMBERS... (BUT NO LADDER FOR THE DISABLED OR ELDERLY)

HOOK HOLDS BED FRAME

CAPRI SUN LEMONADE (EMPTY)

SIX PEOPLE FROM NEWCASTLE STAYED IN THIS ROOM FOR TWO DAYS. HERE I FOUND THEIR BOOKING SUMMARY (ON THE BACK OF SCHOOL PAPERS) PRINTED

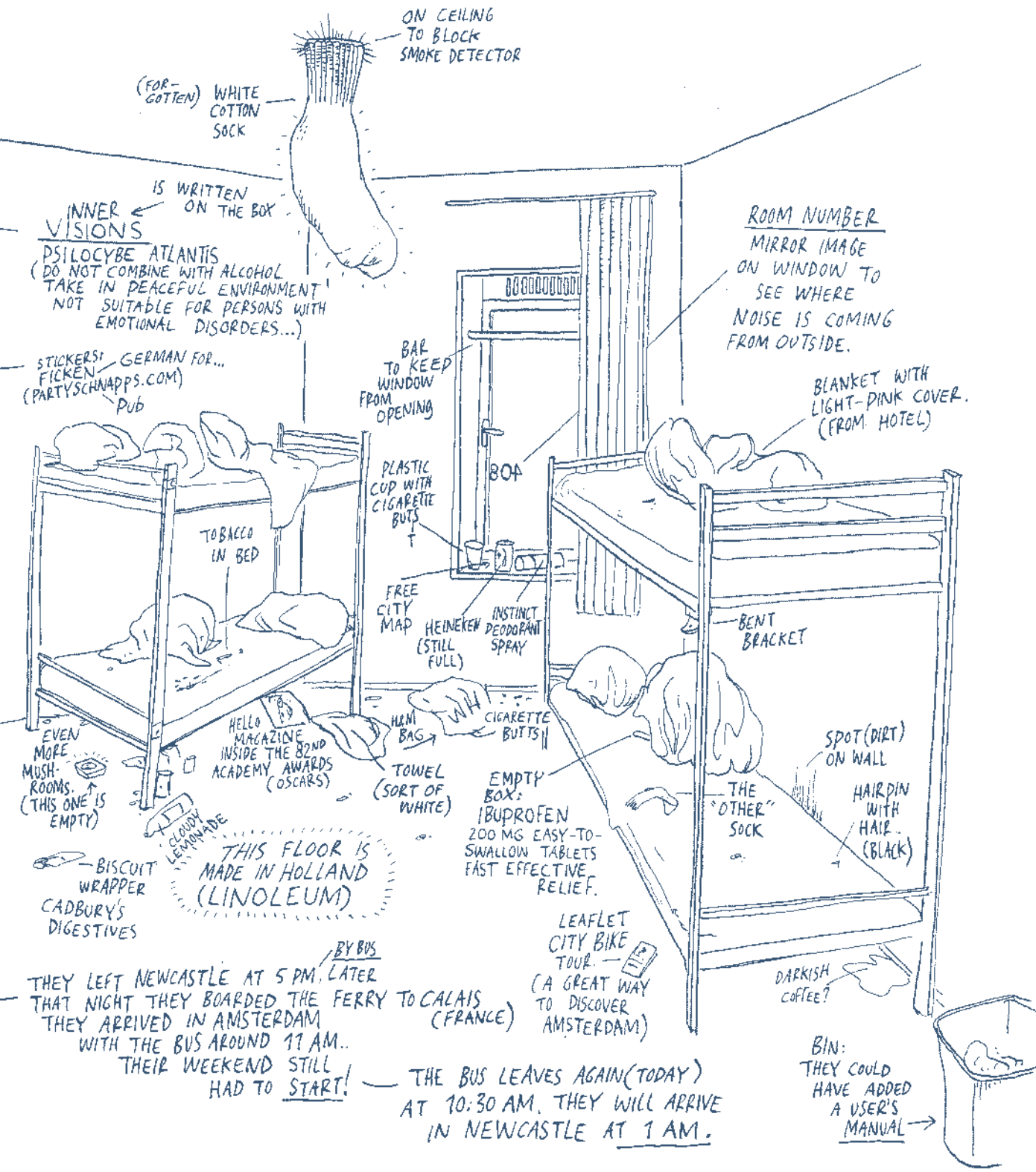
RECEIPT:  
1 SM/BONDAGE  
(ONE PIECE € 19.99  
19% TAX € 3.19)

WHAT COULD THIS BE? HANDCUFFS. (A SMALL CAGE..)



# Budget hotel

Amsterdam is a favourite destination amongst twentysomethings. It's especially popular for stag parties, with young grooms coming here for a blow-out on their last night of 'freedom'. But the current mayor stresses that this doesn't mean people can leave their morals and decency at home.



THIS IS THE RIJKSMUSEUM BUILT IN 1885

THEN ONE OF HOLLANDS BIGGEST BUILDINGS!  
IT TOOK 7 YEARS TO BUILD...

ARCHITECT PIERRE CUYPERS (1827-1921)  
DIDN'T WANT THE BUILDING TO LOOK MODERN.  
HE WANTED TO CREATE A WORK OF ART  
TO CELEBRATE THE NATION'S GREATNESS.

IN 1885 THEY,  
EXPECTED 250,000  
VISITORS A YEAR

TODAY THEY HAVE  
10,000 VISITORS  
EACH DAY

IT'S MOST BUSY  
BETWEEN 11 AM  
AND 3 PM  
MOST VISITORS  
STAY 2 TO 3 HOURS

THIS BUILDING WAS  
DESIGNED AROUND  
THIS FAMOUS PAINTING  
BY REMBRANDT

DAYLIGHT  
FOR THE  
NIGHTWATCH

FOR PEOPLE AND  
GROUPS WHO HAVE LESS  
TIME THERE IS THE  
EXPRESS LIFT  
(FOR 35 PEOPLE)  
IN THIS TOWER

CRITICS COMPLAINED THAT  
THE BUILDING LOOKED LIKE  
A CATHOLIC CHURCH  
EVEN THOUGH THE ART  
IT SHOWED WAS 17TH-CENTURY  
PROTESTANT

EVEN IN  
1885 THIS MUST  
HAVE BEEN  
A OLD-FASHIONED  
BUILDING

OLDISH, LIKE  
A STALE CAKE  
WITH TOO MUCH  
FROSTING

THIS IS NOT THE  
QUEUE FOR THE  
MUSEUM  
BUT FOR THIS  
HOT DOG STAND.

THE JEWISH  
BRIDE: AS A  
FILMSTAR ON A  
BILLBOARD

INSIDE  
IS THE  
LIBRARY

ASIAN  
PAVILION  
FLOATS LIKE A LOTUS  
FLOWER

RESTAURANT

THESE LETTERS  
WERE PLACED HERE IN 2004  
PART OF THE CITY MARKETING  
CAMPAIGN TO ATTRACT MORE  
BUSINESS AND VISITORS  
(TOURISTS)

THE LETTERS BECAME  
A "SELFIE" ATTRACTION  
ON ITS OWN



LATER IT BECAME  
THE SYMBOL OF MASS TOURISM  
(AND DECLINE OF THE CITY)

THEY WERE REMOVED  
IN 2018

THE CITY LAUNCHES  
THE "ENJOY AND RESPECT" CAMPAIGN  
ABOUT WHAT IS ALLOWED  
AND WHAT NOT IS ALLOWED  
WHEN VISITING

IN 2023 "STAY AWAY" A  
DISCOURAGEMENT CAMPAIGN, IS  
LAUNCHED TARGETING MEN AGED 18 TO 35  
FROM THE UK

THE BUILDING'S  
ACHILLES HEEL  
IS THE CYCLE PATH  
UNDERNEATH.

THE CYCLIST UNION SAYS  
AROUND 13,000 PEOPLE  
CYCLE THROUGH THE  
MUSEUM'S UNDERPASS EACH DAY  
AND CLAIM THE RIGHT OF WAY!

ICE  
CREAM STALL  
WITH OLD-FASHIONED  
FLAVOURS LIKE PARSNIP  
AND SALSIFY

SURPRISE  
FOUNTAIN  
FOR CHILDREN

OLDEST  
TREE  
HERE