

2003

The Superhero

The fair has been decline for some time. At the beginning of the twentieth century the Rotterdam City Fair was banned because it formed a threat to the established social order. Public drunkenness, fights, sexual escapades and a loudly exclaimed disgust for work caused the banishment of the fair to the outskirts of the city. Today there is still a very modest annual fair one might be acquainted with but it does not deserve the predicate “city fair”.

But the fair has also somehow also lost its fascination because our city life has many more leisurely characteristics that were once only provided by the fair. Skateboarding is a lot more fun than waiting for public transport; break dancing is a lot more exciting than being bored in between the junkies of the Schouwburgplein; turn-tabling and DJ-ing have turned the jukebox into a tragic almost prehistoric phenomenon; graffiti is much more adventurous than a ten day course of aquarelle painting; and ‘urban exploration’ is a thousand times more educational, let alone easier, than an organized boat trip with the Spido. Are you surprised that in this day and age we immensely enjoy movies such as Batman, Spiderman and the X-men. We have *become* superheroes.

“Urban Exploration” is the youngest shoot on the stem of our city’s culture. Individuals and clubs with catchy names like Infiltration, Propaganda, Urban Adventure and the Bureau of City Trails, organize semi-clandestine often nightly trails through our city areas. Trails through dark sewers and subway tunnels, through uncompleted sky rises and bridges, across abandoned docks and **train graveyards**. This is about an activity that is not only very exciting, but above all gives us a different perspective on our city. It generates a different experience of the city.

One of the best “urban exploration” devoted sites is “ Urban Adventure in Rotterdam” made by Petr Kazil. No one has ever been able to create an image of Rotterdam that is so different from the conventional perception of the Maascity. Kazil makes inventories and documents abandoned places, strange places, extreme building projects, tunnels, ascents, psycho geographical walks, sunsets, graffiti, etc.. Not only that but he also organizes trips with a historical or artistic theme, trips to other cities and to other kindred spirits. Through his site he not only generates a unique vision of Rotterdam but he simultaneously shows how exciting and adventurous your own neighbourhood can be. ‘Urban Adventure in Rotterdam’ lets you realize that you don’t have to travel to Thailand or Patagonia because it can be much more exciting at home. Moreover his site discusses the tension between the concepts public and private spaces. In today’s world what can be seen as public and what is private? Where are you allowed to go and what should you stay away from?

If the 'urban explorer' can teach us one thing, it has to be this: we don't need the fair anymore. To redesign our life in today's hyper city requires a sense of admiration, creativity, excitement and adventure. Indeed, these are the characteristics of the superhero.