Installation: Friday 31st May

Tom Jaspers arrives on his motorbike transporting the installation's fragile components .
The pipes are delivered in a van.



We insert the speaker into the bottom of the pipe, so that it exists just behind the horn, close to ground level. We have opted for this setup as opposed to installing a speaker at the top of the pipe inside my house, because of fear that the sound would dissipate into abstraction if it was to travel the entire 13 meters along the pipe, bouncing off of the sides of the tubes.



The Boels carpet lift has been accidentally delivered to Tom's home address, where he is not, and so returns to the warehouse. We install the pipe to as high as we can reach by standing on Tom's motorbike, then wait for 5 hours.

Many neighbours ask what we're doing. Having only lived at this address for three months, most of these people are new to me. And I to them. The pipe is our first interaction.

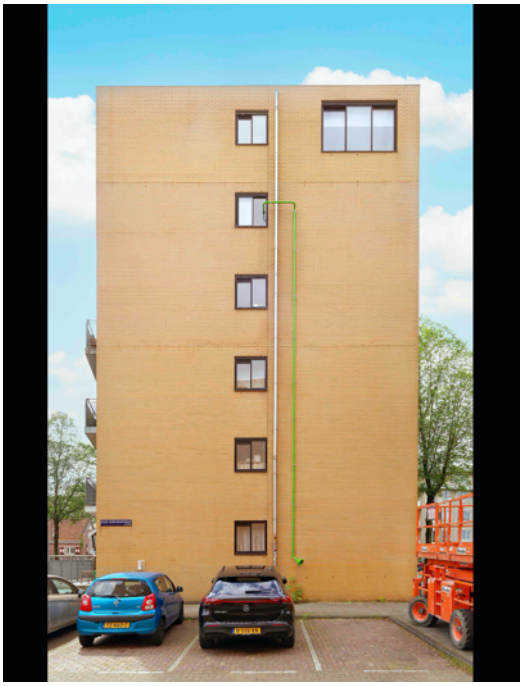
A man running the community garden is particularly interested. Through our conversation I realise that he is responsible for some of the stickers that cover the actual drain pipe to the left of de spreekbuis. Particularly the ones promoting the legalisation of drugs.

Another man stops to talk. He thinks the pipe is designed to pour water onto the single plant that grows beneath it.



Eventually the pipe is installed. Tim (Tom's assistant for the day) shakes the horn to see if it's indeed "hufterproof", then concludes, "If someone wants to pull it off of the wall, they will."



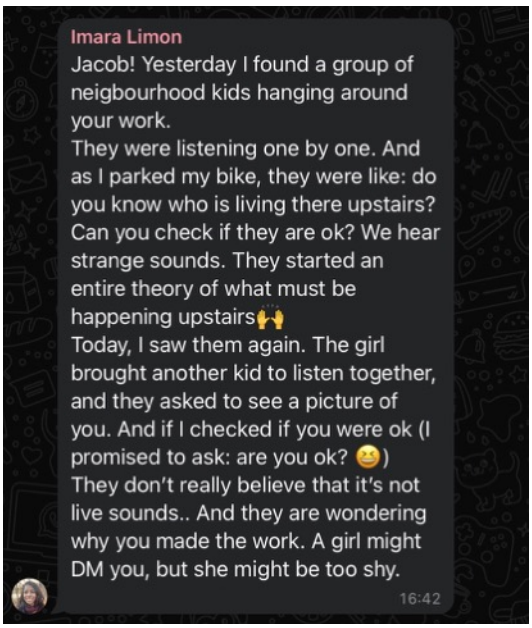


That night I fly to Glasgow for two weeks to install another exhibition. I leave de spreekbuis.

3rd June

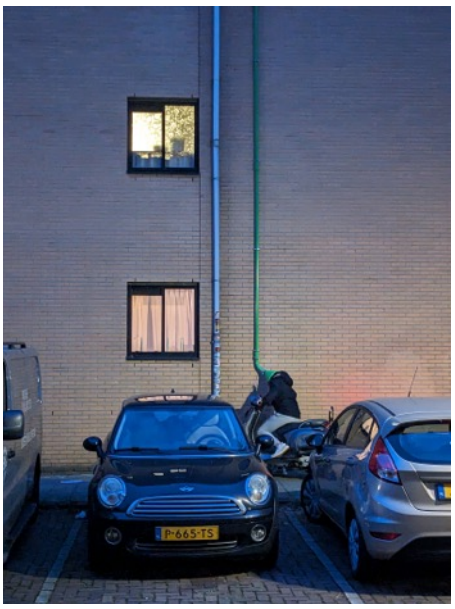
Imara Limon, my house mate, sends me a photo of her son, Lucas, interacting with the pipe as well as this message.





I reply asking her to tell them that I am “okay”.

I receive a message on instagram from someone called Naomi Jansen. She is an artist living locally that runs a performance program in a local hedge. In her message she shares a video in which a group of young boys have driven up to the pipe on their moped and are shouting “Hallos” up into it. According to Naomi the boys approached the pipe after seeing her interacting with it.



The horn of the pipe is very close to the window of the ground floor apartment. I am worried that any shouting might dusturb and annoy my new neighbours living there, whom I’ve yet to meet.

10th June

I return from Glasgow. The pipe is still in one place. The sound is working well and it appears as if brand new. I am both surprised and relieved.

22nd June: Saturday 12:00. 1st gathering.



I'm surprised to see so many unfamiliar faces present. Apparently somebody shared the event in the neighbourhood WhatsApp group.



We have coffee, croissants and Marianna hosts a Q&A in which I speak about the work. Then we open up the questions to the audience. A young girl, around 9 years old, is standing there with her parents. Her dad announces that the girl has a question that she'd like to ask. We all look at her. After a few seconds she plucks up the courage to speak and says, "what happened to the dog?" I have no idea what she is talking about. I stand there confused and nervously chuckle a bit then reply, "I'm not sure what happened to the dog." This seems to be enough for her and the Q&A moves on.

When the formalities end I go and speak to the girl and her parents. They elaborate on her question and I realise then that she was questioning a very specific moment in the script in which I

talk about throwing down wasabi nuts from my balcony to the neighbours dog below. I apologise for not understanding at the time, and explain that the script contains so many anecdotes and details that, on the spot, I didn't remember the dog. They ask how long the script is in total. "50 minutes" I say. In that case, they explain, they've probably listened to at least two thirds of it. They stop everyday for a few minutes and listen whilst walking to the girl's school. I'm so happy to hear this!

A British man who is also from the same part of London as me (Ealing) joins the gathering. I don't much like his vibe. Immediately he begins to gossip about some of the neighbours in my building, explaining how years ago they very aggressively told his son to stop playing the piano because of the noise. I'm surprised to hear this. They'd welcomed me very warmly into the building and had even invited me to join them for a yoga session, after noticing me hobbling up the stairs.

24th June

A sticker appears inside the horn of the pipe.



Amongst the conversations of the first gathering I'd discussed the idea of leaving such public interventions on the work should they appear, and had come to the hypothetical conclusion that I would, curious to see how they'd accumulate over time. This particular sticker, however, felt almost too perfect, as if part of the work all along. A green face blending into the horn. Could it be the face of the man talking to us from from the other end of the pipe? Illustrating the voice felt as though it narrowed the character in one's imagination. I decide to remove the sticker. Would I have done so had it been less perfect?

25th June (the hottest day of the year thus far)

I return home to find the horn covered in cheese.







Was the cheesing a reaction to the sticker being removed? And if so, what comes next if I remove the cheese?

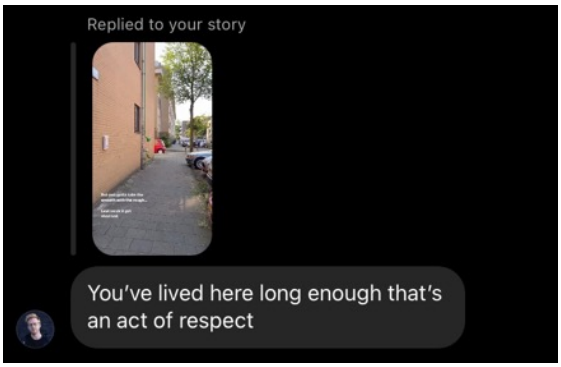
I remove the cheese with my friend Timmy van Zoelen, picking it out from the grate where it's been squished in. Timmy has come to listen to the work and once the cheese is gone he puts his ear to the horn. As he listens two identically dressed boys around the age of 13 walk past and shout over, "he's not listening! it's an app!" An app? Was it them who did the cheesing? Frustrated about not being listened to?

Upon entering the building of my apartment via the main door around the corner, we realise that cheese has also been pushed into the screen of our doorbell.



I go upstairs and get some cleaning products to clean everything properly. As I'm cleaning the cheddar grease from the horn, I see the two boys walk past again. Hovering around the scene of the crime?

Alternative understanding:



1st July:

De Spreekbuis is "Kunstwerk van de week" in de Volkskrant. Marianna seems confident that the article will stimulate other press to write about the work and seventeen days later, on the 18th July, it appears in het Parool in a piece about about Welcome Stranger. Some of my neighbours notice the article and they seem proud that our building is featured in the national news.

In the weeks following the articles I notice a different audience visiting the work. It's not only the locals stopping as they walk past the pipe, but new people travelling specifically to it. This change makes me realise who the work is really for; my neighbours.



Placing an ear against the pipe one hear's a collection of fragmented anecdotes spoken from a voice sitting in the living room four floors up. The anecdotes are separated by stretches when the character eats chips. When writing the script I imagined the listener as a passer-by, not stopping for more than a few minutes at a time. I had this hope that, like the young girl on her way to school, the anecdotes might stack up over time to create a wider portrait of this character. And through this character we'd build a broader narrative on housing struggles.

For the new audience traveling specifically to the pipe, I can't help feel that there is a pressure on the work to deliver something. They have committed their own precious time to travelling to the pipe. But the pipe and the words that can be heard through it are deliberately underwhelming. This might be funny, but it might also be underwhelming. Either of these responses, however, are far less interesting than how I imagine the work affecting my neighbours.

This realisation also made me more aware of the works location. Wittenburg is not an area that people move through to get to another area. It is an island of residential housing. The only people that move up into this island regularly, are those living there. Or those using the island as a base from which to sell drugs (the island is perfect for this, as it is connected to other islands by a series of small foot bridges, and thus it's very easy to escape on foot or bike from police.)

3rd July Wednesday 12:00 2nd gathering

It is raining. Only myself, Marianna and Kristina Benjocki (another of the artists in this years Welcome Stranger) are present for the gathering. I am quite relieved for two main reasons. Firstly, we hadn't planned anything special. And secondly, for the reasons I give above, I am less enthused about the prospect of people travelling to the work specifically.



August

For the entirety of August I am away from the pipe. My housemates keep an eye on it. They report no problems.

5th September (second hottest day of the year)

At 1:00 am I hear shouting outside on the street below. Three teenage boys are trying to move one of those electric Check mopeds. A man shouts at them from his window.

The boys leave the moped then notice de Spreekbuis. They walk across the road towards my building. Because of the pipe I cannot open the window and look down to see them but in the reflection of a window on the opposite apartment I can. Through the tube I can faintly hear them. They're shouting "Hallo" up into it. Then, in the reflection, I see one of boys step back a few meters before running up and booting the pipe. The pipe shakes a little, even in my apartment. He does it again and the pipe shales again.



I throw on some clothes as if to run downstairs. I'm not sure what I'll do when I get there but simply operating on the idea that it's my duty to intervene. Luckily by the time I go to leave the house, I see in the reflection that the boys have left.

8th September

I notice that a chair in my living room has been pulled up to the window through which the tube enters.

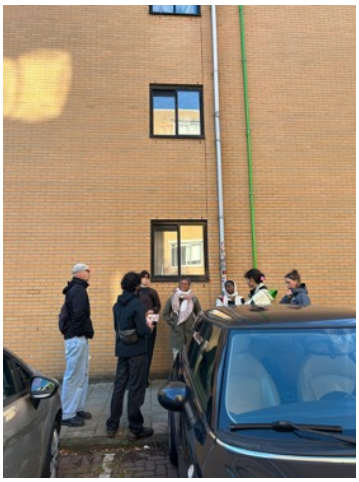
Over the past week I have noticed the chair stood there a few times, each time moving it back to the dining table a few meters away. I'd previously assumed that it was my partner, Clemence, but she's out of town on this day. I realise that it must be Lucas, my five year old housemate, moving the chair to the end of the pipe. I wonder, does he speak into it? Or just listen, waiting for a voice from the street below?

Putting my ear to the tube I can hear my pre-recorded voice faintly rising up. It's very quiet, but much clearer than we'd anticipated having traveled through thirteen meters of pipe. Does Lucas think that it's me downstairs, speaking up into my own apartment.

The apartment itself is relatively new for Clemence and myself having moved in just 6 months earlier. It's a woongroep and we live together with a couple and their five year old son, Lucas. Until these moments, Lucas had kept his distance not entering mine and Clemence's living space. Perhaps he'd been wary of us, his new housemates. Or perhaps he just wasn't interested. De spreekbuis marked the start of him entering our space. His curiosity was stronger than the desire or lack of desire to enter our domain. In entering, however, he became more comfortable. Not only in our part of the shared house, but also around us in general. Since the de spreekbuis has been removed, Lucas is in our rooms often. I'm happy that he feels comfortable around us.

12th September

My friend, Helena Julian, arranges for the new sandberg students pass by de Spreekbuis on their initiation trip around the city, in which they visit art spaces and other sites that will be of potential use. It's their last stop. According to Helena it felt like one stop too many. Apparently by this point they all just wanted to go to the pub. This type of interaction once again confirms my thoughts that the work is far better stumbled upon, rather than visited.



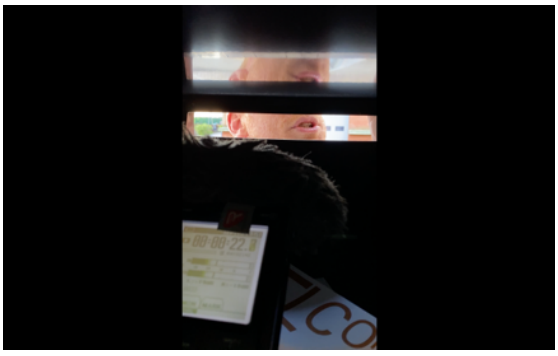
13th September Friday 18:00 3rd and final gathering

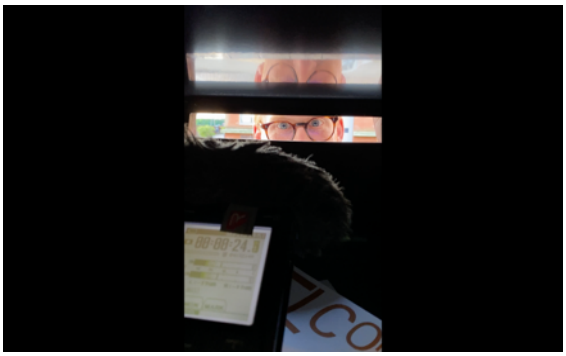
Michiel Huijben, my good friend and board members of the BPW (Bond Precaire Woonvormen) speaks a little about the BPW and how it stands up for the housing rights of people who live temporarily, insecurely or too expensively.

His talk contextualises de spreekbuis within the housing crisis. And I think more about its form. This solitary voice, speaking out to anyone, speaking out to no one from the confines of their precarious living space. Unable to listen or even enter dialogue.

The talk focuses on the membership structure of the BPW. How people join to fix things together. Through this togetherness change and stability becomes more attainable. Michiel's talk moves seamlessly into a group discussion and prompts some great conversations that eventually dissipate into splintered anecdotes regarding housing woes over beers.

Inevitably everyone has a story and I leave a microphone in my letterbox and ask people to share their story by speaking it through the flap. This idea is Marianna's. I love it. We hope to create a sonic document that lives on beyond the works deinstallation.





The man running the community garden joins the event. We get talking and he asks if anyone did anything to the pipe. I tell him about the cheese and I tell him about the green sticker, showing him the photos I'd taken. A big smile appears on his face and he admits that the sticker was him but the cheese was not. I tell him my dilemma about whether to remove the sticker or not because of how perfectly it fitted the pipe. He's clearly happy to hear that it was considered. He then explains that he was very high at the time of placing it on the pipe. He'd come home and searched specifically for this very sticker.



The sticker had made me more aware of the other stickers on the lamppost one meter away from the de spreekbuis. And monitoring the lamppost loosely over the course of my work's installation I came to the conclusion that there are two main parties involved in a polarised sticker-ing dialogue. One party that posts up stickers with a pro-Palestine sentiment, and another party that peels them off. If they can't peel them off, they draw a cross in permanent marker through the sticker. Each of these two parties posts up other stickers and these remain untouched. These include "black lives matter", the flag of gay pride and "fck FVD". When I speak to my housemates I discover that this has been going on for years. Pieter Paul has his suspects as to which neighbours are on which sides. Monitoring the lamppost more and more I'm shocked at how quickly the pro-palestine stickers are removed and have the idea to place some on the pipe myself using ladders to reach a point harder to reach.

Another conversation from the evening is with a friend, Lorenzo. We've had a few beers and begin to joke, imagining de spreekbuis as a tube through which I drop fish onto the street. Raw herring flying out to whoever is passing by. Thirty minutes later this young heron approaches and walks into the gathering.



16th September: Deinstall

Tim and Tom don't want to wait five hours for a carpet lift this time, and decide to climb up the side of the building, removing the tubes one by one.





Ropes run from the banister inside my apartment block.

The deinstallation is going smoothy and as I carry the poles into my small storage unit I bump into another neighbour in her storage unit. She's attempting to fix a chair to the back of her bike so that she can transport it into town.

She asks for my help and I try but fail to attach the chair to her bike in a good way. I apologise and she lets me know that it doesn't really matter because I passed the real test of being a good neighbour. Seeing the tube she smiles and asks if I'd made the artwork. I say yes expecting her to follow up with a compliment but she replies by saying that my posture is really bad.

She explains that she is a retired masseuse specialising in thai massage. She gives me some simple tips as to how to straighten my back by lying flat on the floor. Then she instructs me to sit on the floor of the storage unit hallway. Without asking she then puts her knee in my back, before pulling back my elbows like, in her words, "a chicken wing". It's extremely painful but when I stand up my back feels much better.



I return around the corner to Tim and Tom. They're talking to another of my neighbours in Dutch. I recognise the man as the local wine seller. He seems quite moody. When he leaves I ask what he'd said. Tom paraphrases, "how many thousands of euros did the government spend on putting this thing up for only a couple of people to listen to it." Ah, a numbers man, I think.

17th September

De Spreekbuis is gone.

