

DEAR PUBLIC TRANSPORT COMPANY,

LETTER BY
**ADRIAN
MADLENER**
WRITER

EDITORIAL LETTERS
***SEVEN
CLICKING*
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FINGERS**

- GRADUATES MENTIONED
- WOUTER STROET
 - KYULIM KIM
 - GOYTUNG
(WEI TUNG KUO)
 - ANTONI ZAMORA
 - ANNE THERIOT
 - KLARA WAARA
 - SILVIA FAGGIANI
 - FRANZISKA GORALSKI
 - AMBER OSKAM
 - DAVID C. KANE

Dear Mr. Tjalling Smit, Nederlandse Spoorwegen
Director of Commerce & Development,

Cc: Wouter Stroet, Kyulim Kim, Goytung (Wei Tung Kuo),
Andoni Zamora, Aimée Theriot, Klara Waara, Silvia
Faggiani, Franziska Goralski, Amber Oskam, David
C. Kane

I hope this message finds you well. COVID-19 poses innumerable challenges to transport systems throughout the developed world, but this paradigm-shifting pandemic also serves as an opportunity to envision and implement significant improvements. Nederlandse Spoorwegen is one of the entities best poised to enact these changes. While large-scale architectural and engineering programs are essential in the amelioration of our rail, road, and air infrastructures, softer solutions can also help enhance traveler and commuter experience. They perhaps even solve the unsolvable when it comes to customer satisfaction. Through initiatives that focus on the reprogramming of existing structures, not massive overhauls, much can be achieved through the simple rethinking of the frameworks and tools in place.

I wanted to bring to your attention the projects of four recent graduates of the Sandberg Institute in Amsterdam and suggested how they might put their diverse perspectives and skill set to good use in the improvement of the Nederlandse Spoorwegen's various products; whether it be its comprehensive rail network, state of the art stations, efficient vehicles, or the various services offered on- and off-board.

The Netherlands and its passenger railway operator have long been a moniker of competence around the world. Your extensive, well-served routes help connect cities like Delft, Eindhoven, and Amsterdam, which have each, in their own respect, emerged as hubs of innovation in recent decades. The rapid advancement in areas like technology and healthcare achieved in these metropolises are now joined by strides in creative fields like

design and art. The push for these sometimes disconnected or aloof disciplines to have a broader sustaining impact on society has inspired practitioners to think and work with even more rigor. Along with its impressive engineering feats and pioneering urbanism, the Netherlands also boasts a world-renowned design scene and thriving cultural sector.

There's something inherent to the experimental, dynamic, and no-nonsense nature of this collective output that alludes to the country's forbearance as an entrepreneurial and hard-working nation with a truly modern outlook. There is little fear in tackling some of our times' most pressing and overwhelming dilemmas. Part of this distinctively Dutch quality is an openness to and acceptance of new ideas. In recent years, movements like social and service design have established interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary methodologies that have brought creative problem solving and critical thinking to almost all industries.

Companies and institutions, large and small, have called on creatives to help implement products and applications in ways that better serve their customers. With the freedoms Dutch art and design schools afford their students, burgeoning practitioners are better poised to help in these collaborative efforts. Nederlandse Spoorwegen is an essential part of that fabric and is responsible to the people of The Netherlands in this respect.

Though hailing from various countries and backgrounds, Sandberg Instituut graduates Wouter Stroet, Kyulim Kim, Goytung (Wei Tung Kuo), Aimée Theriot, Klara Waara, Silvia Faggiani, Franziska Goralski, Amber Oskam, and David C. Kane all embody this spirit. Having produced a vast body of work that addresses a wide range of topics and issues, this crop of recent talents explores space, time, routine, and behavior in different ways. Descriptions and images of their theses can be found on the following pages for your review and support of my recommendation.

I would like to reiterate the proposal I put forward in my first letter and suggest these creatives as potential advisors for Nederlandse Spoorwegen's ongoing research and development projects, especially in conducting observation and ethnographic investigations. Statistics and other forms of quantitative analysis are fundamental tools that help in assessing what needs fixing. More quantitative research could reveal nuances in the commuter experience. It might even expose social, cultural, and economic inequities, the problems that might fall through the cracks of a spreadsheet. What do people truly want in their daily rail journey?

I hope you will consider this proposal and see the potential artists and designers have in shaping Dutch commerce and culture.

Sincerely,

Adrian Madlener

Dear United States Department of Transportation, Amtrak, Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, Delta Airlines, Nederlandse Spoorwegen, Prorail, KLM, and other related entities,

Americans are currently coming to terms with systemic failure on three levels. Widespread protests spawned by police brutality and racial injustice have joined an economic crisis not seen since The Great Depression. Having claimed over 4 hundred thousand lives in the past five months, COVID-19 continues to cause trouble in parts of the world that opened too soon, suffer from poor infrastructure, or in which the proper measures have not been implemented at the right time.

Across the developed world, this century-defining pandemic has uncovered fault lines in almost every aspect of our daily experiences and in the underlying structures that we might have taken for granted in the past. The adage “the straw that breaks the camel’s back” has come to define so much of this tumultuous period. Yet, such extremes are often a catalyst for rapid adaptations that allow us to move forward in new ways.

One area where such a fissure has become even more evident is the state of our national transportation infrastructures. It’s no secret that a lot of our stations, airports, bridges, tunnels, railroads, roads, and highways are in bad shape. Though efforts in recent years have been made by local governments to ameliorate these essential arteries, more still needs to be done. This multivalent crisis has arisen as an opportunity to completely rethink what renewal should actually entail.

While engineering feats like the soon-to-reopen LaGuardia Airport in New York stand as finite testaments to new environmental standards and technological advancements, they do not yet fully reflect an evolved, holistic, and human-centric mindset; the cultural and social behavior that have rapidly changed in a short period.

New approaches that rely on more immediate and softer interventions could improve our individual and collective experiences and allow us to adopt changes in a quicker yet more sustaining manner. Adhoc solutions like the painting of circles in a number of parks to better instruct city dwellers on how to follow social distancing protocols is one such example.

In the past months, officials and planners have had to ask themselves a series of tough questions. How do we better facilitate the massive flow of people through our systems at different times of the day, month, year? How do we suggest, educate, and enforce that people maintain distance? How will these new measures impact our budgets and economies? How do we mitigate the impact of this crisis on the social structures that normally depend on a careful, unregulated balance of individualistic pursuits and coexistence in this new reality? What can new technologies and sets of tools do to ease these swift transitions?

It's clear that an interdisciplinary approach is necessary to better solve these dilemmas. Students at postgraduate art and design school Sandberg Instituut in Amsterdam are familiar with these set of methodologies and often engage a wide range of skill sets to better comprehend, communicate, and alter the world around them.

This letter is an open proposal to reimagine every step in the process of commuting or traveling in a pandemic and post pandemic context, as a point of inquiry from various vantage points. One condition reflects a more mundane routine and a certain set of factors whereas the other represents a more sporadic occasion for most and another set of elements. However both are accomplished by employing the rich tapestry of interconnected infrastructures and vehicles that are made available to them on a daily basis

Achieved through different forms of empirical investigation, this multilayered research project would ultimately seek to understand how a wide range of

people are adapting to new behaviors, cultural norms, and actual modes of transportation. The study would take in consideration practical issues of time, space, and value, but also the more intrinsic issues of shifting etiquettes, moods, and interpersonal relationships.

As a measure of their completed or ongoing theses and particular interests, a select group of recent graduates from the Sandberg Instituut could offer their insight, intellectual focus, and practical aptitudes in the aim of drawing out a more meaningful set of results.

Wouter Stroet employs cartographic techniques to understand better how our public spaces are direct reflections of those who decide on how they are planned and built. His images capture cataclysmic events in time and space.

Kyulim Kim seeks to identify and highlight places in our concrete urban landscapes that have been overlooked. She employs both sound and image to question how global events have impacted the infrastructural environments we might take for granted.

Goytung (Wei Tung Kuo) is currently developing a mobile application that guides people through their immediate environments, daily routes, and audio instructions that might make them reconsider and come to terms with different aspects of that transitory environment.

Andoni Zamora questions the conventions of physical behaviors. She aims to draw links between these mannerisms and the cultural practices that define our societies.

Together, these four artists, amongst other graduates Aimée Theriot, Klara Waara, Silvia Faggiani, Franziska Goralski, Amber Oskam and David C. Kane, could comprise an invaluable resource to such a research project. Whereas Stroet and Kim could unearth the raw data of time and space, Chacartequi could help evaluate what

changes in collective behavior are occurring. Tying it all together would be a mobile guide based on a multi-narrative paths model in which the users select their own desired journey through a set check in point. This tool would allow them to at once become more aware of their commute or trip and adaptable when it comes to navigating unforeseen road blocks.

We would be honored to invite you to these talent's respective graduation presentations later this year, through either digital or virtual channels, and to introduce you to their work. Reflecting the nature of this research proposal, a guided tour that focuses on the most relevant projects through these shows would provide you with a more concise framework. Please let us know of your interest and we would be happy to provide you with further information.

Sincerely,

Adrian Madlener

Graduates mentioned:

sandberg.nl/graduation2020/final/wouter-stroet

sandberg.nl/graduation2020/final/kyulim-kim

sandberg.nl/graduation2020/final/wei-tung-kuo

sandberg.nl/graduation2020/final/andoni-zamora

sandberg.nl/graduation2020/final/aimee-theriot

sandberg.nl/graduation2020/final/klara-waara

sandberg.nl/graduation2020/final/silvia-faggiani

sandberg.nl/graduation2020/final/franziska-goralski

sandberg.nl/graduation2020/final/amber-oskam

sandberg.nl/graduation2020/final/david-c-kane

Adrian Madlener is a Brussels-born, New York-based curator and writer covering a wide range of design-related topics. A graduate of both the Design Academy Eindhoven and the Parsons/Cooper Hewitt History of Design and Curatorial Studies programme, Madlener is particularly interested in exploring where craft and the social sciences intersect with design. His writings can be found in Archpaper, DAMn, Disegno, Domus, Frame, Icon Design, Metropolis, TlMag, The Design Edit, and Trend Tablet.