

THE WATER PARTY

David Bernstein

Sometimes I wonder what I would do if I started a political party. Of course there are many important issues to talk about these days, but my party would focus on water. It is obvious that we need clean drinking water and that tap water should be free at all restaurants as a legal right, but what I am most interested in is the magical potential water has for the public.

Baptisms, mikvahs, tsukubais, libations, and other ablutions (ritual cleanings) all use water. It is a universal way to clean both practically and spiritually. With water we can dissolve into one another and return to the cosy warmth of the womb. We gather with friends around public fountains and relax like lazy potatoes at the fake city beach. We drink it, we are it.

And so we must recognize the deep value water has for all of our lives. As The Water Party, we want to share this love for the essential liquid and add more of it to the public space. And what better way is there to connect with a city than to put the city inside of us. Let us install drinking fountains in every square, just like in Rome. Have you ever noticed that Rome has so many places to get water on the street, but nowhere to let it out

of your body? What I am trying to say is that the city smells like pee. I mean, where are all the toilets? Amsterdam is the opposite, you have some public toilets (of course not for women, this would be changed with our new political decrees), but hardly any drinking fountains. In fact, there are barely any decorative public fountains either. Somehow, I always think the monument on the Dam is a fountain and then I am constantly reminded that I made that up. Well, as The Water Party, it will become a fountain, and maybe also a fountain mountain, because the Netherlands needs mountains too. And then let us throw into that design a wishing well in which you can toss your coins, so you can wish for more wishing wells. Perhaps wishing wells can be a way to collect funds to build more wishing wells? But you know what I really wish for is a place where I can take a warm bath with others and melt together.

So why did we give up the bath house as a public space? Okay, I know they were built at a time when people did not have bathrooms at home. But these spaces have such an incredible social potential that we do not seem

to realize. They could take on another role, as meeting spaces and places for sublime wellness. Fill them with hot tubs, hamams, saunas, and maybe even sensory deprivation tanks for the psychedelic curiosities. The bath house can be an affordable, public, non-hierarchical, non-commercial space to hangout, meet your neighbours, friends, and strangers. There you can discuss the issues of the day, like for example: 'Why are there no art centres on boats?' Come on Witte de With, become Blauwe de Blauw. Bonnefonten, how about Bonnefontain? A Tale of a Tub, do not even get me started, and De Appel, you will have to move soon anyway, here is your chance to become De Banaan, The Banana Boat!

I know one bath house that became a cafe. Another one is now a theatre. Perhaps we should flip this script of cultural venues in bath houses around and put bath houses inside of cultural venues. How great would it be to have a bath house inside of the botanical gardens? Just imagine having that soak inside the rainforest, and then you dry off in the desert cactus room. Or perhaps art institutions should add wellness centres as integral features just as important as cafes and libraries. The Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam built a 'bathtub', so why not put a bathtub inside it? It is the least they can do for the community.

Now I know it is not very likely that this political party will ever exist. And probably art centres are too worried about humidity for amphibious ambitions. But that does not mean we should not dream and have ideals to work towards. While there are important issues that we cannot ignore, like getting rid of Zwarte Piet (just rearrange the letters to 'Waterz Piet'). We cannot also forget to have an absurd imagination for untapped ways of sharing our collective joy. And after all, we do not need any seats in parliament, why sit when we can float?

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