

## **Too late, too little, (and how) to fail gracefully**

Fort Asperen is part of the New Dutch Waterline (Nieuwe Hollandse Waterlinie), a defensive inundation system on which construction began when the Netherlands was under French rule. During the Franco-Prussian War (1870) and the First World War (1914-1918), the Netherlands was left relatively undisturbed and there was no need to deploy the New Waterline. On 12 April 1940 the fort was readied for war, but the New Dutch Waterline proved to be unfit to withstand modern warfare. The German Luftwaffe flew over the 19th-century defensive systems without any problems and dropped their paratroopers far behind the line of defenses. This marked the end of the fort's military usefulness, even though the ingenious system had never actually served as an effective means of defense against 'intruders'. Based on old defensive principles, it was already outdated during its realization. Despite all the effort it entails, once it is erected a defensive system often proves to be no match for the inventiveness and imagination of the enemy, who often escapes, maps out an alternative route, or strikes back with astonishingly simple means.

The question is whether it is actually possible for a society to keep out 'intruders' whatever the costs and, a wartime situation aside, whether this is always desirable. In the meantime both the means and the global reality have continued to evolve. Here in the 21st century, the defensive systems that need to be established tie in even more closely with economic and financial mobilization, the consequences of globalization and migration, and technical innovation and political interests than they did a century or so ago. The conduct of war has a different dynamic as well, and with that has assumed a different form, one for which a different language is often used. For example, in the Netherlands we prefer to talk about peacekeeping and reconstruction missions rather than 'our participation in the war in Afghanistan', in order to lend our involvement a more humane slant. An important part of the struggle for economic and political power takes place at a remote distance: behind the keyboard, on the stock exchange, in blogs and the media, namely in non-local places that elude any form of purchase. 'Participation in' is also less and less of an actual physical engagement. A target can easily be hit with extraordinary precision from a distance, without the emotions that a physical confrontation would entail. Driven by economic efficiency and the growing influence of technological means, an increasingly refined arsenal of instruments and strategies is being developed in order to pinpoint, identify, isolate, control, and manipulate targets. Whipped up by the media and by populism, our existence has degenerated into a competitive struggle to create the illusion of ultimate control and certainty in a context of capitalism, globalization, and related crises.

The fort's military history and its shortcomings served as the starting point for this multidisciplinary event, which reflects on the impossibility and undesirability of raising barriers, on the fiction of the creating expectations that are not or cannot be fulfilled, and on the creative ability to optimistically turn around established positions and to sidestep apparent barriers. A defensive system implies that there are intruders. Too late, too little, (and how) to fail gracefully considers social boundaries and barriers, critically and with a touch of irony. When is 'the other' seen as a threat? How and by whom are fortifications being erected? How and where are territories delineated or undermined? And, perhaps not unimportantly, does this indeed lead to the desired safety and protection or is it merely a mental certainty? After all, no fortification is impregnable and intruders often achieve their goals.

Too late, too little, (and how) to fail gracefully is structured like an operation in which visitors personally test out the breaching of territories. With the deployment of Special Forces, a group of

conspirators who without exception are accessories to the formulation of the program, it is a movement involving several people. The code words Trojan horses, early warning systems, smoke screens and camouflage, the infiltrator and the campaign – all military terms that, not uncoincidentally, are also fairly well established in our everyday lives – provided the guideline for the bringing together of these diverse voices. These code words help to cast light on various questions about a diversity of domains, such as ecology, the waging of war, internet developments and information terror, ownership and community, and knowledge and manipulation. The Trojan horses investigate, observe, and collect subversive and underground strategies that manage to force freedom (cultural or otherwise) into seemingly hermetic or emotionally charged contexts and systems. Creativity can, for example, break through the blockades of censorship. Early warning systems reveal a certain hypersensitivity, with regard to the environment or society, for example. They are tracking something that has never previously been noticed, sensorily or rationally discover something which had until then been strange and atypical for the surroundings, or they spot new trends. Smoke screens and camouflage are means that obscure the view of reality or lure away the opponent with diversionary tactics. An infiltrator disguises himself as the enemy and is thus rendered invisible. Lastly, the campaign, which is always a crucial component of a strategy, is comprised of a refined communications network of statements that go much further than a catchy slogan. The campaign's deviser, indispensable for communication with the outside world, is comparable with the embedded journalist in a war zone. Because of intensive involvement with the campaign, he does not simply effect a translation for the public, but he also influences the strategy. The bounds of publicity and the operation proper are therefore sometimes vague. The packaging of the message in the form of codes creates both recognition and obscurity, which will challenge a good listener or curious adventurer to crack the codes to gain access to information.

Strategies are not contrived as open books; it is necessary to prick up your antennae and look into the stories and actions of others, people who prefer to focus their attention on totally different issues. This publication can therefore best be understood as a guide: it is a collection that explains this mission and provides clarification of the operation's various aspects. It is also a logbook with collected texts that are related to the mission in a free and associative way.