

Logbook #1

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**HET**

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**RESERVAAT**

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Sophie Hope



**#1 Het Reservaat**

CONTENTS

1. Introduction to the Logbooks
3. Introduction to the project
5. Context and starting points
9. The making of the project
13. Manifestation or findings
17. Critical reflections and key questions
23. Acknowledgements and references

LOGBOOK SERIES

- #1 Het Reservaat
- #2 Critical Friends
- #3 Performative Interviews  
(including DVD)
- #4 FUNding FACTORY

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## Introduction to the Logbooks

This series of four Logbooks document the projects carried out in the context of my PhD research into cultural democracy and the commissioning of art to effect social change (2006-2010). The Logbooks act as summaries of the projects and accompany a more in depth written thesis. They provide background information, descriptions, documentation and critical reflections of each of the projects and follow a chronological progression. In my practice-based research I explore methods of cultural democracy as collective critical reflection to negotiate and contest the limits and problems of the democratisation of culture exemplified in the artists' commission to effect social change.

By cultural democracy I mean a way of thinking and acting that recognises the cultural expression and critical knowledge of individuals and communities. Through my PhD I argue that this notion of cultural democracy does not sit happily with the more dominant top-down practice of democratising culture, which implies cultural provision based on predefined economic, aesthetic and social values. Cultural democracy disrupts expected forms of participation and communication of culture, drawing attention to the inequalities and inadequacies of the democratisation of culture and the re-enforcing of certain neo-liberal values such as social inclusion, citizenship and urban regeneration. The projects documented in these Logbooks explore the complex relationships between commissioned, funded socially engaged art and the meaning of critical reflection, action and participation that contradicts or reaffirms the parameters of the commission itself as a form of art labour.

Logbook #1 documents 'Het Reservaat', an experiment in collective time travel which was the result of a residency I did with 'Beyond', in Leidsche Rijn, a new town near Utrecht, The Netherlands. Logbook #2 looks at 'Critical Friends', a participant-led critique of commissioning art which evolved from an invitation I had to evaluate a series of public art projects in Greenwich, London. Logbook #3 is accompanied by a DVD of ten short films documenting a series of 'Performative Interviews' I carried out with practitioners and commissioners as a way of going public with stories of compromise, failure and censorship of commissioned socially engaged art. Logbook #4 focuses on the 'FUNding FACTORY', a work-

shop method I tested with a group of students in Austria as a way of critiquing and negotiating the cultural production line and the relationship between critical art practice and wage labour.

Each Logbook takes the form of a step-by-step guide to the projects, beginning with an introduction to the project, the context in which it was carried out and the key starting points. This is followed by a 'making of' section which explains the process of the projects. The subsequent manifestation or findings of the project are then explained through documentation and the booklets conclude with my personal reflections on how the project has informed the relationship between cultural democracy and the commissioning of art to effect social change, highlighting key questions that have emerged. The progression of the projects reflects an iterative process that establishes a development of a methodology for a collective critical practice.

While the projects themselves have been the result of conversations and collaborations with many different partners, funders and individuals, I am the author of the content, design and editing of these Logbooks which have been produced as an integral part of my PhD research. They therefore do not necessarily reflect the opinions or experiences of others involved in what have otherwise been multi-authored projects.

I would like to thank everyone I have worked with on the projects and acknowledge the different roles they have each played to make these projects happen. These Logbooks I hope will prove useful both to those who have been directly involved and other readers who work in the field of commissioning art and those who are concerned with the meaning and possibilities of developing collective, critical practices and manifestations of cultural democracy.

## Introduction to 'Het Reservaat'

In 2006 I was invited by 'Beyond' to carry out a residency as part of their Action Research programme during the building of the new town Leidsche Rijn, near Utrecht in the Netherlands. This part of the 'Beyond' programme was tasked with putting art on the map of Leidsche Rijn and for art to contribute to the making of that map, with invited artists taking the new town as their 'field of study'. The artists' collective Bik Van der Pol who were involved in setting up 'Beyond' described the projects as "provisional propositions that spark different narratives that will eventually settle themselves as new myths, typically and specifically from and belonging to this land" (Bik Van der Pol in Heezen, van Gestel and Zonnenberg 2010, p.127).

'Beyond' was initiated by the Municipality of Utrecht in 2000 with an overall budget of 7 million euros over 15 years. The fee for my residency was 6000 euros with travel, accommodation and production covered separately. The artists' projects on the Action Research strand of the 'Beyond' programme usually took place over a three month block but I



Sketch of a time machine over an image in a brochure advertising homes to buy in Leidsche Rijn. (Sophie Hope)

negotiated with 'Beyond' to spread the three months over one year with trips to Leidsche Rijn every couple of months during which time I held workshops with residents about what Leidsche Rijn would be like in 1000 years time. Based on these discussions, I worked with artistic director, Daphne de Bruin and producer, Joost de Groot to develop a one-day outdoor performance in Leidsche Rijn involving residents of the town on 15 July 2007 called 'Het Reservaat' (The Reservation).

The performance was a one-day open-air museum of life in 2007 seen from the perspective of people living in the year 3007, as if remnants of the town had been re-discovered and brought to life in the format of a living history museum. The audience arrived at the entrance of the museum and were encouraged to think they were living in the year 3007 enjoying a day at a 'reservation' depicting everyday life in 2007. They were given a guided tour around fifteen scenes devised and performed by different interest-groups living in Leidsche Rijn, who carried out their everyday activities, such as practicing tai chi, discussing 'democracy', performing music, feeding animals, filling a car with petrol, playing board games and drinking coffee. Each of these everyday scenes was slightly exaggerated or misinterpreted by the performing guides, echoing the improvisation often required to interpret life in the distant past. For example, the visitors were told the band playing had been bigger than the Beatles in 2007 and every hour they would screech around the park in an orange jeep followed by paparazzi (a group of local photography enthusiasts) and the guides warned the visitors not to approach the older people ('grandmas and grandpas' playing board games) as they may be in danger of being hugged and might not let you go. To see such old people, was a shock to the visitors from 3007.

This experiment in future archaeology aimed to provide a context for collective critical reflection by presenting slightly skewed versions of today as a provocation to think differently about the way we live in contemporary society. As part of the performance I staged a fake protest at the entrance to 'Het Reservaat', with placards declaring the art event to be a waste of money and that art was useless – accusations the 'Beyond' programme had received in the past from some local press, implying that these views would perhaps still hold true in 1000 year's time.

## Context & starting points

The 'Beyond' programme involved a number of commissioning strands which resulted in sculptural interventions, social events and architectural projects. The original objective of 'Beyond' was to stimulate and attract "an international and urban cultural climate in Leidsche Rijn, in which particular attention was given to art projects that fit in with citizens and interested parties" (Sponselee in Heezen, van Gestel and Zonnenberg 2010, p.177). Artists were invited to create links with architecture, re-landscaping and urban development and react to the phenomenon that is Leidsche Rijn: "The art of 'Beyond' establishes roots in the material (soil, landscape, archaeology), searches for connections with old and new culture, and subsequently allows itself to be dragged along in the unrelenting flow of time" (Colenbrander in Heezen, van Gestel and Zonnenberg 2010, p.91).

The 'Beyond' programme ran from 2000-2009 during the building of the new town and was initiated and managed by the Municipality of Utrecht with a budget of 7 million euros (€3.5 million from Utrecht City Council, €900.000 from the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment, €550.000 from SKOR - the Foundation for Art and Public Space and contributions the K.F. Hein Foundation and the Elise Mathilde Fund). The money for 'Beyond' had been ring-fenced allowing for a semi-autonomous fund for artists' projects which therefore did not need approval at every stage from the Municipality.

The name 'Beyond' was inspired by a quote from the architect Rem Koolhaas: "For each project there is a Beyond. A domain where no jury will follow" (Koolhaas and Mau 1995). By the end of 1997 building work had begun on former agricultural land, incorporating two existing villages (Vleuten and De Meern) and by the time I visited in 2006, the largest new-town in the Netherlands was over half way near completion (with 30,000 new homes to be completed by 2015).

'Beyond' contacted me in 2006 and invited me to visit Leidsche Rijn and stay in the Nomads in Residence (No.19), a converted container designed by Bik Van der Pol and Korteknie Stuhlmacher to house the artists' who were in residence on the 'Beyond' programme. During my residency,

No.19 was situated on the edge of the new development and seemed like a spaceship that had landed to survey foreign territory.

Following my first research trip to Leidsche Rijn in May 2006, my original response to the place was how the design and use of public/private space embraced the ideal of the individual. There was an air of self-sufficiency based on the co-dependent relationship between consumer and market. A family could drive where they want, when they want, choose their home-entertainment and avoid their neighbours in the process. The lack of communal centres, cafes, community centres and religious centres in Leidsche Rijn seemed to reflect this preference for a private over public life. The urban planner Rients Dijkstra and architect-



Sketch depicting 6000 years history of the site of the new town, Leidsche Rijn. (Sophie Hope)

ture historians Michelle Provoost and Wouter Vanstiphout had previously written about the new town of Leidsche Rijn:

“The shift in attention from collective to individual now requires an urbanism based on such generative concepts as contrast, temporal uncertainty, market conformity, image (in the general, cultural sense) and ambiguity” (Dijkstra, Provoost and Vanstiphout 1995).

This increasing fragmentation, atomisation and privatisation of communal life was then being counterbalanced by artists employed by ‘Beyond’ to undo or challenge these factors through developing community participatory projects. I was interested in the picture of desire for individualism and freedom being promoted by the Leidsche Rijn marketing team in their brochures advertising a ‘common dream’ of independent living for people to invest in. I was keen to ask: what happens when others enter this club of individuals, behave differently and do not share the same dream? Are they then excluded and if so how? How does Leidsche Rijn deal with these different dreams and collective moments that do not prioritise or fit the individual, ‘self sufficient’ worker / consumer?

I wanted to build a fictional narrative about Leidsche Rijn as a microcosm of the liberal-capitalist global village by collectively imagining a future archaeology of Leidsche Rijn. What, for example, is the future of a gated, individualised community which ‘selects’ its population based on its property owning potential? How will future archaeologists interpret their findings? I was imagining innocent sporting events turning more sinister as the different parts of Leidsche Rijn became more gated, resources more scarce and battles commencing between these communities. What happens to social responsibility and interaction when life becomes increasingly housebound? What will happen to the landscape as people become more interested in individuality over community?

I was also keen to reflect critically on the reason for me being in Leidsche Rijn in the first place and was keen to develop a project with the people who had inadvertently paid for me to be there. I had arrived to some extent as an uninvited guest and I wanted to draw attention to this awkwardness.





Sketch 'Welcome to Leidsche Rijn' using quotes from people I met and images from brochures advertising Leidsche Rijn. (Sophie Hope)

## The making of 'Het Reservaat'

I worked closely with 'Beyond' to make contacts in the area and develop the proposal. The way I met people was through one to one meetings with people or groups recommended to me by 'Beyond' and through the workshops which were advertised more publicly. It proved difficult to meet people through informal chance encounters as there were few public, communal places where adults in Leidsche Rijn congregated. The project evolved through an open-ended process of conversations with people I met and setting a framework of the workshops through which people could get involved. My process of working involved:

- meeting people to find out about their experiences of living in Leidsche Rijn (including local journalists, politicians, schools, a teenage rock band, tai chi class, the local vicar and staff at a local second-hand shop, among others);
- a series of 'futures' workshops with residents (invited through word of mouth, invitations to previous participants of 'Beyond' projects and my visits to local clubs, groups and societies);
- two projects in local primary schools run by Brigit Postma and Marielle Hendriks, artists based in Leidsche Rijn where the students invented objects they thought might exist in 3007 which were then displayed as a museum of artefacts in 'Het Reservaat';
- a period of editing and consolidating material with Leidsche Rijn-based artistic director, Daphne de Bruin and producer, Joost de Groot to devise the one-day performance, 'Het Reservaat'.

During the futures workshops we discussed the themes: landscape, environment, education, family, work, play, property, security, health, art and religion in 2007 and 3007. One thousand years into the future constitutes 'big time', a temporal distance that is awesome and difficult to comprehend. It stretches beyond a more manageable 200 years of safe futures, a time period in which it is just about possible to imagine one's children's children. Beyond that imaginations drift into the realm of fantasy and science fiction. It is difficult to take seriously predictions beyond four years let alone 200 years, as most big decisions, policies and laws are backed by politicians who, despite analyses of trends and scientific predictions being presented to them, often make decisions that will





Sketch documenting some of the predictions for Leidsche Rijn in 3007 to have come from the futurology workshops with names of some of the people I worked with on the project. (Sophie Hope)

get them elected next time around. Investments are often made based on there being a financial return during one's lifetime, or that of one's children. Thinking beyond that does not make immediate economic or political sense.

The act of imagining life in 3007 meant the group had to leave their experiences of current realities behind and enter the realm of fantasy, an exercise some found easier than others. Such an experiment in collective mental time travel, however, allowed the group to talk about difficult subjects with the protection of fantasy as a buffer zone. Thinking about the future of a newly-built town was a way of unveiling the different ideologies and perceptions people have of today, imagining the future triumphs and failures of such an 'ideal place to live'. As a facilitation method, it revealed the different hopes and fears of individuals in the group about life now but through the lens of the future. Ideologies and political points of view were allowed to clash because the group was temporarily and collectively inhabiting a different time zone. Encapsulating these differ-



Dressing mannequins with the fashions people were thought to have worn in the early 21st Century in preparation for the opening of 'Het Reseraat'. (Photo: Jeroen Wandemaker)

ences became a crucial aspect to the development of the project as it was not about coming up with a shared vision of the future but that any future is based on the diverse opinions of the present being heard.

'Beyond' employed actor and director Daphne de Bruin and producer Joost de Groot who live in Leidsche Rijn to help me develop the proposal into a manageable one day performance. I had intended the performance to happen in different locations around the town with the audiences on bicycles but de Bruin and de Groot were able to develop a more realisable proposal considering the time and budget constraints. De Bruin and de Groot had extensive experience of producing community performances, something I had never done before and were instrumental in developing the concept of the performance and working with me and the other participants to turn the ideas into a realistic format. They were also invaluable in maintaining and developing contacts in Leidsche Rijn during the run up to the final event.

## Manifestation



Sketch outlining the invitation to 'Het Reservaat'. (Sophie Hope)





Your guides to 2007



Entering 'Het Reservaat' through the time tunnel. Goggles are necessary to see exhibits



Visitors watch the strange ritual of 'Tai Chi'



Politicians try to explain what 'democracy' was in 2007



Bigger than the Beetles!  
The infamous 'Eitnerway' greet fans at the museum



A typical 2007 'living room'



Preparations for a display of typical fashions of 2007.



Visitors interact with the religious events of the early 21st Century



A guide explains to an incredulous crowd the usages of various everyday objects found in the area.



Visitors stand well back to observe 'grandmas + grandpas' play board games.



Children try to explain the ways in which citizens of 2007 made use of these strange beasts.



A special collection of artefacts made by children of 2007 depicting how they imagined life in the future to be.



THEMEPARK

# HET RESERVAAT

EXCITING TIMETRAVEL IN ONE DAY

3007



2€11€

2007

CASTELLUM HOGE WOERD LEIDSCHER RIJN

## ONLY ON 15 JULY

WWW.BEYONDUTRECHT.NL

Poster advertising 'Het Reservaat'.

## Critical reflections & key questions

This one-day fictional museum aimed to be a site bustling with contradictory views, ambitions and ideologies with the combination of visitors, performances, props and interventions triggering both laughter and puzzled looks. But what has 'Het Reservaat' taught us about the democratisation of culture and cultural democracy? Did it offer a critique of commissioning culture and orchestrate opportunities for cultural democracy by redistributing that critique among those who took part?

The residency commissioning model of 'Beyond' is tied into a set of agendas that require a certain form of participation from artists and others involved based on the social, cultural and economic development of the new town. While the brief was an open invitation to artists to respond to Leidsche Rijn as their 'field of study', it was framed by the development of the town. Art becomes the alibi for a planning process that outsources its 'experimentation', leaving the development of Leidsche Rijn to continue apace.

There is an inevitable contradiction in the implementation of an art programme within a development such as Leidsche Rijn between the process of development based on market demands and the open, relatively unproductive activities of artists during this juggernaut of change. Art is justified in terms of it having some knock on financial rewards for the developers – it looks good to be incorporating a critical, artistic practice into the process of the development as it might increase property prices. The progressive approach taken by the Municipality meant that even projects that were critical of the town planning were encouraged as any form of engagement would be good for the marketing of the town.

'Het Reservaat' perhaps enjoyed a position between 'autonomous' and 'over-regulated' where I tried to work towards an illusive proposition for instrumental change through a communal 'disruptive' performance (see O'Neill in Heezen, van Gestel and Zonnenberg 2010). Even with the embedded status of the art programme in the mechanisms of planning and development at the City Council, however, it is still difficult to gauge the extent to which individual projects such as 'Het Reservaat' or the overall programme have developed a rigorous critique and/or influenced

the mapping, planning and implementation of change in Leidsche Rijn.

Cor Wijn, co-ordinator of 'Beyond' also points to the paradox of 'Beyond' in that it was a local authority initiative that aimed to "agitate the establishment and challenge prevailing views" (Wijn in Heezen, van Gestel and Zonnenberg 2010, p.102). Wouter Vanstiphout (an architectural historian who was involved in the master-planning stage of Leidsche Rijn) contests this semi-autonomous position 'Beyond' supposedly occupied and points out that this model of art commissioning cannot achieve 'the real Beyond' ("a domain where no jury will follow"):

"You can't be embedded and steer an autonomous course. As part of local government, 'Beyond' falls under a process manager, a civil servant, a local council member and so on. Content and execution are then mixed up by people who are not content-oriented in the first place...the process becomes the ultimate goal, and you can perhaps do things that are interesting on a temporary basis, but you don't achieve the real Beyond..." (Vanstiphout 2009, p.175-6).

'Het Reservaat' was one of these temporary moments in the development of Leidsche Rijn that invited critical reflection from the people who lived there. In line with 'Beyond's' ambition, it tried to offer an alternative platform for multiple subjectivities to challenge and question the top-down master-planning of a community and the community's complicity in its development. 'Het Reservaat' slotted neatly into the timeline of 'Beyond' projects, as a demonstration of their productivity and community engagement. While the project did not have a direct impact on the planning of the town (nor did it set out to), the question remains, what was gained from presenting a slightly off kilter image of life in Leidsche Rijn back at the communities of lived there? This in itself is a relatively obscure and futile gesture and yet the experiences of those involved and visiting the performance were multifarious and it remains to a large extent unknown if the impact of that experience effected the psyche of the town's inhabitants. The fact that this is near impossible to document and evaluate is one of the dilemmas for creating such occasions for undirected or non-prescriptive responses and is perhaps one of the characteristics of acts of cultural democracy - that they remain ephem-

eral or undisclosed. The project avoided prescribing a certain format for participation and simply held up a mirror (albeit slightly broken) to invite people to critically reflect on their conditions and forms of behaviour in the everyday, a spectacle that may have ruptured or reconfirmed those behaviours to varying degrees.

To some extent, the programme is based on the notion that Leidsche Rijn needed culture – that as a new community it did not have culture yet and the 'Beyond' programme was tasked with either shipping that in from outside (inviting artists to respond to the place) or encouraging artists to administer an 'orthopaedic aesthetic' to existing communities to establish their own cultural expressions (Kester 2004). 'Het Reservaat' fell mainly in the second camp and I found at times I was imposing my own critical interpretation on the community, assuming that this may be an uncomfortable experience for some people. The fact that this was in turn challenged and contradicted through the workshops by other critical readings of the place by people who lived there perhaps suggests that the space I had created was open enough for people to have their say.



Image of part of the staged protest I held at the entrance of 'Het Reservaat'. (Sophie Hope)

In order to implement and share that critical reflection I felt 'Het Reservaat' had to be more than a fun day out for all the family. But to what extent did people collectively critically reflect? Did the intention to create a critical art project that 'got people thinking' and that was beyond a 'fun day out' actually occur and if so, how? Did it need an artist for this to happen? My desire to maintain an element of absurdity or uncanniness to the proceedings, which I saw as a trigger for opening up a questioning of both the context of the new town itself and art's role in that was a struggle to maintain as it confronted a desire for a family friendly entertaining day out. Commenting on 'Beyond' the poet Ingmar Heytze wrote how it was promoting "unsolicited art that challenges, interrogates and disrupts" whereas residents would have perhaps preferred "culture that forges ties between people" (quoted by Haagsma in Heezen, van Gestel and Zonnenberg 2010, p.78). Did continually opening up the process to more participants mean it was harder to maintain a critical approach and was this welcomed or rejected by residents who perhaps needed or wanted something more easy-going, affirmative and entertaining? At times, I felt the project was slipping into a form of art as light entertainment. I had given myself a role of watchman, making sure things stayed irregular, disruptive and did not get too comfortable, thinking that if I took my eye off the ball, things would descend into ordered, polite, celebratory consensus, with the participants having their positions confirmed rather than confronted. The more people and agendas that got involved meant it was harder to justify my own role and presence in what was becoming a multi-authored process and yet this made it even more prescient that I define my role in orchestrating (and monitoring) an open process that allows for this multi-agenda'd situation to take place. Rather than assume a back seat, the manipulative role of the artist in this context is a strategic role that unfolds numerous contradictory expectations and experiences of cultural democracy in action.

To visualise this dilemma I staged a protest outside the entrance to the museum, using cardboard placards tied to lampposts with statements from the local media about earlier 'Beyond' art projects, such as, 'waste of money' and 'art is useless'. The protest could have been seen as a critique directed at the event, pre-empting some of the visitors' comments, or as part of the performance itself but, apart from being approached by the police whilst installing the signs, the action seemed to go largely

unnoticed by the commissioners and public attending the event and so did not necessarily succeed in creating a poignant critical remark on the commissioning of art.

'Het Reservaat' used the metaphor of time travel to illicit collective imaginings of the future, and future misinterpretations of the present, as a way of developing a self-reflective, critical relationship with the world and for that to resemble some form of political agency, that moves beyond an escapist fantasy or self-help exercise. Play and humour can trigger these moments of self-reflection and enable us to laugh at ourselves collectively.

In the case of 'Het Reservaat' I wanted to try out critical reflection on the conditions of contemporary urban living and the role art plays in that on a mass scale and so exaggerated the notion of critical distance to 1000 in the future. This exercise was not about workshopping a shared vision of how we wanted the future to look like, rather the metaphor of time travel enabled us to critically reflect on our hopes and fears in the present moment but through the lens of 1000 years time. It was not a purely fantastical, escapist exercise and its value lay in the metaphor generating different and conflicting views and interests of a community that was being master-planned, top-down, by developers.

The metaphor breaks down, however, when those accessing it see through it. It requires an element of playing along and performing a role which some people resisted (more so during the event than the workshops when some of the visitors to 'Het Reservaat' refused to play the game and took the performance literally and disagreed with the stories the guides were telling them, but even then, generating frustration may have led to new thinking on contemporary Dutch new town life and art's role in shaping this). 'Het Reservaat' straddled reality and fantasy by re-presented the everyday through the lens of the future. There is an issue, however, that the performance takes over and can be easily brushed aside as escapist entertainment and remain in the land of fantasy.

The paradox is that art already has the mandate to go beyond and when it 'gets real' (i.e. artists start to think they can grapple with the planning department) its project is undermined and instrumentalised. If art's remit



is to float beyond, just out of reach of the jury, outsourcing the experimental aspects of Leidsche Rijn to a series of distinct art projects perhaps means to kiss goodbye to real experimentation happening through Leidsche Rijn's design, conception and realisation. Did 'Het Reservaat', in its demand on spectators and participants to travel in time achieve 'the real Beyond'? As it shot off into the land of beyond, or elsewhere, did it ever have a chance of effecting changes in real life scenarios of Leidsche Rijn or are such fantasies forgotten as naïve and unrealistic?

The future as a realm of fantasy is no longer a foreign land, funfair or dreamscape, instead, fantasies are sold in the form of beautiful new housing developments. Within this context, how do critique and reform jostle for publicity in 'Het Reservaat'? To what extent did it remain a satire of these structures or does the work have more impetus from this critical position? Ultimately, what can the playful and fantastical elements of 'Het Reservaat' offer beyond an escapist self-help exercise that merely improves the image of Leidsche Rijn and 'Beyond'?

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## FURTHER READING & LINKS

Beyond website: <http://www.beyondutrecht.nl/>

Via Vinex website (Joost de Groot and Daphne de Bruin):  
<http://www.viavinex.nl/>

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Logbooks #1-4

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Birkbeck, University of London

Supervisors: Cameron Cartiere, Anne Douglas and Isabelle Fremeaux

For further information contact: [sophiehope@me.com](mailto:sophiehope@me.com)

[www.sophiehope.org.uk](http://www.sophiehope.org.uk)



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