

## An interview with Ivanka Annot by Anja Grote

One of the H&D founders, Selby Gildemacher, met artist Ivanka Annot during the camp Entre-Nous located in the experimental settlement in Frederiksoord. H&D had been exploring what it means to be reliant on the systems of capitalism and how to change our dependency on these systems, Ivanka's practice has been inspired by this. We were excited to meet her again to discover more about her life and work and to share it in an inspiring way.

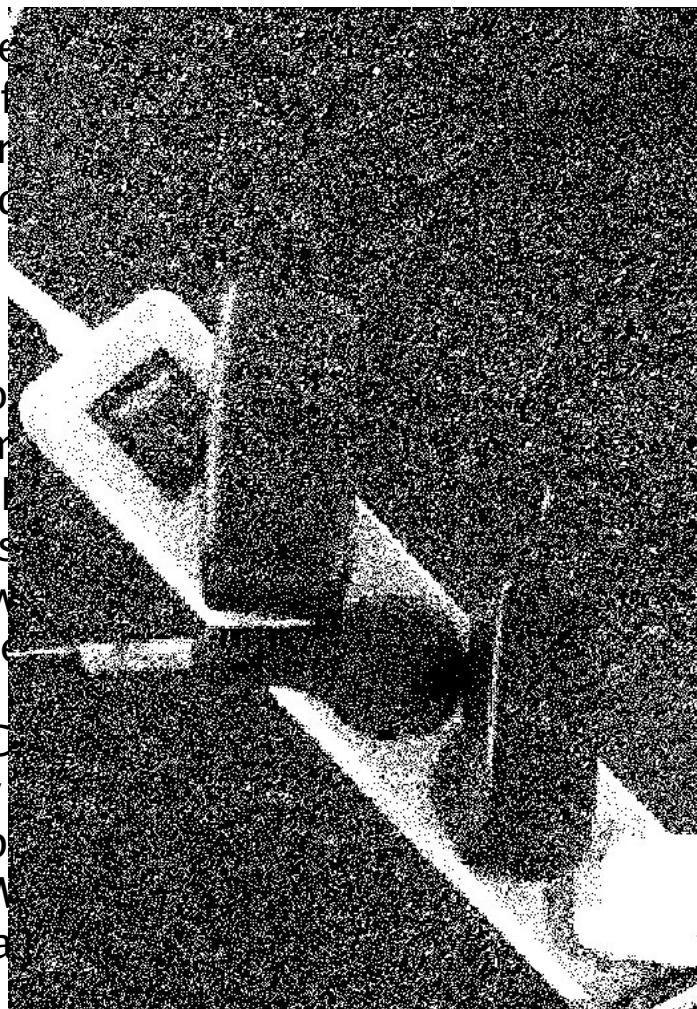
**Anja:** To give some context to how you developed such an autonomous practice, can you tell us about your background? How did you grow up and end up making the work you do now?

**Ivanka:** Art school fixed everything for me! It taught me that I could share my voice. The biggest message I got from it. All of a sudden that made me critical of society. I realized I could affect my surroundings through creativity and creative practice. I thought about how I wanted my surroundings look and how this vision differs from what is. It started for me.

It quickly turned into more of a critique of society. I didn't want to spend time doing a job that I could pay a house owner who doesn't really care. It's unfair that that's the way that the world works. It's your life.

My partner has had much influence on me. We want to minimize our living costs together – to live in a dumpster diving for our food and we made a collective. There is also a collective association. Through this we can share. You just have to start somewhere. We started with a small group. We found so much that we found even more discarded food, so we

We created this place called The Free Community. It was engaged work that involved everybody. It was about the idea. There was a group of people who shared food, and hand the food out for free. We found that two angles on the wrong angle make



Without prior knowledge, we just started. More and more we were realizing that we start taking small-scale actions, talking about it. That strengthened and energized me.

**Anja:** What is your method for acquiring a technique and then you dive into that and you figure out the skills that are necessary.

**Ivanka:** I see my art practice in two parts: that you create what you want to see happening and then what's happening now, you prefigure it. You give it a shape, you make it happen and it follows. That's most of my work.

The Free Café is prefigurative. Only by creating this free restaurant have we a next level plan that we now have a piece of ground and permits for; it is a plan. De Wandeling is a plan to use a piece of the local city park in Groningen and create a permaculture jungle with a social center for the exchange of knowledge.

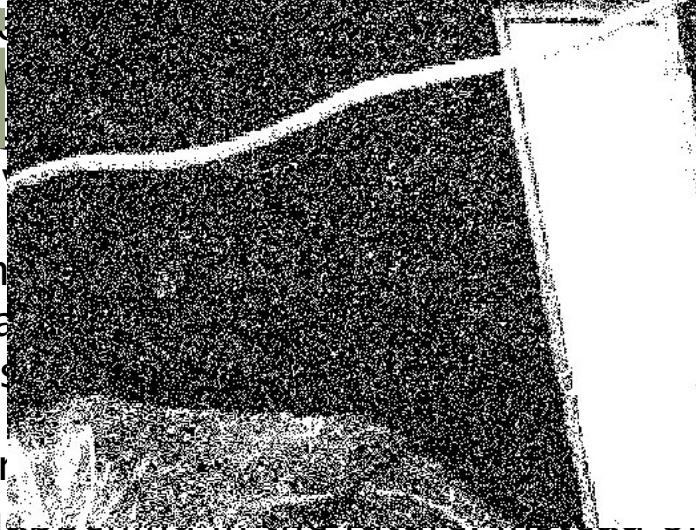
De Wandeling means literally The Walk. We chose this name because we want to focus on nature and focus and learning, like the taking a walk in the woods. It's in the meantime, I've built my own house out of local straw and loam. The house has to pass laws for new types of construction that can last for 50 years. For me it's about politics.

These prefigurative works are all about acquiring skills to be able to reach the goal. I'd like to cut a window. Let's cut a window!" It's more that you need to reach the goal with the knowledge and experience necessary to make the project possible.

For example, we had to make a formal permit request for De Wandeling. I and I have no knowledge of this sort of procedure. Together with my partner we researched construction laws, everything about sustainable technologies, DIY methods. We made 3D and 2D detail drawings, and made construction calculations. We presented it to the municipality and it was good! In one year we took this education full on a crash course for architecture to be able to reach the goal of getting this project realized in a capitalist and socially-inclusive society in our city.

That's one approach that is very practical. My other works mostly go into installations and residencies. For these works, it's more about acquiring theoretical knowledge, much inspired by queer theory, for example. Topics that inform politics, borders, are what interest me.

In this sense, these different lines of work have opposite approaches. But



by my environment and what I want to influence.

**Anja:** And you call both of these practices work and not life?

**Ivanka:** I call it all an art practice. I see my art practice as my life and my don't distinguish something as art if it's in an art space. It could equally building a house with a hundred people who also learned these skills and next door, this an art practice.

**Anja:** I saw a very beautiful drawing of yours, it was of a vehicle – something also like a bike.

**Ivanka:** I had this dream of a bicycle camper with a dual purpose. First, to carry large loads of food from one location to another to give it away for free, and fuels. Second, for it to function as a bicycle camper just big enough for two people. It would sustain itself by using solar energy and filtering rainwater. Then, I would outfit this thing to go completely undetected. Camouflaging it and coming in without it showing heat radiation.

I was playing with a sort of preparation scenario. What if shit hits the fan, like populism and with the Sleepnetwet, the law that allows national and international to tap, store, and forward all digital and telephone communication, I felt it was visibly put in a far corner of politics. Who knows what happens when you're a dissident.

I ended up not having the time to undergo building it. I still have all the plans. If somebody knocks on the door saying, "I'd love to build it with you," and I say yes.

**Anja:** Do you think that there are people out there that think what you do is a threat to society?

**Ivanka:** No, not right now. But I do think that this could change. I feel that it's not that you're shifting the politics, but that the politics are shifting you into this very extreme corner when in actuality I'm just a person who wants to live a simple life.

**Anja:** Would you call yourself a prepper?

**Ivanka:** No, not at all. I'm not busy with those things. I think it's a very practical thing, finding the things coming towards you and getting ready for it. I see it as being around, to create what is around us. This is my artist practice and my life. I am not undergoing.

**Anja:** What role does material play in your work? How do you select what

**Ivanka:** As uncapitalistic as possible. For example, I am building a small house and people would go to the nearest eco-construction website and order everything. But those products are produced in questionable ways. They come from far away and aren't locally grown.

It's a combination of uncapitalism, but also I try to find the autonomy to do it. I go to a farmer and ask for straw, do it! It was the farmer closest to me who had the right kind of straw for my project. If a bit further out you can dig out some straw to make the basis for your house, then do it! I think in these sorts of practical things and accomplishments.

I would really like it to come straight out of nature as much as possible in the way

**Anja:** Do you also reuse materials?

**Ivanka:** Definitely! My house is built on legs, raising it 50cm off the ground. And I got them from a furniture maker who had collected them over the years and threw away his other leftover pieces.

**Anja:** You were talking about working with your partner and I saw there are many projects you are involved in. What kind of collaborative forms are you interested in? How do you collaborate? How much do other people play a role in your work?

**Ivanka:** It depends whether I work for an art space or not. If it's for an art space, I almost always conduct travel research to explore other initiatives. Almost everything has been informed by other people in that sense.

Whenever it's more collective work, then my main principle is self-organization. It's still initiated by me, but it ends up being a co-creation of everybody. It's always between coming up with an idea and starting it with a group of people. The form will be determined by the self-organisation within the small group. There could be a framework is set and then there's an invitation to a bigger group so that it can grow.

When you actually practice self-organization you realize that even though you have an input as the rest, there is first always a framework that has been determined. In this way, there is a hierarchy when it comes to policy and determining the direction.

The De Wandeling initiative has to be the legal entity called a foundation. In legal practice, though, the initiative is completely self-organised. De Wandeling is not by law we wouldn't be a legal person otherwise. And we must make it a legal entity able to sign a users agreement with the municipality and formally apply for a permit.



the foundation is the only legal shape that allows us to have a fully horizontal structure, no money, a bank account, paid membership, or any form of ownership.

I find it very problematic to set up a legal person. One reason is because in the Netherlands has more rights than most people anywhere else. That's different from other countries where corporations are political entities and have privileges over actual human beings. We had to make De Wandeling a foundation in order for it to function.

**Anja:** Is De Wandeling creating a cooperative model?

**Ivanka:** No. We're not an cooperative because there is no ownership to be shared among participants.

With the foundation, we have our own framework in which we do not use money. We don't hand it out. People can't pay donations for the food or any activities.

A foundation with no bank account is not able to pay taxes, though we don't need to pay income taxes. But, we are constructing a building and that is taxed. This has turned into a legal battle. I have had to go into the city hall.

The issue is that if you do a permit request, you must pay a fee based on the construction costs. We shouldn't have to pay this fee because our construction costs are zero.

In legally setting up this organisation, we found a way to not have bank accounts and to not have ownership, despite being in use of the material.. There is no exchange. We recycle everything.

This has never been done before in the Netherlands. Doing the legal battle is very obvious how much tension there is between DIYing and the policies.

How to implement one in the other makes you wonder if you shouldn't be registered. But, how big can you grow if you are not registered? De Wandeling is a very small thing. I want hundreds and thousands of people to come in contact with it. You're a little thing on the fringe of society. The fringes of society also often consist of people that reside there. And that is closed: private, not public. We never want to be private because we want to be public.

**Anja:** All these struggles seem to inform your work. I think it is very generous that you are sacrificing your life and investing your time in figuring these things out. Some imagine escaping when departing from neoliberal capitalist system, but you are consumed by the work you do. There is an information pool developing and many people don't have the means to do this kind of work and they don't know how. Can you share these findings with even more people?

**Ivanka:** We said that we would stop The Free Café because we got as far as we could. But the other organizers said they didn't want to stop and so it continued in a different form, something that became autonomous and that is completely self-informed by the people involved. The Free Cafe became a model that could be copied.

For De Wandeling, I think we're at point zero. All we have done is the production of knowledge and experience for the project, but also for other people to learn from. How can you bend the law or find some loopholes in it, how can you create a space?

We talk amongst each other, and I talk to other initiatives too, to eco villages, to share the knowledge that we have gathered and people can build their own projects.

De Wandeling will become a big hub for exchanging knowledge, experience, and resources. It was centered around food, which is only a means, not an end. It's a means to an end, but what we really want to create is a place where people come together and the elements of DIY construction and self-organisation can be shared.

**Anja:** In a way, each project is a start for another project.

**Ivanka:** It ended up this way because we had the entire framework for De Wandeling 10 years ago. We sent it to the municipality because we had to collaborate with them for the land and to get the permission on ten different accounts. But, we got an idea of what to do with this. So while we waited, we did The Free Cafe.

It was thought up to be a six months-long project, just to show them that it was possible. We had no record of having done anything this ambitious before. They were not ready to support us. Groningen is getting interested, though, and talking among different departments of the municipality.

This experience taught us million things that I'm very happy to have learned from De Wandeling.

**Anja:** Would you consider yourself an autonomous artist or an autonomous organization? At least part of your practice is realized with many people and within government structures. Does it have a greater reach? Is it possible to really be autonomous?

**Ivanka:** Yes, definitely. I have always defined myself as autonomous. That was the goal I had before going to art school. To be autonomous. Not in the sense of being individualistic or collectivity. And, not in the sense of being individualistic. Rather, to be able to create your own structures with which you want to comply. It starts with the luxury of choice. These terms of choice. It's definitely a privilege. In that sense, I have a very strong sense of where I have had the luxury to have choose autonomy.

**Anja:** One of your works is a reaction to *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac. You put it into a European setting. I was fascinated by the project's employability and accessibility. This book has been read widely and it carries this dream off the grid. It has this romanticism as well as naivety to it. Can you tell me about this trip into a European setting?

**Ivanka:** I really don't like this book! I'm very critical of Kerouac. I think he's a narcissistic, woman-hating pig. That's the type of dream that is 100% personally beneficial or exploratory. Let's take a van and travel around the world to places where nobody has been yet and ruin it with our presence. I think about thinking, that you can go everywhere and you can be king wherever you go. You can go into any place because your passport will bring you to any place you want. That's the work. To be critical of this kind of understanding of going off the grid.

**Anja:** Do you travel a lot yourself?

**Ivanka:** I do travel a lot. But when I do, I usually hitchhike, stay at people's homes, and participate in initiatives that are awesome in some way. I would never fly to a forest of ayahuasca.

**Anja:** Is there any organisation that you declined to work with?

**Ivanka:** In a way, the municipality. We asked them for their collaboration on finding possibilities. When we gave them our 80-page proposal, they said yes. They were up to subsidize us. But, in the end we saw this as them owning us. We worked with them, but on our own terms by refusing their subsidies and their money and donations!

**Anja:** What are your most low-tech and hi-tech works?

**Ivanka:** The most low-tech is the one that I ended up making at the art school. I used wool from this local sheep herd and felted it into a bed. I specifically used felting techniques to do this, techniques that were born outside of Western civilization and mostly performed outside of Western civilization. Here, it's not worth it to do because for 5 euros you can buy a futon mattress in a shop.

Traditionally, the technique is to have a horse pull the wool behind her, or to have the wool behind me while walking circles around the camp. I wanted to do something that is outside of the structure of Western society.

The most hi-tech work was done when I was still an art student and had a background in neurosciences and biology. I made really big red and green trust lights and electrodes that would read all types of brain waves.

I made a program that filtered the alpha and beta waves, which say something about your mind being stressed or being relaxed. The program made the colors pop out based on your brain response and green if you were relaxed. I collaborated with Het Nieuw Ensemble, a modern dance group in Groningen on this too. They would do performances where they asked somebody from the audience to sit in this very big dentist chair and they would monitor their heart rate right then and there. Their responses were translated into different colors on a screen so the musician could see the responses to their performance in real time. It was a great experience between the performers and perceivers.