

This text is published on the occasion of Architecture Day. Such a festivity is of almost religious importance for Rotterdam, a city in which architecture and building, often feel like goals in themselves. And today the growth-machine is again in full swing—this time under the command of the new city slogan ‘Make It Happen.’ POST Rotterdam is one of several new ‘icons’ being developed under this slogan.

But what exactly is at stake in this modern ambition to *make it happen*? Is this dominating mentality at the heart of neoliberal capitalism and thus at the heart of worldwide suffering? Is this actually a matter of exploitation, of people and of planet, disguised as opportunity? Are we sure this is the kind of society we want?

Here are some things that are happening *now*: flooding, drought, food shortage. The effects of climate change. This gives another interpretation to what it means to ‘make it happen’: that of an accidental *causing*. Such events do not present themselves on command, but merely with a question—the final question: *is it happening?*

**IS IT HAPPENING?** poses questions to the answer **MAKE IT HAPPEN.** At this critical moment in time, it intends to be Rotterdam’s counter-brand; a *non-profit pay-off*, offering unsolicited and intrepid critique of the city’s urban policy in the face of ecological disaster.

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# POST- ROTTERDAM.

A new, soon-to-be-old icon for Rotterdam. 230 five-star hotel suits and 306 luxury apartments. Because those tourists and expats won’t land in your city by accident. You gotta put in a bold move now and then. Too bad we’re really reaching the limits of this excessive lifestyle now gentrification has arrived for Rotterdam. But whatever. Make it happen.

Dag van de  
Architectuur  
Special

## IS IT HAPPENING?



## POST(-) Rotterdam

The redevelopment of the old Rotterdam post office into a multifunctional complex has been given the name POST. Ironically, a deeper level of meaning is added to this name by the building's post-postmodern facade design: a cascade of repeating classical arches and terraces that, together with a slender structure, form a porous building shell. The resulting image is utopian; like vertical ancient Rome. One might wonder which one was first: the postmodern aesthetics or the name POST. Postmodernism, as an architectural style, reappears in the post-historical twentyfirst century as another flavour to be employed by contemporary architects in their business of selling images. That, or it never left. Anyway, the irony is this: we live in a time in which depth is given by reference to a style once characterized by its sense of depthlessness.

To get an idea of what this project is about it is instructive to watch the recent promotional video. One might wonder who this video tries to address. In what is akin to a trailer of some sort of upcoming gentrification game, a sophisticated narrator tries to inspire

the viewer with cliché prose of dualistic qualities. The American theatricality arguably came with the employment of New York-based architects ODA. That name may be a spin on OMA, once the postmodern avant-garde, and POST would indeed sit well as a fiction within a *Delirious Rotterdam*. One in which a public monument of democratized communication services has been sold to turn into a luxury hotel and apartment-complex for the international rich that merely 'like' each other on Instagram. So there's your audience.

Hidden behind postmodern architecture was the existential question: who or what are we building for? This question remains relevant, but architects cannot afford to bother anymore. POST openly testifies that we no longer build for the supposed community of people presently living in the city. Nor for the advancement of the planet or some other universal idea. Such ideals have long been thrown overboard. What remains is power and money, mediated in this city by the a-political ambition to 'Make It Happen'. Architecture has become a vehicle for capital and POST shows it while making a parody of postmodernism itself.

But, interestingly, the full name of the project is actually 'POST Rotterdam', whereby the function of the prefix can be restored, and another, more ironic, but also cynical, meaning comes to the fore. This interpretation is furthermore true to the original intent of the word 'post-modern' as a transgression. *Post-Rotterdam*. When will we be *post-Rotterdam*? When will the Babylonian tower collapse? This might well be sooner than developers seem to plan ahead.

Here is an hypothesis: POST will never be realized. Its existence will always remain utopic, a chimera. A testament to these rampant times.

The cynicism behind the name 'POST Rotterdam' is that the building cannot exist post-Rotterdam. And indeed, exist it never will. Both its name and image spell the end of times. The economy is about to crash and, more importantly, so is the planetary ecosystem. Its decadent promise is out of bounds and its timeframe is beyond the horizon. Developers hope to complete it in 2022, around the same time we'll be experiencing an ice-free arctic. Scientific models vary about what happens after that, but it might well be when crisis turns into collapse. Would the

captains of this ship actually manage to motivate workers to complete its construction, its success will be short lived. It will stand like a dreadful reminder of overshot luxury.

Parody, irony, quotation: it is political quietism, and it is used to scar over profound questions. Questions which today return with a vengeance in the face of an unparalleled existential threat: our own mass extinction. But maybe, deep down, you already know this. Maybe you just want to have a good time. It is architecture day after all. 'Don't speak to me about the addressee of architecture, or about the limits of growth. Let's have a good time': that's what's a-political. It is like the last waltz of the passengers on the Titanic.

