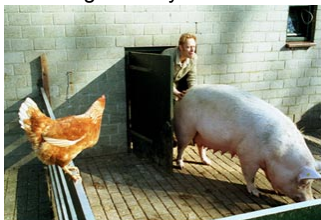


JENNIFER ALLEN TALKS WITH AVL'S JOEP VAN LIESHOUT**JA: Currency, sewage, energy—are you going to tackle any other state monopolies in the Netherlands? What about incarceration?**

JVL: I had a plan to make a prison in my proposal for Almere, with an economy based on illegal activities. It would be great to make a factory for prisoners because they're expensive for the state: Guards, medical bills, housing—a prisoner can cost up to \$25,000 a year. We can make cheaper prisons; the prisoners from Europe could come and work here, and the state would only have to pay half the cost. The inmates could work in the drug and alcohol factory and then enjoy themselves at night. It would be free labor for us, the state would save \$12,500, and the prisoners would be happy. It'd be a great way to make money.



Clockwise from top left:
AVL member Herman de Jongh working on *The Pioneer Set*, February 2001. Photo: Derk Jan Wooldrik. **AVL, *The Pioneer Set* (stable), 1999–2000,** mixed media, ca. 8' 2 7/16" x 20' 1/8" x 11' 5 13/16". **AVL, *The Pioneer Set* (chicken coop), 1999–2000,** mixed media with chickens, ca. 9' 10 1/8" x 16' 8 1/16" x 7' 6 1/2".



JA: That market is already being exploited in the US. How do you distinguish AVL-Ville from conservative and right-wing groups that also question government control and promote individualism, not to mention self-armament?

JVL: I'm not against public services. I don't mind paying taxes to the Dutch government because the money is redistributed to the homeless and unemployed, and everyone gets free medical care and an education. In a way, it's an ideal society. What I don't like is the bureaucracy, and I think there should be more room for experiments. But experimenting doesn't mean creating a reactionary community; I'm not fascist or racist. I believe in harmony, living together, and making things together. My problem with government has to do with its scale—you get all kinds of rules and limitations because of the larger territory and the growing population. If you have a smaller community, you can govern and decide things using common sense: Clean your tools, don't kill each other. Those are the basics.

JA: If you don't believe in killing, what are you doing with all those homemade weapons and bombs?

JVL: They are there to show people that we can be nasty. There's a thin line between what is serious and what is art. Making weapons isn't interesting; you don't earn money; you only get problems. But as artworks they're very interesting because a weapon is a strong symbol. You show people that you're willing to fight and to die for your cause. I see the bombs in a similar way. Besides, we'd never blow up any public buildings because the government gives us money.

JA: Did you have to make any compromises to obtain funding for the festivities celebrating Rotterdam as one of this year's two "cultural capitals" of Europe?

JVL: They wanted us to add activities and events, but that's no problem. We actually made our own public transport company, *AVL-Transport*, 2001, for the tourists. We'll drive around the center of Rotterdam with a farm tractor and trailer and pick up passengers for free. Well, they have to buy a beer—but for a very low price—and drink their way to AVL, which is about ten minutes from the city. Once they arrive, a guide will show them what we build, explain our systems, and answer questions. In our studio, there are skywalks twenty-three feet above the floor, so visitors can watch the works being made below. They can also hang around, have delicious food in the restaurant, or try out the *Compost Toilet*.

JA: Are you going to open a museum?

JVL: No. *AVL-Ville* is a living museum. It's between an open-air museum and a free state.

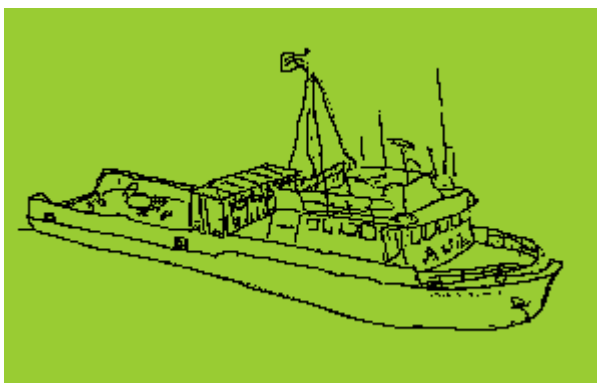
JA: Without getting utopic, what does the future look like for AVL-Ville?

JVL: We would like to expand and set up franchises around the world. The concept is not to have a state that gets bigger and bigger but to make islands all over the place: AVL West Coast, AVL East Coast, AVL Asia. But for now, we're waiting for a larger piece of land that is close to the Rotterdam airport and the water. If all goes well, we'll simply put everything on a boat and sail to the new location.

Row v. Wade

WHAT DOES AVL CREATE ON COMMISSION?

Anything from study cells (Maastricht Library, 1999) to bicycle shelters (The Hague, 2000). Of all AVL's recent projects, *A-Portable*, 2001—a gynecological unit in a shipping container that is currently under construction at the behest of Dr. Rebecca Gomperts—best reflects van Lieshout's own preference for piracy over policy.



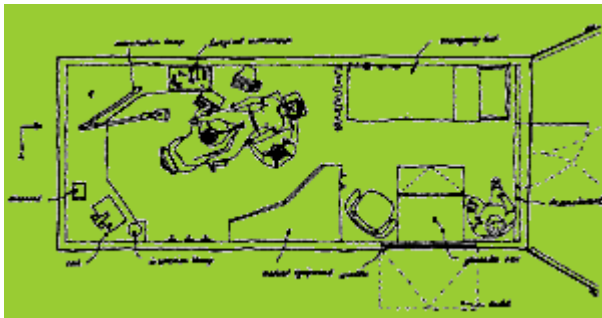
The founder of Women on Waves, Dr. Gomperts made headlines around the world last year with her plans to put *A-Portable* on a ship and operate the mobile reproductive-health clinic on the high seas. The Amsterdam-based activist intends to make first-trimester abortions available to women in countries where the procedure is illegal by performing them in international waters, twelve miles off shore and just beyond the jurisdiction of national laws.

Although Women on Waves has been likened to pirate radio stations and floating casinos, Dr. Gomperts, who served on the *Rainbow Warrior II*, sees the project as a cross between Greenpeace and Doctors Without Borders and emphasizes its humanitarian dimension. "The World Health Organization estimates that every year, 20 million illegal abortions cause the death of up to 100,000 women," she notes. "Whatever one's position on abortion, it remains the most-performed medical intervention, twenty times more common than an appendectomy. Making abortion illegal does not reduce the number of procedures; it actually increases them since access to information on family planning and birth control is also restricted. And the mortality rate of women increases, too, because they are forced to obtain illegal abortions in unsanitary conditions."

The Netherlands proves her point: The Dutch state pays for abortions as well as birth control and boasts the lowest abortion rate in the world. For Dr. Gomperts, Women on Waves brings the borders of Holland closer to women living in countries where abortion is illegal. "Once the ship is in international waters, Dutch laws prevail on board. "In addition to first-trimester abortions, all contraceptives, counseling, education on reproductive health, and training for local practitioners will be provided free. "The container will also function as a floating memorial to the women who suffer and die every year needlessly. Wherever *A-Portable* appears, it will make people aware of this international tragedy."

Like van Lieshout, Dr. Gomperts believes that art should work in different contexts, and she notes that *A-Portable* will cross legal, medical, navigational, and aesthetic territories. She chose AVL not for its ideology, but for its exceptional designs. "For a lot of women

abortion is a frightening experience, and therefore it is important not to make the room too cold and clinical. Joep is an artist who has great insight—not just into technical and functional aspects, but also into the way a space can influence people. He can make the treatment room into a friendly and comfortable space."



With funding in place for the pilot project, Women on Waves will set sail later this year with an all-woman crew to an undisclosed location. In light of the current threat to take away the women's rights gained in *Roe v. Wade*, Dr. Gomperts has not ruled out future voyages to the United States. "If abortion became illegal, we would

certainly consider going there, but only with the support of local women's groups." —JA

Top and bottom: AVL, sketches for A-Portable, 2001.

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