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Cinematic Rotterdam: the times and tides of a modern city

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CHAPTER 10. TO ANIMATE THE CITY

§ 1. city – event

Whereas the culture of the city used to be rooted in the port, after WWII it became intertwined with the programme of the reconstruction. Rotterdam became a city of labour, as a way of life. The cultural achievements concerned the ever growing and highly dynamic port, the rationalist planning and modern architecture, and the social institutions in the newly established suburbs (cf. Van Ulzen, 2007: 149). It does not mean, however, that the city was devoid of special facilities for ‘the arts’.

Immediately after the war, a new, temporary theatre was built (1947, arch. Hendrik Sutterland), while in Rotterdam-Zuid a new grand theatre was erected (1957, arch. Sybold van Ravesteyn). Theatre plays were also performed at, for example, the newsreel theatre Cineac¹⁰⁶¹. An important stage for different artistic disciplines, including film, became ‘t Venster’ (1948-1949, J. Bakema)¹⁰⁶². One of the theatre groups that played here was the socially engaged *Rotterdamse Comedie*, with Anna Blaman and Kees Brusse, among others, but it should be emphasised here that they also played in factories¹⁰⁶³. Several new cinemas opened¹⁰⁶⁴. The Luxor cinema was also used for theatre plays. At the new ‘Bijenkorf’, special events were organised such as a book fair, with well-known writers as guests¹⁰⁶⁵. In the ‘Rivièrahal’ of the Blijdorp zoo, events took place such as fashion shows, lectures, concerts, and games¹⁰⁶⁶. The same counts for the Ahoy’ hall, as well as the Feyenoord stadium, where various performances were organised besides football matches¹⁰⁶⁷. Next to that, all kinds of sports events took place, such as cycling tours and, of special importance, the annual *Concours Hippique International Officiel* at the Kralingse Bos from 1948. The experience of such events was a matter of ‘double exposure’, since they were recreated through film, to be seen in the Cineac theatre, among others¹⁰⁶⁸.

Some temporal centres for the arts were established in existing buildings, such as the former district water control office ‘Schielandshuis’ (1662-1665, J. Lois & P. Post). It served the RKS as an exhibition centre (1950-1953), and when the RKS got a gallery at the ‘Lijnbaan’, it became the city’s historical museum¹⁰⁶⁹. Surrounded by modern, functionalist architecture, the museum looked like the ambiguous ‘Ancient House’ in Yevgeny Zamyatin’s science-fiction novel *We* (1921), as a reminder of history in the ‘timeless present of modernity’. Just outside the city centre, a concert hall was established in the former ‘Koninginnekerk’ (1904-1907, B. Hooykaas, M. Brinkman). In the meantime, plans were made for new facilities, such as an extension to Museum Boymans.

These institutions, and the events they organised, were an integral part of the project to reanimate the city. During the war, Museum Boymans had already organised exhibitions (in 1941 and 1942) to present plans for the reconstruction of the city. In 1947, the museum also organised the exhibition *Rotterdam Straks* (“Rotterdam Later”), as part of the first *Opbouwdag*, which was

¹⁰⁶¹ Edzes, 1973: 2.

¹⁰⁶² It was also the place where the association *Vrienden van de film* was established, by a.o. Lichtveld (Albert Helman) and M.T. Brusse, on 1946-03-09; *Rotterdams Jaarboekje*, 1947, p31.

¹⁰⁶³ Hendriks, 2006: 141.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Lutusca (temporary), ‘t Venster, Lumière, Corso, Thalia, and Scala/Cinerama (a.o.).

¹⁰⁶⁵ JOURNAAL, NTS, 1957-04-09.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Such events had already taken place since the creation of the zoo. An example is a show by German fashion houses, see: Polygoon, 1941-wk21. For general information on this accommodation, see: www.rotterdamers.nl/gebouwen/riviera.htm (website visited: 2006-04-04).

¹⁰⁶⁷ An example of a performance at the Feyenoord stadium was the play ‘Golfslag der Eeuwen’ by the Cultuurdienst der KAB, see the KAB propaganda film *JA, ZO WAS ‘T* (1951, Polygoon-Profiliti); see also, for example, the speech by Billy Graham at the stadium (JOURNAAL, NTS, 1955-07-04 and 1956-10-05).

¹⁰⁶⁸ An example of (a report of) a cycling tour is: *WIELERONDE ROTTERDAM* (1953, Polygoon), shown at Cineac. Concerning the *concours hippique*, it was largely covered by the media, (almost always) by Polygoon e.g. 1950-wk37; 1951-wk37, etc.

¹⁰⁶⁹ See: *WIE WAT BEWAART* (Leen Timp / AVRO, 1961-10-06).

also reported by Polygoon¹⁰⁷⁰. It showed the exhibition with its 3D models of the future city, the reconstruction of the St. Laurens church (through an excursion of Mayor P.J. Oud and a delegation), and new housing projects. More exhibitions followed, including shows that travelled abroad¹⁰⁷¹.

All of this resulted eventually in a series of mass events which animated the new city. These large ‘markets’ (at a time that the city centre actually lacked an ordinary market, until 1958¹⁰⁷²), turned the apparently fixed city into an event itself, a temporal reality, a developing, growing complex, to which different disciplines contributed. Strategies from mass communication were applied, while mass media were used too, as part of a *Medienverbund*, as Thomas Elsaesser would have it (2005b: 391). But rather than adding ‘culture’ to the emerging physical structure, these events became intrinsically part of the emerging urban fabric. According to Peter de Winter (1988), they presented the current state of the reconstruction and its ideas, and as such they tested the plans (in this perspective it is also important to note that several architects that collaborated on the events would be involved with Rotterdam’s reconstruction too); they promoted a modern way of living, tried to generate enthusiasm among the citizens, and to stimulate participation in the development of the city and the country.

§ 2. Ahoy’

A force behind the reconstruction of Rotterdam, in terms of organisation and finances, was the banker and chairman of the ‘Chamber of Commerce’, Karel Paul van der Mandele (•1880-†1975). He was the initiator of the annual *Opbouwdag*, and subsequently of the Ahoy’¹⁰⁷³. The Ahoy’ was the first large event to take place in ‘Het Park’, during the summer of 1950 (15th of June – 31st of August). It celebrated, first of all, the successful reconstruction of the port, as the precondition for the reconstruction of the city. It lasted two weeks more than initially planned, due to its overwhelming success. Within two and a half months it attracted 1,657,000 visitors¹⁰⁷⁴.

In a special edition of the architecture magazine *Forum*, dedicated to the Ahoy’, the architects Van den Broek and Bakema, who designed its masterplan, explained that the plan had initially been to connect the port and the city, hence an event that encompassed a large part of the city centre, but ‘this plan proved to be too vast and then [it] was limited to the area of the Rotterdam Park’¹⁰⁷⁵. It kept nevertheless the ambition to give expression to urban culture at large. Organiser Jacques Kleiboer, who had previously organised the visit of the Zeppelin (1932), made the event into a joint-venture of architecture, visual arts and media. The event provided a common framework and a common agenda, which allowed for various different kinds of approaches and styles, ranging from functionalist architecture to symbolic murals (e.g. by Dolf Henkes) and abstract expressive sculptures (e.g. Karel Appel)¹⁰⁷⁶, next to documentary photography (e.g. Cas Oortuys) and all kinds of commercial presentations. The cross-disciplinary character of the event raised an enormous enthusiasm among its participants.

¹⁰⁷⁰ ROTTERDAM STRAKS, OPBOUWDAG IN DE MAASSTAD (Polygoon, 1947-23).

¹⁰⁷¹ Exhibitions that took place in the next year were *Rotterdam Bouwt* (1948) and *De Maasstad in de Steiger* (1949). Within the perspective of international exchange, the Dutch Ministry of Reconstruction and Housing also organised a series of exhibitions abroad, in which Rotterdam was prominently present. The first one was a show, designed by Opbouw architect W.F. van Gelderen, on emergency dwelling, which took place in Brussels, 1946. Two years later Van Gelderen was also responsible for a travelling exhibition that was to be seen in Belgium, France and Germany. NAI, archive Van Gelderen – GELX.

¹⁰⁷² See: JOURNAAL, NTS, 1958-08-26.

¹⁰⁷³ see: Halbertsma & Van Ulzen, 2001: 156; see also: Oudenaarden, 2004: 13-14.

¹⁰⁷⁴ GAR: archive ‘Tentoonstellingen Ahoy’ 1950, E55, Floriade 1960’, toegangsnr. 315, inventarisnr. 14: ‘kranteknipsels en documentatie’, green-grey cover includes a booklet by J. van Tilburg [= alderman for finances]; *Verslag van de tentoonstelling “Rotterdam Ahoy”*, Gemeente Rotterdam/Stichting Tentoonstelling 1950, October 1952. Page 8.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Van den Broek & Bakema, 1950: 60.

¹⁰⁷⁶ See: De Winter, 1988: 29-31.

Architect Aldo van Eyck, for example, wrote an article for *Forum* about the spatial ‘sign’ that he had designed, in which he thought of the Ahoy’ as something that was part of ‘a new renaissance, not of the human being in respect of oneself this time, but of all things in space’¹⁰⁷⁷.

The central hall of the Ahoy’ was from the Neniĳto, from 1928, which had been relocated to ‘Het Park’. An extension to it was built by Van den Broek & Bakema, who also built the pavilion of Rotterdam. Inside the Neniĳto hall, now called the Ahoy’ hall, all kinds of enterprises presented themselves. Stands were designed by various architects and designers, like Gerrit Rietveld, Herman Haan, Rein Fledderus and Paul Schuitema. The latter, for example, designed a constructivist-like pavilion for *Betonfabriek De Meteeor*, with a small office room and a model of the port, to show the so-called Stelcon industrial floor panels that were used for the reconstruction of the port¹⁰⁷⁸. It might be no coincidence that Multifilm, the company that Schuitema was related to as a filmmaker, made the short documentary ROTTERDAM AHOY’ (1950). Media were used to promote and document it, and this material was used afterwards as well, for example in the Polygoon production THAT MOST LIVING CITY (1954, Walter Smith), which was commissioned by the municipality. Film functioned as an extension of the event, both in space and time.

Polygoon had already reported on the Ahoy’ two months before the opening. The report shows images of the port and mentions that its reconstruction is complete, and that it now functions at full capacity¹⁰⁷⁹. To celebrate it, the Ahoy’ is organised, and images are shown of the construction of the pavilions. Inside the Ahoy’ hall just stands a model of Rotterdam and the port, with prominent people watching it, among them Mayor P.J. Oud and Minister D.G.W. Spitzen (Traffic & Water). Polygoon also reported on the opening, with general shots of the port and the exhibition¹⁰⁸⁰.

While the exhibition was going on, several events took place that were related to it. A particular instance was the visit of the British Royal Navy, with its cruiser ‘Cleopatra’, torpedo-boat destroyers, submarines and a storage ship, which was also reported on by Polygoon¹⁰⁸¹. The reconstruction of the port was not only of crucial importance for the economy, but also in military terms, and the Dutch Royal Navy actively participated in the event. In the central hall it had its own stand, while in ‘Het Park’ its submarine service gave another presentation. It also organised a demonstration of its submarines in the Nieuwe Maas, which attracted a lot of attention¹⁰⁸². It also showed a film, produced by Polygoon-Profilti (1949), on its new aircraft carrier ‘Karel Doorman’, which had previously been in use by the British Royal Navy.

In order to show such films, the Ahoy’ had its own cinema¹⁰⁸³. Concurrently, special film screenings were organised in the nearby Institute for ‘Navigation and Aviation’ (*Instituut voor Scheepvaart en Luchtvaart*), which informed the spectators and motivated them to visit the exhibition itself as well¹⁰⁸⁴. In the evaluation of Ahoy’, the chairman of the organising committee, Alderman Van Tilburg, mentioned the film screenings explicitly for their contribution to the success of the event.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Van Eyck, 1950: 15. Original quote: ‘een nieuwe Renaissance, niet van de mens ten opzichte van zichzelf deze keer, maar van alle dingen in de ruimte’.

¹⁰⁷⁸ De Winter, 1988: 23 and 35.

¹⁰⁷⁹ ROTTERDAMSE HAVEN GEHEEL HERSTELD (Polygoon Neerlands Nieuws, 1950-17).

¹⁰⁸⁰ TENTOONSTELLING ROTTERDAM AHOY (Polygoon Neerlands Nieuws, 1950 – 50-26).

¹⁰⁸¹ BRITS VLOOTBEZOEK (Polygoon Neerlands Nieuws, rec.: 1950-07-13, 50-29).

¹⁰⁸² GAR: archive ‘Tentoonstellingen Ahoy’ 1950, E55, Floriade 1960’, toegangsnr. 315, inventarisnr. 14: ‘kranteknipsels en documentatie’, *knipselalbum* p86: ‘De 024 schudde zich als ’n natte poedel’ (1950-07-27) [unknown newspaper].

¹⁰⁸³ De Winter, 1988: 23; number 30 on the list of attractions.

¹⁰⁸⁴ GAR: archive ‘Tentoonstellingen Ahoy’ 1950, E55, Floriade 1960’, toegangsnr. 315, inventarisnr. 14: ‘kranteknipsels en documentatie’, green-grey cover includes a booklet by J. van Tilburg [= alderman for finances]; *Verslag van de tentoonstelling “Rotterdam Ahoy”*, Gemeente Rotterdam/Stichting Tentoonstelling 1950, October 1952. Page 7.

Although there seem to be no records left that mention the film programming related to Ahoy', a number of films could be considered here. First of all are the films made by the municipal *Fototechnische Dienst* of the department of Public Works. It was directly involved with the reconstruction of the port, which it documented at length through films such as ROTTERDAM HERSTELT ZIJN KADEMUREN ("Rotterdam reconstructs its embankments", 1947) and PALEN ("Poles", 1950). An indication of their screening at the Ahoy' is the fact that the latter was submitted to the national censor just before the opening (it was approved on 1950-06-10). It also seems likely that the municipal office for information and publicity took this occasion to show EN TOCH...ROTTERDAM (1950, Polygoon-Profilti), since it was an outstanding opportunity to inform the public about the reconstruction and to motivate them to participate in it. For similar reasons, and also because of the presence of the Marshall Plan agency ECA at the Ahoy', one can also think of other reconstruction films that dealt with the Netherlands in general¹⁰⁸⁵. Next to that, a link can be made with the various firms that presented themselves at the exhibition, like KLM and Philips, as well as locally oriented firms. Spido, for example, organised popular boat-trips through the port¹⁰⁸⁶, and for this purpose it commissioned the film TOCHT MET SPIDO ("Trip with Spido", 1950, Klaas van der Knoop).

In short, we might distinguish different kinds of films related to the Ahoy'. Firstly, there were the 'extensions of the event', as I call them, which promoted the event, including news reports and documentaries. Secondly, there were films that promoted the participating enterprises, which might be called 'intentions of the event'. They do not necessarily concern Rotterdam as such, but due to the interest in Rotterdam of most of the enterprises present there is nevertheless a direct connection with the city. Finally, we might add another kind of film: those of amateurs. Although 8mm film and equipment had already been a mass-consumption product since 1932, when Eastman Kodak had introduced the format, it only became widely popular after WWII. In fact, the Ahoy' is one of the first large events in Rotterdam that became subject of such recordings¹⁰⁸⁷. In one sense, these films were also 'extensions' of the event, as people took the images home, but they stayed in the private realm for decades¹⁰⁸⁸. Rather than calling them 'extensions', it would be better to call them 'retentions'. They were the hidden dimension of the spectator. They point to another end of the spectrum of media usage and the way the presented ideas were internalised through the active involvement with media.

An example of this is ROTTERDAM AHOY' (1950), by amateur filmmaker Ed Millecam. It shows diving demonstrations by the navy, demonstrations of technical schools, a model of the ship Willem Ruys that enters and leaves the port, and further illustrates performances by bands, and all kinds of entertainment, including rides in Ahoy's Lunapark at night. Since Millecam was a committed amateur, it is a well-made report, but that does not count for many others. In AHOY (1950, anon.), we see port models, the entrance, pavilions, a hand written sign saying 'trip' (*uitje*), a church and a bridge that are part of the exhibition, ships, games, visitors who relax at the terrace of a café, an ostrich, sails and a windmill. The images have no clear order, which gives an idea how visitors actually experienced the exhibition, with a strong focus on ordinary things, instead of the new landmarks and future plans of architecture, planning, commerce and industry.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Possibly the films EEN HUIS (1948, Henry James & Rob Out), WONINGNOOD (1950, Max de Haas), and SOMEWHERE TO LIVE (1950, Jacques Brunius).

¹⁰⁸⁶ 159,560 people made a boat-trip by Spido, see: GAR, archive 'Tentoonstellingen Ahoy' 1950, E55, Floriade 1960', toegangsnr. 315, inventarisnr. 14: 'kranteknipsels en documentatie', green-grey cover includes a booklet by J. van Tilburg [= alderman for finances]; Verslag van de tentoonstelling "Rotterdam Ahoy", Gemeente Rotterdam/Stichting Tentoonstelling 1950, October 1952. Page 8. See also in this archive: knipselalbum p100: 'Havenrondvaart zeer in trek' (1950-08-12), article from an unknown newspaper.

¹⁰⁸⁷ E.g. AHOY (a.o.) (1950, P. v/d Bosch); ROTTERDAM AHOY' (1950, E.F. Millecam), AHOY' (1950, anonymous).

¹⁰⁸⁸ It is only since the 1990s or so that such recordings have become publicly available, as historic documents within the city archive.

After the Ahoy' had taken place, the Ahoy' hall kept its function and more events took place, as different as an exhibition on the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright (1951, with J.J.P. Oud as its curator), a 'technishow' (1951), a table-tennis tournament (1953) and a 'hobby fair' (1954), which were all considered highly important. The opening of the hobby fair, for example, was even attended by Prime Minister Drees, Queen Juliana and Mayor Van Walsum – and many of these events were reported by Polygoon's news¹⁰⁸⁹. Besides that, annual fairs were organised, like the 'Femina' and the grocer's trade fair ROKA (*Rotterdamse Kruideniersbeurs*)¹⁰⁹⁰. In 1954, filmmaker Jan Schaper made a documentary about that fair (i.e. ROKA-FILM¹⁰⁹¹), which was his very first film. It was shown at different meetings of grocers' organisations, and it was highly appreciated by them. In half an hour, it shows the preparations and setting up of 170 stands, the activities that took place and the people involved.

Through the various events that were accommodated at the Ahoy', it had not only a lasting effect on the city's development, in terms of spin-off, but also in an immediate way, for its heritage as a concrete accommodation for the urban culture at large. This would culminate in two other big manifestations, using the same halls, modifying them, and adding several new ones, which was the case with the E55 and the Floriade (1960).

§ 3. E55

The next major event was the *Nationale Energie Manifestatie* or *Energie 1955*, which was simply called 'E55'. It took place from the 18th of May, when it was opened by the Queen, until the 3rd of September 1955. During this period of exactly one hundred days, more than three million people visited the exhibition. As summarised in an official *communiqué* that was held afterwards¹⁰⁹², the aim of the exhibition had been to show the nation and the world the results of the energy of the Dutch people since 1945. The E55 exhibited the achievements of commerce, industry, scientific research, and education, to set an inspiring example for the youth.

The E55, organised by Jacques Kleiboer, was the largest exhibition ever organised in the Netherlands. On a lot of 37 hectares, situated between the city centre and the Nieuwe Maas, including 'Het Park', forty large steel-and-glass pavilions were built, next to various other constructions and installations, under supervision of the architects Van den Broek & Bakema. The design of the exhibition was based on two premises: the organic coherence of distinguished spatial elements together with the human activity taking place in it¹⁰⁹³. Moreover, various pavilions were especially dedicated to social issues, like public health, the protection of workers, and social welfare. The pavilion of the latter was called "Social Flashes" (*Sociale Flitsen*, design: Strijbosch & Crouwel)¹⁰⁹⁴.

The E55 was documented in detail, on the request of Kleiboer, through a one-hour (silent) colour film, called E55¹⁰⁹⁵. It was made by architect Herman Haan, who had also been involved with the Ahoy'¹⁰⁹⁶, and his wife Hansje Haan-Fischer. It is a lively and virtually complete tour through the exhibition, characterised by outstanding cinematography. Rather than summing up all the presentations, the film shows how the exhibition was organised and

¹⁰⁸⁹ But not on Frank Lloyd Wright. For information on this exhibition, with J.J.P. Oud as its curator, see: Taverne e.a., 2001: 471.

¹⁰⁹⁰ An example of a report on the latter is JOURNAAL, NTS, 1959-09-25.

¹⁰⁹¹ Information is based upon the newspaper article 'Premiere Roka-Film een groot succes; vele tevreden gezichten op de jaarlijkse standhoudersvergadering', from an unknown source (probably a grocer's magazine), April 1954, personal archive Jan Schaper.

¹⁰⁹² What follows is based upon the official *communiqué* given by the organisational board after the event was finished.

¹⁰⁹³ De Winter, 1988: 43.

¹⁰⁹⁴ It included telephone booths with sound recordings of Prime Minister Willem Drees (De Winter, 1988: 47).

¹⁰⁹⁵ After the event was finished, the film was handed over to the city archive (GAR) by Jacques Kleiboer himself.

¹⁰⁹⁶ For the Ahoy' he designed various stands, of which he even used materials afterwards to build his own house at the Kralingseweg – De Winter, 1988: 35 (60).

experienced, while it also introduces some of the key figures behind the scenes¹⁰⁹⁷. In fact, Haan and Haan-Fischer were in close connection to many of the architects, designers and artists involved (a.o. Bakema, Bakema-Van Borssum Waalkes, Rietveld, Niegeman-Brand, Appel and Constant).

In his book on events in Rotterdam, Peter de Winter (1988: 11) has emphasised the aim of the E55 (like that of the Ahoy'), to 'integrate as many sectors of human activity as possible', and to facilitate cross-disciplinary collaborations. The E55 was another test-case for new approaches within design and architecture, and as such it played a role, especially through the work of Bakema (as a member of Team X), to set a new agenda for the modern movement¹⁰⁹⁸. Bakema himself designed the entrance of the E55, which encompassed a long steel construction with a large canvas roof. In front of it, the artist Constant Nieuwenhuys built the spatial 'energy logo'. More than six meters high, made of steel, it consisted of three vertical triangles, with spheres inside, which symbolised cosmos, science and trade. Constant had a large share in the event, for which he also made a (temporary) monument for the reconstruction that was called 'Symbol for Dutch Will and Work', which consisted of large rectangular shapes, and another monument, to symbolise the last century of the Netherlands¹⁰⁹⁹.

The central part of the exhibition was a complex of halls. The main one was the 'Energiehal' (arch. Van den Broek & Bakema), with an exhibition about 'water as friend and enemy of the Netherlands'. Attention was paid to the Dutch ports and their connections with the hinterland, shipbuilding and the fight against floods, with presentations of models of the Zuiderzeewerken and the Deltaplan. Next to the Energiehal were the 'National Pavilion' (arch. Rietveld), and the former Ahoy' hall (1950), which was dedicated to the theme of 'building and living'. It showed the results of the previous ten years of reconstruction and how planners imagined the 'city of the future', through renewal and city extensions. Located behind the halls was one of the landmarks of the manifestation, the Aeolusmast by artist Arie Jansma; with a height of about 40 metres, it moved quietly in the wind, to symbolise natural energy and the way people make use of it¹¹⁰⁰. The E55 also included working sites, with the actual construction of a ship, the construction of a house, a working oil-installation, and the loading and unloading of ships in the port, as well as simulations of several industrial processes and manipulations.

The entrance was connected to Het Park through 'the bridge of knowledge', designed by Paul Schuitema, and a chair lift. Located in 'Het Park' were pavilions of the different Dutch provinces, as well as presentations on agriculture and food production, which showed traditional farmhouses next to modern, fully industrialised ones. In Het Park one could also find the 'entertainment city' *Unifesti*, with daily performances of music, dance and cabaret, the E55 television studio, which was a major attraction that will be elaborated on shortly, and the 'Pavilion of Space Travel', showing the future possibilities of aerospace and 'interplanetary traffic'. This science-fiction complex was designed by the architect Jaap Bakema in collaboration with the artist Karel Appel. Next to it was a gigantic turning crane with two arms, each holding a capsule to lift visitors high into the air. In front of the pavilion, in the middle of a lunar landscape, was another sculpture by Constant, which consisted of curved steel strips. As a whole this 'artificial moon' did not only have a futuristic appearance, but it was also a playful and fantastic environment. Along the Nieuwe Maas, were presentations related to the port and themes such as maritime commerce, emigration and the navy.

¹⁰⁹⁷ A.o. J.A.C. Tillema, director of Gemeentewerken; architect Jaap Bakema; organiser Jacques Kleiboer; K.P. van der Mandele, one of the initiators; the artist Karel Appel a.o.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Team X prepared the influential tenth CIAM congress (1956), which eventually resulted in dissolving CIAM in Otterloo in 1959, where Herman Haan was present as well (presenting the results of an expedition to Africa and advocated an architecture based on the 'human habitat'). Besides contributions to the E55 by members of CIAM (through De 8 & Opbouw), there was also a special presentation by Opbouw (De Winter, 1988: 46).

¹⁰⁹⁹ 'Symbool voor Neerlands Wil en Werk', De Winter, 1988: 52, nr. 107.

¹¹⁰⁰ Cf. Van der Struijs, 2006: 1.

Whereas the film by Haan and Haan-Fischer exemplifies the memory function of cinema, the experiment with commercial television exemplifies that of oscillation. It had been the intention of the E55, and Philips, which had initiated the associated foundation TV55, to get the Dutch people acquainted with the new medium¹¹⁰¹. The E55 brought television to the attention of a broad public¹¹⁰². About three hundred television monitors were installed at the exhibition area, which were provided by Philips and its Rotterdam based subsidiary Erres, while people could also visit the TV55 television studio. Those in Rotterdam who had already their own television set could receive the programmes at home too. In this way, a shop like ‘Radio Modern’ (Schiedamseweg) had a television set in its shop window that showed the programmes of TV55¹¹⁰³.

The presentation of television at the E55 was initially welcomed by the national public broadcasting station NTS, until they learnt about the plans for commercial broadcasting, because NTS-secretary Wim Rengelink feared ‘American situations’¹¹⁰⁴. In the end, however, the E55 got its permission. Philips just wanted to establish the position of television as a medium, with no further plans for commercial broadcasting, and the NTS would eventually profit from it too. The NTS collaborated only marginally, and TV55 became responsible instead. Jo Brandel became its managing director and Erik de Vries its programme director; both of them had been employees of Philips in the past. Brandel, who then worked as a film and television producer in Paris, had previously been the president of Philips in France. Since the early 1930s, De Vries had worked for Philips on the development of television, and he had also been involved with the first stage of national broadcasting, in Bussum¹¹⁰⁵.

De Vries was assisted by Ansje Swinkels, who had previously worked for Marten Toonder’s film studio. Every ‘matinee’ began with a test image, a clock, programme announcements, a fanfare, and presenter Mies Bouwman introducing the performances of different artists¹¹⁰⁶. It marked the beginning of Bouwman’s long career as a television presenter. Together they made twelve programmes per day, and each of them was concluded by a block of commercials and a ‘television news service’ (*televisie nieuwsdienst*), regarding activities related to the E55, which was provided by the newspapers *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* and the *Algemeen Dagblad* – while *Het Vrije Volk* issued a daily E55-paper¹¹⁰⁷. This is in itself an instance of oscillation between different media, and a remarkable instance of *Medienverbund*; at the end the NRC even awarded De Vries a special ‘medal of honour’ for his work at the E55¹¹⁰⁸.

The chief operator of TV55 was filmmaker Theo van Haren Noman, who worked together with a group of cameramen, including Ruud Herblot and Jan Schaper¹¹⁰⁹. Recording and

¹¹⁰¹ The first television programme in the Netherlands (DE TOVERSPIEGEL, NTS), was broadcast on 1951-10-02. At that time, about 400 television sets existed in the Netherlands. Two weeks later (1951-10-16), KRO television showed its first programme, presented by Mies Bouwman, which was shown in Rotterdam on three television monitors that were installed on a van in front of the Schouwburg, for an audience of a hundreds of people. The presentation of television in Rotterdam was reported by KRO-radio ‘Eerste televisieuitzending KRO’ (1951-10-16, Leo Pagano, Paul de Waart), B&G: id 18814, 9’59”, ¼ inch tape nr. HA313. It was a direct promotion for the new medium (Pagano: “We kunnen concluderen dat de publieke belangstelling steeds groter wordt – Nog niet in actieve koopkracht omgezet. Nederlanders kijken eerst de kat uit de boom – Maar u kunt beter thuis kijken dan op deze parkeerplaats met koude voeten staan te kijken”).

¹¹⁰² See: Akkermans, 1998: 100.

¹¹⁰³ Van der Struijs, 2006: 1.

¹¹⁰⁴ According to Akkermans, 1998: 97.

¹¹⁰⁵ See: ‘Erik de Vries, uitgebreide biografie’, 2004-03-25; www.beeldengeluid.nl

¹¹⁰⁶ E.g. Piet Muyselaar, Cees de Lange, Wim Kan, Jan de Cler, Joop Geesink.

¹¹⁰⁷ Willem Duys was one of its journalists. He would later become a well-known television presenter (De Winter, 1988: 44).

¹¹⁰⁸ Akkermans, 1998: 99.

¹¹⁰⁹ Van Haren Noman is mentioned by Akkermans (1998: 98); Herblot is mentioned by Burcksen (personal communication, 2007-05-22) and Schaper is mentioned in a letter of Stichting Televisie ‘55 to Jan Schaper (1955-04-06); personal archive Jan Schaper.

broadcasting took place in a special studio (1014m²), which was designed for this purpose by the architects Van den Broek & Bakema. It was open to the public. The technical equipment of the studio was provided by Philips, except for the three cameras that were made by RCA. Part of the television programming were quizzes and games, like the PHILIPS ELECTRONISCHE TIENKAMP (“Philips Electronic Decathlon”)¹¹¹⁰, presented by Mies Bouwman, which were combined with commercials (e.g. PHILIPS SUPER M, PHILIPS RADIO, PHILIPS KOFFIEMOLEN)¹¹¹¹. They neatly combined with the exhibitions in the pavilions (i.e. another instance of ‘oscillation’). Next to the studio recordings, one also made reports of the activities across the E55 exhibition. For that purpose, the crew members drove around with a mobile studio unit – an especially furnished Citroën HY bus.

Among the films shown were informative films, documentaries and commercials. Several shorts were made by Louis van Gasteren, including a commercial and six informative films about ‘electro acid’, for which he founded the company ‘Telespot’ that existed only for the E55¹¹¹². One of the major film companies that contributed to the programme was Polygoon, whose director, Joop Landré, was both a member of the TV55 programming committee and a member of the E55 publicity committee¹¹¹³. First of all, Polygoon paid attention to the manifestation through newsreels, shot by cameraman Joop Burcksen¹¹¹⁴. The first of three reports shows the construction of the exhibition and other preparations. It was followed by a report of the opening and of activities that took place a few weeks later¹¹¹⁵.

Besides news reports, Polygoon took part in the production of various films, shows and commercials. Most of them were made by Burcksen too¹¹¹⁶. One of the most striking films presented at the E55, according to various reviews, was his short EEN WANDELING DOOR ROTTERDAM (“A walk through Rotterdam”), which promoted the city and its businesses. A couple in love, played by Mies Bouwman and Kees Brusse, makes an excursion through the utterly modern, shining and attractive city, to end up at cinema Lumière. In the darkness the cinema’s name lights up in neon, emphasizing visually what it says: Lumière. It becomes an abstract play of light and graphics in a film referring to the origins of film. The narrator says:

And then it was time to go to Lumière, which is a credit to its name at night, when Lumière is indeed a fairy-tale of light. The most beautiful films from the world are shown here. You can now have a look yourself at which film runs this week.¹¹¹⁷

The film embodies the encounter between television (TV55) and film (Polygoon), while it addressed the importance of cinema (Lumière), as an attraction to visit and to experience the city, which the film itself reflects as well. For the E55 Burcksen also made separate promotional films for the cinemas ‘Lumière’ and ‘Thalia’, as well as the ‘Groothandelsgebouw’.

For Philips the event was a success: the E55 caused a boom in the sales of television sets. Spectators, however, wanted a continuation of commercial television, according to a NIPO-

¹¹¹⁰ De Winter, 1988: 77.

¹¹¹¹ These commercials are part of the Philips collection of the Nederlands Film Museum (see: ‘Philips’ in filmography). Another film that might have been shown here too is PHILIPS IN NEDERLAND (1955), produced by Polygram Films.

¹¹¹² Afterwards he did not continue the productions of commercials. It makes them unique in his oeuvre, but unfortunately they have been lost – information by Van Gasteren in a conversation with the author, 2003-10-07.

¹¹¹³ Pp93/98, *Catalogus E55*, Rotterdam: Drukkerij Trio-Hillegersberg, 1955.

¹¹¹⁴ Polygoon Neerlands Nieuws, 1955 (55-07) ‘De Opbouw van De E55’; (55-21) ‘HM Koningin Juliana Opent E55’; (55-27) ‘E55 Manifestatie van Nederlands Energie’.

¹¹¹⁵ Resp. Polygoon Neerlands Nieuws 1955-07, 1955-21, 1955-27.

¹¹¹⁶ For example, a commercial for the Dutch paper industry.

¹¹¹⁷ Original quote: Toen was ’t tijd om naar Lumière te gaan, dat zijn naam ’s avonds wel eer aandoet. Want Lumière is dan inderdaad een sprookje van licht. De mooiste films uit de wereldproductie worden hier getoond. U kunt trouwens nu zelf zien welke er deze week draait.

survey¹¹¹⁸. As television director and historian Leo Akkermans (1998) has pointed out, journalists were critical of this claim. Although the experiment of commercial television had no direct follow up, a few years later, TV55 director Jo Brandel became the director of the commercial television pirate TV Noordzee of the *Reclame Exploitatie Maatschappij*. Polygoon director Joop Landré would be its programme adviser, and subsequently the director of television station TROS that emerged out of it. In this way TV55 exercised its influence on the course of Dutch television, alongside its impact on film production in Rotterdam and the image of the modern city.

§ 4. events in perspective

The events in Rotterdam offered frames for an urban culture at large, since they dealt with aspects of daily life – both public and private, work and leisure, as well as commerce and industry, through design, architecture, art, media, performances and games. According to De Winter, ‘young designers and artists like Karel Appel, Wim Crowel and Constant Nieuwenhuys got a chance to explore new ways to experiment with a new visual language, which would resonate for a long time in many fields after the different events had taken place’¹¹¹⁹. Appel, for example, produced a large art work of glass and concrete at the Hofplein Theatre in the ‘Technikon’ building (1955-1970, Hugh Maaskant)¹¹²⁰. Crowel would create various projects, such as a design for the Femina fair¹¹²¹. Constant elaborated on the E55 through his utopian project New Babylon (1956-1974), which is of special interest here.

New Babylon became an important reference within the history of Dutch architecture and urbanism¹¹²². His plan consisted of one large urban network, in the form of connected sectors built over existing cities, including Amsterdam and Rotterdam, as well as cities abroad. This overall ‘city’ was based on automation and information technologies that enabled leisure, play, mobility and adventure, which created a dynamic and temporal environment. Sectors could be modified accordingly, because of industrially fabricated building elements, not unlike those of the E55¹¹²³. In order to express the dynamic character, Constant made moving models, which Hy Hirsh used for the film *GYROMORPHOSIS* (1958)¹¹²⁴. Its movement was still ‘mechanical’, but this was a first step. Electronic machines would do the work humans used to do, for people to concentrate on challenging activities. Work and leisure would be no longer separated, but interwoven – not ‘alienating’, but ‘liberating’, as a matter of self-development. Constant spoke of the *homo ludens* – the playing human, after Johan Huizinga. The inhabitants of New Babylon would live like nomads, being commuters and tourists at the same time. It promised a new human interaction and experience; the environment and society would be one, through a kind of utopian *Medienverbund*. Constant called this ‘unitary urbanism’, as explained in a VPRO television

¹¹¹⁸ Akkermans, 1998: 99.

¹¹¹⁹ Original quote (De Winter, 1988: 11): ‘Jonge ontwerpers en kunstenaars als Karel Appel, Wim Crowel en Constant Nieuwenhuys, kregen een kans om nieuwe wegen in te slaan en te experimenteren met een andere beedtaal, die nog lang na afloop van de verschillende festivals op vele gebieden zou doorklinken.’

¹¹²⁰ Appel got involved with the project around 1962, see: Emous, 1970: 13.

¹¹²¹ Nicolai-Chaillet, 1960.

¹¹²² See: Taverne, 1983: 30/40-43; Groenendijk & Vollaard, 1998: 26; Wigley, 1998; Heynen, 1999: 151.

¹¹²³ Standardised elements were applied through the concept of ‘core elements’, to which smaller elements were attached (cf. De Winter, 1988: 43).

¹¹²⁴ Different sources provide different dates. I follow Wigley, 1998: 238. About this film Hirsh wrote: ‘*Gyromorphosis* strives to bring into actuality the inherent kinetic qualities seen in the construction-sculpture of Constant Nieuwenhuys of Amsterdam. To realise this aim I have put into motion, one by one, pieces of this sculpture and, with colored lighting, filmed them in various detail, overlaying the images on the film as they appear and disappear. In this way I have hoped to produce sensations of acceleration and suspension which are suggested to me by the sculpture itself.’ Hy Hirsh, from ‘Articulated Light programme notes’, www.iotacenter.org/Hirsh/

program¹¹²⁵. ‘The project radicalizes and idealizes the transitory aspects of the experience of modernity’, as Heynen has said (1999: 151-152).

New Babylon is actually an amplification of the E55, regarding its premises and concept, the connections it established, and its design. Constant’s models are akin to Bakema’s plan and designs for the entrance composition, the complex of connected halls, and the pavilion of space travel, among others¹¹²⁶. In terms of networks, the E55 resulted from a series of events, including travelling exhibitions that showed the reconstruction plans for Rotterdam in various European cities. Alternatively, Bakema contributed to various other manifestations that created a ‘network of events’; in 1957 he produced the Dutch part of the architecture exhibition ‘Interbau’ in Berlin (1957), and with Boks and Rietveld he designed the Dutch pavilion at the World Exhibition in Brussels (1958)¹¹²⁷. A similar observation can be made, for example, of Philips, which was present at many large events. It is of particular interest since it was largely involved with electronic automation, which it promoted through electronic means, such as the television game PHILIPS ELECTRONIC DECATHLON. This followed a tradition, including the annual Femina fair, since 1948, which presented also household innovations¹¹²⁸.

During the war the *Nederlandsche Vrouwen Electriciteits Vereniging* (“Dutch Women Electricity Association”) had already commissioned the promotional film ELECTRO BLIJSPEL (“Electro Comedy”, 1942, J.S. van de Nieuwendijk). Six years later, the same director made HET ELECTRISCH HUIS (“The Electric House”). Its futuristic message contradicts the medium: a silent film with intertitles. The first titles say: ‘Your grandmother, 50 years ago, did not cycle, did not practice sports, moved with a horse-boat, and used petrol light. Many things that your grandchild will find indispensable in the future [i.e. 2000] already exist now’¹¹²⁹. There is a map of a modern bungalow, and subsequently the bright façade of the house, recorded at night. Two young ladies approach it and ring the electric door bell. The hostess picks up a phone and opens the door by a remote control. The ladies get a tour through the house, and so does the spectator. It is a show of all kinds of electronic equipment: a fridge, boilers, lamps under the beds that are ‘practical when taking care of children and ill people’, and heated cabinets for warm clothes. The women suddenly get a glimpse of a man shaving himself, and move quickly on to a greenhouse, as part of the living, which ‘brings atmosphere’. At the end they walk around like photographers, measuring the light with ‘luxmeters’, to adjust the light in order to read.

Films with a similar message would also be made afterwards. An example is the Polygoon production VOLG DIE VROUW (“Follow that woman”, 1959), which was commissioned by the “Association of Operators of Electricity Companies in the Netherlands” and directed by Kees Brusse. As an actor Brusse had been present at the E55, for his role in the Polygoon film EEN WANDELING DOOR ROTTERDAM. In ‘Follow that Woman’ he played the role of a man who does not trust his wife (played by Brusse’s wife Mieke Verstraete), since she is only doing pleasant things (like going to the movies). Therefore he asks a detective (played by Bueno de Mesquita), to follow her. The film opens in film-noir style, full of suspense, but soon it develops into slapstick. The detective must hide himself in the most unlikely places, in the fridge, which opportunity he uses to have a lunch, and in a centrifuge, where he gets laundry on his head and is centrifuged. The man makes a sound of bubbles and when he gets out, he still tolls around, which

¹¹²⁵ ATELIERBEZOEK; MET SIMON VINKENOOG NAAR HET NIEUW BABYLON VAN CONSTANT (Simon Vinkenoog, VPRO television 1962-04-02); cf. OPENBAAR KUNSTBEZIT; CONSTANT, EEN KUNSTENAAR VAN ONZE TIJD (Jan Venema, NTS 1965-07-12).

¹¹²⁶ His models resemble also the sculptures of the Russian constructivist Naum Gabo, who drew at that time one of his major works, ‘Het Ding’ (1954-1957), for the Bijenkorf departmentstore in Rotterdam, see: Brinkman, 2002: 138-139.

¹¹²⁷ The Dutch pavilion was 25,000m²; together with those of France, USA and USSR it was one of the largest.

¹¹²⁸ Newsreels on this fair, which would take place at Ahoy’ after 1950, were made on a regular basis since 1959: NTS JOURNAAL, 1959-09-25 (on the 12th Femina); following edition were consequently reported by the NTS as well.

¹¹²⁹ Intertitles; original quote: ‘Uw grootmoeder 50 jaar geleden fietste niet, deed niet aan sport, zat in de trekschuit en had petroleumlicht. Toch gebruikte men de vélocipède, werd reeds getennist, bestond de stoommachine en kende men gaslicht. Veel van wat Uw kleindochter te zijner tijd als onmisbaar zal beschouwen, bestaat ook thans.’

is accompanied by fast jazz music. He understands finally that the woman has so much spare time because she has furnished her modern apartment – in a modern high-rise housing block – with all kinds of electric household equipment. The housewife became the *homo ludens par excellence*.

The reconstruction era is generally considered as a no-nonsense period. Things had to be useful, functional and sober. At the same time one was concerned with leisure, which made up the complementary factor. In this way we can also understand other examples of fictionalised promotional films, such as *DRIE DAGEN MET MONICA* (1956, Wil van Es), which was initially conceived for the E55. The practical purposes of such films allowed for cinematic play, which suggested a promising future that provided a reason for today's tasks. It was reinforced by other media, like television, and also amateur film, like recordings of one's visit to the E55.

By 1960, the reconstruction had entered its last stage. Hence the character of the large events also changed. The next one, which was the Floriade (1960), was devoted to floriculture and horticulture. Although it was all about enjoying natural beauty, this show of growth and blossoming had its economic reasons too, to give an impulse to the important and proud Dutch industry of horticulture. Moreover, Dutch agriculture needed to be modernised, which was stimulated by showing the possible results of it.

The Floriade was the last event out of three held in Het Park, and from this event to permanent verdure in this park was a small step. The Floriade became institutionalised within the national context as a quintannual event, to be organised in different places in the Netherlands. In 1967 the Ahoy' hall was finally removed from 'Het Park' and relocated to the Heliport terrain where it was used, among others, for a flower exhibition called 'Lentiade' (*lente* = spring)¹¹³⁰. The so-called 'Energiehal' was relocated to an area close to the original Nenijs location. It stayed there for about forty years, until it had to make space for an extension of Blijdorp Zoo. The urban culture had spread and enlarged itself; the city had gradually incorporated the complementary dimension of leisure and entertainment, in order to animate the city.

¹¹³⁰ The event was opened by Mayor Thomassen on the 15th of March 1967; impressions of the exhibition are to be seen in the film report *LENTIADE* (1967, Henk Vrijmoet).