Mothering the post-industrial city: Family and gender in urban re-generation

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CHAPTER II
RE-GENERATION AND URBAN GENDER BENDING
A reassuring story? From the modernist to the post-industrial

“There is a reassuring story being told in the world today. Through it many people, undisturbed and baffled by the ever-expanding, increasingly destructive powers of man, have regained their belief in the future, in the ultimate triumph of good over evil. They have heard it from friends, they have read it in the newspapers, they have listened to it being related on the wireless. The lucky ones among them have seen it with their own eyes. For it is a story that is being told in deeds rather than in words. It is the story of Rotterdam, the city where man has rebuilt what man had destroyed. Nay, more than that. Both the port and the city have risen again, more efficient and more beautiful than they ever were before. Thus Rotterdam has become, as it says on its coat of arms, stronger through struggle. There is not a shadow of doubt about that.” (Rotterdam PR, 1955: 3, original in English)

Today, dystopian images or Rotterdam often overshadow such “reassuring” stories. The reassuring message in the above quote is the opening paragraph of a 1955 booklet of the Rotterdam Public Relations Office. It shows a determination to overcome the destruction of the World War II bombings and a utopian, distinctly modern and modernist view of the future of Rotterdam. The booklet looks back at the “damage defying description” that was the result of the Nazi bombing of the city centre in May 1940. Almost the entire centre was burnt out in the days after the bombing and the harbour, too, was hit hard. Famously, modernist planners seized the opportunity to not rebuild, but build anew. Modern roads for automobiles and skyscrapers had been planned and build in the decades before the war, but the empty space that was the result of destruction provided a planners’ carte blanch (Van Ulzen, 2007).

The 1955 booklet sings the praises of this new, modern, healthy, forward-looking city that rose out of the “unbroken spirit” of Rotterdammers.

“In spite of all the hardships, the job (of cleaning up after the bombing, MvdB) was finished before the end of the year and the centre of Rotterdam (...) had by then become one vast open space ready for future building.” (...) “whatever the new city centre was going to be and look like, (Rotterdammers) realised that good results could be achieved only if an all-embracing plan were drawn up for the entire area.”(8).

The “all-embracing plan” included high-rise, space for automobiles and modern garden cities. In the booklet, pictures of pre-war slums are followed by the much “healthier” dream of “bright”
communal gardens. “Light” and “air” were the magic words of the future in 1955. Contrasting the “higgledy-piggledy place, with buildings designed and erected in a haphazard manner” was the “spacious, airy complex of carefully zoned buildings designed for a city devoted to commerce and industry”. (31). For these purposes, the city’s functions were separated into grouped spaces and collective buildings.

This modernist dream of the forties, fifties and sixties is now the city’s nightmare. The zoning of work and shopping areas, the building of residential areas outside of the city centre, the motor ways dissecting the city: all are results of the efforts of post-war planners and eyesores for the current administration and its planners. Today’s regeneration of Rotterdam consists of precisely the departure of these ideals and materialised spaces. Rotterdam now wants to mix urban functions instead of separating them and build for the post-industrial future. Precisely the departure of the industrial and modern character that was the object of praise in the 1955 promotional book is now its goal.

In the 1955 promotional booklet, gender surfaces as an important ingredient when it emphasises the role of housewives on Rotterdam’s reconstruction.
“Many think it was the men who built the new centre of Rotterdam. That is not true. It was really the women, the housewives, who reinvested Rotterdam with its specific character, its personal touch. The men were bold enough to conceive a grand plan for its reconstruction. (...) However, once the big office blocks headed by the new bank buildings had been completed, it was found that the typical atmosphere of a city centre had not yet been created. That did not make itself felt until more shops had been built. The big department stores, the attractive fashion stores, and especially the enchanting variety of smaller shops have drawn the shopping public – which, after all, is predominantly female – back to the city centre. With them the old bustle returned to the centre of a city from which it had been absent so long.” (44)

In this excerpt, a clear gendered division of labour appears: the men designed the material city and the women (or, rather “housewives”) graced this new and modern city with their presence and “personal touch”. They did so, the excerpt says, by going shopping. This narrative and version of events now seems very dated. We will not likely find this particular romantic view of “housewives” and their “rational” men in today’s texts and images of Rotterdam. But as I will show in this chapter, when analysing contemporary plans and representations of the city, striking continuities appear alongside clear departures from this industrial past. The aims for change in Rotterdam work in a similar way as a kaleidoscope. A kaleidoscope uses mirrors to produce different patterns of imagery, maintaining some elements and changing some each time you twist the tube. The ambition is to reshuffle aspects of the image of Rotterdam, the actual physical realities and the population in a way that allows the city to become something new and to become a success.

In this chapter, I analyse Rotterdam’s aims for change and some actual practices that are employed to bring about the desired success. First, I look at the logics used in policy to understand the current economic situation of the city of Rotterdam. I look at common analyses of causes of and solutions to current economic troubles and the way in which Rotterdam can be compared to other former industrial port cities such as Marseille in France, and Antwerp in Belgium. Then I analyse three cases of policy interventions that are meant to bring about the desired change for Rotterdam: 1) a case of city marketing, 2) a case of urban planning and 3) two cases of revanchist intervention in urban poor areas. My choice for these cases is strategic; the materials I used for these analyses can be considered “strategic research materials” (Merton, 1987). That is to say that these materials teach us something about the logics of city marketing, planning and policy in a city aiming to de-industrialise.
Departing from an urban industrial economy

However much Rotterdam celebrates its harbour and related industries, there is also a large consensus among economists, policy makers, politicians and administrators that Rotterdam needs to depart its industrial past if it is going to be an economically successful city in the future (Van der Waal & Burgers, 2011; Van der Waal, 2009; Kloosterman & Trip, 2004). This consensus is largely informed by the need to create employment. The Rotterdam economy boomed from the 1950s to 1973 because of the harbour, but since then, the economy has been struggling. And, as we know now, Rotterdam is not alone in this predicament. Other large industrial cities such as Antwerp, Liverpool, Marseille and Hamburg and have had to deal with similar hardships. It seems that precisely the cities that were booming during the decades of industrial expansion in the West, have the hardest time adjusting to new global economic situations and interurban competition (Van der Waal, 2009; Van der Waal & Burgers, 2011; Mangen, 2004).

Since 1973, Rotterdam’s unemployment figures grew tremendously and by the end of the 1990s, Rotterdam was the city with the highest unemployment in the Netherlands. Much has been said about this by Dutch (urban) sociologists, geographers and economists and most in comparison to Amsterdam, the Dutch capital and a much more successful post-industrial city. What I think is most important to recount from these studies here, is that today, it seems that the Amsterdam economy is creating more jobs in service sector employment - for both higher and lower educated workers – than Rotterdam and is doing this faster. Because of this, Burgers and Musterd (2002; see also Van der Waal, 2010) have argued that Saskia Sassen’s famous polarisation model (the idea that in global cities the amount of higher-earning and higher-educated jobs grows, resulting in a higher demand for lower educated jobs in the service sector) fits the Amsterdam job market quite well, while the Rotterdam economy seems to be characterised by a mismatch: the large numbers of lower educated inhabitants cannot find jobs because the jobs that are created are higher professional ones. Van der Waal & Burgers (2009) and Burgers & Musterd (2002) thus suggest that international competition has led to a labour market composition in Rotterdam that provides jobs for the higher-educated in banking, business and for professionals while leaving the lower educated unemployed because their sets of skills are no longer needed in the new economy. Why exactly globalisation and economic restructuring affects Rotterdam in such a different way than Amsterdam remains somewhat an unanswered question. It seems, though, that at least two factors play a role: 1) the relative diversity in Amsterdam’s economy when compared to Rotterdam’s assures Amsterdam of more economic flexibility and 2) Rotterdam’s new vacancies for higher-educated personnel are filled by people living in the vicinity of Rotterdam and not by actual Rotterdam inhabitants. The latter would hypothetically create a demand for services within the city and thus a polarised job market with job creation for the lower educated as well.
But it seems that for Rotterdam, this effect is not realised. Following the above problem analyses, administrators and politicians in Rotterdam develop strategies to narrow the gap between the unemployed and the job market. Two categories of strategies are especially important to the analysis of the parenting guidance programmes that are the central object of this thesis: 1) the enhancement of the attractiveness of the city for business and investment, 2) investments in the knowledge and skills of the Rotterdam population. The first has to do with the idea that an attractive urban space will attract visitors, investment and inhabitants (see Van den Berg, 2012). The idea that “quality of space” will lead to economic growth is based on the idea that economic restructuring has resulted in more or less footloose businesses. Service sector companies are far less tied to place than industrial businesses were in the past. In the past decades, this resulted in a market inversion (Hernes & Selvik, 1981 in Burgers, 2006): businesses are not competing for locations anymore. Instead, locations are competing for business. In the very influential theories of Richard Florida, a place is considered attractive if the “creative class” resides there. This “creative class” (cf. Florida, 2002), including artists, but also bankers, accountants and architects, is the most desired group of inhabitants today and in today’s thinking about urban governing, creativity is most important in attracting investors as well. A dominant idea in place marketing today is thus that the attraction of a creative class will lead to an interesting cultural climate that will attract investors, and will consequently lead to job growth and revenue throughout the economy. The second category of strategies of Rotterdam to depart the industrial past is the enhancement of the skills of the population in the hope of closing the gap between the skills asked in the job market and the relatively low education levels of Rotterdammers. Strategies that fit this category include programmes to end early school leaving, parent involvement programmes for schools (see Van den Berg & Van Reekum, 2011), and some of the parenting guidance programmes that I have researched for this thesis.

Other ship-to-chip-cities: Marseille and Antwerp as entrepreneurs
Rotterdam is not alone in its aims to change from a “ship to a chip city” (the metaphor is Dangschat & Ossenbrügge’s, 1990). Cities like Antwerp, Genua, Liverpool, Hamburg and Marseille are other European examples of such changing urban port economies. What these cities have in common is not just their similar histories, but also strategies to depart these. They became what David Harvey has called “entrepreneurial” (1989). Especially former industrial cities met severe economic challenges in the 1970s, as manufacturing, steel and other industries rationalised and moved their production across the world. Pittsburgh, New York and Glasgow are early examples of cities where governors saw themselves forced to behave like entrepreneurs and “place market” their city as a product to attract new investors and compete with other urban areas for new
economic opportunities. US cities were the first to develop these strategies because they were more dependent on their local tax base and, thus, on their local economies (Ward, 1998: 46). The “I ♥ New York” campaign is the first famous example of city boosting and Boston and Baltimore led the way in developing strategies to change their cities into consumption places. These formulas have been highly influential in the development of entrepreneurial strategies elsewhere from the 1980s on (Ward, 1998). Later on in this chapter, I argue that certain Rotterdam policies can be seen as forms of urban entrepreneurialism, but first I would like to contextualise the case of Rotterdam with two short explorations of other ship-to-chip cities: Marseille and Antwerp.

Marseille is in some ways strikingly similar to Rotterdam. Like Rotterdam, Marseille is the second city of the country, following only Paris. With 860,000 inhabitants it is larger, but still relatively comparable in size to Rotterdam and like Rotterdam, Marseille has seen tremendous economic decline over the past decades resulting in a range of contemporary urban problems. In the years between 1960 and 1990, Marseille lost half of its industrial jobs (Mangen, 2004). This loss of employment was hardly compensated in the tertiary sector. Actual compensation came almost solely from jobs in the public sector (Mangen, 2004). Coupled with ethnic tensions that became apparent in the large housing estates of Marseille (Body-Gendrot, 2000; see also Bauhardt, 2004), and relatively high crime figures, the economic situation gave rise to serious concerns in the local and national government about the city’s future and image. To some, Marseille with its crime ridden neighbourhoods and rundown city centre was an eyesore and not particularly worthy of being the second metropolitan area of France (Mangen, 2004).

Because urban policy in France is in large part a national endeavour, Marseille became an important target of planning from the Ministère de la Ville in Paris. First under president Mitterrand, and later also under Chirac and Sarkozy, Marseille has been an important focal point in nationally planned urban policies and this was reflected in two appointments of important figures in Marseille to the post of Minister of urban policy (Mangen, 2004). Like the Dutch, the French selected urban areas (the Zones Urbaines Sensibles) for special attention on the national level. Mitigating fierce place wars (such as those in the United States), the Marseille budget is quite substantially distributed on the national level (Savitch & Kantor, 2002). Under the pressure of the populist right and especially since the 2005 riots in the French banlieus (although Marseille remained relatively calm), urban policies now are much more repressive and focused on crime and safety than they were before. Sarkozy (first as Minister of Interior, later as President) especially came down hard on the youths in the large poor housing estates, calling them “racaille” (scum). Like Rotterdam, Marseille is simultaneously repressive towards these groups of marginalised youths and facilitative of a new urban middle class (these strategies are, like in Rotterdam, to “recapture” the city), using “quality of place” strategies such as investments in the cultural sector.
and in seafront development. In fact, Marseille became the European Capital of Culture in 2013, like Rotterdam was in 2001.

Like Marseille and Rotterdam, the port city of Antwerp saw economic decline coupled with ethnic tensions and the rise of populist politics. Although different in many ways, Antwerp struggles with unemployment like other former industrial cities and has developed various entrepreneurial strategies during the 1990s to boost its local economy. Unlike Marseille and Rotterdam, Antwerp and Belgium do not have long histories of urban policy and planning. In fact, Justus Uitermark (2003) argued that a certain anti-urbanism that may have its roots in the reaction against the rapid industrialisation and urbanisation of the nineteenth century, prevented an urban focus in policy and politics in Belgium. It took until the 1990s for urban policies to develop under the severe pressure of the populist right wing party Vlaams Blok that, in fact, built its very success on an urban and xenophobic agenda. Although the Vlaams Blok party never took office in Antwerp or Belgium, other political actors saw themselves forced to formulate policies against the spatial segregation and concentration of immigrants from (primarily) Morocco and focused on safety and “liveability”.

In a parallel development, Antwerp positioned itself in the 1990s as a culturally exiting city with special attention for fashion. The European Capital of Culture in 1993, Antwerp successfully marketed itself as an Avant-Garde fashion city without actually being a fashion trading hub (like Milan or Paris). Javier Gimeno Martínez (2007) argued that “Antwerp’s status as a fashion capital was created within the logic of organised tourism and mega-cultural events” (2449). That is to say that by positioning fashion as Antwerp’s most characteristic creative industry and by presenting and conceptualising fashion first and foremost as art, Antwerp succeeded in fulfilling its post-industrial ambitions of becoming a progressive creative hub. In fact, the fashion image was also discursively put to work against the felt “negative” image that was the result of the success of Vlaams Blok (Gimeno Martinez, 2007). It helped to produce “cosmopolitan” images to balance out the “xenophobic” messages that were communicated as a result of the populist right’s success.

At any rate, both Marseille and Antwerp today deal with hardships that are the result of economic restructuring and interurban competition and both have developed strategies in the fields of urban policies for “liveability” and safety on the one hand and the marketing of their cultural sectors on the other hand. In the following paragraphs, I analyse similar strategies of the city of Rotterdam in greater detail.

**Gender Bending Rotterdam: “La City ‘08”**

Many Western cities are characterised as masculine (see for example the work of Elisabeth Wilson, 1991). Tall towers, steel constructions and working men in the streets all fit into common
categories of the masculine. This is even more the case when it comes to industrial cities. The harbours and the physical work needed on the docks make us think of muscled men. The fact that Rotterdam, specifically, is perceived as a masculine city has everything to do with its working class mythology and modernist built environment, as I wrote in chapter 1. In this paragraph, I analyse in detail an imagineering strategy of the city of Rotterdam to change the city’s gender. Imagineering refers to the rewriting of meaning that is attached to urban environments and the social and economic effects this produces (see for further elaboration Van den Berg, forthcoming).

According to the city marketing bureau, Rotterdam suffers from a masculine image that needs adjustment in order to become the “Creative city” (“Urban Vision 2030”) it aspires to be. To change the masculine imagery, Rotterdam organised a cultural event and campaign in 2008 called “La City”. “La City” was a month-long chain of events in fashion, music, dancing, arts, sports and dining. It also involved a national marketing endeavour to highlight the “feminine” side of Rotterdam. The Rotterdam city council decided on the organisation of the festival. “La City” was deliberately designed by the administration and the marketing bureau to cleanse the city of the working class image that according to the officials and marketers was mitigating vital innovations and future economic growth. Strategies were designed to adapt a new symbolic economy (Zukin, 1995) by giving Rotterdam a more feminine mythology to fit the future.

This desired future was to be less working class, less focused on production and less masculine. “La City” highlighted the city as a place for consumption and introduced a new economy in Rotterdam: one that is service-based and post-industrial. One of the other strategies - for which Florida’s work (2002) is very influential - to accomplish this goal is to stimulate a “creative industry” and attract gay inhabitants to live and work in the city. Rotterdam employs these strategies as well, but has chosen to primarily focus on attracting dual earning middle class families to live in the city. The aspired new economy is to replace the lost jobs for men in the harbour and industry by new jobs for men and women in tourism, healthcare and creative industries. Blue collars are to be replaced by pink collars; masculine “work” by, slightly exaggerated, feminine “professions”. “La City” is an excellent case to illustrate the extreme ideological lengths that cities are willing to go, to depart their heavy histories.

A masculine mythology: The muscleman

Imagineering is a form of mythmaking. I argue that what the city of Rotterdam is aiming at with the event “La City” is to alter the mythology of the city and thus rewrite and change meanings. For my analysis of this mythmaking, I build on the theories of Roland Barthes ([1957] 1993) for two reasons: 1) because this way, we can better understand the discursive strategy that is “La City” and the way in which the old and new narratives relate to each other. 2) Because “mythology”
as a concept will allow us to move away from the vocabulary that is used by the city marketers themselves. For Barthes, a myth is a meta-language: a way in which a sign becomes a signifier, or, rather, a way in which extra meaning is given (and imposed) to what is seen and interpreted. Myth makes first order images into second order meanings. In this sense, myth does not mean “unreal” or “fake” as it often does in everyday use. Myths, rather, distort meaning instead of letting meanings disappear, although they are often “vehicles of forgetfulness” (Selwyn, 1996: 3). This distortion is to “simultaneously reveal and conceal, undercommunicate and overcommunicate” (Selwyn, 1996: 3). In Barthes’ terms, this is a process of inflexion. Myth functions to naturalise certain narratives of history and meaning. In this perspective, imagineering is about influencing particular inflexions. It serves to present a certain shallow narrative of history as matter-of-fact, not to be questioned: “Myth has the task of giving a historical intention a natural justification and making contingency appear eternal.” (Barthes, [1957] 1993: 142). Modern cities in the global marketplace need to produce uniqueness and, for that purpose, produce narratives and images to change the meanings that are attached to the city. To stand out from other cities, they produce unique selling points: they highlight their unique vistas, scenery, historic treasures or specific food culture.

The mythology of Rotterdam is a collection of myths. The myths of Rotterdam are the “international orientation”, “working class population”, the status of “metropolis of the Netherlands” where people have a “down-to-earth” and “no-nonsense attitude”. The mythology or narrative that is told around these myths consists of at least two elements: the harbour and the World War II bombings. I described these elements of the mythology of Rotterdam in chapter 1. What I analyse here is the attempt by the local government to influence the already existing inflexions of history that are myths. This can be compared to the way in which Barthes analysed for instance the way in which commercials and marketers make myths and use existing cultural repertoire and myths to do so (see for example his short essay “The New Citroën”, Barthes, [1957] 1993). Rotterdam aims to influence the inflexion in the mythology of Rotterdam to fit their new entrepreneurial strategies. What happens here seems to be paradoxical: On the one hand, the repertoire of the masculine “working city” mythology is constantly invoked to construe a coherent present day mythology despite the fractures in the city’s history (after all, a mythology selects certain myths or shallow historic narratives), for instance when the “Actions speak louder than words” adagio is put to work by politicians. On the other hand, a new fracture is forced with a departure from the “working city”, or the “working class city”. The city’s administrators are seeking ways to construe a new mythology with selective reference to the city’s past. A new mythology is formed in which certain myths are maintained, some are departed and others are influenced. A way in which the paradox of the city’s mythology is resolved is the way in which the fractures in the city’s history are celebrated as a sign of Rotterdam’s daring attitude.
“(Rotterdammers) are not afraid to take risks. (...) For some reason, the people of the city have always been open to the great and the new. (...) that is because they live in a port city (...) they have seafaring blood flowing through their veins and the mentality of daring to take risks and looking beyond the horizon has not disappeared.”
(Van der Horst et al., 2008: 17, original in English)

This quote from a promotional book is a perfect example of how the mythology is construed to be natural: although Rotterdammers no longer work in the harbour, they still have seafaring and daring blood. To the myth, it is of no relevance that today, most of Rotterdam’s inhabitants are not the children or grandchildren of Rotterdammers that worked in the harbours or industries.

The old myth of the “working ethos” of the city is adjusted to fit a new mythology of doing and daring and is adjusted to fit new strategies. Myths that were once compatible parts of the mythology are now rearranged and juxtaposed: the “working city” is a “daring city” that moves “beyond the harbour” and can ultimately even change its gender.

**Rotterdam Entrepreneurial City: “Rotterdam dares!”**

Rotterdam’s strategies to depart the myth of the muscleman are typical forms of urban entrepreneurialism. The Rotterdam public sector has, in the words of Phil Hubbard, taken “over characteristics once distinctive to the private sector: risk-taking, inventiveness, promotion and profit motivation” (1996: 1141). These characteristics are also often associated with masculinity. Risk-taking and competition are not only the symbols that the city of Rotterdam uses to define itself, they are also the symbols that fit neatly in common sense views of the masculine. In fact, the entrepreneurial city has even been said to be inherently masculine (Hubbard, 2004: 667). Interestingly, the masculine, the entrepreneurial and the Rotterdam identity overlap in this respect. Rotterdam’s masculine identity that derives from its working class mythology here serves to legitimate an entrepreneurial strategy to, paradoxically, install a more feminine mythology and identity for the city.

Rotterdam aims to present itself as a culturally interesting city in large part because the idea is that the attraction of a creative class will lead to job. Just as the entrepreneurial is most often associated with the masculine, the creative is associated with the feminine. Not only are employees of the service and creative sectors women far more often than in other economic sectors, the “creative” itself is considered a feminine trait. The masculine entrepreneur that is Rotterdam thus has to get in touch with its feminine side in order to attract much desired feminine creativity.

In this context, it is important to note that the entrepreneurial Liveable Rotterdam administration launched a new slogan for city promotion purposes that expresses its entrepreneurial
ambitions, but also taps into the Rotterdam masculine myth of risk taking: “Rotterdam dares!”

The logo of the Rotterdam dares campaign refers back to the harbour, blue collar work and Rotterdam’s roughness in the aesthetic imperfections of cracks and shades in the dark blue colour of deep waters, while using an old-fashioned font that is to remind people of the most productive decades of the city. The exclamation mark at the end can also be analysed to symbolise the daring and doing attitude that is said to be part of the essence of Rotterdam-ness. Rotterdam is stressing its uniqueness in the aesthetics of its campaigns, while also creating diversions for the people of Rotterdam and a mythology to unite Rotterdammers. These aesthetics are ideologically charged. They communicate the masculine, neo-liberal entrepreneurial attitude of the administration and political strategies to a wide audience. They make these strategies into a brand of doing and daring that is associated with Rotterdam, therefore making the entrepreneurial political strategies that the administration employs more acceptable to the public, because the public identifies with exactly the characteristics of Rotterdam that the brand communicates. The rhetorics and aesthetics of the “La City” event are interesting, because of the paradoxical underscoring of at the same time as the departure from the above sketched mythology and aesthetics with new, more feminine aesthetics and narratives to be told.

The Festival “La City”: Aesthetics and Actions

On the tenth of July in 2008, the front page of newspapers showed a picture of a gigantic cocktail glass, made of ice filled with a pink cocktail made especially for Rotterdam called “My Rotterdam” or in short (referring to the very feminine Marilyn Monroe): “MonRo”. DJ Helene di Firenzi, unknown to the larger audience, but according to the organisers the ideal spokeswoman of “La City ’08” because of her “daring attitude” and “male profession” (Rotterdam Marketing, 2008b), climbs the stairs to the cocktail ice glass of four meters while smoking a large cigar.

Adorned in masculine artefacts (a power suit and cigar), the DJ symbolises the kind of woman that Rotterdam is looking for: the educated, assertive, non-traditional (maybe even promiscuous) woman that is thought to be needed for the aspired new, post-industrial, economy. “La City” is to establish a mythology that 1) includes women and families, but, most importantly 2) attracts more middle and higher class inhabitants and visitors and 3) can catalyse a shift towards
a post-industrial economy. The event and marketing material does this by combining Rotterdam’s “daring” image with a particular brand of femininity:

“Rotterdam dares to show her feminine side. During “La City ’08”, the city takes its feminine interests and ambitions in focus, with a month long of innovative initiatives and sparkling events in fashion, art, dance, business, sports, emancipation and personal hygiene. Rotterdam will be more tempting than ever, for women and men” (italics MvdB)

This quote from the promotional booklet of “La City” focuses on the innovativeness of Rotterdam. The booklet seems to say that Rotterdam may have been a “muscleman” in the past, but that it is now a creative temptress. The “city as woman” is a tempting femme fatale, luring new people with its virtues: “stylish, powerful, creative, inspiring, sparkling and full of surprises”5. In fact, the evaluation of the festival in 2009 pointed out that Rotterdam was successfully portrayed as a city in which traditions are broken (success was measured in the relative amount of people that agreed with this statement in a questionnaire). The evaluation report notes this specific outcome as the most important effect of the event (Rotterdam Marketing, 2008b) What is interesting here, is that the city invokes the image of an eroticised temptress in order to attract more women and especially more families to the city. There seems to be a tension here between the figure of the “eroticised woman” on the one, and “the mother” on the other hand. But the temptress is primarily invoked to break with the mythology of the rough men of the harbour. Both images are extremes on the axes of gender. Rotterdam uses the hyper feminine to change the mythology of the hyper masculine. Moreover, the image of the promiscuous woman can serve to exclude Muslim women and other inhabitants of Rotterdam that are deemed “traditional”.

The logo of “La City” is laden with ideology as well. The phrase “La City ’08” was printed in a round font that was especially designed for the occasion.
This roundness refers to “the feminine form” and is to express the “softer”, “feminine” side of the city (Rotterdam Marketing, 2008b). On top of form, the message of the festival was brought to the fore by the changing colours in the logo: fading from blue to pink. Alternately, the image of a pink stiletto shoe frequently appeared in articles on the festival and on the festival’s materials themselves. The message is clear: Rotterdam is trading the steel-nosed shoes of the harbour for the pink high heels of the cocktail bar. (Representations of) the city is moving like a transvestite from blue to pink, from masculine to feminine and does so by promoting an image of femininity that is not only quite traditional and stereotypical (alas for the tradition breaking ambitions), but also very much bourgeois and white.

Moving beyond the aesthetics, the actual actions or activities show a similar pattern of gender transgression and class upgrading. One of the most important activities in the “La City month” was the “Ladies Night”, a night of shopping with extended opening hours of the stores in the city centre. The activities of “La City” were very much about consumption and “pampering”. They were divided into three subthemes: Body, Mind and Soul:

“Body stands for pampering, Mind stands for development: mental exertion and enrichment (but also personal and professional relaxation, of course), Soul stands for inspiration, turmoil and temptation” (Rotterdam Marketing, 2008b: 3).

Examples of activities were concerts, dance parties, lectures, fashion shows, sporting events and “Meet and Eat experiences”. The feminine is in this instant more or less equated to consumption.

Cities have been the décor of (conspicuous) consumption since at least the second half of the nineteenth century. And very early on, consumption and femininity were connected (Laermans, 1993; Wilson, 1991). The early department store for consumers (instead of customers) has become a symbol for the change from a production based society to one that is consumption centred. Modern consumer culture was a parallel process to women’s emancipation. Talking about leisure spaces for women without men and women’s free movement often means talking about consumption spaces, as it did in “La City”. The actions and activities of the city of Rotterdam in
“La City” symbolise its ambition to partake in the move of many global cities towards a more service-based economy. What better way to shake off the myth of the “blue collar workers city” than to combine the myth of the active, traditions-breaking city with a more feminine gender that is embedded in leisurely activities and luxury and thereby introduce a new, pink collar economy?

“La City” uses this cultural repertoire in a marketing endeavour to change the gender identity of Rotterdam. Rotterdam is bending its gender. The city’s administrators and marketers are construing a new, more feminine mythology with selective reference to the city’s past. The myth of Rotterdam as a “daring city” used to be told in the context of the masculine, “blue collar/working class city” and harbour. Now, precisely this myth of “tradition-braking” is invoked to embrace on the one hand masculine entrepreneurial strategies and on the other the city’s feminine side, middle class families and a “pink collar economy”.

Rotterdam is one example of a former industrial city adjusting its mythology. The selective reference to the old myths and repertoires in the construction of a new one is meant to produce new realities: a class upgrading in terms of the population, space and economy. Like many other cities, Rotterdam is aiming for a more affluent population, “mixed” neighbourhoods with more middle class dwellings and a new, post-industrial economy. The association with femininity is an entrepreneurial strategy that is to accompany other forms of “social upgrading”, and also make the real and large-scale restructuring of the city and the city’s economy easier to digest. The mythology is gendered, as is the real gentrification strategies that are at the centre of Rotterdam’s future vision. The production of a feminine mythology with “La City” is to fuel economic growth and to frame who belongs in the city and who does not. In the next paragraph, I analyse a particular form of gentrification as urban planning practice: genderfication and what I term urban re-generation in Rotterdam in the case of the “child friendly city” plans.

Urban re-generation: City children and genderfied neighbourhoods

Because of the huge stress that is put on the “quality of space” for the urban economy in today’s thinking about urban government, many entrepreneurial strategies of Rotterdam take the shape of planning interventions in housing and the spatial organisation of the city. While “La City” was primarily a discursive strategy to change images and meanings, many strategies are aimed at changing the material built environment of Rotterdam. One collection of strategies that has become immensely popular in the Rotterdam government but elsewhere as well is state-led gentrification. In fact, in the eyes of many policy makers in former industrial cities, gentrification is a “positive urban policy” (Lees et al., 2008: 198). Gentrification policies are so widespread in Rotterdam and the rest of the Netherlands that the term seems to have lost its original critical meaning. Administrators and planners are aiming for more middle class inhabitants in former
working class neighbourhoods and at a “social mix” of different groups in their populations. Interestingly, women and families play an increasing role in gentrification policies today.

The term gentrification generally refers to the process where affluent people or businesses buy property in formerly poor or working class neighbourhoods and occupants are displaced. Lia Karsten showed how YUPP’s (“Young Urban Professional Parent”; 2003: 2573) increasingly make a “positive choice for the urban way of life” (2003: 2573). Especially certain groups of dual earner families seem to find the city an attractive place to live, because of the proximity of amenities, a liberal climate for those that want to depart from patriarchal ideals and the proximity to work, which makes the combination of work and family life much easier (Karsten, 2003; Warde, 1991; Lees et al., 2008). Changes in the way in which people think about differences between men and women, and proper roles for each sex, influence gentrification policies. Men taking on care work in the home change the form of gentrification, as do women entering the labour market. Altered behaviour of men and women and new gender roles spur new forms of gentrification (Bondi, 1991; 1999) and this has not gone unnoticed by city administrators. The city of Rotterdam is after YUPP’s and aims at attracting them through a spatial strategy of urban design.

The phenomenon of the YUPP shows a hiatus in theories of lifecycles and gentrification. Many theorists emphasised that gentrifiers are mainly young adults that live in gentrifying areas prior to having children (see for example Bondi, 1999; McDowell, 1999). When planning a family, and thus entering a different phase of the lifecycle, many former gentrifiers seem to buy property outside of the city. But in the case of the YUPP, precisely having children is a motive to buy property in the city. The Rotterdam administration is deliberately associating family with gentrification and thus aiming at the YUPP. The gentrification efforts of Rotterdam are thus exactly targeted at young people with children (compare: Boterman, 2012).

The 2010 plan “Building Blocks for a Child Friendly City” (Rotterdam Municipality, 2010a) gives a detailed strategy for the future planning of especially older inner city poor neighbourhoods. I interpret this plan as an ‘instant gentrification’ (D. Rose, 2004: 280) strategy and an exemplary case of the shift in focus of cities that aim for gentrification from single young men and women to middle class nuclear families as gentrification pioneers. Rotterdam explicitly takes its cue for these policies from Vancouver’s history of recovery (Van den Berg, 2013). This Canadian city is often considered an international emblem for urban “liveability” (Punter, 2003). The city was successful in attracting desired inhabitants to its urban core by focusing on dual earner families. Vancouver developed a gendered strategy to attract these groups: it built family friendly housing in inner city neighbourhoods and provided spatial solutions for the combination of care and work (Hutton, 2004; Punter, 2003). Rotterdam’s plans for a “family friendly” or, alternately, “child friendly” city are inspired by these examples.
In this paragraph I analyse the Rotterdam plans for a “child friendly” city by looking at three texts: 1) “Building Blocks for a Child Friendly City” (Rotterdam Municipality, 2010a), which is the main text to set out the plans, 2) the “Child-friendly Boroughs Monitor”, an annual monitor that is designed to track the effects of the plan, (Rotterdam Municipality, 2010b) and 3) the “Urban Vision Rotterdam 2030”, which outlines the more general urban planning of Rotterdam (Rotterdam Municipality, 2008b). I view the plans for the “child friendly city” as part of what I term urban re-generation. In the case of the plans to attract families, urban re-generation means the replacement of the current population of parents and children with a new population of families that are better suited in terms of education and income levels. I define urban re-generation as efforts to renew the city by either investing in the children (the next generation) of the current population or replacing the current population of children by a new generation of better suited children. Urban re-generation as a concept supplements the much used term of urban regeneration in the sense of material and economic restructuring in its focus on the city as a reproductive milieu.

**Stopping “selective out-migration” by “family friendly planning”**

Rotterdam considers “selective migration” of the “opportunity rich” to be the root of all urban problems. This comes to the fore most clearly in this quote from the City Council:

>“The capacity to absorb in certain areas is challenged and exceeded by a continued in-flow of people without and the continuing out-flow of people with opportunities. This is the core of all problems of Rotterdam.” (Rotterdam Municipality, 2004)

The image is invoked here that without an immediate stop to this process, further deterioration of the city will be inescapable. Note how a discourse on “opportunities” is put to work here.

The other side of the “upgrading” of the city as a whole is formed by policy efforts to manage “youth”. The unequal character of these projects comes to the fore in the construction of one category of children as “opportunity rich” or “potential” and a second category of “opportunity poor”, “risk youth” and “nuisance” (see Schinkel, 2009). “Opportunity rich” on the one hand and “opportunity poor” on the other are signifiers for a variety of factors. In Rotterdam youth policies, “opportunities” are a signifier of educational levels, for instance when a 2004-2007 youth policy plan states: “Too many Rotterdam youths have a low education and, thus, too few opportunities” (Rotterdam Municipality, 2004b: 7). And in other instances, “opportunities” signify employment, ethnicity, knowledge of the Dutch language, or even health. Generally, though, “opportunity rich” and “opportunity poor” are categories that are used in the exceptional spatial policy measures to prohibit the renting of houses to people with a low income (less than 110% of the social minimum).
in specific areas under the “Umbrella and Exception Law”, also known as the “Rotterdam Law” (see Schinkel & Van den Berg, 2011 for further elaboration on this law and its consequences). In these cases, “opportunity poor” is a euphemism for “poor”, because it is defined as people with a very low income.

Changing the demographics of Rotterdam thus focuses on limiting the number of “opportunity poor” and attracting the “opportunity rich”. The administration argues that a logical way to do this is by attracting more families:

“(Families with children) strengthen the social cohesion and the economic activity of the city. They provide the ideas and the energy for the future Rotterdam. They are the future in which the city invests.” (Rotterdam Municipality, 2010a: 9)

New families of which the parents are dual earners and have a higher education (as is made explicit in the plan) are the future of Rotterdam, it turns out in this quote, and they are also the ones in which the city invests. This quote is telling because the plan indeed focuses on spending public budgets to provide housing and attractive milieu for the “opportunity rich”.

**When “child-density” is and is not a problem**

The plan insists that a “family friendly city” is accomplished by working on four “building blocks”: housing, public space, amenities and routes. Public space and routes speak more or less for themselves: the efforts under these headings focus on sporting areas, parks, playgrounds and traffic safety. The efforts to strengthen family amenities are interesting because the plan speaks of the necessity of families in order to keep amenities affordable. It says: “If families leave, the quality and quantity of amenities withers” (Rotterdam Municipality, 2010a: 13). What is interesting here is that in most of the boroughs in which this plan proposes to invest, there are already many families with young children. In fact, some of these boroughs are the most “child dense” (the amount of children per hectare) of all the boroughs in the city, such as Afrikaanderwijk or Rotterdam Noord. The neutral language of “families” and “amenities” disguises the way in which very specific families are targeted: the municipality will invest in amenities such as schools, sporting clubs and child care if it will attract the higher middle classes.

The municipalities’ efforts for gentrification by families find their concrete distillation in the definition of “family friendly housing”. In the guideline, a “family friendly house” is 85 square meters in size or larger, has a private outdoor space, an elevator if it is not on the ground floor and has a separate bedroom for each child. In fact, if the latter is not the case, the municipality now considers a house “overcrowded” (Rotterdam, 2010b). When applied on the current housing stock
of Rotterdam, the city states that certain neighbourhoods have less than 10% “family friendly houses” (Rotterdam Municipality, 2010a; 2010b). The plan proposes to change this not only by building new homes, but also by converting two smaller apartments into one. This leads to less dwellings and the displacement of current inhabitants. This is, however, exactly what is the more or less latent goal here, as is made explicit:

“An accidental advantage of this is the dilution of these highly populated boroughs.”
(italics MvdB)

Interestingly, the middle class boroughs and the city centre are areas for planned residential “condensation”. Under the neutral guise of remaking the city into a “child-friendly” one, the dispersion of the lower classes and a “heightened density” of middle class families is an important goal. The plan speaks of attracting more families and the need for children in order to have “life” in the city. But when it comes to the poorer neighbourhoods, exactly the density of children becomes a problem. In the urban planning texts, “child friendly” is a proxy for middle class friendly. The city does not apply the guidelines for “family friendly housing” so that all families in Rotterdam can have such a house at an affordable price. Instead, prices will go up, creating affordability problems for large groups and new, more affluent families will move into these neighbourhoods, leaving many of the poorer families displaced. Or this is at least what the administration plans to happen.

Before moving on to an analysis of the gender notions underlying the plan, what I would like to note here is that the programme is accompanied by an annual monitor that is highly publicised. 6 months after releasing the “Building blocks” plan (Rotterdam Municipality, 2010a), the first “Child-friendly borough monitor” (Rotterdam Municipality, 2010b) was published. It is hardly surprising that so soon after the presentation of the plan, already 7 of 11 “pilot boroughs” turned out to have become “significantly more child-friendly”, even though the text of the monitor report explains that an entire investigation was not yet possible due to insufficient data (Rotterdam Municipality, 2010b). This is a very good example of the performative nature of “managing through measurement” (Noordegraaf, 2008). The measurement of “child-friendliness” is meant to make the existing qualities of Rotterdam visible. “Child friendliness” is in part accomplished by claiming it. The “child-friendly city programme” in this case works as a city marketing tool, just like the “La City” event does.

The gender subtext: genderfication
The families that Rotterdam is looking for are dual-earning, middle class, nuclear families. In the “child-friendly city programme”, space is produced for families that subscribe to specific gender
ideals, for instance when the combination of work and care is made easier by the provision of childcare facilities close to “family friendly houses”. At the intersection of class and gender, this means that class upgrading of neighbourhoods is given a distinctly gendered form and is done using gendered strategies. I propose the term *genderfication* to help understand the gender dynamics in the strategies of the city to change its gender composition. I define *genderfication* as the production of space for different gender relations. For this definition, I build on Hackworth’s definition of gentrification as “the production of space for progressively more affluent users” (Hackworth, 2002: 815). The advantage of this broad definition of gentrification is that it can be applied to the production of space beyond residential properties in working class neighbourhoods. Moreover, it focuses on the social production of space, and is thus well suited to look at meaning making and at the production of space “through human intentions” (Molotch, 1993: 887). Building on Lefebvrian theories of space, *genderfication* points to shifts in the do’s and don’ts that space signifies (Lefebvre, 1991:121). Space is produced for a specific gendered order. In the Rotterdam case, the modernist space that was produced after the Second World War, ordered the patriarchal separation of the sexes, the clear separation of private and public space and clearly distinguished gender roles. *Genderfication* changes this order into one in which the public and private sphere are much more intertwined, where men care and women work in the (home) office and where children are brought up in dual earning families and in day care facilities.

What Rotterdam aims for is not *just* more families and children, but in fact women, children *and* men that subscribe to certain specific norms about raising children and dividing labour. In other words: Rotterdam is seeking middle class groups with specific gender roles and norms. And these specific gender notions are dominant in the YUPP- higher middle class that Rotterdam desires. The production of space for these gender norms is a means to produce space for progressively more affluent users (and thus gentrification), but can be distinguished from gentrification because it does order space in a clearly gendered way. Thus, *genderfication* is to establish gentrification in the end, but has specifically gendered features, uses gendered strategies and thus works differently and produces specifically gendered outcomes. Informed by intersectionality perspectives, we can thus see how Rotterdam’s efforts are not just about class upgrading and gentrification, but instead consist of gendered strategies to attract “desired” new inhabitants. Those have sufficient income to buy a family home in the city, they live in nuclear families, share work and care tasks, aim for gender equality and earn dual incomes.

**Producing space for gender-equal task sharing**

From the analysis of the plans for the child-friendly city, it becomes apparent that the gender ideal that guides *genderfication* in Rotterdam consists of norms of 1) gender-equality, 2) dual-earning
and 3) the nuclear family. Genderfication assumes a specific shape in the case of Rotterdam: it leads to building larger, more expensive (as compared to the current housing stock) owner-occupied homes for middle class nuclear families, with ground level front doors, 3 to 5 bedrooms, parks in front of the houses and day care facilities in direct proximity. As Liz Bondi (1991) argued, the restructuring of urban space and definitions of gender are closely linked. “Changing patterns of production and reproduction have caused women and men to adjust their uses of space and time such that ‘the process of gender constitution and the process of constituting urban environments are inextricably linked’” (Bondi, 1991: 194, quoting Mackenzie, 1988: 27). The spatial organisation of the city is a reflection of dominant gender ideals. Spatial organisations reaffirm and co-construct dominant gender norms, precisely because they make certain gendered practices possible and obstruct other organisations of production and reproduction. The combination of paid work and caring for a family, for example, is obstructed if childcare facilities are not located close to home or work and parents have to commute in a modernist city.

The first element of the genderfication in the case of Rotterdam, i.e. gender-equality, is expressed in the farewell to modernist planning that consisted of the zoning of spaces for work and family that is declared in the “Building Blocks” plan. As I wrote earlier in this chapter, Rotterdam is a typical example of such a modernist city. This kind of zoning is a spatial expression of a patriarchal social structure and this spatial organisation itself produced patriarchal gender relations. It shows how urban planners in Rotterdam worked on the basis of the separation of production and reproduction in gendered spheres. Now, Rotterdam attracts middle class families precisely on the basis of their moving away from modernist zoning with a new spatial mix of urban functions. The most telling example of this is the goal of the city to become an attractive residential city. The Rotterdam Urban Vision 2030 (Rotterdam Municipality, 2008b) states:

“To be able to live in the city there must be good housing and suitable employment. Employment, in turn, thrives only when the city can offer favourable conditions for business development with high quality housing.” (10)

These goals are presented as neutral in the plan, as it says that both goals are “inextricably linked” (10). In this quote, the current ideal of the effect of “quality of space” on the urban economy is obvious. After the Second World War and in the 1970s, Rotterdam primarily focused on building residential areas outside of the city centre and did not consider residential and economic functions to be linked spatially at all. The ideal in the beginning of this century is that women and men share their responsibilities of work and family and that in order for the new, more gender-equal family to live in the city, work, play, home and care facilities should be mixed and provided on a
neighbourhood-level in order to make the combination of work and care both more equal and accessible. The modernist ideal of the separation of production and reproduction in gendered spheres is thus departed in favour of a production of a gender equal space of mixed urban functions.

The second element of the Rotterdam gender ideal, “dual earning”, is expressed in the form of larger, more expensive family houses. Dual earners generally have more to spend than traditional breadwinner families and can therefore afford such a house. Moreover, dual earners are working increasingly from their homes in order to, again, be able to combine work and care duties. This is expressed spatially in the plans in the form of home offices. The merging of smaller and cheaper apartments into larger dwellings is one of the main instruments of the plan “Building blocks for a child friendly Rotterdam”. Moreover, the first two elements, “gender equal” and “dual earner” also find their concrete distillation in the investment of the city in community schools (brede scholen) in which after school programmes and childcare facilities are most often included. This enables parents to combine care and work duties.

The third element of the gender ideal is expressed in the form of the provisions of homes for nuclear families. A family, in the urban plan for the “Child-friendly city” consists of parents and children under the age of 18 living together in one unit. This is an expression of the general practice of families in the Netherlands. But the above mentioned guidelines for a “family friendly house” show how families with approximately 3 to 5 members are the norm (see the “child friendly monitor”, pp. 8 and 9). Interestingly, the gender subtext of the plan for the “Child-friendly city” here expresses precisely the bourgeois, heteronormative, modern, ideal of the nuclear family with 1 to 3 children and both parents present. In the form that genderfication assumes here, we see on the one hand a departure from the modern ideal of the breadwinner household and on the other hand an affirmation of the ideal of the nuclear family.

**Revanchist interventions – the other side**

*Never the boys from the posh bit up by the park, they’re just boys,*  
*but our lot are “youths”, our working-class lads are youths, bloody terrible, isn’t it?*  
Zadie Smith

In 2002, citizens of Rotterdam voted for the populist party of late Pim Fortuyn in large numbers. The election results gave way to a new political and policy discourse that focused on safety issues. Many inhabitants complained that they had lost their neighbourhoods to immigrants, junkers and criminals. The dystopian images of Rotterdam legitimated the construction of Rotterdam as a “laboratory” for urban politics and policy, in which “zero tolerance policing” and “strict safety
policies” are combined with efforts to “elevate” the “lower classes” and “youths”. The other side of genderfication and urban re-generation is the problematisation of youth, the “penalisation of nuisance” (Van Swaanningen, 2005) and revanchist interventions.

The concept of revanchist urbanism was developed by Neil Smith in the context of New York in the 1990s (N. Smith, 1996; see also Van den Berg, 2007). Smith identified a reaction in popular media and in public policies to the “supposed “theft” of the city, a desperate defence of a challenged phalanx of privileges, cloaked in the populist language of civic morality, family values and neighbourhood security” (N. Smith, 1996: 211). Revanchism is about the identification, elimination or disciplining of the “enemies of within”: of the migrants, the poor and the homeless. MacLeod (2002: 616) argued that “the revanchist city framework might stand accused of being a slave to New York.” However, many scholars have attempted to use “revanchist urbanism” as a heuristic tool to understand developments in the UK (MacLeod, 2002; Atkinson, 2003), Ecuador (Swanson, 2007) and the Netherlands (Uitermark & Duyvendak, 2008; Van der Horst, 2003). When using the concept in a more flexible manner, it enhances understanding particularly of the political dimensions of contemporary urban inequalities (compare MacLeod, 2002; Uitermark & Duyvendak, 2008). In post-Fortuyn Rotterdam, the call to “reclaim the city” for “ordinary Rotterdammers” was often heard (Duyvendak, 2011).

**Revanchist interventions 1: “Youth” as a spatial problem**

Notwithstanding the efforts to attract families with children, generally, “youth” is a spatial problem in the eyes of Rotterdam policy makers and police. In Rotterdam, paternalist and punitive “youth” policies are connected to genderfication and re-generation. Without doing justice to the complexity of this dynamic (see Schinkel, 2009; Van Swaanningen, 2005), I will highlight some elements of measures that are taken to deal with “undesirable youths”, and “opportunity poor”, because, as became clear in the analysis of the “Child friendly city” plan, not all children are considered necessary ingredients of a lively city. In fact, some are said in policy to be precisely the cause of “liveability problems” and thus delegitimised as urban citizens.

“La City” is one of the elements of a long term strategy of the city of Rotterdam to turn the city’s public spaces into a “City Lounge” (Rotterdam Municipality, 2008a). The “City Lounge” is to make Rotterdam an attractive residential and consumption city as are the “Child friendly city” plans.

“The concept of the city lounge indicates the most important goal of Rotterdam: to develop the city centre into a quality spot for meeting, staying and entertaining for inhabitants, corporations and visitors.” (Rotterdam Municipality, 2008a: 10, translation author)
The municipal council agrees that Rotterdam’s residential quality needs to be improved and therefore public “lounging” is necessary. Rotterdam wants to encourage people to be a “flâneur” (Rotterdam City Information Center, 2008) and to enjoy the streets and parks of Rotterdam as “leisure spaces” (Rotterdam Municipality, 2008a). But “the City Lounge” is a strategy that invites very particular populations to be a “flâneur” and considers other Rotterdammers that meet each other in the streets as nuisance. Contemporary safety policies and municipal laws (“APV’s”) prohibit groups of more than three people spending time together in any part of public space (De Pers, 2008; see also Schuilenburg, 2012). In Dutch, this is called a Samenscholingsverbod, which literally translates as “Prohibition of assembly” or “Prohibition of gathering in public”. Rotterdam is the only municipality in the Netherlands that enforces this prohibition permanently and in all places, thereby subjecting its citizens to a paradoxical constant state of exception and arbitrariness. The “city lounge” is thus not for everybody, as in practice, especially young men are often told by the police to “lounge elsewhere”. The effects of the prohibition remain to be researched, but the law can be seen as a form of what Dutch criminologist Van Swaaningen has termed the “penalisation of nuisance” (2005: 295) and was established as a tough policy measure against “annoying youth” (Overlastgevende jeugd, Rotterdam Municipality, 2007). Exceptional policy measures such as Mosquito’s (little boxes that put out a very high sound that only young people can hear, find very irritating and urges them to leave) are used to prevent youngsters from gathering on the streets in designated areas (Boonstra & Hermens, 2009). The idea that legitimises these measures is that “nuisance” can quickly deteriorate into “criminal behaviour” (Schinkel, 2009). Social and safety policies see the very idea of groups of “youth” in itself as a spatial and criminal problem. In general, the youngsters that are targeted by these policies and laws most often come from working class backgrounds, are often immigrant’s children and are almost exclusively male (see RMO, 200811). The gender and class position of “annoying youth” is the exact opposite of the position of the group targeted by “La City” and the plans for a “Child friendly city”.

**Revanchist interventions 2: the Intervention teams**

One of the most debated revanchist strategies in Rotterdam were the “Intervention Teams” (Schinkel & Van den Berg, 2011). The practice finds its origins in 2001, when a team of street-level bureaucrats of the municipality, the city’s housing bureau, the local social service agency, the public housing agency, the local tax authority and the police united in the first team to jointly visit houses in the “Strevelsweg”, a street in the south of Rotterdam. The team was put in place by the Rotterdam administration as a solution to the perceived deterioration of this particular street, but also to find “innovative” ways of fighting urban decline in general. The “Strevelsweg” is located in “Bloemhof”, one of the poorest neighbourhoods of the city (part of my ethnographic
research took place there too). Built in the beginning of the 1900s, many houses were (and still
are to a certain extent) inhabited by recent immigrants (both with and without legal status) and
poorly maintained. According to the municipalities’ information, the “Intervention Team” visited
700 houses during a period of five months. Various forms of behaviour, forms of housing and
inhabitants themselves deemed deviant were targeted. It was an ambitious project to enhance
the livability of the city of Rotterdam, soon to be followed by forms of physical restructuring.
Currently, the street is one of the “spots” where the municipality is hoping to establish a form of
“state-led gentrification” (Uitermark et al., 2007).

The “Intervention Teams” are a follow-up of what was then called the “Strevelsweg method”
and entailed an implementation throughout Rotterdam. In 2009, “Intervention Teams” visited
22,500 homes in Rotterdam (Van der Meer, 2009). “Intervention teams” are especially deployed in
areas that are considered “unsafe” and designated “Hotspots” (see Schinkel & Van den Berg, 2011,
for a more detailed analysis of this logic). The Rotterdam administration defines “Hotspots” as one
or more streets characterised by “an accumulation of problems relating to physical environment,
houses and public space. In the social environment, social structures and healthy potential for
individual and group development are lacking and, moreover, crime and nuisance are present”
(Rotterdam Municipality, 2005c: 73). The administration selects “Hotspots” on the basis of the
“Rotterdam Safety Index”, a quantitative tool combining subjective and objective measures of
“safety” with context variables, one of which pertains to the number of non-native Dutch residing
in an area (Noordegraaf 2008).

The “Intervention Team’s” methods have changed somewhat over time. However, the core has
remained the same: addresses are selected on the basis of a selection of “unsafe” neighbourhoods,
as defined by the “Safety Index”. In the “Hotspots” thus selected, the “Intervention Teams” visit
all dwellings. Once the team has entered the apartment or house, they investigate a wide range
of things: whether or not the house is fireproof, if the inhabitants have legal statuses, how many
inhabitants there are and how many there should be according to the city’s administration, which
inhabitants are entitled to public benefit and which should be fined for tax fraud. Also, the teams
search for criminal practices, illegal prostitutes and hemp plants. The people deemed responsible
for these practices face police actions. The list of items is much longer, because the teams explicitly
declare to not focus on specific problems, but to employ an “integral approach”. This also entails
that the officials write down whatever they find important. As one team-member said: “we come
for everything, really” (cited in: Rotterdam Ombudsman, 2007: 101). The executive bureau that
was founded by the municipality especially for this policy practice, Bureau Frontline, identifies
five goals of the “Intervention Teams”: 
“1. The tracing and ending of illegal letting of rooms;
2. The control and ending of nuisance from (drugs) buildings;
3. Helping inhabitants on their way to paid work or social services;
4. Activating the so-called care-network;
5. Ending fraud with income support” [translation authors]

It is the combination of enforcement and care that is considered “innovative”, “integral” and necessary for the inhabitants of these specific areas by politicians and some academics (Cornelissen & Brandsen, 2007). Inhabitants of the “Hotspots” are led to believe that they are obligated to open up their homes to the control of the “Intervention Teams”. A complicated set of practices and legitimisations of the practices make it difficult even for law experts to know exactly what the legal basis of the “house-visits” is (to use the euphemism often used by the municipality).

To illustrate how confusing the practice of the “Intervention Teams” can be for the inhabitants an article by the Dutch columnist Carrie Jansen, visited by an Intervention Team herself, offers a good an example of contestation. Expecting government officials for an entirely different matter, Jansen was not aware of letting an “Intervention Team” enter her house in a Rotterdam “Hotspot”. Once inside, the officials explained that they were not the officials Jansen was expecting, but were instead there to “look at everything, for example whether or not you grow Hemp in your house or if you house illegal immigrants.” In my underwear drawer?” (2008: 16) Jansen asks in her essay, because as the official was explaining his mission to her, his colleague was going through her personal items in the bedroom. Each member of the “Intervention Team” gave her a different reason for their visit: from having too many doorbells to living in a “Hotspot area”. And every member was working for a different institution: from the housing agencies to the police. When Jansen asked for the legal basis of their visit, they all had different answers (Jansen, 2008). This far-reaching intervention in the private lives of those living in “Hotspot” areas is legitimised on the basis of the “emergency-state” of the “Hotspots”: it is an activation of the repertoire (as analysed in chapter 1) of Rotterdam as an urban dystopia in need of exceptional measures.

**Conclusion**

Rotterdam aims to depart from its industrial past and employs entrepreneurial strategies to do so. Like other former industrial cities, Rotterdam imagines a future of a consumption based economy (the “City Lounge”), a well-educated population and a public space free of “nuisance”.

Encouraging “lounging”, a “feminisation” and a “child friendly city” are one side of the implications of the ambitions of the city of Rotterdam to transform. The “prohibition of assembly”, the “penalisation of nuisance” and “Intervention teams” are a different side of the same story.
Both consist of strategies to produce space for middle class and more feminine groups. When trying to enhance the attractiveness of Rotterdam for potential middle class residents, young men from lower class backgrounds are the first category to exclude. And interventions in the most living in “Hotspots” became a plausible solution to “liveability problems”.

Supplementing urban regeneration in the form of material and economic restructuring, Rotterdam is now focusing on the city as reproductive milieu. Rotterdam sets out to “elevate” and “upgrade” the urban youngsters of the lower classes into the middle class of the future or to replace these children and youngsters with families that are “opportunity rich”. These two focus points show that Rotterdam is trying to transform the city by bringing in a new generation. In short: to establish what I term urban re-generation. The parenting guidance practices that are the main concern of the remainder of this thesis are a form of urban re-generation too: they are meant as investments in the next generation of Rotterdammers.