Participation and collaboration in contemporary art: a game without borders between art and 'real' life

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Citation for published version (APA):

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INTRODUCTION

It is Saturday afternoon, September 18th 2004, in the park by the Schuttersveld Sport Centre in the Nieuw Crooswijk area of Rotterdam. I am wandering around waiting for the second episode of the one-year long project *Dwaallicht* by Jeanne van Heeswijk to start. Over the coming ten years Nieuw Crooswijk will be undergoing an expanded regeneration process that is expected to change its architectural face as well as the composition of its population. Within the framework of the art project *Dwaallicht* the author Dick van den Heuvel is every month writing a chapter of the story *Een zoektocht door Nieuw Crooswijk* about the mysterious quest for Dwaallicht. It is based on stories told by residents about past and present events in Nieuw Crooswijk. The writing of the story is running parallel to events organized each month by the artist, her production team and people from the district. Jeanne van Heeswijk is herself a resident of Nieuw Crooswijk. So this second episode is about to begin with a parade of youngsters, as I hear. The Saturday visitors to the Schuttersveld Sports Centre are sometimes difficult to distinguish from people who are there for the project. A stage and some temporary stalls with flyers, food and other things are standing in the park ready for use. It looks like a small festival. To kill the awkwardness and boredom of the non-Dutch speaker, I start chatting with a passer-by, when we hear that the parade has started in some street nearby and we head towards there. Ahead a team of teenagers with yellow T-shirts are playing percussion instruments bearing the words: “Antiliaanse Drumband Nos Kas.” Some girls are dancing and behind them kids are holding banners reading, for instance, ‘Thuis is het mooi in mijn huis.’ A small crowd is following the parade – not more than the youngsters’ parents and friends I assume (Fig. 2-3). A few people I register as looking like me: their clothes, their faces look
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more like those who on a Saturday afternoon find the time to visit some art show. I guess they came for Jeanne. Finally, a small number of people must be the artist’s production team: some are shooting a video and taking photographs, some running around looking concerned that everything is OK. The loud drums bring the neighbors out to their windows and balconies. The footsteps of our small crowd are loud by the street’s standards. But for the rest it is a quiet parade, faces are serious, people do not shout anything. This absence of voices gives me an uncomfortable feeling that people are not parading for real, they are just doing it “as if.” I ask my companion and learn that in the Netherlands people do not have to shout at demonstrations. Then I guess it is a cultural thing. I should myself start re-reading the signs, re-order the criteria of my observations. Yet neither a celebration, nor a protest mood are evident. But it may well just be my awkward position as observer of this crowd about which I know very little: they are at the moment participating in an art project, they must live in Nieuw Crooswijk and they are mostly of non-European descent. But then again, I still really do not have a clue beyond the information on the Dwaallicht website and my - as yet unclassified - observations and assumptions.

The parade reaches the park of Schuttersveld with the stalls and the stage, and people stop marching. The boys keep on beating their drums, the girls dance and the younger kids hold the banners, while the small crowd spreads around them and claps to the rhythm (Fig. 4-6). After a while attention dissolves; there is movement around the stage and the stalls. I stick around for some time with my random companion, but do not feel like staying to the end, so we depart. I got a small taste of an event in Jeanne’s projects. My companion - an engineer by profession – was introduced to the idea that this can be an artist’s project. In the subsequent months he followed almost all of the Dwaallicht events, becoming a more faithful attendant than I really.

Back in 2004, Dwaallicht was not meant to be included in this book that originally aimed at looking into projects already finished at the time of my research. But what does this mean? How would a subject’s direct experience – that automatically includes a role, even as observer - of part of such a process-based project affect a later analysis? What does the concept of the project Dwaallicht say about the relations initiated and directed by the artist with different parties, from representatives of the Municipality of Rotterdam (Gemeente Rotterdam), to the borough Kralingen-Crooswijk (Deelgemeente), to the Department of Visual Arts and Public Spaces (Beeldende Kunst & Openbare Ruimte, BKOR) of the Visual Arts Centre of Rotterdam (Centrum Beeldende Kunst, CBK Rotterdam), to local residents and to the artist’s production team, to journalists of the local press or art critics and institutions? What does the organizational and administrative efficiency in preparing an event say about the quality of the experience of people present during the event days of Dwaallicht? Should we consider the efficiency in project management, the communication with local residents, the quality of the experience of participants present during events, the relation between the conceptual and narrative framework of the project with Nieuw Crooswijk’s everyday life, the political position of the artist on the city council’s politics of urban renewal, the writing skill of Dick van den Heuvel (Dwaallicht’s commissioned author), the communicative and the aesthetic potential of the entire project’s narrative as it appears on its website, on printed matter and in possible future
lectures or exhibitions as re-presentations of the project? Do all the above parameters constitute criteria to be considered when analyzing Dwaallicht as an art project? Are all the above part of an art historian’s work and agenda? Which is? How does such an art practice function within an art context, especially from the moment on that its existence is registered and interest raised? Is such a project visible in another context? Are possibilities opened up for new social, mental and discursive spaces by means of the concepts and/or the interactive processes developed during such projects? And what does this art say about aesthetics in contemporary culture?

The first case study in this dissertation is the practice of the artist Jeanne van Heeswijk. Her work has been chosen as starting point for various reasons. It is in constant dialogue with issues and structures specific to the socio-political and artistic conditions of the Netherlands. At the same time it constitutes an interesting example of both the expansion of engaged, collaborative and participatory artistic practices in Europe since the early 1990s, as well as of their connections to related artists’ practices that preceded them in the United States. Practically every project by Van Heeswijk is process-based and employs some model of interaction between people as working method, while it also thematizes the conditions and potential of this interaction. And this holds true even when certain objects play a significant part, such as a mobile room (Room with a View, various locations, 1993-1998) or the multifunctional machine “Vibe Detector” (Valley Vibes, London, U.K., 1998), their role being to create a platform and facilitate a process of dialogue. In past years she has received particular attention within the Dutch art scene and responded to invitations by large art events - such as Manifesta 1 (Rotterdam, 1996) and the Venice Biennial (Dutch Pavillion, 2003) – as well as to opportunities for projects in the dullest urban or suburban, residential areas, such as Vlaardingen (1995, ongoing) or Columbus, Ohio (USA, 2002).

In what follows, I will first give an introduction to her projects from 1993 onwards, pointing out aspects that are significant to this thesis. The overwhelming size and complex structure of the projects render detailed descriptions within the main body of the thesis impossible. A full list of projects including descriptions is provided in Appendix I. Following the discussion of her projects, the artist’s practice will be analyzed on the basis of what is produced within her projects, splitting this “production” into three parts: the conceptual and narrative part, relations and events. This is a methodological division of three interwoven parameters and it does not correspond to any explanation by the artist that I am aware of. Indeed, for an art practice often so preoccupied with “real” life’s socio-political issues, this approach might appear to reduce the content of those issues to a story-board for an art theory preoccupied with art forms and methods. However, in due course, this approach will become a way of relating what is presented as the content and agenda of Van Heeswijk’s projects to the wider socio-political context within which her practice emerges, and to which it responds.

A point related to the above, and the last one to be made in this introduction, is that both in Part I, as well as in the last chapter on Hans Venhuizen, the importance of the links between the practices of the artists discussed and circumstances particular to the Netherlands cannot be underestimated. From the vague content of the
term “circumstances,” one parameter should be kept in mind throughout. Namely that the Netherlands constitute a very particular case in terms of urban and generally spatial planning. The creation of polderland in areas originally covered with water led to a long-established and uncontested, centralized system of spatial, urban and social planning. Related historical consequences, alongside the consequences of the general restructuring of the country after the 1939-1945 War, are still present in many aspects of contemporary Dutch society: from priorities in political decision-making to everyday life and, apparently, to art.\textsuperscript{86} The specifically interesting aspect of this planning here, is its influence on the motives and practices of the artists’ socio-political engagement, in the face of both art-world and governmental cultural agendas. But let me focus for the time being on Jeanne van Heeswijk.

1 THE ARTIST: JEANNE VAN HEESWIJK

Looking back at Jeanne van Heeswijk’s art projects, most of them had a duration of at least a few weeks. There is hardly any single piece of art or of documentation left afterwards, which could be regarded as adequate representation of what a project was about, or of what exactly happened there. Therefore, I will start here with a presentation of the artist’s projects and practices, so as to avoid in subsequent sections a constant interruption of the flow of analysis for the sake of describing the projects referred to. Additionally, parameters significant to the questions of the entire thesis will also be directly or indirectly introduced.

Projects and practices

After the Jan van Eyck [Academy] I exhibited an installation near Flatland in Utrecht. It was a sort of diary of objects. But when I visited the exhibition after the opening, I suddenly noticed that I was terribly bored with my own work. I was convinced that this was not it, I had a vague idea that art had to be about something different. … I started researching. I read a lot, I went to see a lot, and talked a lot with people. … [Suchan Kinoshita] had the idea of doing something relating to borders, in the context of Schengen. I am quite good at organizing things and asked her if I could help her. … I set up from my home a press office, an archive of correspondence with artists, press communication and address files. Everything published about borders in the press was faxed daily. This was the first time that I was truly myself the way I am, that I did things the way I did them and that I thought that this could be sufficient. It was an enormous relief. Because I really have to say one thing: I have always had great difficulties with the form. I have always wished to say lots of things and found narrative important, but it has always been a problem how I should put across all the things I have wanted to say in an object.\textsuperscript{87}

The project \textit{The Office} for Suchan Kinoshita in 1993 is the oldest of Jeanne van Heeswijk’s works, about which information is given on her website (Fig. 7). During the same year she also organized \textit{The Dinner}, in which she invited to her place the
artists Suchan Kinoshita, Q.S. Serafijn and Marcel Wanders asking each one to organize their own dinner party, with their own guests and a discussion theme (Fig. 8). According to Van Heeswijk, she was interested in their work and stories, but could not fully comprehend them. Therefore she took the role of a butler during the dinners, serving, listening, observing, but not actively participating.88

Between 1993 and 1998 she presented the project Room with a View in different versions, according to the re-contextualizing setting where it was placed each time, such as her studio in Rotterdam, the Amsterdam art fair KUNST RAI, a psychiatric clinic in Germany and the Maritime Museum “Prins Hendrik” in Rotterdam. The Room was a wooden box with four walls, a door and wheels (Fig. 22-23). Each time it provided the artist with a space for discussions with various individuals, mainly from the art world.

In 1994 the CBK Rotterdam commissioned temporary works to local artists as part of Opzoomeren, an annual event organized by the city of Rotterdam at neighborhood level.89 Jeanne van Heeswijk created a plan for the passageway that connects two houses for the elderly on the Mookhoekplein in Overschie. Together with residents of the two houses, she furnished the passageway as a living room. This project was named Outside Livingroom and was meant to last for one month, but in the event continued until 1998. Also in 1994 Van Heeswijk co-curated together with Ine Gevers the exhibition I + the Other, Art and the Human Condition. The exhibition was a joint initiative of the Dutch Red Cross and the Artimo Foundation and was hosted at the Beurs van Berlage in Amsterdam. It included artworks by a wide range of well-known, Dutch and international artists combined with visual and archive ma-

terial from the Red Cross and the media. This seems to have been the first project by the artist – here as curator – that attracted considerable attention by the art press, though not always favorable. Some art critics saw it as “dignity in exchange for art,” as art’s reduction to an instrument of human rights organizations and altogether as too didactic.90

Early projects contained central elements and directions to be met again in later ones. The initiatives of The Dinner and Room with a View are foremost about staging a concrete situation for dialogue and encounter between particular individuals.91 In them, as well as in The Office for Kinoshita, Van Heeswijk appears more as a listener choosing her mentors or a work placement. In The Office and The Dinner the “tutorials” are symbolically exchanged for a service – as secretary, butler – reminding one also of the Services discussed by Andrea Fraser and Helmut Draxler between 1994 and 1996.92 What is particular about these two projects of Van Heeswijk is the emphasis on enriching her own knowledge and skills, an interest that will continue throughout her career. Only later it will be traceable more in the challenges posed by the extensive research and gradual complexity of projects, rather than as direct target.

From 1994 onwards, the basic model of providing a simple context or platform for a group to have a dialogue evolved into providing a context or platform for invited participants to produce something in their capacity as artists, architects, writers and so on. As such, Van Heeswijk’s projects conceptualize and function as a basic frame of reference, in response to which others develop their own concepts and practices. This basic motif of art-world peers as participants was repeated in Until we meet again (Vlaardingen, 1995-2004), A House for the Community (Oud Beijerland, 1996-2002), NESTWORK (Rotterdam, 1996), State of mind (Rotterdam, 1996), Break Dance (London, U.K., 1997), The Secret City (Middelburg, 1997), Hotel New York PS1 (New York, USA, 1997), A Christmas pudding for Henry (Leeds, United Kingdom, 1999), Subway to the outside (New York, USA, 1999). In this light, Van Heeswijk’s projects especially till the mid-late 1990s display some elements of art practices that Nicolas Bourriaud connected to each other under his theoretical proposal of relational aesthetics from the mid-1990s.93 Bourriaud was interested in gallery practices, in which relations that were produced, staged and elaborated on, circulated within art-world networks. It must, however, be pointed out that the relations

and interactions at the core of Van Heeswijk’s practice are almost always located on the map at the geographical and social locations inhabited by the people involved.

At first loosely and hesitantly, more focused and emphatically from the late 1990s onwards, Van Heeswijk herself and invited art-related participants sought to have direct interaction with people from the places that the site-specific projects focused on. In some of the first projects these people were either the residents of an area as in *Until we meet again*, or of homes for the elderly as in *Outside Livingroom*, or of the new housing estate who were offered a ‘Welcome package’ in *Welcome Stranger*. The role of these people – whose urban and social environment supplied/ provided the art projects’ themes - appeared to become more active and complicated in *Valley Vibes*. There, people took the “Vibe Detector” and decided how to use it. Or later, when in the two versions of *Face Your World* the children were provided with high-tech equipment in order to visualize how they would imagine (Columbus) or lobby local authorities (Slotervaart) about the design of their urban environment. In *The Strip* and *Dwaallicht* people from the respective areas were involved in activities and performative events. It is noticeable that - with the exception of *Face Your World* – in most projects outside the Netherlands the concepts and narratives of Van Heeswijk’s projects do not thematize directly the particular conditions regarded as problematic in the neighborhoods. Even though it is due to these conditions that art is often called for in the first place.

This implies a consciousness of the ethical implications of what Miwon Kwon characterized as nomadic artists doing community art here and there with return tickets in their back-pockets. But also a consistency with issues implicit in I + the Other and Van Heeswijk’s own insistence on the necessity of “trust” and “accountability” towards all parties involved in a project. Nonetheless, it is hard to deny that this understanding of the issues of I + the Other, ”trust” and “accountability” originates with discourses of social work, ethnography or even with local authority policies. Only in about the past fifteen years such issues have emphatically entered art discourses. They are usually surfacing in discussions about what the artists’ ultimate aspirations are, when they engage with art commissions during urban planning projects – a long-standing and complicated procedure in the Netherlands – and, even more, with groups designated as socially weak.

Let me return to the model of creating a platform where art-world fellows were provided with “space” to produce work. It should be underlined here that the extent to which variations of this model have been repeated by artists during the 1990s, and their initial enthusiastic reception by art events’ curators of any scale, ideology or professional aspirations, created a sense of exhaustion. This exhaustion was accompanied by a certain disgruntlement at the fact that the artworld networks promoted were often far more sophisticated and fascinating than the artworks produced, unless one equated the two. And that is not to mention an overdose of documentation-based [re]presentations of process-based projects in art exhibitions. In Van Heeswijk’s projects some of the same collaborators appear time and again, such as Rolf and Maaike Engelen, Wapke Feenstra, Marcel Wanders, Irene Hohenbùchler and so on. From the late 1990s onwards the significance of inviting art-world peers starts dissolving with the appearance of differently prioritized collaborative structures with more vari-
able groups and based on more complex narratives and scenarios than before. What this means can be shown in the examples of two projects.

The first one, *A Christmas Pudding for Henry* (Leeds, UK, 1999), upon invitation by the Henry Moore Foundation External Programmes, comprised activities including workshops, fieldwork, presentations and discussions that were presented on three podiums (Fig. 9). The first was the Leeds Metropolitan University Gallery, where every evening somebody presented their visions of the city of Leeds in a lecture, performance, work or film screening. The website [www.henry-w.org](http://www.henry-w.org) was the second podium, giving weekly updates. As the third podium, the prestigious, black marble façade of the Henry Moore Institute became a blackboard on which ideas about Leeds and activities in the city were presented. The whole project had the purpose of elaborating on a portrait of the city with an emphasis on cultural infrastructure and relationships. It was realized with the daily involvement of more than thirty artists and members of the public. What seems to be indicated by the project’s organizational structure is the intention that, firstly, the creation of the city’s portrait go through various agents, from art institutions to non-art related individuals. Secondly, that it be (re-)presented by means of various artistic and communication media and methods. Finally, that it addressed various audiences, from visible visitors to events, to invisible internet users and the random passers-by of the Henry Moore Institute. All production or audience groups are accorded equal significance within the project’s formal concept and structure.

The second example, *The Strip* in the Westwijk district of the city of Vlaardingen, which lasted between May 2002 and May 2004, is far more complicated than the first (Fig. 10-13). The project was born as part of *Until we meet again*, which was commissioned to Van Heeswijk by the Vlaardingen City Council. The Council had originally wanted a sculpture master plan for the finished, regenerated area and Van Heeswijk was one amongst three candidates. Her proposal was to switch from the sculpture master plan to the idea of a project accompanying the gentrification process, commenting and intervening in close collaboration with residents. This residential area counted as a typical example of modernist urban planning from the 1950s; dysfunctional in the 1990s. While *Until we meet again* was a project invisible outside Vlaardingen, *The Strip* rapidly developed much broader ambitions, expressed...
The artist was given access to a shopping strip pending demolition at that time. Its owner wished to avoid acts of vandalism by “decorating” the facade. In an area of minimal cultural production, inhabited by migrant families alongside elderly Dutch who had not moved since the 1950s, Van Heeswijk turned the shopping strip into a “factory” for art and community production. Under its roof *The Strip* hosted next to one another an exhibition branch of Rotterdam’s Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen including a café and bookshop, a space for different workshops on youth culture organized by MAMA (Showroom for Media and Moving Art, Rotterdam), studios and small workplaces that artists and craftsmen could use for periods of three months on condition that they be open to the public twice a week. Different spaces within *The Strip* were available for a lecture and performance program organized by inhabitants of Westwijk. Finally, a fortnightly newsletter announced news from *The Strip* and Westwijk. What the organization, production and presentation structures of this project indicate is an intention to have a maximum of activity and creativity in a place, where it is the least expected. In this way possibilities would open up for everyone to imagine what the area could be like during the years-long period of the regeneration, which seemed to be only about closing down, demolishing and dismantling. Instead, *The Strip* emphasized possibilities of using the empty spaces in transition to tell about a community in transition. The project formally embraced in its structures, as participants or audiences, residents of Westwijk, the municipal authorities of Vlaardingen, the housing association Waterweg Wonen and the artworld.101 Anyhow, it should be kept in mind that, while it all started officially for the benefit of the locals who were “there,” Westwijk’s ex-shopping strip would not have received the lights of publicity without the involvement of the Boijmans Museum, the MAMA Showroom and the appearance of some well-known artists, curators and art historians.

This brings us to an inherent link between the largest of Van Heeswijk’s recent projects in the Netherlands, namely *The Strip, Dwaallicht* and *Face Your World* (Slotervaart). All three showed an attempt to function as catalysts in bringing to the surface the creative potentials that exist in the urban fabric of poor, “uninteresting” areas, pending regeneration and inhabited largely by families of migrant background.102 This intention goes part and parcel with the Dutch government’s decision implemented in 1995, according to which Dutch housing corporations were privatized and financial priorities seem to have taken over social considerations in urban planning. As a result, such low-cost urban residential areas became subject to gentrification strategies favoring demolition rather than renovation, often displaying business indifference if not disapproval of the population composition of poor districts.103

As is traditionally the case with most Dutch urban projects of large scale, there was some money allocated for art. And it is not unusual that the attention of commissioned artists – in this case Van Heeswijk’s – might be drawn to the social issues at stake. For these projects, the artist capitalized on existing opportunities: the initial invitation to just “embellish” the shopping strip’s façade, the interest of the Foundation Art and Public Spaces (SKOR) in a new version of *Face Your World* in Amsterdam, the attention Van Heeswijk received at the time as participant in the 2003 Venice Biennial.104 An artist’s professional prestige is a cultural capital that can contribute to
convincing potential collaborators like local authorities to allow access to areas and budgets – even if the convincing takes a whole year like in Slotervaart.105

According to the artist, residents of migrant background often know very little about what will happen to their neighborhoods. Her three projects were about raising awareness so that people could form their own opinions and appropriate their reality. Through such projects communities can come into being, groups can become visible and create their own identity.106 None of the three projects had the character of radical oppositionality.107 Rather, they aimed at providing those social groups, which planning decision-makers appear to regard as controllable and undifferentiated masses, with the means and confidence to demand a say in their future - starting here with their urban environment.

The artist’s concerns and methods in these projects, including the direct participation of members of the communities thematized, the photographs and further printed promotion material seem to demonstrate a turn here towards “traditional” community art. Despite ridding their vocabulary of terms like “community empowerment” or “representation,” they seem to have more in common with, for instance, the projects referred to by Finkerpearl, Felshin or Kwon principally for the United States, than with Van Heeswijk’s earlier “relational platforming” of peers.108 Indeed, the artist herself leaves us no room to assume that she is unaware of older community and activist art, of the critique they have received, as well as further theoretical approaches of communication with and representation of the “Other” from the fields of sociology, philosophy, anthropology, cultural theory and so on.109 Thus excuses of ignorance or naïveté, occasionally heard for socially engaged artists eager to explore group dynamics, could not be applicable here.110 Van Heeswijk’s recent practices can be read as a conscious “take it or leave it” proposal for a socially responsible art practice. This point will surface in the following sections on the production of concepts and narratives, of relations and of events.

2 CONCEPTS AND NARRATIVES

The term concept refers to “an idea or a principle relating to something abstract.” A narrative is a “spoken or written account of events, a story,” but narrative means also “telling a story.”111 In ephemeral, process-based art what exist at the very beginning are ideas and concepts. From them, all the ways through the formulation of a project proposal and the imagining of future scenarios, down to the involvement of various people and the implementation of selected events, a story is built up. A project’s story or a project as a story exists in all possible forms of articulating and communicating a project’s ideas and content. These might be written, verbal, visual or other. They might, or might not, be recorded. The narrative reaches beyond the official finissage of a project – provided a project has an endpoint – while there are also stories of projects unrealized.

In this section, seeing the project as narrative or in a narrative, will mean regarding it as a kind of space, within which a project is acted out and forever re-enacted, re-written and re-born. This is an important perspective to take, because through a project’s story one gets to know about – and thus evaluate – the forms that the initial ideas and concepts have taken within projects. Narrative can thus
become the strength or the weakness of a project, whether before, during or after the latter’s implementation. Here I will try to show what this narrative can be composed of and how it holds together not only single projects, but the whole practice, forming a most complex aspect of this art form with links reaching beyond the field of art.

The narrations within and without. Narrative as a practiced place

Thus, my working process consists of a continuous exploration of questions. Working with those questions instead of with images is a process inching towards a slippery slope, since one will always make mistakes in the course of such a process. One could say that my work is merely an investigation of the conditions under which images could be regenerated. I believe that today’s aesthetics has isolated art by separating the image from reality, while shifting presentation to representation. Because of that, isolated images have emerged without any connection to reality. In my work, I try to create contexts for images and their different possibilities so that images have the capacity to reconnect in a meaningful way to their environment.

Where is the difference between working with questions and working with images? If questions are part of an investigation, are images part of an outcome? Moreover, does reality present itself or is it itself presentation, while today’s images are only representing something, themselves mere means of representation – something detached? What if images are both, representing something and themselves presentations? And what constitutes that domain of aesthetics that appears to encompass the potentiality of all the above somehow in pairs, and in a time-based sequence marked by an implied ethics-driven prioritization? Is ethics here the yardstick of meaningfulness of an artist’s vision against a reality?

Below I will investigate for sources, resources, references, as well as for times and places of articulating the questions that the artist poses. In essence this is an investigation for the means with which projects are constructed as narratives. The study material may include everything from the first official proposal to all texts, talks during presentations, promotion material, invitations, documentation (if compiled and accessible) and so on, all of which are produced to communicate a project to different publics. Such narrations are principally articulated by the means of language. Any visual means used for presentations in exhibition spaces, printed matter, public spaces etc. also depend on some text, if they are to communicate a project’s story or content. Below I will initially refer to language-based means and later move on to visual ones.

Being foremost language- and issues-based, the narrative is in fact sharing similar means, references, concepts, points of skepticism, it complies to similar rules in building up its concepts and argumentation and it requires similar rhetorical skills or even tricks, as art critique and theory. It can include in the artwork its external critique, appropriate it even. An extreme example of how this works is the fictitious dialogue “Creative Urge” by Maaike Engelen, published on the artist’s website. A voice called “the poet” says:
Under the pretext of art one can furnish many activities with loads of money and give them the requisite amount of kudos. How boring it would be otherwise, if no one would know about me reading to these people of whom I don’t know whether they understand a mere iota of it. When I turn the activity into art, at least I’ve got a public. And that’s how Jeanne would put it: it’s very lucrative to call oneself an artist nowadays, and then just to go on doing what one wants to do, whatever it may be. Whether it’s helping the homeless, preaching in public, or spading over vegetable gardens for the neighborhood, anything goes - public and money for nothing - when you’re an artist and when you know to steer a middle way through all the specialisms.115

The dialogue was written for the presentation of an art prize to Van Heeswijk in 2001.116 Engelen - herself often involved in Van Heeswijk’s projects - has staged on paper a number of “voices” originating from a range of capacities that either the artist or others had taken within her projects, such as a museum attendant, a chambermaid, a critic, a dancer, a poet and a thinker. They all suggest variant interpretations of Van Heeswijk’s practices, echoing also positive and negative opinions expressed by critics in the past.117 One could, for instance, juxtapose the poet’s quote about using art as pretext for money and public attention, with the criticism that the exhibition I + the Other (1994) put art at the service of the Red Cross, “reduc[ing] works of art to mere pamphlets … in the cause of human dignity.”118 But what is more interesting is that one could claim this dialogue falls within the narrative domain of Van Heeswijk’s work. This claim could be argued for on the grounds of Maaike Engelen’s involvement in various projects, the occasion of the speech, the website where it is published and, of course, the origins of the conversing voices from Van Heeswijk’s projects. Thus the critique of her work’s weaknesses is incorporated in the narrative of the artist’s work and potentially turned to a strength.

There are more ways in which such transgressions might occur. The following account by Mirjam Westen of the project Until we meet again (1997-2007), out of which The Strip was also born, could be an example here. Until we meet again was conceived to follow and comment on the ten year long reconstruction of the district of Westwijk in Vlaardingen. Westen’s account accompanied a 2004 interview with Van Heeswijk:

The Strip … is part of the extensive long-term plan Until we meet again which Van Heeswijk began to present in 1995. … Her plan involved a series of projects that could make a positive contribution towards community life precisely during the chaotic period of dug up streets, unoccupied houses and vandalism. It became a comprehensive project aimed at involving residents in all the changes and initiating “meetings” between residents, the housing association and council departments. Van Heeswijk set up a series of activities for which she commissioned artists, architects and residents. In addition, for an eighteen-month period Van Heeswijk was given the use of a dilapidated shopping arcade in a block of flats, fulfilling an ambitious plan.119
Reading the above one is left with the impression that *Until we meet again* was a vibrant project already before *The Strip* started. Nonetheless, discussions with people from the Municipality of Vlaardingen, including the Municipal Council’s cultural policy maker between 1999-2003, Esther Didden, gave a different picture. They all were favorably disposed towards the artist and her work in Vlaardingen. Yet according, for instance, to Didden, when she started as advisor, with Westwijk’s reconstruction moving too slowly and Van Heeswijk traveling back and forth to New York during *Hotel New York P.S.1*, the project was “sleeping.”

Jeanne was frequently in the area, the meetings, but there was not much art going on, if I can put it this way. But she was there. And everybody slowly recognized her after a few times, that she was the artist, but there was no art. They were not worried or something, because they knew about the process [of Westwijk’s urban renewal moving slowly] and all the limitations etc. But it was not a dynamic situation when I came in. … *The Strip* was a savior for *Until we meet again*, it gave it an impulse.\(^{120}\)

From the 9-10 assignments given by Van Heeswijk to other artists, at the time of the 2005 interview with Didden only about six were realized. The realized ones were mostly limited in complexity, duration and reach beyond the sometimes few people directly involved.\(^{121}\) In total the project’s short description reveals little about what actually took place.

It is hardly possible today to think of *The Strip* without remembering the publicity it generated. But for the project *Until we meet again* very little was known outside the area of Westwijk in Vlaardingen.\(^{122}\) Whatever took place, took place in Vlaardingen and amongst the Municipality, the housing association Stichting Waterweg Wonen and the residents involved. Access to information on the individual assignments and their outcomes is possible only through approaching the aforementioned parties. Under this perspective, when Mirjan Westen writes that “in addition” to the “series of activities” of the comprehensive project *Until we meet again* “for an eighteen month period Van Heeswijk was given the use of a dilapidated shopping arcade...,” (i.e. the shopping *Strip*), it seems rather as if she is projecting on *Until we meet again* the image of a vibrant, multifaceted project that basically *The Strip* was at the time – and was also extensively published as such. Nonetheless, as the former saw its story published only rather locally, a text like Westen’s may easily be incorporated into its story for the wider art public, potentially making something of it in excess of what it was.\(^{123}\)

To move to further aspects of the narrative construction of projects and practices, as many questions handled in Van Heeswijk’s projects usually have their origins in non-art contexts, the artist draws from discourses in academic fields, such as cultural theory, sociology, social anthropology or philosophy. This engagement with theoretical discourses from the humanities and social sciences becomes evident in Van Heeswijk’s article “Fleeting Images of Community.” She starts by stating that “my whole artistic practice departs from my belief that art has the capacity to contribute to life” and a couple of paragraphs further on she explains:
The direct attention in my work for the participant implies the creation of platforms where people are able to encounter each other again and design and represent their own environment. At the same time, one should attempt to formulate a new moral attitude, since I do not believe in an aesthetics without ethics.\(^{124}\)

And Van Heeswijk continues by discussing the new moral attitude of the artist that should also:

… focus on the necessity of creating contexts outside of recognized art spaces while breaking down the isolated positions of these spaces. These novel contexts intensify and even create meaning because of their capacity to intervene both physically and mentally in the domain of visual art, whereas another kind of experience might emerge as a precondition for an active process of signification.\(^{125}\)

With regard to the above fundamental points of how the artist reflects on and develops her practice, and especially about the ethical and communicative dimensions of how the “I” can relate to an “Other,” she points to the influence of sociologist Scott Lash, of Emmanuel Lévinas and Hannah Arendt on her thinking.\(^{126}\) Quite interestingly, reading the above thoughts of the artist, the driving force and criteria of artistic explorations appear inherently connected to an investigation of ethics. Ethics, in the sense of the reflection on, and renegotiation of moral questions and principles governing a person’s attitude towards him or herself and towards others. Therefore, it does not come as surprise that in the same article she underlines art’s priority in her work, which distinguishes it from being merely a contribution to cultural theory discourses: “In my activities, imagination and the space for the image continue to be decisive.” In this article, just like in all her texts and interviews used for this thesis, Van Heeswijk’s discussion of her work has the strength of being coherent and – quite appreciated by art theorists – of creating spaces in one’s mind for an idealism that does not echo some over-chewed and outdated rhetoric. In this respect, the artist can help take the thinking on what the function and role of the artist’s engagement could be in today’s society a step forward.

But that’s exactly where the problem starts for projects that are developed on the basis of, or alongside the shaping of the artist’s thinking on meanings and objectives: the methods and interactive events employed, such as the “platforming” of peers, neighborhood meetings, activities with children, amateur band concerts, festival-like events, working group discussions with experts and so on, all these appear more commonplace, less sharp and intriguing than the thinking that frames them. This is not because they deal with a common-place and mundane everyday. Rather, it is because in comparison with the complex conceptual and theoretical approaches of how art may affect life, in the narrations of various projects there is a repetition, time and again, of similar patterns, motifs or formats of everyday life interactivity.
To elucidate the above, while keeping in mind the “new moral attitude” that one should attempt to formulate alongside a new aesthetics, let me move on from language-based discourses to the place of the image. Gallery exhibitions could be the first example here.127 The artist argues that she does not believe in the representational act, in representing the outside – the public spaces, the participating publics – inside a gallery and especially by means of documentation like photographs or videos.128 This position echoes ethical questions familiar to anthropologists, journalists, activists or documentary makers, who find themselves becoming spokesmen or lobbyists for groups to which they often do not belong themselves, but in the interest of which they choose to work.

Instead, Van Heeswijk tries to devise presentations in exhibitions that aim at functioning metaphorically for the ideas of projects that took place outside.129 What is meant here as metaphor can be seen, for instance, in interactive installations like Draw a Line (Tokyo, 2000, presented also in Venice translated as Conquest, 2003, Fig. 14), a twenty-five square meter area filled with Dutch earth, where visitors could play a traditional Dutch game about gaining and loosing land.130 The means of a game were employed for this interactive installation, which represented the ideas behind the project called The Future from the Sidelines that had taken place in Gorinchem, in 2003. She chose to appropriate a traditional game, that is, an already existing and non-art related form of interactivity between people, to which she cannot claim artistic authority. This game functions as a metaphor for the artist’s ideas and practices of staging platforms of activity outside designated art spaces. While it can operate as reference to the specific project The Future from the Sidelines - the game neither represents any identity of particular groups involved, nor recounts the story of the project. It remains at a level of representing the idea of doing things with people as art, of seeking out as yet undesignated spaces between art and the everyday. What’s more, the installation did not seem to aim at a strong impact on the viewer whether as visual or as conceptual art work. Some viewers found it “sitting” somewhat uncomfortably in the environment of the high-profile Venice Biennial. For the artist herself, such reactions only testified to a most meaningful presentation of her work in such a context. She recalled with satisfaction an art critic in Venice saying: “Jeanne, for the first time I respect you. Because how can you be so unrespectable? How can you be so low present? I expect that you still are you, that you don’t work for expectations.”131

Moving from the presentation space of the gallery to the presentation space of the page, whether a printed or internet one, things become somewhat more complicated in terms of avoiding representation. Significantly, books and websites rather than exhibition spaces, constitute the artist’s preferred media for communicating her projects. When looking at the pages of the *Face Your World* book (Columbus, Ohio, 2002, Fig. 15-17), or the *Face Your World* website (Slotervaart, Amsterdam, 2004-05, [http://www.faceyourworld.nl/slotervaart.php](http://www.faceyourworld.nl/slotervaart.php)) it is difficult not to talk about representation of a neighborhood. Attention is drawn to the effective informative and - for the web design - the interactive character of these publications.

An interesting question that arises asks what the relation between the narrative of a project and the narrative or the myth of the artist might be. How can an artist, on the one hand, responsibly communicate ephemeral, collaborative art projects that are about the Other, without arbitrarily representing the Other? And, on the other, decide whether as an artist one wants to create a recognizable visual identity for oneself with graphic means? In the case of Van Heeswijk, she makes herself disappear as initiator by giving to each project a very specific visual identity that refers to issues reflected on in the projects. For instance the eye-catching green of *Dwaallicht*’s graphics and various souvenir-like objects alludes to the expanded green areas within Nieuw Crooswijk - due to two old graveyards - that made the district appealing to developers ([http://www.dwaallicht.nl/](http://www.dwaallicht.nl/)). Or the blood-red surfaces of the *Strip*’s building façade, book and website that implied that the gentrification was not turning the area into a dead place (Fig. 10, 18-19 and [http://www.destrip-westwijk.net/](http://www.destrip-westwijk.net/)). Thus the visual vocabulary of the design is each time specific to the respective project. In that sense, priority is given to ethical and functional design choices, which, in turn, indicate, shape and “brand” her own chosen identity as an artist.

It was suggested at the beginning that images, meaning here *concrete* visual materials from projects, require some text if they are to communicate a project’s content.
Images used for printed matter and websites include mainly photographs, drawings, cartoon-like and digitally designed images, maps and collages. Amongst these, it would be interesting to consider photographic images separately. They usually document activities, events and the respective places. They show the people, environments and objects referred to in the texts. There are plenty of images and visual materials used, but they always rely on an awful lot of text to communicate meaning. The books of the projects *A House for the Community* and *The Strip*, could be taken here as examples. More than any other book, the former is a celebration of colorful pictures (Fig. 20-21). Two thirds of the book are taken up with full-color photographic plates occupying the entire double-spreads. However, in the middle of every single one of these double spreads, there is a half-page sized, four-page long, monochrome brochure inserted that provides explanatory texts. Cutting the image half, the text does not just accompany, but simultaneously imposes itself upon and violates the image. Similarly, in the book of *The Strip*, where half the book consists of photographs in full A4-scale, there are titles and texts laid over every single photograph (Fig. 19). Again the text does not just frame or support the pictures, rather it sits over and within them, imposing itself physically as well as conceptually. Consequently, even there where whole series of photographs relating to a project are employed to support the narration of a project, they are not really trusted to do so.

To take a different, but supplementary to the above, perspective towards photographic images, one could further consider how an individual image functions. Forgetting about art for a second, any photograph from an event records what once took place. In a photograph the event is forever framed. Taking a snapshot already interprets an activity as potentially worthy of capture. Photographs selected for public presentation further contain the decision that these particular shots caught something significant for an interpretation and identity of the recorded event favored by the publishing agency. Bearing these characteristics, a photograph cannot be regarded as a neutral means of representation. It presents itself to us with significant interpretation, it carries its own aims within the borders of its frame.135

Yet within an art project’s book or website a photograph itself also becomes an aesthetic event. Even if per se it is not intended as art, its selection there reflects the art project’s ideas and concepts, its placement complies to as much as it supports the priorities of that specific narration of the project. What’s more, in Van Heeswijk’s projects this exposure to a frame of aesthetics is in fact double. Not only does the

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context in which the photograph appears – a book, a website etc. - place it in a domain of aesthetics. In most cases, the events themselves - dinners, lectures, walks, meetings, workshops etc. – were already activities that had been drawn into a domain of art from a repertoire of non-art professional or leisure activities. The staged event was already framed, before the picture came. Had that first exposure to aesthetics with its ephemeral character gone unrecorded, it would theoretically had been possible for the event, with its ambiguous space and time, to be returned to the “real,” everyday life of participants or collaborators in the form of an experience – personal, slippery and fugitive like any other. Nonetheless, the presentation of the photographic image will persistently testify to a double exposure to aesthetics, eliminating forever the possibility of the art event merging back into an undifferentiated space of personal experiences from everyday-life situations, which provided the prototypes for many of those events.

Moreover, this second framing, the turning of an event into an image, is something that the artist, regardless of whoever else worked with her, is herself returning to the domain where her practice originated from – to art. In fact, even the absence of documentary evidence from an ephemeral art project would simply be the other side of the same coin: in the logic of art since the appearance of conceptual and process-based art forms, the absence of documentation – if not accidental – has to be the artist’s intention, therefore by definition an aesthetic choice.

Physically present or absent by choice, photographic or other images within the narrative space of a project will forever attest the presence of the artist. In the end, the kind of latent iconoclasm at work within the very imagery of the projects’ narratives as in books or websites can be regarded as functioning similarly to the design decisions mentioned earlier. While they leave out traits of the artist’s individual identity in favor of accentuating each specific project’s identity, they eventually type-set and stamp a whole practice to be identifiable with the artist as her own. A practice in which concrete images are never left to function with their own means, but have to be textually interpreted in the name of an abstract notion of the “image.” To put it differently, the “image” becomes one of the concepts that are taken up and narrated within projects.

If narration can be rendered on the space of a page by linguistic, visual and other means, there is another category of space, far more widely embracing as well as vague, that should be examined separately: public space. Whether seen simply as
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publicly accessible physical spaces like squares, streets and public buildings, or conceived as the more abstract notions of the “public sphere” or the “public domain,” the concept of “public space” comprises a category that includes and defines roles. The artist, as well as art in general, also have their roles and histories in it. The perceptions that dominate in a society about the roles of groups and individuals within the public domain go part and parcel with the narratives, the myths, even the scenarios that a society produces for itself, and by the means of which it makes sense of itself and sustains its structures.

Van Heeswijk’s is one amongst numerous other international artists in the 1990s, who aimed at creating platforms and stages, where situations and activities could be acted out, outside the everyday, but not at a higher level than the everyday. Many of them allocated active or passive roles to a public within activities as simple as a party, a dinner, a game, a workshop, a guided museum or city tour. The simultaneously increasing focus on “public space” as an issue in academic and political debates drew the aforementioned art practices in public, everyday-life spaces, into the middle of much broader discourses than one would, at first glance, have expected this art to raise.

By now these general observations are already clichés for European art of the 1990s. They have been partly pigeonholed within theoretical paradigms like “Relational Aesthetics” or “Kontext Kunst.” Yet, as mentioned in the introduction about the Netherlands, one should always look back at significant historical particularities in the reception ground for artistic practices that deal with public spaces. As the carefully calculated production of physical space by planners, engineers and architects has been an inescapable reality for centuries, the imagining of physical and social spaces of everyday life by artists has functioned as a metaphor of an emancipatory practice throughout the 20th century. One could follow the thread of this metaphor in ideas assigning to art tasks such as enlightening the public, uplifting it morally and spiritually, but also conceiving scenarios where art and life, utopia and reality would merge in imagined cities of the future. From the so-called “communal art” (“Gemeenschapskunst”) of the 1920s and de Stijl between ca. 1917-1931, to the Situationists in the 1950s, Constant’s “New Babylon” and later the Arnhem School’s Environmental Art of the 1970s, the line of this metaphor can be traced throughout Dutch modernism. What’s more, parallels can be drawn with the art-commissioning practice of non-art institutions, such as the Rijksgebouwdienst and the 1% for-the-arts legislation.

More details about this discussion will be given in Part II - chapter three of the

thesis with reference to Hans Venhuizen and his Bureau in Rotterdam. What should be emphasized here is that the fields of urban - and generally spatial - planning and management with their policies and discourses play an important role in Dutch society and culture. Art in public spaces and in the public interest should be understood respectively, as a smaller discourse within the larger and interdisciplinary field of spatial planning. What is significant here is that due to the large number of public art commissions from public constructions moneys, the space planning sector has for many years been a significant source of finance for the professional art sector. And while the commissioned art follows its contemporary art-world tendencies, there are certain independent characteristics that artists working in the public domain are expected to have, if they are to perform their public role well. Not only are they expected to produce interesting art - whatever “interesting” might mean - but also to appear thoughtful, resourceful, well-articulated and responsible in their articulations towards both non-art commissioners and artworld peers.\footnote{Especially when primarily engaging with a social context, it is difficult for artists working “in public” to escape the question of why they make the works they make by arguing for art’s autonomy of interests. Consequently, it is hard to avoid looking out for some theoretical framework and debate for the site-specific relevancy of their art.}

With these last observations in mind, let me conclude with summing up what has been suggested in this section. The projects of Jeanne van Heeswijk have been seen to unfold in forms of concepts and narratives, employing means of theoretical discourse more than any concrete visual means. Still, in the entire narration of this artist’s work, the “image” is always there as an idea. It becomes a kind of vanishing point on the horizon of any project’s narration, just as the vanishing point in a painting with Renaissance perspective lays down a horizon for the visual narration, regardless what the represented theme is. In that respect, seeing the projects as narrative spaces, following Michel de Certeau’s notion of space as a practiced place, one can take all the other discourses referred to in this section – whether artistic, scholarly, public or other - to be other spaces drawn into the domain of art in order to shift previously given perspectives. Then this kind of “interaction” becomes constitutive of the artist’s practice.

Consequently, one might claim that it seems as if the discourses of the “Other,” of art as (re)presentation and the subsequent allegations about yielding prior-
ity to ethical over aesthetical questions, all fade in significance. This is not entirely so. The instability of overlapping discourses, the fugitiveness of mental images, the priority of the imaginative over the visual, the continuity of practice instead of the momentum of a final, concrete object, all these are representative of the current state of affairs in the aforementioned discourses. If we accept that today it is not possible to rely on standard models of relations and positions of partners whether in reality, in art or in discourse, then how could the artist be expected to represent any subject-matter as a matter of fact? Rather, she turns out to be both presenting and representing the negotiations thereof. What this last remark means shall be elucidated in the following section about the production of relations.

3 RELATIONS

The aim of this section is to present the art practice of Jeanne van Heeswijk as a production of relations and, subsequently, to show in what way these relations constitute a form of representation. Michel de Certeau’s theory of *The Practice of Everyday Life* will be employed as a tool to explain the practice of relations produced by means of art projects. These are simultaneously relations of production and relations produced. Framed here as art, the practice in question cannot anymore belong merely to the domain of the everyday. Adapted by the artist, it is transformed into a form of art. It is by looking closely at the practice of producing relations as a form of art, that this section tries to investigate the respective implications and consequences with regard both to theory, as well as to the artist’s agenda of social engagement.

Relations between complicity and everyday life tactics
How does a person relate to the surrounding world? Is this not something that may find expression, may take some form of representation in works of art? If at one level relations might be represented by means of art, at another level relations and negotiations exist also during art’s production process. These are relations with different agents who directly or indirectly provide an artist with the tools, the support and a lot more that is necessary to produce work. This rough distinction seems reasonable for
art forms such as painting or installation, but not quite sufficient for the process-based projects discussed here, in the process of which an artist at the same time makes the involvement of others a precondition, a method, material and target. As quite sharply conceived, but loosely and selectively presented by Nicolas Bourriaud, relations in the work of several artists during the 1990s became a matter of aesthetics. A positive effect of Bourriaud’s proposal of relational aesthetics was that it gave the discussions a different tilt than before. Most discussions till then evolved around analyzing the engaged 1980s-1990s artist for instance as activist, ethnographer, social worker, unwilling instrument in city administration strategies, service provider, or just as wishful promoter of a 1960s-1970s revival. Those critical views had contributed key insights, often more substantially analyzed than Bourriaud’s theoretical proposal. But in most cases, they did not offer any tools for getting closer to the artwork beyond the ethics of representing and empowering the “Other,” the artist’s stated intentions, his/her conscious or unconscious complicity with urban gentrification, and his/her adaptation of practices from other professions. In what follows, I will concentrate on aspects of relations being part of the project’s process, which is both a process of production and an outcome thereof.

Working on, with, for and about people, means learning people, learning through relating with them, as well as learning how to relate to them. In their sequence, the works of Jeanne van Heeswijk move towards each new project acquiring increasing complexity in structuring relations between different parties, and with different functions and targets. Experience makes her more and more efficient in conceiving, developing and administrating ever more complicated small universes of relations.

What is emphasized in most positive writings about Van Heeswijk’s interactive artistic practice is her creation of platforms where people meet, where a community can come into being. Ideally, a community realizes itself and its creative potential and through that process it can imagine itself changing. In her projects she usually sees communities in the users of the same spaces, her preferred spaces starting from the basic unit of the neighborhood. In the previous section I discussed these approaches as constructions of narrations and I emphasized the production of narrative as almost the most wide-reaching aspect of this practice. But there is another significant parameter that cannot be reduced to narrative: the everyday. In most texts about Van Heeswijk one feels a preoccupation with the spaces of the everyday ever present. But the domain of everyday-life practice is usually given only a cursory glance. Art critics hover about it without really stepping right into it, where the artist develops her skills, like a painter or a sculptor improving their brush or chisel technique.

To be more precise, on the one hand the thematic core and the aims of a project give shape to the artist’s vision of how a community could come into being. A guiding principle is that within a project room be provided for many different parties to relate to this vision: local residents, staff of municipal or cultural institutions, or anyone providing conceptual or technical services. But themes and aims don’t tell us much about how things are done, about the relational grid in the making and the network in the use. One can think of Jeanne van Heeswijk like one of Michel de Certeau’s users of everyday life: her practice does not have any proper place, as it is developed outside the formal spaces of art production. Nonetheless, it does take advantage of opportunities from different fields, disciplines and structures, starting with the art
system. She sees a given situation and what to make of it. And there she tactically approaches the “x” or “y” institution, theoretical framework or network, knowing what their strategies and tactics are and temporarily drawing them into the terrain of the situation that she is building up at any given moment. It might be the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen brought over to Vlaardingen to open a temporary branch at an empty shopping strip (The Strip). Or the city mayor of Columbus, Ohio, having a bunch of colored kids coming from neighborhoods undergoing redevelopment into business districts to address him with formal enquiries (Face Your World). Size and status do not matter, as they enter the universe of the artist’s vision. She offers to all parties involved (e.g., the museum, the mayor, the children) the conceptual and in-between relational space of her art projects. She offers them a narration for what they could be. But as she is trained in tactics of hard-core everyday pragmatism, she does not only appropriate the strategies of different parties, but appears to adjust her own vision too to an attainable narrative. She does not seem interested in exiting the mundane everyday for a higher realm, or in envisioning a utopia, but in staging art within the spaces of the everyday. Therefore her projects are indeed always balancing on a thin rope, as it is never very clear if one should interpret the results of negotiations as compromises, or as achievements in putting across a positive vision that would otherwise meet with indifference or resistance by established structures.

It is never clear, because on the one hand, it is never really possible to measure what is spent and consumed for the production of a project against the value or even the nature of its outcomes. To remember de Certeau: “What is counted is what is used, not the ways of using. Paradoxically. The latter become invisible in the universe of codification and generalised transparency.” On the other hand, the projects have an equalizing effect on everyone involved. Participants are encouraged to explore in public their creative potential. There is space for the temporary staging of a personal moment. But nobody is ever recorded as having exceeded an average. There is no place for exceptional individuals to stand out, as the resulting vision will always be the sum of its parts. In the end, there is collective authorship and creativity is indeed generated, but it is difficult to imagine that such a democratic approach to creativity and performance coincides with visions of ambitious individuals. In creative workshops run by community centres, by social or medical institutions for specific population groups, or even by NGOs in non-Western countries, one can appreciate the immeasurable positive impact that amateur creative expression can bring to people’s lives. When such amateur collective creativity enters the artworld, framed by the initiative of an artist’s project, the balance changes considerably.

Thinking back to de Certeau’s user of the everyday, he or she is a poet of the everyday, subverting the institutions and structures by using them in his/her own individual way that hardly ever responds exactly to official blueprints or manuals. But this subversive power of everyday life lies in its lacking the intention either to change institutions and structures, to formally draw up new blueprints, or to diffuse one’s own ways to others. Moreover, practitioners of everyday life neither aspire to being acknowledged as such, nor need to imagine themselves as something different. In de Certeau’s view the subversive power of their practice lies in that it is all about creativity in individuals’ untraceable, uncodifiable patterns of using and consuming, rather than in producing measurable values.
But if an artist claims the practices of everyday life and goes back to an institutionalized and structured art scene, then the practice is instantly codified, it is broken down and analyzed if it is to be reproduced as art. Even when it goes out and mingles with the everyday life of a teenager, a shopkeeper, a company director, a kindergarten teacher, a philosopher and so on, still they will all, together with the artist’s hired cameraman who documents activities and the volunteer who buys sandwiches, regard and eventually judge it all as art.

It sounds flattering nowadays for an artist to have people doubting whether what he or she makes can be called art. A late recognition by critics can be sweeter than their early enthusiasm. It is less flattering to have them questioning if it is good or bad art. What has bothered some critics is that the ways of realizing socio-politically engaged, participatory art projects have often relied on making use of art’s cultural capital, commissioning framework and artworld P.R.. While also the relations produced between different groups involved in a project – target groups of citizens, commissioners, various service providers, sponsors – appeared so contaminated by tactics of everyday life speculations, as well as by strategies of professional networking and negotiations, that their relation to what the realm of art stands for looked almost opportunistic. In the end, professional circles still prefer to distinguish between the management of one’s relations to advance an art production, and the content of that production.

Practising negotiations or (re)presenting simulations
Nonetheless, one might see things from a different perspective, one that eventually cares little about rebutting the above negative critique. In the constellation of relations between different participants and facilitators - relations that are formed, mutate and get consumed within a process that is at once an art production process and the product thereof, one can discern also a representational function. To explain what sort of form and structure of representation that is, I will use as an example a description given by Crimson Architectural Historians about the field of professional urban planning nowadays:

Near total exasperation about the state of the profession has given way to one of the most important new urbanistic concepts in a decade: an urbanism of negotiation. Dutch city planners complain that 99% of their time is spent meeting people: trying to get the highway people to talk with the sports centre people; trying to get the railway people to stop their vendetta against the vegetable-garden people; trying to convince the Shell refinery people that they should stop protesting against the McDonald’s drive in being built in front of their installations; … All the while he is dreaming about devising a beautiful urban plan, that would be usable …

Ankersmit offers an interesting perspective on the contemporary state of urbanism. . . . In urbanist discourse the third power is indeed seen as powerlessness, as an obstacle to the implementation of big ambitions; it is seen as an anonymous mass made up from abject market forces
and incomprehensible bureaucracy. It is a lowly presence, best to be avoided, hardly ever written about except in the most averse tones: as something architecture and urbanism has to be saved from. The fact that the third power - orgware, bureaucracy, market forces (or however you want to call it) has meanwhile turned out to be the natural environment for building in any form or scale, is the trade’s biggest public secret.

And a few paragraphs later they talk about their own contribution to the design of the new Vinex location of Leidsche Rijn. 152

Leidsche Rijn is an urbanism of negotiation, and proud of it. The negotiations were not done in order to get the design realized; the design was made to negotiate with, to get the city built. The most important ingredient of this story is that the urban designers who came up with the impossible idea of integrating the construction of the new highway into the construction of the new town, and succeeded in having it their way, had no real power at all. They did not even have a strong and stable power base to operate from. They were a young office hired by a big office, hired temporarily by the city. Their position was that of consultants, the plan they drew up had the shaky status of a “sketch masterplan.” The power they were able to tap into came from the fact that they put forward one simple idea that upset all existing power relations, and then proceeded to try and influence these powers. Having no power themselves, their freedom of movement was not defined by the limits of their mandate. 153

What are Crimson suggesting here? Have the strategies and hierarchies in the professional fields of urban policy making and planning been taken over by practices of tactical speculation and maneuvering? Is the maker of blueprints meeting de Certeau’s user of everyday life? Has the process of producing merged with processes of negotiating? The “real” profession of urban planning seems in Crimson’s text to have become a simulacrum of itself. The professional planners exhaust themselves - that is, their energy, their time – in re-producing the background relational grid – orgware, bureaucracy, market forces, what Crimson identify as Ankersmit’s third power – of their professional field, rather than be supported by it.

If things are so, if paradigms of professional practices have merged with de Certeau’s practice of everyday life, then art projects like Van Heeswijk’s can still be regarded as comprising representations of the world around us. Such an artwork does not represent relations by the means of another medium. But it directly adapts and reproduces their functioning structure, it simulates it, and as such it represents it. One could think back again to what was mentioned earlier about “…aspects of relations being part of the art project’s process, which is both a process of production and an outcome thereof.” What Crimson refer to as a current (dys-?)functioning state of urban planning, has in Van Heeswijk’s projects been turned to a functioning of art projects. Crimson do not describe how an urban planner acts in producing as supposedly expected from an urban planner – see here also de Certeau’s blueprints
of cities. They describe the field’s function within the thickened plot of “orgware,” within which the planner is trapped on his/her way to eventually plan. Crimson’s product for Leidsche Rijn was not a design either. They used their “position … of consultants” that had “no real power at all” (Crimson), that is, no fixed “place of power” in de Certeau’s terms and therefore no set limitations – “the limits of their mandate” (Crimson). They had “freedom of movement.” What they claim they did, was a clever manoeuvre that influenced the field’s function by disrupting it, and only that way was it efficacious. While they basically describe how they hijacked Frank Ankersmit’s “third paradigm of power,” they come close to Van Heeswijk’s use of de Certeau’s everyday life tactics. And from there, whether as urban planning or art, they both advance towards establishing a position that is a practice: a becoming produced of pure movement that has itself become a place…

What does art do, when producing relations as art?

It all boils down to a handling that resembles politics: “real” life politics. Whether by professional politicians or in everyday life situations, politics function between strategies – the rules of the professional arenas of politics, art or urban planning – and tactics – de Certeau’s everyday-life practice, but also Ankersmit’s paradigm hijacked by Crimson. Politics do not function only in pursuing set targets, but also in reproducing their very process. That is also where relational aesthetics would lead, if brought to their ultimate consequences: organizing and coordinating groups of people in accordance with one’s vision is a matter of politics, as it includes acquiring and exercising power within these groups. Relations do not exist outside structures of power and the politics thereof.

Making a leap from Crimson’s Leidsche Rijn example to an abstract model, one sees public, political and economic relations in today’s Western societies advancing more by networking and by the skills of manoeuvring between situations and means available at any given moment, rather than by any de facto possession of concrete or symbolic capital. Power is equalized with knowledge of what is there, combined with flexible creativity in using this knowledge. In our case one could say knowing the professional field’s history and theory, the current state of affairs including institutions, agents and critical issues, but also knowing the content of cabinet papers, knowing how to deal with different people, and how to translate all this knowledge into strategies and tactics. This is also how webs of relations are woven, which make art projects like The Strip or Face Your World happen.

This over-flexibility in making use of means and situations - including people’s participation - was possible as means and situations were themselves no longer regarded as having concrete and stable meanings. One might remember here how Fredric Jameson or Jean Baudrillard dragged the evacuation of signs from their meaning in writings that became very popular in the 1980s. They interpreted reality as a sea of free-flowing, self-referential signs. Against such a backdrop, artists like Jeanne van Heeswijk who did care about the social relevancy of their art, tried to put art in the service of defining anew causes that would be meaningful for “real” life. While, at the same time, they adopted as their methods of making art this reality of free-flowing signs available for any use. If a world à la Baudrillard was an impossible place
to live, this was not in terms of practice – reshuffling signs and symbols to achieve one’s goals in “real” life can be really fascinating. It was intolerable in terms of being: oneself not standing as a sign for anything.

Within a “real” world that dangerously started taking up art’s terrain, as a space where codes of signs where decoded in re-presentation and thus revealed and then subverted, art itself tried to become a place where new identities and relations could be realized, rather than just represented. Nonetheless in doing so, the art project found itself becoming more contingent than ever: while aspiring to get closer to everyday life and become a simple event in its spaces, in conceiving and recounting itself as such, it actually lent itself a fluid existence as pure narrative. One can remember here the example of Until we meet again: the discrepancy between, on the one hand, its inspiring concepts of creativity and, on the other, the repetitive patterns of participatory events - partly due to which the project was confused with The Strip – coupled with the questionable existence of the project’s events as they appeared in Mirjam Westen’s account. As such, art actually did imitate the kind of free-flowing reality it originally set out to oppose. And only in doing so, imitating “real” life, the art did render possible the production of the means – vocabulary, argumentation – with which to articulate a critique against a reality accepted as empty, hijackable signs: the very criticism made on the art project.

Accordingly, such a process-based art is not a representation of a structure condensed to fit within the dimensions of a physical object that may trick us into believing that intentions and codes have become stabilized in its form, and might as such become subject to interpretation. Rather, the project is something between a re-production and a simulation of functions and relations. Thus also the determining agent, the artist, is rendered susceptible to continuous critique of political correctness when working with groups and institutions big and small, prestigious or disenfranchised, on the same social battlefields as community activists but claiming there an artistic function and without rejecting recognition and roles by prestigious cultural institutions (e.g., Venice Biennial, Wexner Center) or large-scale governmental programs (e.g., urban renewal of Crooswijk, Slotervaart).

The question that arises is who could possibly act and grow without leaving behind any traces of complicity? Or who knows complicity’s weighs and measures? Tricky enough, as the ways of being an artist in the professional arena have merged with the content of the process-based art project. As a result, both in the artworld, as well as in contexts of relations outside it (see here the various stakeholders involved, e.g., in Dwaallicht, Face Your World, The Strip, The Blue House) the aesthetics of relations appear at first sight to be swallowing up the ethics of relations. But this is exactly what is instantly reminding one of ethics for the groups of participants, against the projects’ initiating and framing persona of the artist. Ever returning to ethics, in a vicious cyclical movement, the more successful and widely known a “participatory art project by Jeanne van Heeswijk” is as “a participatory art project by Jeanne van Heeswijk,” the more the artist’s original vision of collective authorship and of the priority of the image against that of cultural theory is turned on its head. Even more so, as the artist was conscious of all different sorts of implications inherent in her practice - think back to websites, pages, texts etc., as in the analysis of “Concepts and narratives” – and did try to keep it all under the
sign of ethics, revisited by art. Eventually the failure of the artist’s intentions to oppose standard representational acts in the “real” world becomes the success of the art project as representation of the “real” world of social relationships. Looking closer, a representation of the public domain of which she is a product, and which she constantly reproduces and simulates in the inherent contradictions of her practice.

4 EVENTS

This section is about the events that Jeanne van Heeswijk organizes during her projects. What role do they play? What is the relation between events, projects and the whole artistic practice? Herewith I will suggest a way of breaking them down into various aspects: discursive, performative and, foremost, play. As a significant resource for the latter, I will use the concept of play developed by Georg Gadamer. In his hermeneutics, Gadamer developed this concept to describe the event of interpretation that takes place every time a viewer encounters an artwork.

But what would happen, if the event is the artwork?

On the “event”

One could describe the practice of Jeanne van Heeswijk like this:

Jeanne van Heeswijk is an artist whose artistic practice consists in organizing projects that include the active involvement and contribution of people, whose social situation relates to the projects’ theme.

Alternatively, one could describe it like this:

Jeanne van Heeswijk is an artist whose artistic practice consists in organizing events that include the active involvement and contribution of people, whose social situation relates to the events’ theme.

There are moments in most projects when something is happening that we could call an “event.” These moments and what is happening in them are not the project. A meal during The Dinner, a lecture during A Christmas Pudding for Henry, the moment the artist hands out a “welcome package” in Welcome Stranger, the festival, the parade and all other monthly events of Dwaallicht, each tour in the specially equipped Face Your World bus in Columbus-Ohio during which children were redesigning their neighbourhoods and so on.

Considering how much in the previous sections the scope of what constitutes the art project has been stretched in terms of concepts, narratives and constellations of relations, one might wonder with good reason whether such staged moments of activity are anything more than a necessary excuse. Something like a showcase public moment that allows a scenario and a network to join together and mutate into an art project. Nonetheless, this is something that they do: their taking place usually determines the difference between a project proposed and a project realized.

If, say, rain spoiled a Dwaallicht day, if in the Face Your World bus a couple of computers crashed on the same day, or if a visit to an activity of The Strip proved
a boring afternoon, would that mean that the entire projects failed? Well, not really.
There is still more to the projects than a strict implementation of plans or individual
experiences of single events. Besides, one cannot control luck. Of course, having put
so much energy into organizing these moments, these events, whatever takes place in
them has to be significant, to have some significance.

What in the above I have called moments, have in fact a longer duration and a
specific place and time. In essence they are time-based: fragments of time staged out
of the flow of the everyday, but still very near to it. As activities, they usually have
a model in some everyday-life, professional, social, leisure or other activity, which
is partly a reason why their patterns and forms appear repetitive. But within the art
project they are staged and framed differently, often undertaken by people different
to those “normally” undertaking them in “real” life.

When they take place during a project they are indeed often called “events,” a
term that also essentially describes time, as it refers to moments of a particular place,
time and significance. As events, they have their models in social and professional
events like visits and gatherings, or in cultural, festive or leisure ones such as festivals
and parades (that might even have once had a religious character), or in artistic events
like performances and happenings. Only to historical events would they not really
bear a resemblance: historical moments that establish concrete or symbolic turning
points in people’s collective consciousness. Besides, in our case, the term “events”
is not always suitable to describe moments of, for instance, collectively designing
and setting up the Outside Livingroom, or working as museum guard for Acte de
Présence – Sans Valeur. Nonetheless, I will conventionally use it, for the lack of a
more suitable word.

Thinking still in terms of time, and more specifically the time of the art project
as a process- and thus time-based entity, these moments are the parts of the project
that are distinct from all the period of preparing, since they are what is prepared.
They are what draws de Certeau’s field of everyday-life into the field of art pro-
duction, in the sense that in “how things are done,” they are (the) “things” that are
“done.” But further than that, they do not exactly serve any purpose beyond their own
taking place. Indeed, they activate the project beyond its being as a scenario and they
are its public moments. But while they do bring art to a wider public than the usual
exhibition audiences, they can be most exclusive in their selection of participants
strictly related to their themes. This is even more the case, when the scheduled mo-
ments of activity literally feature the people who are thematized, for instance children
from Columbus-Ohio and Slotervaart (Face Your World) or residents of Crooswijk
(Dwaallicht). Thus they may not always be meant for a live audience, as they could
render engagement a spectacle, parade the people they take as their subject, turn them
to illustrations of their social situations.

In all their above characteristics, the events discussed here as part of longer,
participatory/collaborative, engaged art projects indeed bear a resemblance to pre-
existing forms of art events as we know them mainly from Fluxus. Fluxus events also
transferred the everyday to the domain of art. And they often did so without either
necessarily removing it from its routine times and spaces, or needing an audience
to attend them live or documented to be acknowledged as art. Think, for instance,
of Alison Knowles’ quite well known event The Identical Lunch. It was a score
based on her habit of eating the same food at the same time each day: “a tunafish sandwich on wheat toast, with lettuce and butter, no mayo and a cup of soup or a glass of buttermilk.” Similarly to the flexibility of activating scenarios of projects like Van Heeswijk’s, Fluxus events were based on scores that gave them simultaneously specific and open structure, only in much more minimal form than the events discussed here. Yet for all possible similarities, the latter differ from their art historical predecessors foremost due to being parts of larger projects, the specific themes, intentions and structures of which directly configure the content and forms of the events’ activities. Accordingly, the projects’ framework also determines their events’ relation to specific social sites and the significance of their occurrence. One could actually sum up the essence of their most important differences in the significance of the spatial dimensions of the events discussed here: the space of the art project within which the events’ occurrence derive their meanings (see also “Concepts and narratives”), and the space of the social or political context in which the artists’ socio-political initiatives derive their intentions and socio-political relevancy (see also “Relations”).

Now, let me herewith sum things up and see where they lead. There are staged and themed moments of activity that I conventionally called “events.” They are something that is produced within a project, situated at a particular place and time, planned and organized with a certain structure and not as spontaneous action. Even if, in the event, they simply happen without strictly performing a detailed script, and they are subject to chance, since their primary content for participants is their experience. Anyhow, for all their open-endedness they still give some form to the play of the project: a play between the flexible space of the project as scenario, narrative, as an operating field of relations, but anchored at the particular place selected each time: the neighborhood of Nieuw Crooswijk and the theme of its regeneration, the children of Columbus-Ohio and the theme of the run-down streets in their neighborhoods, but also the Amsterdam art fair of RAI with its galleries, artists and visitors in Room with A View (Dependence).

On modes and forms
In what follows, I will try to investigate what forms and modes are employed within these events and how they relate to the projects as a whole. Ultimately, what do all the above say about the relation between art and the “real,” art and the everyday? What kind(s) of spaces do the art projects produce within, or between the two. And if these spaces do not merge – Van Heeswijk always organizes projects as art – then what exactly happens there?

The consideration of forms and modes is inherent in the consideration of art as long as we accept that the question of form is the bottom line of aesthetics. Yet as mentioned in the introduction, the immediacy of the socio-political themes and issues dealt with by engaged artists have led theorists of contemporary art to a consideration of the artists’ work using prominently tools from political theory and philosophy. This entails that questions and priorities from those fields have occasionally been transferred as such to art. This transfer often finds artists in agreement – especially some whose intention, admittedly or not, is aligned with social or politi-
cal activism. Consequently, this perspective indeed responds to developments in the field of contemporary art. Yet when it comes to the question of how participatory/collaborative social or political practices operate when re-produced as artistic ones, this approach more often than not submits awkward proposals. Towards the end of this section I will briefly return to this issue.

The question of theorizing forms and modes for process-based, interactive, socio-politically engaged art practices of the past couple of decades is not an innovation of this thesis. An interesting example would be Grant H. Kester’s book *Conversation Pieces. Community and Communication in Modern Art*.\(^{167}\) The significant element that Kester sees a number of such projects sharing and due to which he advocates the construction of a model for art theory, is that conversation is an integral part of the works per se, not just something provoked by the works. He defines them as “dialogical works” that “unfold through a process of performative interaction.”\(^{168}\) He mentions the art practice of Suzanne Lacy, WochenKlausur, Stephen Willats, Íñigo Mangalo-Ovalle and others, as examples of the paradigm he proposes. A central goal in his book is to understand this work “as a specific form of art practices, with its own characteristics and effects, related to, but different from, other forms of art and other forms of activism as well.”\(^ {169}\)

It is exactly this concern of Kester to investigate a form, a way of making art that interests us here. It relates closely to many projects by Jeanne van Heeswijk, in which interaction through discussion is at the heart of what is taking place within a project, such as in some versions of *Room with a View, NESTWORK, State of Mind, Break. Dance, Hotel New York PS.1* or the *Casco Mobile*. Nevertheless, there is a fundamental difference between Kester’s approach and the approach suggested here. What Kester identifies as the discursive part in a project, from which the whole art practice derives its distinct “dialogical” form, is here regarded as the moment(s) of staged activity within a project. The project in its entirety unfolds equally in processes of preparing and framing such staged moments.\(^ {170}\) A further difference is also that discussions as understood in Kester are not the only pattern of discursive events. One could also add lectures (e.g., in *A Christmas Pudding for Henry*, in *The Strip*), debates, experts’ meetings and roundtable discussions (e.g., in the Stedelijklab of *Face Your World*).\(^ {171}\) Indeed, one could further include discussions between visitors to the KunstRai art fair of the exhibition Grensvervaging and the actresses who performed a different role in each case as part of the two versions of *Room with a View*, *(Dependence)* and *(Real Stories)*.

Considering the last examples with the actresses in terms of their being staged moments of activity, one is likely to find the dialogical or discursive aspects of these events’ forms and modes less weighty than performative aspects. The mere fact that we are all the time talking about activities that are staged at a particular place and time, as well as move within a kind of open-ended *scenario* between “real” life and an artist’s vision, all these demonstrate close connections to performative acts.

However, one would not really call them art performances, even less link them to theatre. This is partly because they are not independent entities, but integral parts
of larger projects within which the events stage the projects, as much as the projects stage the events.172 Most significantly, it is also because the three aspects of the modes and structures of the performative which are of interest here, namely the act of staging, the stage and the players involved, all emerge and move within spaces where the borders of art and life are not transgressed once and for all for the creation of a new, discernible structure. Quite confusingly, they circulate back-and-forth between the two. In that sense we could probably say that they play some kind of game between art and the everyday.

The above relates to the structure and patterns of these activities – such as tours, meetings or workshops – the repetitive, everyday character of which is partly a reason for their resulting tedious character as art. One is unlikely to have the methexis of watching a “real” theatrical play. On the one hand, there is no act of mimesis, no drama play, no art performance on stage, just “real” life: a neighbourhood and its residents (e.g., Dwaallicht) or a museum with its staff and visitors (e.g., Acte de Présence – Sans Valeur). However, on the other hand, one is unlikely to take it seriously as “real” life either, since these staged activities remain outside the flow and expediency of a “real” everyday.

To see what all the above means, let me first consider examples of modes of the performative taken from various projects. At Moderna Gallerija the artist was acting out the role of museum attendant. Just like in Room with a View (Dependence) an actress was acting out a gallerist. Both were within situations of institutional environments, where the presence of an exhibition guide and a gallerist respectively, but also the presence of artists, were fully expected, but playing their “natural” professional and social roles. Accordingly, the element of staged performance is inherent in all situations where a given place is transformed by the artist into a particular different one. Both the very act of transforming, as well as the new setting, frame here the project’s events. That was the case when the galleries of Villa Alckmaer were returned to their original, residential function, or when the art space PS1 was transformed into a hotel room modeled after the Dutch “Hotel New York.” The transforming act provided a loose scenario, supported by the new temporary setting. Both conditioned a situation in-between art and ordinary moments of social interaction. Furthermore, there are events that literally include performances, but Van Heeswijk usually organizes the events as producer or host, staging performances by others. These might be art, music or other types of performances, examples of which can be found during NEsTWORK, A Christmas Pudding for Henry, The Strip, Dwaallicht, or even the Valley Vibes, where the multifunctional instrument of the Vibe Detector was lent to whoever wished to use it as DJ booth, recording studio, karaoke machine and so on.

There are two distinct levels in the above. Firstly, the events of, for instance, a music or theatre performance take place within and as the event of the art project. Consequently, someone who, at a first level, is performing something (e.g., music, a script) at a second level is performing him or herself in a wider range of his/her capacities. An example here could be The Strip. At one level, it was a shopping strip of ca. 3500 m², the various spaces of which were used by people for activities related to music, theatre, meetings, workshops for children and adults, studios for artists,
cooking sessions and much more. At another level, the variety and liveliness of The Strip demonstrated the potentials and capacities of the urban environment and the residents of the neighborhood of Westwijk in Vlaardingen. In the following extract the urban historian Michelle Provoost relates this second level also with the historical background of the neighborhood:

…the organizers of The Strip were able to gradually reveal that in such a neighborhood, albeit fairly unexpectedly, an urban potential exists and can be developed. … without falling into politically correct ecstasy about the diversity of residents who partook in The Strip, it is undoubtedly a positive outcome of the project that the creativity and self-awareness of so many groups was uncovered. The meals that people took together, the tours and the en masse visits to cultural events were reminders of the fact that these neighborhoods were initially built as the ideal environment for the emancipation of working class and formerly rural families, where they would be “taught” how to become “urban citizens” and would “integrate” with the other city-dwellers.¹⁷³

This overlap of roles and capacities between art events and “real” life illustrates also some of the problems of the public of public art. If the public is present within the project acting out its real self, how can it not be turned into a spectacle if there is another audience? And if there is no audience – as often the case – can there be art without spectators? In a complex merging of roles, the events of art and life are fused and confused: who is participant, performer, audience, organizer, who is staging and who is staged, whose story is it anyway (as author, as subject) and for which public?¹⁷⁴

Similarly to the analysis of projects in the preceding sections (“Concepts & narratives,” “Relations”) so also here the analysis of events demonstrates confusion of roles and vagueness of interests. Yet, simultaneously, it also shows an awareness about this contingency being the event’s real essence. Nothing makes this more explicit than the performative events in the last two versions of Room with a View, namely Room with a View (Positioning) and (Real Stories) (Fig. 22-23). Literally and metaphorically, they were performances of self-awareness and -reflection of the Room’s contingent character and nature as art. To be more precise, in its previous versions the Room had always been a wooden box on wheels, which could be dismantled and re-erected. Beyond the theme and context of each one of its previous presentations, the very act of each time adjusting the Room in a different relation to the institutional spaces of art (e.g., in the artist’s studio, at KunstRAI), had been a continuous performative trying out of how to make room for new ways of making art within existing art institutional contexts.

In Positioning which took place three times in three different art institutions, a dancer pushed and pulled the “Room” around for the duration of one day within an exhibition space. Thus the “Room” itself literally performed in a performance that concretized its contingent condition in and as art: being an event staged and staging, a space transformable and transforming, transferable, transferred and itself a transfer (metaphor).¹⁷⁵ Finally, a work between the plastic and performing arts, emerging
within the paradigm of the former, but adapting means and methods from the latter. *Real Stories* was presented at the group exhibition Grensvervaging, where documentation material of work by various artists was hung on the walls. The “Room” was left in its dismantled state and placed aside against the wall. In front of it there was a table, behind which an actress sat once per week to talk with visitors about the “Room” and the problem of documentation. Based on these conversations and all materials gathered through the journey of *Room with a View* and the life of an artist, Van Heeswijk wrote a twenty-minute long monologue to be played by the actress. Here the *Room* became a performative representation of its inherent tensions and contradictions: between the roles of one person collecting and editing contributions and the contributing participants, between presenting and representing (e.g., the artist was replaced by an actress), between experience and documentation. Besides, in *Real Stories*, the “Room” that in previous versions constituted an instrument for the setting up of an event, itself became the event. This was indeed accentuated by means of suspending its use: the “Room” was absent as a physical, functioning stage for the playing out of an event, only to be restored at the centre of attention as an object of study. One could go as far as to say: in order to restore the possibility of a theory of the art event, against multiple, temporary stagings and appropriations of its subjects. I use the term “theory” here in the sense that the concept had in its ancient Greek linguistic roots with regard to the sacred communion in festivals (and the so-called dromena, predecessors of ancient theatre) of religious character, where it was enough to simply be there present at the time of the event to be a participant. A spectator, a “theoros,” was already a participant just by being present, as part of a delegation watching the sacred, festive event.  

Let me summarize briefly what has emerged as significant characteristics of the performative aspects within the staged moments of activity that I have conventionally called “events.” The space within which these events take place expands across on a field that stretches over either side of whatever is the line that separates acting from being, art from reality, representation from presentation. This space is created by the project itself, by its emerging and existing in the practizing of both sides, moving back-and-forth between, as well as simultaneously within the space of either side. Adopting such an understanding of *space-place relations*, I am actually spatializing all three parameters I earlier claimed important with regard to the peformative: the
act of staging, those staging and those staged, as well as the stage itself. But at the same time, the very notion of presence as movement - in-between, back-and-fro – renders existence here a temporal matter: the moment of the event, that is, the moment when the intention of the artist’s scenario activates what she identifies as a particular context.

This last point reminds us also that it was exactly in response to a thematized context – an issue, a community, a region – that such projects came into existence in the first place and that they were usually called “public” art. Yet, when we now look closer at the modes of their participatory events, with their repetitive patterns and reified experience of being-what-one-plays and playing-what-one-is, the relation between the artwork and its public becomes confusing, whether regarded from an ethical (“real” life as context), or an aesthetical (forms of re-presentation) point of view.

As a consequence of the above, it becomes advisable to search for another category as analytical tool to explain the projects’ events in their space and time existence, with the discursive, performative or any other modes they employ, as well as in relation to, but not dependent upon their themes and content. A category that could embrace all the above, as well as apply to those staged moments of activity where the term “events” seemed rather out of place. That would be a category of play.

One should not, of course, expect that a notion of play is meant to explain everything about the staged moments of activity and their role within projects by visual artists, such as in my example of the artist Jeanne van Heeswijk. That would equate practices of art with practices of play and games. What we see the art practices doing in this case, is adapting and using forms, structures, patterns or methodologies of play. Besides, a most significant difference remains between play and the moments

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of activity that are here the object of study: following, for instance, Johan Huizinga’s definition, play can be play, only if it is a free and voluntary activity, not subordinated to any other sphere of activity, and taken up on the initiative of the player, who subsequently loses him or herself in play.\(^{177}\) This seems rather incompatible with events taking place in the sphere of art. **Forms and modes** of play and games can, nonetheless, be found operating in many different areas of “real” life. We could think, for instance, of sophistries or of any other language tricks one uses to dominate in discussion. Elsewhere, one is performing one’s skills and plays with one’s chances in exams, interviews or competitions.

In our case, modes of play and patterns of games are used in activities that are already framed by an art project and co-ordinated as such.\(^{178}\) Therefore, even if there is fascination and engagement in the experience of participants involved that relates to their experience of playing (e.g., for children participating in *Face Your World* it might be like playing), still it is not to be regarded altogether as “real” play. It has all along foremost been something else – art. In its initial intentions and in its ever after - mediated through documentation and narrative – existence. Thus, it is more of a reified experience of play that one has here, as well as more a matter of operating with the terms of a project as the rules of a game, rather than playing for the sake of the game.\(^{179}\)

One could name one important exception here that can be considered playing proper, but that would be with regard to entire projects, if not to the entire art practice, rather than just to the staged moments of activity. This exception is the artist herself, including whoever might occasionally be seen as part of the artist’s extended body, which here means partaking in the artist’s role(s) within the whole process. Because the artist is the master of the game in each project, in as much as she is playing seriously with her chances that the whole “machinery” she has set up for or as a project, and which also depends on how others will perform their roles in it, will eventually work. Besides, the artist is also constantly in the game of “negotiating” with the world outside the projects – whether the artworld or the rest of the world – why and how her projects are art, and what sort of art are they.

But apart from this special role of the artist, for the rest the play-like character of the whole endeavor corresponds most essentially with the **form and structure of its processes and the space(s) it longs to create between art and the everyday.** Only this character is usually downplayed by the leading part that the rhetoric of social or political engagement plays or, to put it differently, the space it occupies in a project’s narrative. Hence also the recurrent, played-out discussion of art’s aesthetics dissolving in fluid ethics.

But let me take things from the beginning and look first for forms and elements of play and of games in examples of events in projects, and afterwards return to the analytical problems that could herewith be viewed in a different light.\(^{180}\)

Starting from Van Heeswijck’s older projects, one could think of the *Outside Living-room* as a life-size dollhouse for grown-up children to play with designing, and then to be proud of how pretty it looks. Accordingly, every transformation of space I referred to as a kind of change of theatrical setting, such as in Villa Alckmaer (*State of Mind*) or the PS1 Studio (*Hotel New York PS1*), could be seen as inviting participants to play the Villa or play the Hotel. The same logic could apply in the artist acting as
museum guard at Moderna Gallerija, or the actress Anke van de Pluijm acting as gallerist in *Room With A View (Dependance)*. Furthermore, play as form, as structure or mode of doing something is quite explicit in cases when music is played as, for instance, in events of *A Christmas Pudding for Henry* and *The Strip*; or when music, sounds, recording of conversations are re-mixed as in *Break. Dance, Room With A View (Real Stories)* or *Krachschlagen*. Moreover, one could consider the different “gadgets” that were used for events in various ways, as similar in some respects to children’s toys that can be played with in different games. Examples would be the “Room,” the “Vibe Detector” or even the computer stations with special software used in urban design workshops during *Face Your World*. There is also the virtual game of interactive websites that often constitute autonomous parts of projects and not just their documentation or communication platforms. On the *Dwaallicht* website one can play a game of re-designing Crooswijk. Literally connected to the idea of games was the traditional Dutch Game *Draw A Line*, presented as exhibition display in Tokyo and Venice. Connections can easily be made between the Situationists’ psychogeographic games and the *Subway to the Outside* travels that the artist and Martin Lucas undertook around New York City, armed with a camera, microphone and questions for passers-by.

To end with – though there are still lots of examples – there is indeed a game “economy” in any themed debate, round-table discussion or experts’ meeting. These might represent the ideal of models for dialogue-based confrontations with serious issues, as long as one does not ultimately aim *primarily* for the sake of a social agenda, for a concrete application of the events’ outcomes in “real” life situations. A case of the latter seems to be the expected realization of the children’s park design of *Face Your World* in Slotervaart. As long as one does not strictly take the social agenda to play the prominent role, but, rather, takes the whole situation as a game: the game of children playing urban planners within the “real” planners’ playground.\(^{181}\) In that case, the space that the *Face Your World* design workshops and meetings created in excess of the everyday activities of the neighbourhood, of the children, the local schools and, of course, of the planners of the Staalmanplein area is regeneration, is injected as an *excess* to professional designers’ practices.

If the above suffice to exemplify how Van Heeswijk’s art projects connect to play and to games, then two questions still remain. Firstly, what is it that renders a concept of play *exceptionally relevant* as an analytical tool to understand forms and modes of what I have called “events” within these projects? And, subsequently, how will it help us in dealing with difficult issues deriving from projects, such as the overlapping of roles and identities or the social engineering rhetoric of community work, which often leave art critics at a loss?

For the former question, it would be useful to turn to a definition of play and its characteristics. Hans-Georg Gadamer’s concept of play, developed in the context of his aesthetic theory, could come in handy here.\(^{182}\) In his book *Truth and Method*, Gadamer developed a concept of play that he applied to explain the hermeneutic circle of communication taking place between an artwork and a viewer, each time the latter encounters the former. This hermeneutic circle constituted for him the event of interpretation of the artwork, outside of which the artwork does not exist for the world. In...
that sense, he saw play as “the mode of being of the work of art and its hermeneutic significance.” In what follows below here, I shall refer to Gadamer’s concept of play and relate it to art, but not in the sense of his hermeneutic model of art as play. By the end of this section, this differentiation should become explicit. Let me herewith quote and discuss some relevant passages from Gadamer’s text:

... it seems to me characteristic of human play that it plays something. That means that the structure of movement to which it submits has a definite quality which the player “chooses.” First he expressly separates his playing behaviour from his other behaviour by wanting to play. ... Correlatively, the space in which the game’s movement takes place is ... one that is specially marked out and reserved for the movement of the game. Human play requires a playing field. Setting off the playing field, just like setting off sacred precincts - as Huizinga rightly points out – sets off the sphere of play as a closed world, one without transition and mediation to the world of aims.

In the above Gadamer gives us the characteristics of play (e.g., the conscious, targeted and structured character of the activity, the structure of movement, its set-apart space) that have a lot in common with the descriptions of the projects’ events and their spaces as I tried to delineate them, but for which I could not find a terminology. In a nutshell these were the notions of having certain modes applied to individual events, an awareness of the staged and set-apart character of the activity, existence in movement, a marked space and, eventually, the creation of a separate sphere where the outcomes of the events as such have mostly no concrete influence in respective activities of the outside world.

Reading further: “As we have seen, the self presentation of human play depends on the player’s conduct being tied to the make-believe of the game, but the ‘meaning’ of these goals does not in fact depend on their being achieved” (emphasis mine). Which reminds one that if something were to spoil the day of an event, it would not mean that the whole art project failed and, furthermore, that the success of an event or project is unrelated to the creation of sustainable models for “real” life, based on the simulations of everyday activities that are the projects. Besides, in “Concepts and narratives” it was argued that when an event has finished, its story as narrated ever after becomes for it a new form of existence. In that new “life,” the event might even take on a new content and, thus, new meanings.

“Rather, in spending oneself on the task of the game, one is in fact playing oneself out.” Which also calls to mind that there can be no estimatable value of what is spent on the project (budget, energy, time...), measured against concrete outcomes. Particularly in “Relations” this impossibility of estimating was regarded as resulting from the nature of the spending (“what is counted is what is used, not the ways of using”). Here the impossibility is linked further to an excess of spending that renders the outcomes unreasonable to estimate in financial terms, but, rather, in the combined terms of art’s cultural capital and of play as excess of life. Moving on in Gadamer’s text:

The self-presentation of the game involves the player’s achieving, as it were, his own self-presentation by playing – i.e. presenting something. Only
because play is always presentation is human play able to make representation itself the task of a game. Thus, there are games which must be called representation games, either because, in their use of meaningful allusion, they have something about them of representation (say “Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Sailor”) or because the game itself consists in representing something (e.g., when children play cars).

All presentation is potentially representation for someone. That this possibility is intended, is the characteristic feature of art as play.

In the above piece Gadamer shows that the overlapping of roles and of presentation and representation is inherent in the structure and logic of the playing of games. And it is exactly if we see the issue of inherent connections between presentation and representation and arrive at an approach of art representation from a point of view of art as play – that refers to the structure and not to the subject matter (e.g., urban regeneration) or the people-subjects (e.g., specific groups involved or affected) of representation in art – that we are likely to avoid finding ourselves running up against walls of practical and ethical impossibilities of re-presenting one-an-Other. Because play is in movement, while subject matter is more settled.

All this brings one back to de Certeau’s definition of space as a practized place. But, also, to the question of how to approach and describe a space that is created by means of a circulation of movement in-between, and also simultaneously on either side of presentation and representation. Thus, taking my cues from the mode of play, it is possible to find there such a kind of space. A space, where also difference in repetition is an inherent quality as in when people play the same game many times over, or organize the same festival every year. Whereas seen from the perspective of contemporary art, the repetition of a similar repertoire of forms of activities that bring people together (e.g., collective meals, festivals, discussions, workshops and so on) appeared tedious. Returning to my reading of Gadamer a few lines further:

In general, however much games are in essence representations and however much the players represent themselves in them, games are not presented for anyone – i.e., they are not aimed at an audience. Children play for themselves, even when they represent. And not even those games (e.g., sports) that are played before spectators are aimed at them. Indeed, contests are in danger of losing their real play character precisely by becoming shows. A procession as part of a religious rite is more than a spectacle, since its real meaning is to embrace the whole religious community. And yet a religious act is a genuine representation for the community; and likewise, a drama is a kind of playing that, by its nature, calls for an audience. The presentation of a god in a religious rite, the presentation of a myth in a play, are play not only in the sense that the participating players are wholly absorbed in the presentational play and find in it their heightened self-representation, but also in that the players represent a meaningful whole for an audience. Thus it is not really the absence of a fourth wall that turns the play into a show. Rather, openness towards the spectator is part of the closedness of the play. The audience only completes what the play as such is.
This point shows the importance of defining play as a process that take place ‘in between’. We have seen that play does not have its being in the player’s consciousness or attitude, but on the contrary play draws him into its dominion and fills him with its spirit.\textsuperscript{190}

This long passage goes to the heart of the questions of “publicness” of these events. It offers an interpretation applicable also to the events in order to express their character as public art without them necessarily having the public as audience. Thus, from the perspective of their forms, structures and modes as play we can see some coherence in what constitutes the public character for the whole spectrum of activities organized by Jeanne van Heeswijk within projects. Some projects that are meant for an audience (e.g., in The Secret City), others that appear not to (e.g., Room with a View – Verlangen), others yes and no and probably not for large audiences (e.g., the Dwaallicht event on September 18, 2004), while others completely exclude them (e.g., handing a “Welcome Package” to the residents of a new housing estate in Welcome Stranger).

Besides, Gadamer’s passage contains references also to another significant connection between these events and public functions they seem to be expected to perform for people. It has often been pointed out that “identity,” “authenticity” and “orientation” are tasks that public art of any kind is called upon to serve with regard to the places it is created for.\textsuperscript{191} Thinking about certain types of collective activities in events, principally parades and any festive events that include theatre or music performances, collective meals and so on, we could trace their origins back to religion-related events of earlier times. Events that provided the life of communities with common points of reference in space (e.g., churches, monasteries) and in time (e.g., the church calendar, annual festivals). In that way, such religious events provided the respective communities with significant characteristics and gave orientation to the course of daily life.

I am unfortunately unaware of more than one really insightful theoretical analysis of how certain social functions that contemporary public art is expected to perform for communities are, consciously or not, turning art to religious surrogate.\textsuperscript{192} What is of interest here, is that various religion-related festivities of the old days were amongst the most significant play forms in culture.\textsuperscript{193} Viewed, in some manner, as a legacy of these practices, the events can be seen to re-emerge in the repertoires of contemporary art at the time when their original, religion-related, periodical taking place seems to be rather fading in people’s lives. While, reversely, in art, it seems that repetitiveness and reproduction become more and more significant, compared to avant-garde priorities of originality and uniqueness.\textsuperscript{194}

**On representations**

A point that should, however, be made here, in expanding from categories of religion-related practices towards social and political ones, is that the above realizations recall the negative critique mentioned in the “Relations” section with regard to the art project as a sort of third-rate simulacrum of relations in society. Relations understood in forms they used to have, and which today remain rather in the sphere of ideals and
wishes, such as community self-realization and expression. Yet, even if religious, social and political beliefs and ideas have ceased to find expression in traditional forms of collective events that once characterized the identity of communities (e.g., festivals), this does not mean that they have ceased to exist altogether. They have not vanished from interpretational narrations of life today. Rather, we have seen them in their narrations, or even we have “seen” their narrations. Turning narrative - their reformulation at every articulation - into object of study to understand the reshuffling of categories within. At that point, an event that once used to be a meaningful presentation for a community, representing its ideals and aspirations, has now been turned into a presentation of itself, representing to us the practice of its own taking place - from its internal operations and structures, to its external, symbolic functions.

Thus, returning to the concept of play as I drew it from Gadamer’s theory and applied it to events in Jeanne van Heeswijk’s projects, it could also help one see the projects as designating a new space within the field of visual arts. A space that bears relation to “real” life, but in the forms one sees the projects adopting here, did not exist before within the artistic field. What is exceptionally pertinent about grounding an interpretation of the projects’ function on forms and modes of play is that, in their relation to an outside world and audience, the art projects can now accommodate a contingency and complicity that would appear incompatible with the projects’ agenda of socio-political engagement. Now they bear within the very nature of their forms and modes the potentiality for all positive and negative implications of these concepts: the ambivalence of contingency that is pregnant with risks but also with possibilities; complicity, in the sense of betraying some right or order, but also entailing truly deep involvement. Indeed one should not overlook the fact that, in principle, the art projects are not celebrated as public for their pregnant forms and modes, but for social agendas and ideals connected to participation and collaboration that they are supposed to represent. In this latter case, the projects function in mediating some ideal models for “real” life, while in the former, they actually function in representing relations and mechanisms at work in “real” life. In that case, as already shown in “Relations,” the art practice produces – indirectly, through complex negative dialectics and quite unexpectedly – a critique of “real” life relations in the form of the critique on the art project.

This last approach is actually in tune with the model of a pluralistic democratic public space of art proposed by Rosalyn Deutsche. As discussed in the introduction of this book, Deutsche maintained that most understandings of public space and the public sphere derived from the agendas of mainstream discourses in urban aesthetics - as well as from the most influential radical critiques of those discourses - promoted models of a consensus democracy. Those models relied on exclusions of whatever would not fit in as a way of achieving harmony and unity, as well as on erasing the traces of those exclusions. By contrast, Deutsche advocated a pluralistic democratic model, drawing from theorists of radical democracy who understood social and political relations as constructed upon constant encounters and frictions between different, often antithetic subject positions.

Translated into art critique for process-based and participatory, socio-politically engaged art projects, the above issue could be phrased as follows: should an art project represent and critically reflect on, or should it downplay the conflictual aspects of
Authors such as Claire Bishop, Simon Sheikh, Miwon Kwon or Oliver Marchart, taking their cues from Rosalyn Deutsche’s references and line of thinking, have been in favor of the first option: the acknowledgment of the existence of conflicts in societal living. Following the analysis here, this corresponds to representations produced by the projects when regarded from the perspective of their forms and modes of taking place (even if it does not coincide with the ideal models in projects’ official agendas).

**Conclusions**

To wind everything in, let me go back to some main threads of the whole of Part I, as well as of this section in particular. Let me remind the reader that this study focuses on projects of a certain kind of art: process-based, participatory, socio-politically engaged art of about the past fifteen years. It was maintained that the optimal approach here is to understand the art produced as a *practice*, rather than as *matter*. Based on this approach, I wanted to investigate how it functions as art in relation to the world. Or, to be more specific, what forms of presentation and representation it produces, and how it produces them. This way of producing a practice that is a way of producing art, exists in the state of the constant transformations of its ever re-interpreted (re-narrated) variations. Hence, I presented the art production as a production of “Concepts and narratives.” Whereas in its operations and structures, it has been regarded as a production of relations.

This last section on “Events” began with the suggestion that events and projects should be understood as independent entities, yet interdependent on one another primarily in terms of operations (the events stage the projects, as much as the projects stage the events ... but an event ruined, does not mean a project failed). Thus events produced *in, by and as* the projects, basically have the function of creating a space where the projects take a place, a sphere where they happen, a platform where practice becomes event. In that sense, the participatory events have no other primary function, than their own taking place. As such, they should not be expected to mediate models to the “real” world: once one tries to set a foot there, the world betrays the projects as much as the projects betray the world.

To demonstrate the above I took the example of the art theory approach that draws from theories of democracy to analyze the participatory art practices in question, showing that this approach leads to contradictions. Because in their ways of taking place, the representations produced by the art projects contradict rather than coincide with the ideals and principles that the artists’ statements mean to represent. However, in the perspective proposed here, it is precisely within the ways and modes in which the projects take place that one should look for the essence of this art. The contingency and complicity resulting from the overlapping of roles and the overlapping of presentations and representations belong to these forms, they are their most compelling aspects.

To formulate a concept for their in-between spaces and fluid existence, I drew tools from a concept of play and games, but keeping in mind that my primary question was to articulate in words and to interpret, what this art gives us through its abstract forms. On the one hand, what artworks do by means of their forms, is to interpret the world by representing it. While, at the same time, the work itself does not exist
for the world outside of its own interpretation. This is something that Gadamer tried to show how it works with his hermeneutic circle: the play back-and-fro that takes place between artwork and viewer, every time a viewer encounters an artwork. This was for Gadamer the mode of being of the work of art. To make himself understood he used a concept of play to describe this recurring event of interpretation that takes place between viewer and artwork.

However, what I have tried to show with regard to the contemporary practices studied here is that, what for Gadamer was the mode of interpretation of the artwork, i.e. the hermeneutic circle, has here been adopted by the artwork as its own form - not just as the form of the process of its interpretation. Therefore also, Gadamer’s concept of play was relevant to refer to, but his theory of play as the mode of being of the work of art was not. Some three decades after Gadamer published his theory, the artwork confronts the viewer as audience, while it also contains the viewer as participant and as theme. It represents the world in the ways it presents itself to the world. The artwork exists within the interpretations that are the interpretations of it. It is its interpretations not in terms of its mode of being in relation to a viewer (i.e., the hermeneutic circle), but in terms of its own forms proper.