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

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Chapter 3

IN THE EVENT: PLAY. 
A “JEUX SANS FRONTIÈRES”
BETWEEN ART AND LIFE

PROLOGUE

Bureau Venhuizen is a project management and research bureau active in the field of culture–based planning. The bureau focuses on settlement and planning processes of spatial planning, taking culture as the point of departure. In this context, culture is broadly defined as cultural history, heritage and art, and also includes the contemporary cultures of a region’s residents. The bureau was founded by Hans Venhuizen, who acts as concept manager in these processes.

(front cover / page 1, Bureau Venhuizen brochure, Fig. 38)

In 1995 an exhibition entitled The Netherlands as Structural Work of Art was held at the Netherlands Architecture Institute (NAi) in Rotterdam. At the beginning of an extensive review of the exhibition in the architecture magazine ARCHIS Koos Bosma characterized it as “an important experiment in that it covers many centuries and gives a broad interpretation to the term ‘structural work of art’.” Further down the author quotes the “architectural historian and spiritual father of the exhibition and the book,” Toon Lauwen, in his definition of the “structural artwork.” It is regarded as an accomplishment that includes “defences made on earth and water, polders and other land reclamation works, harbors, canals and river improvements; in short, all those works that have artificially changed the look of this country during the last five centuries.”

With Lauwen’s exhibition and Bosma’s review in mind, let me turn now to the text quoted at the beginning. It occupies the whole cover of the informational brochure of the Rotterdam-based Bureau Venhuizen. The text makes a statement about taking a region’s cultural history, heritage and art as the point of departure in spatial
planning. Such a statement sounds like a common-sense, if not commonplace approach. What appears less simple to grasp, is the meaning of the capacity of Hans Venhuizen himself, who “acts” as “concept manager in these processes.” If the text is implying an art practice - Venhuizen’s formal training and professional background is indeed the arts - what does art have in a bureau, instead of an atelier, gallery or public space? Or, if it is about a professional planning bureau, what exactly is it commissioned to produce?

Turning to pages three to five (Fig. 39), one sees a number of photographs with captions indicating the locations (e.g., Sao Paulo, Berlin, New York) and themes captured. On page two the last sentence of a text accompanying all photos reads:

The subjects include hybrid forms of historic culture applied in new ways with varying degrees of success; lies in which there is such strong belief that they pass for the truth; grotesque denials of distinctiveness based on the conviction that it should be something else; and phenomenal situations that have resulted from a sometimes almost absurd logic.

A short text on page five encapsulates in very condensed form a description of their expertise: “Bureau Venhuizen culture-based planning and concept management.” One would probably have expected to find this short description on the cover/page

one of the brochure, and to find the earlier quoted text from cover-page/page one placed here on page five, rather than the other way round. Nonetheless by page five, one should already have an inkling that it must all have to do with peculiar encounters, with re-visiting the familiar and, for some strange reason, with spatial planning. Page six is black. The double-spread on pages seven and eight reads (Fig. 40):

This brochure is about the methodology applied by Bureau Venhuizen and its background. After introducing the concept of culture-based planning and Bureau Venhuizen’s interpretation of it, we move on to an examination of the organization of the process of spatial planning and the concept manager’s role in this. The underlying convictions, choices and methods are illustrated using three projects, which show Bureau Venhuizen’s methodology in practice. …

Now, the only thing clear is that the Bureau’s methodology will be explained in this brochure. The rest is likely to remain somewhat resistant to attempts at rational interpretation, unless one is acquainted with the “structural work of art” that is the Bureau’s home and playground – The Netherlands. A unique case that combines, on the one hand, years of expertise in integrating the professional fields of urban planning, architecture, public constructions and art with, on the other hand, an eclectic range of ideas that might at first sight strike one as strange or peculiar.

Bureau Venhuizen, Brochure, pages 5-6, © 2003.
PARTICIPATION AND COLLABORATION IN CONTEMPORARY ART

INTRODUCTION

With this last chapter I return to the field of public art in the Netherlands that has already been the background to the analysis of Jeanne van Heeswijk’s artistic practice in Part I. The case study here will be Hans Venhuizen and his Bureau, founded in 1999 in Rotterdam. In previous years, he had been working as artist interested in art’s relation to urban planning and architecture. By 1999 he was already repositioning his work from the field of art to spatial planning. The Bureau has no other member as permanent as its founder. But certain members also stay for years, such as Francien van Westrenen (2002-07) and Mariette Maaskant (2003-05).

Venhuizen has developed a methodology with which he investigates cultural elements in regions for which spatial plans are due to be drawn. It should be specified here that spatial planning is the wider professional field containing urban planning. The Netherlands more than anywhere else in the world, is a country where every last inch of land is subject to spatial planning. This is not only because the country is small, but above all because a great part of it consists of artificially made land (polderland), reclaimed from the sea. The outcomes of Bureau Venhuizen projects aim at informing the work of spatial planners and designers. Central to the Bureau’s methodology and to my interests here is a group game invented by Venhuizen, entitled The Making of. Participants in the Game are various stakeholders of any given planning case, such as residents, local authority employees, architects, planners and so on.

With Venhuizen’s Game as departure point, this chapter also returns to the third proposal of this thesis. Namely that next to concepts, narratives and relations, the projects of engaged, long-term process-based and participatory/collaborative art of the 1990s also produce various kinds of events. The term “events” refers here to various kinds of activities. The forms of these events relate to forms of play and games, as I have elaborated in Part I.4 drawing from Georg Gadamer’s concept of play. That discussion evolved around a triangle relation between art-play-reality, which I will pick up again in this chapter. The approach in Part I was based on seeing in this triangle three different domains. The idea of domains relates to the abstract spaces of our conceptualizations of what is art, what is play and what is reality. Perceiving them as domains means regarding them in a kind of spatial relation to one another. With the borders between them and the conditions of each one’s autonomy being in constant negotiation. Taking as starting point events organized during projects, the discussion evolved around the idea that the event is something that happens, something that takes place as part of an art project. However the event itself is not considered art in the sense of, for instance, an art performance or happening. Consequently the question was which domain does it belong to? What is its mode of taking place? Why? How? Finally, what role does an event play for the art project as a whole?

As practices are drawn from various fields (e.g., social work, activism) to the domain of art, the same kind of social, cultural, professional or other event like a dinner or a festival, might or might not be taking place as art. Or indeed, it might simultaneously take place on either side of whatever might be that supposed border separating the domain of art from reality, as it were. This idea essentially introduces to the discussion a dimension of time: when is it this, and when is it the other? When and how does it transit from the one to the other - if that is what it does? Or how can
it simultaneously be [in] both?

In what follows, these questions will be channeled into constructing a conceptual category of the event: the event of a transformation that takes place when an activity affects the relations between what were conventionally described as the domains of art and “real” life. Such a category and understanding of the event in art history and theory has no obvious antecedent except in Fluxus events. Fluxus events also turned moments of everyday life into art. However for reasons already briefly given in Part I, Fluxus events comprise a quite different category to that of the events in the participatory/collaborative, public art projects studied here. The concept of the event proposed in this book also has a genealogy in the field of art, only it has to be searched in quite different directions. Part of this chapter is dedicated to demonstrating this genealogy.

I will trace this genealogy by looking back at art and art-related practices that developed during the 20th century in the Netherlands and for which space - especially urban space - has functioned as a trigger of ideas for alternative, utopian models of life and society. These practices can be found, most notably, in the Situationists, Constant (Nieuwenhuis) or even the Provos. These expressions could all be characterized as avant-gardes, as they all proclaimed the absolute necessity of a radical transformation of life and society and developed conceptual models of their envisioned, quite utopian, worlds. However, the paradigm of space functioning as trigger of ideas for what was regarded as directly applicable improvements in life – i.e. not envisioned for a distant future - can be found earlier in the century, for example, in the Amsterdam School of Architecture with its attached “communal art” (“gemeenschapskunst”). Later it can be traced in the Arnhem School of Environmental Art. I deliberately chose examples from amongst the most celebrated avant-garde moments of Dutch modernist culture in the 20th century. Not coincidentally, as I will maintain later, they have all played a pivotal role in the development of a genealogy of concepts and practices, which led to the institutionalization of the involvement of artists in architecture and urbanism. This institutionalization resulted, on the one hand, in the birth of a flexible field of public art connected to the sectors of architecture, spatial planning and public constructions in the Netherlands. A field to which I view both Jeanne van Heeswijk and Hans Venhuizen as belonging. Consequently, on the other hand, it also relates to a hybridization of the artist’s role as social agent, symptomatic of which (among other reasons) are cases like Venhuizen’s switch of professional status.

Now, let me sum things up by providing the aims, structure and main theoretical references of this chapter. This chapter aims at demonstrating that forms of play and games have existed throughout the 20th century in Dutch art, where they have had a specific role, and that this role has been inherently linked to certain social roles attributed to art. Most importantly for my interests here, they can be detected in art and art-related avant-garde practices that took space as springboard for ideas of alternative models of life and society. And as I will argue, these practices constitute integral parts in the conceptual and institutional history of the emergence of the hybrid field of public art in the Netherlands. In the first section, “The practice of Venhuizen and the Dutch field of spatial planning,” I will introduce the case study of Hans and Bureau Venhuizen. Two interconnected projects will be provided as example, The Discovery of the Washlands Model (Beuningen, 2000-2002) and New Heritage /
The Making of H1 (Winssen, Beuningen region, 2001). Section two, “Space as a trigger of ideas for alternative models,” is dedicated to drawing a genealogy of art and art-related practices during the 20th century in the Netherlands, which found inspiration in concepts and ideas about space in order to conceive of new models of life and society. The relation of this genealogy to play and events is the object of analysis in section three, “Play forms in art.” Taking a close look at the aforementioned 20th century practices, one can see that they employed play and games-related forms. More specifically, they employed these forms as, say, a kind of interface for experimentations with the application of utopian ideas in their present-day reality. Most obvious examples could be found in situationist games and détournements, in models of Constant’s New Babylon, or in provo games and street events. However, related elements may also be traced in artistic forms developed in earlier 20th century modernist architecture and design, namely in the arrangement of visual and plastic elements on facades of Amsterdam School architecture. The application of play- and games-related forms in artistic experimentations with utopian ideas produced the “event,” in which art temporarily infiltrated into life. In presenting all the above, I will employ several theoretical references in this chapter. In a nutshell: in explaining the conception of play and games I use and its relation to art, I will turn to three theoretical propositions made by Steven Connor about conceptions of play in Modernity and up to the present day. Further down, in explaining the “mechanics” of artistic experimentations with utopian ideas about society, and the abstract category of “events” that is so derived, I will refer foremost to theories about play and games in Johan Huizinga, Marschal McLuhan and Giorgio Agamben. All the above will illuminate and give a content to the triangle relation of art-play-reality, especially for art(-related) practices in relation to urban space and its shaping, roughly up to the end of the 1960s. Section four, “The diffusion of play in the administered world” will bring this discussion to the last 10-15 years. While still being at work as evident in Bureau Venhuizen’s game-based methodology, the triangle art-play-reality and its operation seem to have undergone some kind of transformation: a transformation relating to changes within what is (or was) perceived as each one’s separate, autonomous domain. Using Connor’s ideas as departure point, I will examine the role of play and games in Bureau Venhuizen’s practice, in juxtaposition to some recent developments observed by specialists in the professional field of Dutch spatial planning. This last section will conclude with an attempt to investigate and propose possible roles of art and play under the transformed conditions of contemporary culture. Before closing, I should add a note to help the reader in following this long chapter. For reasons of coherence with the structure of all previous chapters in this book, I start in the first section with a presentation of my case study: the practice of Hans and Bureau Venhuizen, including two projects. Then in sections two and three that take a rather historical perspective, the case study appears rather rarely. I return to it and consider it extensively again in section four.
1 THE PRACTICE OF BUREAU VENHUIZEN IN THE DUTCH FIELD OF SPATIAL PLANNING

Bureau Venhuizen

Hans Venhuizen describes the sphere of his Bureau’s expertise as “culture-based planning” (culturele planologie). This term was actually introduced in 1998 by Rick van de Ploeg, economist and at the time State Secretary of the Dutch Ministry of Culture. In 2000 the Dutch Government officially employed the term in its four-year cultural policy plan entitled Culture as Confrontation – Principles on Cultural Policy 2001-2004 (Cultuur als Confrontatie. Uitgangspunten voor het Cultuurbeleid 2001-2004). According to Hans Venhuizen, five years later “many of those involved still cannot provide a concrete definition of culture-based planning.” Nonetheless, “it has become a familiar and accepted term that sparks interest, opens doors and opens budgetary purse strings.”

In Bureau Venhuizen culture-based planning is interpreted as a method applicable in processes of spatial planning. It comprises a careful investigation into existing cultural elements of a region, for which a spatial plan is expected to be drawn up. The usefulness of this method arises partly as a result of commissioners and planners lacking time to adequately contextualize their plans within the existing culture of any region to which they are called to work. Consequently, while a plan or design might look brilliant, the failure of planners to attend to actual local circumstances means that, once a design is inserted into the physical, social and cultural body of a region, it is likely to be rejected, transformed or misused.

In contrast, the first step in the Bureau’s method is to research and create an inventory of cultural elements – e.g., physical, architectural or technological – that they call phenomena. These elements constitute opportunities, potential springboards for design ideas. Which leads to the second step of translating, as Venhuizen explains, the selected phenomena into concepts applicable to the pre-design phase as tasks. Hence, based on these concepts and tasks, the third step of the method is elaborating on design solutions and constraints for the site-specific case.

A central parameter in Bureau Venhuizen’s rating of phenomena is that problems should be regarded as opportunities. Venhuizen all but ignores aspects that appear as problematic in the local circumstances in favour of more promising ones. This is an attitude he had already developed from the early 1990s, before re-conceptualizing himself professionally from “artist” to “concept manager.” Back then he used to call it “opportimism:” an opportunistic reinterpretation of problems based on an optimistic view of what is possible. At the Bureau this “opportimistic” attitude seems to have been turned into a practice.

The specific focus of Bureau Venhuizen is to optimize spatial planning processes. The Bureau is neither involved in the initial stage of deciding to plan, nor in the making or delivery of concrete plans. Rather, it imbues with its methodology planning processes that are already underway, preferably during their early stages. The outcomes of the Bureau’s work mainly inform the designers’ brief. This is also what concept management is all about, elaborating on concepts derived from “real”-life situations of planning in progress, in order to inform the brief for the final design.
Throughout their various phases the projects of Bureau Venhuizen include consultation and participatory team work with members of the local population, external professional experts, as well as any other stakeholders of the final plan. There, the Bureau’s role is to advocate or lobby for the most widely agreed upon plan, rather than for any of the interested parties, no matter who might have the fairest agenda. To accomplish this impartial advocation of an optimal plan, teamwork takes various forms: brainstorming and discussion sessions with stakeholders, experts meetings, workshops, opinion polls, interviews. In cases of public, participatory/collaborative art projects – though Bureau Venhuizen does not regard its output as art – some of these activities would fall into what I called “events” in projects. Besides these forms, the central and most original aspect of the Bureau’s practice is the game *The Making of* that Hans Venhuizen has devised as a method of examining the best conditions possible for a plan (Fig. 41-43: the Game). The Game is applied during the second and third steps. Representatives of all interested parties are invited to participate in mixed groups of players. Venhuizen himself might or might not function as referee. The game constitutes a method of discovering the best conditions possible for a plan. Participants are split into groups. Each group is given all related information gathered around the case in question, as well as a role. Each group is then called upon to come up with and lobby for a plan proposal on the basis of rational argumentation, regardless of what their personal interests might be. The Game has several rounds and out of each round a proposal is chosen, which is the one that meets the least effective resistance, even if it is not the most inspiring one. *The Making of* essentially gives shape to what is most widely accepted or desirable. Its dynamics are such that dominating depends on the power of argumentation rather than on any positions of power the players might have in the actual planning process. Venhuizen explains:

The game constitutes a methodology, applicable at the stage when decisions about spatial issues have to be made, but it is also essentially an abbreviated
course in design... [that] goes further than simply endeavouring to reach consensus, instead hinging on the process of creation, precipitation and rooting of relevant concepts ... all the people involved are detached from their rigidly defined ideas about the form in which they perceive quality and are made more aware of the constraints within which quality can be realized in their living environment. 429

At the moment of writing this paper, the bureau has played the Game some twenty times in different projects. At the same time as aiming at optimizing the different planning processes, the Game should also gradually improve as a process thereby. Thus improving also the effectiveness of Bureau Venhuizen’s methodology. The Bureau still does not interfere in the final design and, as Hans Venhuizen himself maintains: “You find the best conditions, but you don’t make the best design. What I notice with all the projects we do, as soon as it comes to design I only check if the conditions are met and hope to be interested in the design.” 430

From his position as concept manager, Hans Venhuizen himself has no real saying on the actual, final plan. The concept manager’s authority and autonomy are limited to decisions taken during the investigation of phenomena and the choice of which phenomena are worth translating into tasks for the second and third steps. This limited autonomy and authority, in combination with the “shared authorship” derived from constantly testing out ideas with experts and stakeholders throughout his working process, were determining parameters in redefining his status from artist to concept manager.

According to Hans Venhuizen, the transition he made from producing ideas, models and objects that expressed his personal utopian visions into managing concepts was a natural step, if he wanted to deal with real-life situations. 431 In “real” life, drawing a plan is a difficult task limited to professional planners. But the early investigation of a planning concept’s potential within its real context needs a different expertise. This is found in the creative capacity of artists. Whereas if artists get involved only in later stages when central decisions have already been made, they cannot be more than inspiration or amateur consultants to professional planners. Nonetheless, as the projects I will describe right below show, that what Bureau Venhuizen’s methodology offers can still match the aspirations of public art commissioning bodies. This is because commissioners’ aspirations from art might themselves be quite vague.
Two projects in Gelderland: 
*The Discovery of the Washland Model* and *New Heritage / The Making of H1*

In 1996 the artists Lon Pennock and Roos Theuws put together the *Beeldende Kunstplan Beuningen* (Visual Arts Plan Beuningen) upon a commission by Beuningen local authorities.432 The commission aimed at introducing art to the washlands area near the village of Beuningen in the province of Gelderland, East Netherlands. Deviating from the commissioner’s initial idea of just placing sculptures along the dike, the two artists laid the emphasis not so much on what art to place there, but on how to conceive of art in relation to the washlands landscape. They seemed preoccupied with combining the region’s existing – thus understood as authentic - cultural heritage with the man-made landscape and with their own interests as artists in process-based approaches. They saw the region’s cultural heritage incorporated mainly in two decaying buildings belonging to former brickworks. Taking these as starting point, they suggested including a project comprised of activities or events like workshops and lectures by visual artists, art students and local residents (amateurs). The art should be derived from these activities in the form of sculpture, video, drawing, text or whatever else. For the co-ordination of all the above, the Foundation From Weurt to Deest (Stichting Van Weurt tot Deest) was created. In 1997 the Foundation commissioned the curator Eveline Vermeulen for a pilot-project based on the Beeldende Kunstplan Beuningen.433 After Vermeulen finished her project in 1998 the Foundation looked for somebody else. Amongst proposals sent mainly by artists, they selected Hans Venhuizen.

There was in the 1996 plan by Pennock and Roos Theuws a sense of order. They understood Beuningen’s landscape and industrial heritage as themes and potential settings for the art. Process was their favored approach to art making. Workshops and lectures constituted the method and, finally, works like sculptures or film were the expected final artistic products. When Hans Venhuizen came into play in 1999, his proposal was at once responding to, as well as canceling the above understanding of the commission as an *art* commission.

To be more precise, Venhuizen proposed to leave the washlands untouched as either landscape or theme. Rather, the process through which the washlands’ landscape came into being was turned to a conceptual springboard, a metaphor. Throughout the country man has intervened in nature to gain land from the water. Especially in polderlands, man has artificially shaped the natural landscapes we see today. Thus, the washlands were metaphorically seen as a typical example of changing attitudes in man’s intervention into nature. Initially an intervention full of shortcomings, when people sought to plan the landscape’s development down to detail, but were of course unable to predict all imponderable factors affecting nature. Especially significant were changes in the soil, occurring each time that water would inundate the washlands and then recede. Later when planners started leaving “room” for this natural dynamism to unfold, such shortcomings were minimized. Hans Venhuizen saw a “washland model” in this landscape’s story that could be translated into a new approach to planning. It could even replace the already dysfunctional Poldermodel, the well-known metaphor of the Dutch landscape applied to the Dutch state’s model of consensus:434
Whereas the origins of the Polder Model lie in the struggle against the water, the complete mastery of nature, the Washland Model treats nature as a fertile basis that can be used constructively. In this model it is not a case of a resultant form, of the landscape, but on the way in which it has evolved, the process. 435

The project that Hans Venhuizen organized lasted about three years and had three phases that included interactive, process-based activities, quite close to the spirit of the 1996 Beuningen Visual Arts Plan. Some of the activities such as workshops, meetings, the Game, including the project’s working groups, invited experts, locals etc. fall within the category of events as introduced in Part I. The first phase was preliminary research.436 Thousands of cards were distributed in Beuningen, asking people what they liked, what they did not like and what they missed around their homes, the Beuningen region, and Holland altogether. (Fig. 44) Filling in personal details was optional. Around 500 cards, some 2% of the total number, were returned.437 Symbolic prizes were awarded for the best answers: a KLIKO-bokaal to a woman who complained about garbage (1st prize); a photograph of Leonardo di Caprio visiting From Weurt to Deest to a twelve years old girl who replied that di Caprio is what she missed the most in Beuningen (2nd prize); participation in the project session to a woman who complained about finding dog shit everywhere (3rd prize); a cheque for 50 guilders to an anonymous person who wished for the growing number of foreigners in the area to leave (4th prize, the money was sent to a local foundation that helped refugees); participation in the sessions for a woman who replied that she had nothing to complain about, being happy with her life (5th prize).438

Hans Venhuizen himself spent time getting to know the area, for instance talking with people in the Saturday market.439 In situ workshops with art and architecture students from the Netherlands, Norway, Poland and Switzerland took place. Groups of students carried out research on themes that Hans Venhuizen had formulated out of the grounding’s results. These themes also informed the themes of sessions during the second phase, when the game The Making of was also played.440 Later, some students spent one day interviewing young people on the street, reaching the conclusion

that the area’s youth appeared sufficiently pleased with their lives (Fig. 45). Finally, the sociologist Heitor Frugoli Junior from the University of Sao Paulo, Brazil, was invited to write an essay after spending an intensive week in the area.

The second phase of the project was developed mainly around three sessions: i. innovative living, or empowerment through impoverishment; ii. from dirt to waste; iii. identity versus Image. Participants in the sessions included two Dutch and two foreign experts, two local residents, representatives of the students groups and of the mirror groups. Texts, photographs, a project by Recyclicity (2012 Architects) and the game The Making of came out of this phase.

For the region of Beuningen the Game was applied twice. The first time it aimed at “broadly generating ideas for a number of existing situations and future developments in the municipality of Beuningen.” Its general title was The Making of Weurt to Deest and it drew its content from the aforementioned three sessions. There was no concrete planning situation at stake, for which the conditions were investigated in this game. With its culture-based planning approach and its proposal of the washland-model metaphor, the project was not really developed in response to a specific spatial development case in progress. Rather, it was investigating the significant conditions to be taken into account, had there been one. There were spatial developments pending realization – such as a sand mining plan in the village of Winnsen. But Hans Venhuizen was officially involved in the Beuningen washlands’ art commission, not in spatial planning. Thus, Venhuizen’s first project, De Uitvinding van... ended with a planning conditions brief for Beuningen, formally suspended without a planning case.

Things became more concrete when later Venhuizen was commissioned by Beuningen’s municipal council to develop a project linked to Winssen’s pending sand extraction. This project, New Heritage (Nieuw Erfgoed, 2001), was not an art commission. The game The Making of H1 was played several times over five days, informed also by the previous project. Bureau Venhuizen was called upon to apply their methodology, alongside the washlands’ metaphor and their Beuningen experience gained during the previous project. The purpose was to collect as much information as possible about the sand extraction in Winnsen. This information should then be applied to reach decisions about the most practical structural plan for the area.

According to Piet Snellaars, then “Directeur Sector Grondgebied Gemeente Beuningen” and keen advocate of Venhuizen in the local council, Venhuizen’s contribution was meant to offset the financial pragmatism of planners. Their landscape design after the sand mining was expected to downgrade the landscape’s aesthetic qualities and hence also the residents’ quality of life. Interestingly, the traditional inhabitants of the region, mainly farmers, had already sold land for the extraction and generally cared less than the newer inhabitants. The latter had paid to move there for the landscape qualities that were now under threat.

New Heritage took two weeks of intensive work. During the first one, various experts put on the table the existing situation, discussed it and finally played the ideas generating game The Making of H1. During the second week, inhabitants were given all existing information and the opportunity to develop their own proposals, again culminating in the application of the game methodology.

Let me herewith sum up some central points about Bureau and Hans Venhuizen’s practice. Hans Venhuizen has developed a self-invented area of professional
expertise, concept management, with which his creative skills and expertise as artist become applicable to spatial planning processes. Although it is a somewhat vague expertise in its content and difficult to disseminate beyond Bureau Venhuizen, concept management resonates with the so-called field of culture-based planning, officially introduced in the Dutch governmental 2000-04 cultural policy plan. Culture-based planning refers to a practice at the verge of spatial planning and cultural production. While similarly vague in its content as Venhuizen’s expertise, both are clearly conceived as filling up gaps in the work of spatial planners and designers. Venhuizen has officially abandoned his artistic status, as his approach is oriented foremost towards applicability. Even if, in practice, concept management can still respond or adjust to art commissioning calls. His methodology is based on the Game *The Making of*. In the final analysis, I would maintain that what Bureau Venhuizen’s unorthodox methodology produces is thinking about the relation between contemporary spatial planning and society, particularly the Dutch. As the *Washland Model* project shows, ideas derived from the centuries-long practice of human intervention in nature in the Netherlands are metaphorically transferred to the thinking and organization of Dutch societal and political life.

2 SPACE AS A TRIGGER OF IDEAS FOR ALTERNATIVE MODELS

There is nothing exceptionally new about Hans Venhuizen having a somewhat vague professional identity, constructed at the verges of art and spatial planning. In fact hybrid and fluid capacities emerging between art and professions relating to the shaping of man’s living environment have a tradition built up throughout Dutch modernism of the 20th century and still continue today. It has not in all cases been necessary to negotiate whether one should be called an artist or something different, such as concept manager. Nonetheless, one sees a consistency in developing a theoretical background to support the necessity of imbuing the fields of architecture and environmental planning with art. There are two aspects of this Dutch tradition of art in architecture and planning that are of interest here. The first one is theoretical, the second rather practical.

On the one hand, at an abstract, conceptual level art has been useful in exploring the limits of what was possible or desirable and producing alternative ideas and models. In theory these touched the ground – their inspirers would meticulously work out the details of their ideas and models - but their full realization was aiming at the skies. Examples of what is meant here can be found already in the idealism of the so-called communal art of the Amsterdam School of Architecture (mainly 1914-1923), but most importantly in the utopianism of art and art-related avant-gardes that followed the 1939-1945 war, namely in Situationism International (1957-1972), Constant’s *New Babylon* (1965-1974) and even in the Provo movement (1965-1967). These were neither exclusively nor explicitly art or art-related phenomena. The full realization of the ideal models of life that they proposed would render art redundant. What art did in the existing, not very ideal world, was to mediate between reality and utopian visions. If visions were to become reality, there would be no need for intermediary agents. In the above context, the support of art or art-related commissions
within the architecture and spatial planning sectors had at various times served as an embracing - honest or showcase - of experimentation and innovation. These are two qualities for which these professions in the Netherlands have during the 20th century built up their own international reputation.

From an organizational and administrative point of view the inclusion of art in architecture and planning gave birth to institutional structures that I will henceforth call the public art sector. While the foundations were laid in the 1950s, it was the 1970s that saw the institutionalization of public art, the heyday of the so-called Arnhem School of Environmental Art. The aims, operational structures, policies and strategies of this hybrid and light institutional apparatus have depended upon, as much as they have mirrored, tendencies and priorities of the larger professional fields of art, architecture and urbanism. These being the fields, to which the public art sector has been attached to up to today.

So in the context of the birth of concepts and institutional structures established between art, architecture and urbanism during the 20th century in the Netherlands, I will herewith elaborate on how space has functioned as a trigger of ideas for alternative models of life and society. The elaboration below will take the form of a twofold reflection focusing on specific moments in the history of modernism and avant-gardes in the Netherlands. Later in section four I will bring this discussion to the present, returning also to Venhuizen’s example.

Looking back in time - concepts
At the level of ideas one should not limit oneself to researching public art, but more widely consider art and art-related movements and practices where space has functioned as a trigger of ideas for alternative models of life and society. There is a tradition of them in the Netherlands during the 20th century. They offered models of life as a whole, the full realization of the most radical of which was mostly located in a utopian future. No matter how revolutionary or extreme in their ideas and manifestations, these tendencies have all but a marginal place in Dutch history. The examples chosen here have all met with local and/or international interest within the fields of culture, architecture and urban planning during their time. Besides, the fact that in their origins they have all had a group character and occasionally even an international one (e.g., Situationism International) also attests to them being expressions of shared, rather than individual, visions. The following examples are taken from some of the internationally most celebrated moments of Dutch modernism.

Still closer to 19th century ideas than the 20th century avant-gardes, the Amsterdam School of Architecture and its communal art gave their most characteristic works in the 1920s.  In the best, mostly early examples, artistic elements were extensively used on facades of buildings, as well as on bridges and street furniture to provide each one with a rather expressionistic character. Facades were complete with decorative elements ranging from allegorical or mythological sculptural figures, projecting stairwells and balconies, parabolic or truncated gables, windows of various shapes and sizes, surface patterning of brick walls and much more. These elements organized rhythmically the architectural surfaces of entire building blocks and even neighborhoods, rather than single buildings. Art in architecture was important
for one particular function: to accentuate the architects’ ideals. Deceptively irregular, the orchestration of shapes, sizes, textures and colors was made with both the building’s residents and the random passer-by in mind. The architects believed that the environment within which people lived could influence their spiritual and social development. They attributed especially to art the power to uplift people spiritually, to bestow goodness on anyone encountering it and to create a sense of community. Therefore it was important that people’s entire living environment – the home, the street, the city – should be imbued with art, even made into art. Quite importantly, their architecture was part of a larger social program in Amsterdam: it was designed in response to the pressing housing needs of accommodating the large numbers of workers coming from the countryside to work in the city.

Less preoccupied with bricks and mortar of architectural public or private environments and more with a more abstract perspective of urban atmospheres and psychologies, were the Situationists (1957-ca.1972). But they too took the spaces of cities as the sites where a utopian application of new principles would lead to a new life. Their principles came under the concept of “Unitary Urbanism,” meant as antidote to a city-born monster, the monster of the spectacle that disintegrated reality for the consumption of its parts. The Situationists rejected the construction or manipulation of visual or material forms in space as a reaction to the inescapable commodification of any object- or image-based production. For them, the way in which artists could be instrumental in changing the world would be by “converting art from a precious, consumable object to a principle permeating everyday life. Transformations would take place in quotidian, everyday uses of the city and its buildings, revitalization of art through a negation of its traditional values.” Part of the Situationists practices consisted in experimental investigation of how to map out the psychogeography of cities, how to manipulate atmospheres and ambiences or to construct “concrete situations.” Experiments took the form of urban games, psychogeographic walks with walkie-talkies, methods of detournement applied in painting, maps and collages.

The Situationists’ vision shared similar grounds with Constant’s city of New Babylon, the city of mobility, fluidity, transience and play. In New Babylon the architecture was the direct expression of a new man, the Homo Ludens. The man whose life could become play: machines would substitute human labor so that people would have the time to freely nurture the full potential of their imagination and creativity. In the urban and architectural designs of New Babylon space and social life were seen as one. According to Constant: “Spatiality is social. In New Babylon social space is social spatiality. Space as a psychic dimension (abstract space) cannot be separated from the space of action (concrete space).” In the models of New Babylon desires were turned to daily life, habitation to a game. For Constant architecture and urban planning affected human behavior.

Furthermore, one should add here the Provos who appeared in the early to mid-1960s in the city of Amsterdam. The subversive lucidity and absurdness of their performative public manifestations appears at first glance as the complete opposite to the intellectual seriousness and philosophical systematicity of all aforementioned examples. Besides, just like other groupings and movements such as the Kabouters and the Krakers that succeeded them, the Provos did not emerge as an artistic or cultural movement: rather, they had a social and political character. They were revolutionary
youth cultures expressing resentment of bourgeois lifestyles and a love for city life. In the character of their public happenings and statements there were lots of Dadaistic artistic elements. In essence, they turned to stages of their performative appearances not only the streets and squares of Amsterdam, but also political events such as the wedding of princess Beatrix to the German Claus von Amsberg in 1966, or social issues such as anti-smoking campaigns. What interests us here about the Provos is that all the aspects of their interests and actions had a common denominator: they were both derived from as well as inscribed within the space of Dutch cities. This could be maintained about their provocative attacks against the increasingly consumerist and boringly petit-bourgeois Dutch society of the early 1960s. It could also be said of their peaceful White Plans devised not only for a playful and creative, but also socially and environmentally more sensitive society.459

To conclude, what all the aforementioned examples share is that their conceptualizations of innovative or alternative models of everyday life were articulated as models for the formation, habitation, organization and use of space - especially urban space. Especially for those emerging after the 1939-1945 war these models were concise expressions of visions about society’s emancipation of post-war social dead ends. But they also reacted to emerging phenomena like mass consumerism, the commodification of culture, the society of the spectacle, the anonymity of the city. The most radical utopians were mostly aware that a total transformation of life and society - both the fundamental precondition for the realization of their ideas as much as their ultimate aspiration - would never come about.460 Nevertheless, they did elaborate in full seriousness the details of their projects not only conceptually, but also with experiments or single project applications of their models in “real” life.

Looking back in time – structures

For all the utopian, over-ambitious or however else one might characterize the aspirations of the above visionaries, they did meet with interest. Today they count as landmarks in 20th century Dutch culture. Amsterdam School architects were central in the implementation of Amsterdam’s transformation as a walk today around the districts of Spaardammerbuurt, Rivierenbuurt or the Mercatoplein will still attest to. The Situationists and Constant influenced ideas especially of later generations of architects and urban planners. Even some Provo ideas like legalizing marihuana were adopted by Dutch state authorities.

The concrete application of utopian models that were triggered by ideas relating to space, even if mostly in small-scale and short-lived versions (Amsterdam School is an exception here) on the terrains of “real” life, indicates that the respective professional fields or disciplines saw some potential there. The interest of urban planners, architects, but also policy makers and administrators in the applicability of artistic creativity as inspiration or solution provider to concerns of their own, created opportunities and places for artists to enter the processes of professional architecture and spatial planning. A number of artists were anyway keen to serve society. Many saw such opportunities as an optimal way to integrate their work and skills in the reconstruction of the built environment, the formation of the new cityscapes.

Organizations promoting the integration of art into architecture and construction were set up as early as the early 1950s.461 In the following decades they supported
a wide range and number – in comparison to other Western countries at the time – of activities and commissions for public art. In this field of public art, the philosophical or theoretical substratum of art’s relevancy for the spatial planning disciplines was more than a mere reflection of acknowledgment by architects and planners of the conceptual strength of new ideas in art: from the perspective of today, there were processes underway at a social, cultural but also economic and political level in Dutch society for which the philosophical underpinnings of art’s role in public space met concerns of political decision-makers.462 

This is not the place for extensive historical analysis, however some developments specific to the post-war Netherlands should be mentioned briefly, in order to illuminate how political parameters related to art’s relevancy for architecture and urban planning. The 1939-1945 war had left various places, including almost the entire city of Rotterdam, in ruins. This destruction of the infrastructure, coupled with rising post-war birth-rates and the gradual arrival of immigrant workers (gastarbeiders) created in the subsequent decades a pressing demand for new housing.463 The shortage of land and the threat of floods that occasionally caused major disasters – as in 1953 when almost 2,000 people drowned - had in any case been plaguing the area for centuries. Consequently, as it has become a cliché to say about the Dutch, they were forced to invent ways of mastering nature, as well as to develop a mentality where the primacy of the collective over the individual was understood as survival strategy. In the 20th century the spectacular development of technology rendered possible engineering undertakings of unprecedented size, such as the Zuiderzee and Delta projects (1958-1996), and the large-scale draining of polders.464 The positive consequences of these projects - for example in agriculture – coupled with the boom of the national economy from the late 1950s, led to a sense of civic pride.

However, people’s attitude towards the above developments changed during the 1960s.465 The impersonal, concrete architecture, the artificiality of the new urban as well as natural landscape (mainly in polderlands), coupled with the advent of mass culture and individualism in city life, became a source of concern. This concern evolved around people’s alienation from their living environment, from nature and from each other.466 In this context the integration of art into architecture was increasingly seen by architects, planners and policy makers as a way to imbue the designed environment with elements of variety, points of reference and orientation. So as to somehow make up for the loss of authenticity in people’s living spaces.467 Besides, according to Camiel van Winkel, conceptions about the capacity of art to perform such social and cultural roles should be considered also in the light of Dutch society’s secularization. As secularization accelerated from the 1960s onwards, it was the environmental artists of the 1970s who most concretely became recipients of the above as expectations:

The environmental artist can in some sense be seen as an instrument that Dutch society made use of to fill a particular gap. In a nutshell the programme of the welfare state boils down to mitigating and alleviating the negative effects on society of the capitalist system; to adjusting a modernization process perceived as blind. In the face of progressive secularization this programme acquired something of the character of spiritual surrogate.468
Under these circumstances, already in the early 1950s there were initiatives both from artists as well as from the Dutch state promoting the integration of art into architecture. The Association of Practitioners of Monumental Art (Vereniging van Beoefenaars der Monumentale Kunsten, VbMK, my translation) was founded in 1952. The term “monumental art” (“monumentale kunst”), extensively used at the time, referred to art that was created for a specific place or building. Such public art was regarded as the most appropriate for bringing art close to the people.469 VbMK was behind numerous cases during the 1950s, in which architects, as well as commissioners from the business world took interest in the work of monumental artists.470 In 1955 another body was formed, the Liga Nieuwe Beelden, that expressed a broader vision than the VbMK of the synthesis of the arts and their integration into architecture. From 1956 architects were also accepted as members. During the 1950s the Liga drew inspiration also from the pre-war artistic ideas of the Bauhaus and De Stijl. Later, in the 1960s, their ideals took a more social turn, aspiring at improving the quality of people’s life by means of improving their living environment.

On the side of state-promoted post-war initiatives, the cultural policy agendas for art in public spaces concentrated on the art’s alleged power to educate and enlighten a nation facing a post-war moral crisis. The establishment of the 1%-for-the-arts law (percentageregeling) in 1951 - which meant that 1% of the budget for any public construction project would be allocated to visual art - was partly legitimized on such morality-oriented, educational convictions about the role of art.471 Henceforward, the Government Buildings Agency (Rijksgebouwendienst) created within its projects and structures more or less permanent hubs for art, which continue to exist in changing formats up to today.472

By the early 1970s the ground was fertile for the institutionalization of the public art sector. Institutionalization in the sense of its both becoming ideologically accepted and absorbed by the establishment, as well as seeing the establishment of its own organizational structures. That was partly due to the pre-existence of organizational structures like those mentioned above. At the same time it seems that Dutch political, social and religious elites came to believe that a partial embracement of the ideas and spirit of the 1960s social and artistic movements would be in the best interests of society’s internal renewal and international image.473

In the context of these developments the importance of the artist’s role in the shaping of man’s living environment - my specific interest here - was also established institutionally during the 1970s. This happened most notably in the shape of the so-called Arnhem School of Environmental Art. Theirs was a completely abstract geometrical art, focused principally on sculptural forms designed site-specifically for particular buildings, architectural complexes, squares and other public spaces. The ideas of environmental artists met with a very positive reception towards the end of the 1960s and up to the second half of the 1970s. These artists took a phenomenological approach, according to which people’s living environment - especially the built environment - had a determining influence on the shaping of people’s personality and behavior. Therefore it was essential to offer people a stimulating environment, imbued with elements that could provide points of identification and orientation within space. Such elements seemed to be painfully lacking in the artificiality of the recently
drained landscapes of the polders, as much as in the changing cityscapes, especially wherever new districts had emerged.

Schools, universities, health institutions, squares, playgrounds, practically any place that counted as public space was potential recipient of art. Characteristically, these were abstract, geometrical art works, preferably integrated into the specific architectural design of a place, rather than autonomous sculptures plugged into already designed architectural environments.

The ideas of environmental artists about the artist’s role in the formation of the environment had a great impact on official policies for culture. This impact is evident, for instance, in the increasing number of public art commissions, as well as of the artists’ growing professional prestige within the Government Buildings Agency.474

Accordingly, the Ministry of Welfare, Public Health and Culture (Ministerie van Welzijn, Volksgezondheid en Cultuur, my translation) supported the involvement of artists in an impressively broad range of architecture and planning work. In retrospect, the political expectations placed on art in ministerial papers appear quite wild, especially when measured against the rather modest results of realized projects. The extract below from a ministerial report refers to two committees that coordinated the involvement of artists in the fields of architecture and spatial planning. It speaks volumes about the excessively broad scope and number of areas the artists were asked to contribute.

POBK (“Practical Research Support-group for the Visual Arts”) was in comparison with RAC (“Governmental advisory committee for the visual environment in relation to architecture and spatial organization”) more multifaceted from the outset. It also included an advisory committee for projects. The difference to RAC was that POBK strived to provide artists with a place not only in construction processes, but also in six more “areas of work.” The altogether seven areas of work were: 1. architecture and spatial organization, 2. techniques of visual assignments, 3. forms of cultural work for scholastic and extracurricular education and their supervision, 4. recreation services, 5. activities for working situations, 6. forms of service provision and, 7. advising and coaching.475 [My emphasis]

The involvement of artists in all these areas of architecture and spatial planning needed to have some ideological legitimization. This was epitomized in the form of umbrella philosophical concepts such as “alienation,” “identification,” “orientation,” “use” and “experience.”476 These concepts were presented as conditions or criteria for the quality of man’s living environment. Artists were considered exceptionally skilled for imbuing the work of planners with those qualities.477 Consequently, the involvement of artists in the space shaping processes counted as quality improvement agent. The reasoning on what was to be the content of these concepts was rather vague. This vagueness was partly due to the diversity of agents involved in processes of architecture and environmental planning, in the work of all of whom some artistic contributions could potentially be injected.478 Inevitably, for each one of these agents the content of “alienation,” “identification,” “orientation,” “use” and “experience” varied significantly.
The realization of this as a problem is clearly communicated in a report titled *The Care for Design* (*De Zorg voor de Vormgeving*, my translation), delivered to and published by the Ministry of Culture, Recreation and Social Affairs (Ministerie van Cultuur, Recreatie en Maatschappelijke Werk, CRM) in 1978. The following extract from the introduction to this publication gives a taste of the variety and diversity of professional specializations and organizations, within the work of which artistic contributions were diffused.

Out of the demand for the creation of more connections in policies within the field, the Minister of CRM appointed in 1977 a committee (overleg ingesteld) to consider ways in which to coordinate more effectively the tasks of several services, all of which were busy with the visual arts in relation to the built environment. Participants in the committee were representatives of the *Foundation Wonen*, *The Committee Artworks in Schools*, the *National Committee (Overleg) Regional Culture*, *The State Committee for the Design in relation to Architecture and Spatial Organization*, the *Support group for practical research in the Visual Arts*, the *Department of the Aesthetic Environment of the PTT*, the *Government Building Agency*, the *Arts Directorate of the Ministry of CRM* and the *Department of Cultural Policy Preparation of the Ministry of CRM*. [My emphasis]

The commission that was formed on the above ministerial initiative came to exactly the conclusion I reached above. There was lack of clarity with regard to criteria of quality, because each service had its own interpretation of what the terms “alienation,” “identification” etc. meant. Therefore the commission saw it as its task to try to clarify these terms. 480

**Conclusions: losses, gains and conclusions for the coming generations**

By the end of the 1970s it was realized that the artists’ contribution in all aforementioned sectors, as well as the presence of artworks within the spaces of people’s everyday life, could by no means fulfill the qualitative and quantitative goals laid down by policy makers and artists alike. One of the reasons behind the failure of Environmental Art in particular, was the difficulty for most people in comprehending the artworks’ abstract and geometrical shapes and forms - let alone comprehending the connections between the art works’ forms and the public role they were meant to perform as art. This art was seriously expected to have a concrete function: to create an enlivening and stimulating for the senses architectural environment, by means of “form and color, space and movement, material and texture.” With this phenomenological understanding of human perception and of the shaping of human behavior, the environmental artists wanted to provoke an interplay of variety and coherence at a spatial and formal level. Such an enrichment of the (architectural) environment should subsequently be enriching of people’s experience. Environmental art should open up opportunities for them to find points of orientation and identification within their rapidly changing urban surroundings. Nonetheless, as people had difficulties comprehending the abstract forms of this art in the first place, the assimilation of the
world around them through these forms was highly unlikely.

When later in the 1990s social engagement made a dynamic reappearance in Dutch public art a similar difficulty of incomprehensibility seemed to be intrinsic to it. The amount of text that has accompanied all forms of public art – whether object- or process-based – attests to the two principal factors of public art’s inherent difficulty in making itself understood by a general public: the difficulty of comprehending the artistic intention in the form it was given in the artwork, as well as the imperative to justify the public role of art for all parties involved in its realization.

Despite a rapid decline of interest in environmental and generally in socially oriented public art during the 1980s, the institutionalization of the artist’s role in the shaping of the environment was already officially established in the Netherlands. This is what interests me here. Together with the diversity of disciplines and institutional structures (e.g., in urban planning) that the artist had officially entered, came also the de-facto hybridization of the artist’s role. In the understanding of the content, context and aims of the artist’s role in organizations as diverse as, for instance, those mentioned in the report De Zorg voor de Vormgeving quoted above (Stichting Wonen, Commissie Kunstwerken aan Scholen and so on), the only common denominator was the artist him- or herself as contributing agent.

The question of clarifying and justifying the content of the artist’s roles, skills and contribution in all those sectors (see again De Zorg voor de Vormgeving) should at a meta-level be understood as a rhetorical one. The institutionalization of the artist’s role was in essence the institutionalization of vagueness and ambiguity, the official acknowledgment of their necessity in the shaping of man’s living environment. The elements that art had since the postwar years and throughout the 1970s been asked to contribute to public spaces were by definition vague: to tackle people’s alienation from their living and working environment; to help them adjust to technological advances in automation, communication and the energy sector that were changing people’s patterns of habitation and the use and perception of space in everyday life; to bring a sense of community and human scale to the rapidly expanding and thoroughly planned and programmed urban environments; to compensate for the loss of nature’s mystery and wildness in the artificial landscapes of the polders; to maintain spiritual reference points, to help retain a sense of the sublime in space after society’s secularization. All in all, the artist’s role had to be ambiguous and hybrid by definition. The diffusion of artists in various sectors facilitated the performance of this role.

For their part the environmental artists during the 1970s were in fact willing to give up the autonomy and even the individual artistic authority of their works for the sake of integrating art into architecture and spatial planning. From this perspective artists were only one step away from trading their artistic capacity for a different name. Actually, the more seriously and willingly an artist would take any of the aforementioned roles of art in public spaces and try to really do something there, the more understandable becomes a change, a disregard for, or a strategic use of the connotations of the word “artist” as a means to one’s ends. However, a discrepancy could be created by a complete denouncement of one’s artistic capacity: the conception of art as an autonomous field, and by definition elusive in its parameters, had been a precondition of the technocrats’ initial interest in it.
Anyhow from the mid-1990s onwards some artists like Hans Venhuizen did change the name of their profession (here to “concept manager”). Others declared themselves disinterested in whether they are called artists or not. It also became common to see artists taking up jobs as intermediaries in public art commissioning in addition to their “autonomous” art production. The number of similar cases reveal that some transformation in conceptions about art must have taken place. It was a transition that the institutionalization of the artist’s hybridity had prepared the ground for, and the environmental artists occupied exactly this transitional terrain.

By and large, the above observations especially from the 1970s to the present are symptomatic of a transition away from Modernism’s utopian visions and ideas about art towards a subsequent situation. A situation, where utopias appear not to be relevant anymore. Environmental art could be regarded here as the epiphenomenon of this transition. It indicates the point when a paradigm shifts. The phenomenon of institutionalizing the seemingly monumental naiveté of artists convinced of their ideas’ direct applicability to “real” life situations (that artistic forms could have the power to [re]shape people’s mentalities and behaviors), should be understood as indicative of a paradigm shift in conceptions about the relations and roles within the triangle vision-art-reality.

For Situationism International, Constant’s New Babylon and even for the Provos the real implementation of their visions could only go part and parcel with a thorough transformation of the world into a brand new place, where art would be rendered redundant. What art was offering in their present world were models for what everyday life would be like in the utopian cities of the future. However, in the here and the now it was within the domain of art that visions could take shape beyond the constraints of what was possible and realizable. One could quote here Constant to illuminate this point. Talking about New Babylon in 1980, six years after the complete project was exhibited in the Gemeentemuseum in the Hague, Constant formulated in a most insightful way what was feasible and what was not from his project.

Utopia in the true sense of the word ceases to exist, for nothing is a priori unreal unless, like eternal life, it contravenes the laws of science. New Babylon is based on facts that do not contravene the law of science: automation of production, disappearance of human production work, free disposal of the major part of lifetime for virtually everyone, activation of that time by inventive behaviour, the creation of life. These facts prompt several conclusions: freedom of movement, no need of a fixed abode, a built environment with variable functions, movable construction of a micro-structure.

Up to this point, it is possible to form a fairly clear idea of an as yet uninhabitable world. It is more difficult to populate this world with people who live so very differently from ourselves: we can neither dictate nor design their playful or inventive behaviour in advance. We can only invoke our fantasy and switch from science to art. It was this insight that prompted me to stop working on the models and to attempt in paintings and drawings, however approximately, to create some new Babylonian life.
Scientifically or technologically speaking, New Babylon was a feasible plan to realize. Planning people’s behavior was the utopian endeavor. One could only speculate and envision it. Consequently the domain of art was better suited than architecture for allowing imagination to take off.

But there is another aspect why the most radical of the avant-garde plans like *New Babylon*, Unitary Urbanism or the White Plans ought to remain unrealizable. This is something that Constant, the Situationists and the Provos occasionally appear to be aware of in their writings. And due to which the absurd cost of *New Babylon*, or the ludicrousness of the provo happenings and statements could be seen as guerilla tactics persistently keeping their projects at the level of the unrealizable. Namely, stripped of the precondition of a new world, a fully transformed place, single ideas could be manipulated and hijacked by the cycle of capitalist production and see their realization as products for bourgeois consumption. They would be assimilated by that, which their inspirers had set out to oppose: a society of consumerism, artificiality and the spectacle.

In fact this did happen after not too long. Visions became reality in reified versions, which is a major reason why utopias appear naïve and not relevant anymore. Concepts of cities introduced by Situationists such as the urban atmospheres can be traced in how the tourist industry conceptualizes and markets the uniqueness of cities. Think of, for instance, Amsterdam as the city of alternative spaces and cultures. The character of cultural and social movements of the 1960s and ‘70s has been turned into clichés exploited to attract tourism. Ideas of Constant about architectural complexes for New Babylon’s play-spaces have been realized in the non-places of shopping malls, airports and leisure centers configured to the game of consumption. While some of the Provo White Plans and other social campaigns such as the free marihuana have been successfully assimilated by policy makers to tame locals and attract foreigners.

3 PLAY FORMS IN ART

In Part I.4 about the production of Events in the practice of Jeanne van Heeswijk I drew extensively from Georg Gadamer’s notion of play, in order to analyze the relation between projects and their events, as well as to demonstrate how this relation functions in art and what forms of representation are produced there. Gadamer formulated a notion of play to explain “the mode of being of the work of art and its hermeneutic significance.” In other words, a play back-en-fro between viewer and artwork is what takes place, what happens, every time a viewer encounters a work of art. In that sense, in Gadamer’s theory play is there to describe the event of the encounter and, subsequently, the interpretation of artworks, the event of aesthetic experience. Play constitutes the hermeneutic significance of this encounter. Gadamer’s theory of play as the mode of being of the work of art and its hermeneutic significance could no longer be applicable in interpreting the encounter with projects like those of Van Heeswijk. The reason is that the events organized within such projects are not set apart from the viewer who encounters them, as happens with the forms of painting, sculpture or drama theatre before the 1960s. Rather, the viewer participates
in the form of the art project itself. However, Gadamer’s notion of play per se is still very relevant.

Gadamer was not the first in modern Western thought to introduce the relation between art and play. The relation is rooted in modern Western thought. Kant, formally the “engineer” of modern Western thinking who divided the domains of Reason, Ethics and Aesthetics, had originally included play together with art in the latter domain. In the evolution of Kantian thought by most of his followers, art took over. Art was serious, significant, could express the Higher and the Idealistic. Play was the opposite. It was fun, designated to children, good for stimulating the imagination, but not for the development of higher beliefs and ideals and surely not for rational thinking. Yet at the heart of the form of judgment that Kant had called aesthetic, there was the notion of free play.

In this section I will try to show that the avant-gardes discussed above employed play and game-related forms in their experimentations with infiltrating art into life. This means that the triangle art-play-reality that Venuizen employes in his professional practice has a genealogy behind it. In this genealogy forms of play and games functioned as interfaces for temporary experimentations with the envisioned utopian ideas. Investigating a genealogy of forms is important here, since the target of this thesis is to analyze the forms produced by a certain kind of public art. And through that analysis, to examine how this art relates to its social and political context. Forms of play and games are central in the practice of Bureau Venhuizen. Utilizing skills from his artistic background, Hans Venhuizen has devised the Game as a method optimizing spatial planning processes. Moreover, a certain playfulness is inherent in the humor and the “opportimism” of his whole attitude.

In discussing the genealogy of avant-garde practices in relation to the use of forms of play and games I will leave Gadamer behind. Instead I will take as guide, three propositions about the conception of play in modernity and up to the present day introduced by Steven Connor in a keynote talk given in 2005 under the title “Playstations. Or, Playing in Earnest.” I will argue that the conceptions of play proposed by Connor are inherently linked to conceptions of art as discussed in the previous section. That is, in cases where space functioned as trigger of ideas for alternative models articulated by the means of art.

Now, in the midst of all the above it should not be forgotten that this chapter is about the events produced within projects. At a first level, the term “events” refers to meetings, workshops and other group activities that Bureau Venhuizen organizes in its projects. In accordance to what was also suggested about Jeanne van Heeswijk, these events “activate” a project’s ideas and scenarios into something happening, something taking place with a certain theme and at a particular place and time. Various people participate usually in these events, which is partly a reason why this art is characterized as public and participatory. In Venhuizen projects the models for these events originate in professional (e.g., opinion polls), educational (e.g., students’ workshops) or leisure-time (e.g., the Game) activities. Unlike Jeanne van Heeswijk, in Bureau Venhuizen’s practice they are formally presented as furnishing the concept manager’s professional methodology, rather than an art project.

At a more theoretical level, that what happens when forms of play and games are used as interfaces for temporary experimental transitions from reality to utopia
through art can be called an “event.” Notions of “event” connected to notions of play can be found in some theories about play (e.g., Gadamer, about the event of the encounter between viewer and art work, see here Part I.4). In such theories, a category of the event sometimes refers to collective activities and it comes part and parcel with the domain and function of play. In my area of interest, the “event” that is found in hybrid practices that attempt to infiltrate art into “real” life, will become itself a theoretical tool. To explain how this works, I will go through theoretical approaches of play and games provided by Marshall McLuhan and, principally, Giorgio Agamben, both of whom draw heavily from ethnology.492

With regard to the structure of this section, I will start with Connor’s three propositions about play starting with his presentation of play and art in Kant. Then I will move on briefly to Huizinga, McLuhan and Agamben’s approaches, where play and games are taken as clues for the analysis of culture. With this theoretical framework in mind, I will subsequently return to explain how forms of play and games are present in the examples of Dutch 20th century art and art-related avant-gardes referred to earlier. Finally, in the last section Connor’s third proposition about the present situation – in which the modern paradigm seems to have entered a transformation – will be linked to the example of the practice of Bureau Venhuizen.

Looking back in time – play in modern thought
In his keynote lecture given for the opening of the European School on Playtime! The Cultures of Play, Gaming and Sport (ICA, London, 2005), Steven Connor suggested that there are three broad propositions, to which he would try to recruit his audience. The propositions were as follows:

The first is that there is a distinctively modern conception of play, formed from a configuration of law and freedom. Secondly, this conception of play powerfully informs a modern sense of the powers and limits of the human subject, especially as that subject is itself held to be formative of modernity. Thirdly, contemporary conditions of play have tended both to generalise it, removing it from its specialised place and function and dissolving the bond between play and the human. This should make us wonder what a general diffusion of play, throughout and beyond the sphere of human action, a play that no longer knows its place, might entail or portend.493

One could describe Connor’s lecture altogether as a concise journey through a history of Western thought about play from classical antiquity to the present, preoccupied mostly with modernity. A couple of pages after the above quoted paragraph he refers to the crucial point of late Enlightenment-early Romantic thought. He underlines the role of Kant and Schiller there, who first paid serious attention to play and formed a conception of it that remained at work throughout modern thought. Kant’s conception of play, as formulated in his 1790 Critique of Judgment, relates to his category of aesthetic judgment. This is a form of judgment based on the free play of the imagination and connected to man’s encounter with art.494 Connor explains:
Kant emphasises the importance of a form of reflection exercised in the absence of rules or preexisting concepts. It is a form of judgement he calls aesthetic, and that would come to be associated with reflection on works of art, though this was not Kant’s exclusive focus. At the heart of Kant’s theory of aesthetic judgement is the notion of the “free play” of imagination and judgement.

Furtheron Connor distinguishes two most prominent features of the power of imagination, that is, the power of nonconceptual thought that lies at the heart of aesthetic judgment:

The real importance here lies in the word which modifies the notion of play. What matters for Kant is not so much the playfulness, as the freedom of nonconceptual thought. This thought is free, not because, as Aristotle and Aquinas feared, it was insubordinate or licentious, and therefore conduced to chaos, but because it was unconstrained by the cramping structures of human thought. This is a notion that would have had no meaning before the reflexive alertness to the nature of thinking itself which arose in and characterizes the Enlightenment. If systematic doubt was the way in which the mind achieved access to itself for Descartes, for Kant it is free play that allows the mind to elude itself. …The other important feature of this play of the imagination is its mobility: it is inconstant, regularly irregular, well expressed in the oscillations, or, as we say, the play of light and shadow. [my emphasis]

Yet the freedom of play has its conditions: to be free, play needs to be separate and autonomous from interests and constraints of reality. In the development of the notion of play since Kant and Schiller a configuration of law and freedom characterizes the autonomous domain of play and this is actually Connor’s first proposition:

What joins Kant and Schiller, and runs through those who follow them, is an historically new conception of play, in which freedom and constraint uniquely, paradoxically cooperate. When one plays, one is free, and the act of choosing to play is a free choice, and a choice of freedom. This principle of play is emphasised in nearly all theories of play from the early 19th century onwards.

And yet play is far from unregulated. This is in fact the new development in play philosophy that distinguishes it from the reflections on idleness, folly, frolic and lewdness (a word that derives from ludere) that had obtained for almost two thousand years, from the classical world onwards. Play is no longer conceived as formless effervescence. For play to be disinterested means for it to be set apart from ordinary life. What is more, this setting apart must be regulated, by boundaries, rules. The freedom of play must be policed. So play is not free in the medieval sense: it is free in the sense that it gives itself its own law.

Connor goes on to demonstrate how this configuration of law and freedom is at the basis of all subsequent understandings of play. Especially from the 19th century on-
wards, conceptions about play move alongside the formation of another category: the notion of free time. With the industrial revolution work became increasingly standardized and synchronized, thus also requiring less time:

Increasing efficiency, along with specialisation and coordination of labour, produced surplus, not only of goods, but also of time, though this surplus was not made available to all equally. Nevertheless, surplus is sufficiently diffused through the system to allow the formation of a notion… of “free time,” not in the sense of holiday, but in the sense of empty or unassigned time. The distinctively modern experience of boredom comes into being at the same historical moment.\(^498\)

In the subsequent pages Connor shows how under these conditions play became increasingly idealized and cherished for its autonomy and freedom from the rational domain of work. To instrumentalize play was to violate its autonomy. All these elements lie at the bottom of the understanding of the category of play and its roles in culture as one finds them in all authors who dealt with this theme.

Amongst the 20th century authors mentioned by Connor, Johan Huizinga should be singled out here, as he gave play its most famous definition.\(^499\) He emphasized and fleshed out the importance of play as a free activity with its own rules, its time and space boundaries, “stepping out of ‘real life’ into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own.”\(^500\) Huizinga idealized play: “play presents itself as an intermezzo, an interlude in our daily lives … it adorns life, amplifies it.” He acknowledged only disinterested play and exempted profit making games or professional sport as expressions of a degenerated culture.\(^501\) And what is interesting for play’s relation to visual forms in Huizinga, is his fascination with the beauty of play, its harmony, rhythm and order.\(^502\)

Connor refers to numerous other authors of theory and fiction, but it would be unnecessary to repeat all his references.\(^503\) Rather, what is particularly relevant to investigate here is how play and games are considered to perform their special roles in culture, and how that could be linked to participatory public art.

To start with the first question, ethnologists and anthropologists especially of non-Western cultures - Claude Lévi-Strauss being the most broadly known amongst them – have demonstrated functions of play and games across cultures.\(^504\) They have shown that play has an operative role when transitions in religious, social or economic practices take place. For instance, when objects or practices change or lose their original meanings and functions, or during festivals and religious rites. Beyond non-Western studies, these theoretical models have resonated also with studies of theorists much more preoccupied with modern and even post-modern Western societies. Such an example is Marshall McLuhan. In his book Understanding Media. The Extensions of Man he dedicates a chapter to games, the title of which repeats the subtitle of the entire book: “Games: The Extensions of Man.”\(^505\) He starts with ethnological approaches to tribal cultures, to move on to the 20th century world of mass media. For McLuhan games are “media of interpersonal communication … extensions of our immediate inner lives.”\(^506\) He discusses games as models of a culture, of
an entire population as well as games as models of our psychological life, providing in both cases release from particular tensions. Especially for modern societies, games function as a release from stress and pressures derived from the conditions of work. Besides, their group character is also important as compensation for a lost collectivity.

For fun or games to be welcome, they must convey an echo of a workaday life. On the other hand, a man or society without games is one sunk in the zombie trance of the automation. ... Games as popular art forms offer to all an immediate means of participation in the full life of a society, such as no single job can offer to any man.

Yet participation presupposes subordination to rules and conditions: “A game is a machine that can get into action only if the players consent to become puppets for a time.” As I will explain later, McLuhan is particularly interesting to juxtapose to Constant’s New Babylon. In the latter, automation is seen as a condition for man’s release from work and thus a condition of free play, rather than as a negative condition of life that play offers a release from. But beyond that, McLuhan’s conception of games as media and simultaneously as models of a culture is extremely relevant for the idea of forms of play and games as interfaces for experiments with utopian ideas. Besides that, the idea of games as substitutes for a lost collectivity, links to social roles shouldered on public art, and especially on participatory/collaborative art.

Finally, the last issue to raise is the connection between play and event. The most useful analysis that explains this connection - in the example of a reflection on the structured calendar time and the operation of play that collapses its structures - is found in Agamben’s text “In Playland. Reflections on History and Play.” What interests me from his analysis is how the aforementioned operation of play takes place. Agamben’s elaboration of the relation between time and play is the relation between process (structure) and event. He starts his text with an extract from the story of Pinocchio when he arrives in Playland. Playland is the country of boys playing: playing games, playing with toys, or on stages, laughing, clapping, singing, running, hiding, shouting, making all kinds of sounds and noises - a real pandemonium. In Pinocchio’s Playland play has invaded life. An outcome thereof is that time, in the sense of structured calendar time based on repetition and rhythm, has also been overturned: “the hours, the days and the weeks passed like lightning.” While also every week has only six Thursdays and one Sunday. Further on, Agamben explains how transformations occur, when from its original function something enters the realm of play. The transition has consequences on the very “temporality” of that what enters the realm of play (i.e. its relation to time). Agamben uses as example the toy and the miniature:

Everything which is old, independent of its sacred origins is liable to become a toy. What is more, the same appropriation and transformation in play (the same illusion, one could say, restoring to the word its etymological meaning, form in-ludere) can be achieved - for example, by means of miniaturization – in relation to objects which still belong in the sphere of use: a car, a pistol,
an electric cooker …
What the toy preserves of its sacred or economic model, what survives of this after its dismemberment or miniaturization, is nothing other than the human temporality that was contained therein: its pure historical essence. … the toy, dismembering and distorting the past or miniaturizing the present – playing as much on *diachrony* as on *synchrony* – makes present and renders tangible human temporality in itself, the pure differential margin between the “once” and the “no longer.”

In his text Agamben refers to the above also as a basis for a further relevant relation that he is more explicitly interested in: the relation between ritual and play, in which the concept of “event” is prominent. As was previously suggested about time in Playland, where play overturns and paralyzes the structured time of the calendar, so also the relation between ritual and play is one referring to a relation of structure and the event that collapses it. The basic formula Agamben draws here from Lévi-Strauss. Namely, play, which starts off with a certain structure of rules or patterns, moves towards unexpected events, which means to outcomes completely due to chance. While rite, which operates by staging and repeating the same event time and again absorbing all differences, consequently turns events into structure. In that sense, there exists an inverse relation where “ritual fixes and *structures* the calendar; play … changes and *destroys* it.”

The function of rites is to adjust the contradiction between mythic past and present, annulling the interval separating them and reabsorbing all events into the synchronic structure. Play, on the other hand, furnishes a symmetrically opposed operation: it tends to break the connection between past and present, and to break down and crumble the whole structure into events.

And furthermore, to remember the initial example of Pinocchio’s Playland, “Playland is the country whose inhabitants are busy celebrating rituals and manipulating objects and sacred words, whose sense and purpose they have, however, forgotten.” Which means that they repeat the form of the ritual, but the content, the particular myth from which the origins and meaning of the ritual were derived, have been forgotten. In this perspective, as structure and event are constitutive of both ritual and play, but in an inverse order, “every game … contains a ritual aspect and every rite an aspect of play.”

McLuhan and Agamben make reference to art to remind us that in different cultures art and play have functions parallel or supplementary to one another. These are formed in a sphere set apart from, but in correlation with the spheres of the sacred and the economic-practical life. Here I will not enter McLuhan and Agamben’s references to art and play, because their concerns take very different directions to this text. Instead, I will return to the art and art-related movements and practices in the Netherlands, for which space has functioned as a trigger of ideas for alternative models. As already said, looking closer one may detect forms of play and games dispersed in the methods and ways each one devised or adopted to experiment with their visions. This is indeed the case foremost for those who had a more radical avant-garde character.
- the Situationists, Constant, the Provos - and whose experimentations took forms of games, hyper-real models of future life, performances and happenings. That is, forms that could only conceptually translate to applications in real life situations, compared to the application of the Amsterdam School’s principles in architecture. Nonetheless, even in the case of the Amsterdam School one could attempt a link between the visual artistic forms and their attributed spiritual power, with Huizinga’s idealism about the importance of beauty found in the harmonious, rhythmical patterns of games.

**Visions of utopia – agents in transformation**

To be more precise, the architects of the Amsterdam School were busy with the pragmatic implementation of architectural and urban planning schemes for this world (Amsterdam), rather than for a utopian other. Nonetheless, there was a utopian element in their conviction that the external appearance of architecture – as in facades, bridges or street furniture – would influence people’s character, education or morals. This utopian element was indeed derived also from their belief of the spiritual power of art. A belief coming down from 19th century idealism and cultural traditions in the Netherlands that influenced important figures in the early 20th not only of the Amsterdam School, but also of those associated with the *De Stijl* periodical. Interestingly, the artistic touch on architecture was prescribed to serve exactly this goal. At the same time, the carefully devised rhythmic variety of patterns, shapes, colors, textures and forms, which was meant to enliven the architectural surfaces, seems to materialize what Kant (as in Connor) described as the mobility of the free play of the imagination. The description of mobility as “inconstant, regularly irregular, well expressed in the oscillations or, as we say, the play of light and shadow,” that also evokes Huizinga’s elaboration on beautiful patterns. The following description of a characteristic facade treatment by Amsterdam School architects bears elements found in both of the above citations:

Dramatic effects were produced through controlled emphasis and juxtaposition of basic components and details of buildings. Even biomorphic images were suggested by the size, scale and placement of windows and doors, and underlined by the use of projecting forms. Surprising variations in scale occur where small relief decoration is placed on large smooth surfaces and where tiny windows are set in otherwise unrelieved walls and roofs. Finally, jagged shapes of angular masses and curves of balconies, turrets, and brick-faced concrete projections set up contrapuntal rhythms and underscore the play of light and shadow.

In that sense, for the artistic touch on Amsterdam School Architecture play refers mostly to a formal style, a spatial interplay of forms, and the spiritual dimensions in people’s living environment rendered by means of these forms. In the case of Situationism International, Constant and the Provos one sees them inventing games as methods, designing spaces for play, as well as themselves adopting a playful attitude tending towards the parodic or the ludicrous.
Situationist methodologies of experimentation relied predominantly on forms of games. The technique of the *derive* “entail[ed] playful constructive behavior” (Debord), while the *detournement* was “a game made possible by the capacity of devaluation” (Jorn). These games were not simply fun. Their use aimed at a critical transformation of culture:

> It is necessary to conceive of a parodic-serious stage, where the accumulation of detourned elements, far from aiming at arousing indignation or laughter by alluding to some original work, will express our indifference towards a meaningless and forgotten original, and concern itself with rendering a certain sublimity.  

Besides, the programmatic importance of the “construction of situations” as expressed by Debord, seems born out of the conditions of the “free, unassigned time” (see Connor) as well as the idea of the necessity of compensating for a “workaday life” (McLuhan). Debord states in the “Report on the construction of situations:”

> The most general goal must be to extend the nonmediocre part of life, to reduce the empty moments of life as much as possible … . The situationist game is not distinct from a moral choice, the taking of one’s stand in favor of what will ensure the future reign of freedom and play. This perspective is obviously linked to the inevitable continual and rapid increase of leisure time resulting from the level productive forces our era has attained.  

This concern with the qualitative use of the quantitatively increasing free time, and everything that had to do with the construction of situations, atmospheres and ambiances as experimentations towards the program of Unitary Urbanism, resonated with ideas to which Constant gave form in *New Babylon*. Constant believed that since technology had set man, the Homo Sapiens free from the constraints of basic survival (food, clothing), the freedom to be pursued now should be that of the free-unfolding of man, the Homo Ludens’ creativity into everyday life. *New Babylon* as an infrastructure for Play was in essence a way of living and a way of thinking. Play was to become the everyday. Thanks to the advance of automation, man would be released from the need to work. Free time, play time, would be all time. Technology would also provide the mobile and transformable infrastructure for people to play with. One could claim that Constant’s appropriation of automation in the service of Homo Ludens’ play-land produced a reverse image to McLuhan’s nightmarish “society without games … one sunk in the zombie trance of automation.”

Constant employed all kinds of architectural models and other media to represent *New Babylon*’s urban sections and living units, both as architectural structures as well as ambiances. For example in slideshows for lectures that he gave in highly performative style he used sketches, drawings, three-dimensional models, as well as photographs of models. Music, sound, smell, dim lighting created an evocative atmosphere turning the attendance of a lecture to a ritual. Furthermore, the various media and models that Constant employed in presenting the world with his visions of *New Babylon* constituted various kinds of simulations of present and future (utopian)
realities. And simulations are themselves game-realities or, to put it differently, gaming approaches to reality.

To come to the Provos, inspired by Huizinga and even more by Constant’s Homo Ludens, they literally turned the city into a playground and stage for performances and happenings. They turned games into tactics causing police to overreact and make themselves ridiculous in the process. For the Provos a society of petit-bourgeois order defended by the police and other institutional establishments was wrong, absurd, not to mention boring. They had to make people see that, to release them from their illusions. Games were tactically used to this end. The normative provo logic of the tactical use of games is best exemplified in the so-called “Marihuettegame” that aimed at:

…demonstrat[ing] the establishment’s complete ignorance on the subject of cannabis. The players were supposed to have fun, fool the police and, of course, smoke pot. Other than that there were no rules. Anything that looked remotely like pot was called “marihu”: tea, hay, catfood, spices and herbs included. Bonus points were collected when a smoker got busted for consuming a legal substance. The players often called the police on themselves. A raid by blue-uniformed nicotine addicts, looking for something that didn’t exist, was considered the ultimate jackpot.

One could say that the Provos incorporated the parodic-serious principle of the detournement into their behavior and attitude. They “detourned” all possible organizational elements of everyday life – social roles, laws and regulations, common objects, actions and habits - to release the everyday from its self-imposed constraints. For this overturning of reality, ritual was necessary. The cult-leading figure of Robert Jasper Grootveld was described as High Priest. His scheduled Saturday-night happenings on Amsterdam’s Spui square, attended by small crowds, were described as Magic circles.

Finally, it seems tempting to suggest that the ways in which environmental artists used the arrangement of forms and shapes to create a stimulating variety and points of reference and identification in people’s urban environment met the logic of the artistic touch in Amsterdam School. They too used as means “form and color, space and movement, material and texture.” Yet there is a substantial mismatch in the way that environmental artists were seriously trying to somehow improve art to the standards of a scientific, phenomenological discourse, rather than the other way round. While the avant-gardes were bringing to science and technology a logic from art – most explicitly manifested in Constant’s New Babylon project.

On art and il-lusion
To wind everything in, the above mainly avant-garde visionaries were conscious of the unattainability of their ultimate aspirations for a world as a fully transformed place. Nonetheless, they did devise models of that world and experimentation methodologies for temporary illusionary transitions from here to utopia. Entertaining utopias where imagination and creativity – see here also the form of non-rational reflection Kant
had called aesthetic – would be infiltrated into the everyday, was a necessity for the modern world of the 20th century. Scientific and technological achievements secured people their basic needs, freeing them from want. Yet in return, they had made them captive of other discontents: alienation in human relations and in people’s relation to their living environment within the rapidly expanding urban centers; alienation in the working environment, where automation took over and humans functioned like machines; the growing phenomena of consumerism and the spectacle.

Illusions were only permitted within the domain of art, the domain of imagination that was allowed and expected to operate as counterweight to the imbalances brought about by rational thought. In this, conceptions of the role of art and of play in culture prove to coincide, as I maintained at the beginning of this section. Particularly for art, one can see the manifestation of this role in the official expectations of subsidized public art (see above here, section 2). Art was there to season with elements of ambiguity and vagueness the rationality of professional planning and construction processes for public spaces and public life. These were the conceptions about, and expectations of art, which during the 1970s were crystallized as public art’s institutional and institutionalized role.

Bearing in mind also Connor’s proposals about conceptions of play in modern thought, the first and second ones show some concordance with conceptions regarding the role of art. In the sense of allowing man the freedom to escape from the constraints of reason, but also of determining the extent to which modern man could escape his civilization, his own self. Thus were designated the domains where escapes and escapades were tolerated – the domains of art and play. Under these circumstances, it should be no surprise that the domain of art came to contain play, as explained earlier: whether expressed as an interplay of patterns (an arrangement of forms, where “form” could entail shapes and colors in space, or rules and conditions in a game) as “playful” attitudes (parodic, ludicrous or hyper-real), or as gaming-realities (see simulations), one sees that the art and art-related avant-gardes drew from a depository of forms of play and games to devise their experimentations. The situationist games including detournements and derives, the models of New Babylon, the ludicrous provo happenings and behavior, all these functioned as means of transit from here to utopia, as media for illusions. This is where McLuhan’s concept of the capacity and function of games as both medium and mirror models of a culture is most pertinent in approaching the role of forms of play and games in our examples. As the latter’s ultimate target was the transformation not just of art, but of culture altogether. Therefore the capacity of forms of play and games to “engineer” transformation processes within any sphere of culture (remember here the ethnologists and Agamben), rendered them most useful for these avant-gardes.

For the moments that the forms of play and games would perform their role, imagination would take over from reality. They would become the means for participation in the vision, interfaces between imagination and reality, turning illusion to an event - to something happening. At this point the formula that Agamben drew from Lévi-Strauss could be applied to show how this operation takes place. According to that formula: “while rites transform events into structures, play transforms structures into events.” Bringing this formula to the questions of this chapter, one could maintain the following: that what was happening when forms of play and games - say in
a representation of New Babylon or in a happening – were put to work in the service of experimentations with modeling utopias, was precisely the operation of “breaking down and crumbling the connections structuring reality, as it were, into events.” For instance, in the case of the detournement, signifieds of a culture would become signifiers; matter would be reduced to form so as to take on new meanings. By the same logic, an Amsterdam School façade, a situationist collage, as much as a provo happening – using artistic media but drawing their ways and methods of modeling utopias from depositories of forms of play and games - would all function in producing an equivalent effect: the activation of temporary, transitory events. So the art set in motion the events of applying and experiencing the illusion of utopias in the here and now.

To achieve this, they offered the highly regulated environment, the strictly conditioned situation that was necessary for the illusion to take place, for the event to happen. As mentioned, play starts with a structure of rules or patterns and leads to unpredictable events. And for this process to take place play must have its own, separate place. So one could argue that this structure was provided for instance by the extravagant conditions that Guy Debord demanded for participation, while in this world, in the situationist vision of another. Or the proposal delivered to the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam for an exhibition of situationism. According to that proposal, the museum galleries should be transformed into a labyrinth of spaces with different artificial atmospheres, complete with rain, wind and mist and accessed through a hole in the wall. Meanwhile, the situationists themselves would be taking their derives around the “real” city of Amsterdam. Such rules and conditions that rendered a realization of their programs essentially incompatible with reality, as it were, comprised, however, the necessary conditions for the freedom that the avant-garde visions were offering. As indispensable as they were impossible, these conditions express a configuration of law and freedom equivalent to that of play. The freedom of play that was the freedom of having its own law and the freedom of the player in choosing to play. One could also consider here the ritualistic character of Constant’s presentations of New Babylon, or of the performativity of the entrance and artificial atmospheres of the unrealized Situationists’ exhibition, or of being present at a provo happening as such “conditioning” processes. In that sense, one sees that “every game … contains a ritual aspect and every rite an aspect of play” (Agamben).

To sum up, what I have done in this section is to infer from theories about play in culture (mainly Agamben, McLuhan) a concept of play and a notion of the event that are relevant for art. Still Connor’s set of three propositions remains my compass in thinking about play in relation to a genealogy of art for which space has functioned as a springboard for ideas about life and society. Having elaborated above on his first and second propositions about conceptions of play in Modernity, I will take his third proposition as departure point in the following sections.

4 THE DIFFUSION OF PLAY IN THE ADMINISTERED WORLD

Connor’s third proposition is a rather open-ended suggestion about how earlier terms of the role of play in human culture have been dissolved. As a consequence, a paradigm break was caused that was symptomatic of a cultural transition to a new situa-
tion. In that new situation it seems difficult to discern the contours of a specific place and role for play in culture:

Thirdly, contemporary conditions of play have tended both to generalise it, removing it from its specialised place and function and dissolving the bond between play and the human. This should make us wonder what a general diffusion of play, throughout and beyond the sphere of human action, a play that no longer knows its place, might entail or portend.\textsuperscript{541}

As the widespread – at least since Adorno and Horkheimer – pessimistic interpretation would have it, the previously autonomous worlds of art and play have been colonized by the cultural industry. Their forms have thus been put at the service of market, rather than of human relations. While acknowledging this view on contemporary culture, Connor wants to give nonetheless the analysis a different tilt to the one-way lament that the above pessimism usually leads to. He provides a quite broad assumption about where the operations and functions of play have been channeled in contemporary culture, and what the consequences of their displacement might be:

It is possible to give a rather different tilt to this analysis. What if, rather than the realm of play being annexed by the administered world, a certain principle of play had been diffused through the system, such that play constituted the rule rather than exception? In such a set-up we might have to imagine in earnest what the effects would be of a play that played itself out in earnest, without a governing subject. … I have said that, for the few hundred years that play has been seriously considered, or been considered to be serious, play has always functioned as excess, exception or anomaly. But ours is a world built around and governed by the production of play and the consumption of leisure and pleasure. Perhaps in such a world the free play of the faculties has become the fluctuation of desires that nobody can be quite sure any more belong to them, and the interior purposiveness of game has become the immanent dynamic of self-replication of our systematicity as such. Furthermore, ours is a world in which the operations of game have become more and more separated from the conditions of play. Money, science, war, pedagogy, sex, are all being configured as forms of strategy or game-theory, in the sense marked out by Gadamer, governed by the ludic principle, that which gives itself its own rules and purpose. It is not that the play principle has lost its meaning or effectiveness. But perhaps play is becoming more ambivalent than ever before. … In a condition of \textit{jeux sans frontières}, when the empire of play can no longer be clearly demarcated, play can no longer be reliably or decisively claimed for the principle of free self-unfolding on the one hand, or for the grim clinching of systematicity on the other. When every instance of play deepens the reach of organised complexity, simultaneously loosening and consolidating, when the place of play is no longer self-evident, the effects of play are themselves put into play.\textsuperscript{542}
With the above in mind, let me herewith return to the practice of Bureau Venhuizen and afterwards to a consideration of contemporary practices in spatial planning. If Connor’s last proposition has some resonance in this field of study, this should entail that play must have found its way into professional planning somehow without the need of art, and with as yet unclear effects.

The legacy of Homo Ludens in public art
As extensively discussed in section one, Bureau Venhuizen aims at optimizing processes of spatial planning, taking the so-called culture-based planning approach. Hans Venhuizen started his career as artist. Yet he shifted into the self-invented profession of concept-manager in order to participate more concretely than as artist in the “dirty realism” of the professional field of planning. His Bureau has devised a methodology applicable to any spatial planning process. It systematizes the artist’s creative thinking for the production of site-specific recipes, i.e. of the tasks’ brief delivered to designers. At the core of this methodology is the group game The Making of.

Despite Hans Venhuizen’s renunciation of his artistic status, I would still argue that his work falls within the field of public art. As demonstrated earlier, when public art became institutionalized with the environmental artists (1970s), the latter were inclined to renunciation of their artistic autonomy for the sake of integrating their work into architecture and urban planning. Hence, it should come as no surprise if two–three decades later an artist interested in the shaping of public space decides to give up his/her artistic status. Even if he/she continues to receive commissions within an expanded field of public art.

For all its dirty realism, from many different perspectives Bureau Venhuizen opts for a gaming approach and playful attitude towards reality. Think, for instance, of the first commission in Beuningen. Commissioners had art in mind and there was no spatial planning project running, to which their commission was attached. Yet Bureau Venhuizen developed a project applying its methodology of investigating for optimal planning conditions, as if there had been one.

Furthermore, Bureau Venhuizen is more interested in the process than in the outcomes: “With all the projects we do, as soon as it comes to design I only check if the conditions are met and hope to be interested in the design.” From her perspective, one of the Game’s winners in New Heritage, a resident of Winssen, expressed a similar view: “Participating in The Making of H1 was for me more important than winning the game.” For her this was because she and other fellow-villagers could come up with ideas about their future in a creative way. Both statements are reminiscent of the priority that Gadamer attributed to playing the game over both players and results. Consequently, it seems that Venhuizen’s methodology causes ambivalence as to whether it is the Game (as process, as method) or the designed space (the outcome) that is eventually more important (i.e. not for him personally). If it is the former, brought to somewhat far-fetched ultimate consequences, one could see there some disquieting implications. Participants who have something at stake in “real” life and opt for the above view somehow “consent with becoming puppets for a time,” to remember McLuhan. Letting the rules of the Game lead to decisions about their
“real” lives, they authorize a decision-making process, the objectivity of which is based on the elimination of their human subjectivity. Such an observation that stands in sharp contrast to the humanizing effect that we saw art (using forms of play) being expected to have on people’s living environments (the environments that with the advance of technology had been transformed to rationalized, anonymous spaces).

Another important aspect of play inherent in the objectivity–generating methods of Venhuizen is the use of rhetoric. 549 Rhetoric being a form from philosophy that can overturn reality by playing with the ambivalence of language as well as by means of reshuffling of logical patterns in argumentation and discourse. If decision-making by means of the Game depends on a best-argument competition between teams of players, the Game might be taken over by players talented in handling language and discourse. Venhuizen himself is a good example for the tricks of discourse, when, for instance, he talks distrustful people into his game-methodology:

Now we have played it 15 times I think, and every time we invite and every evening a couple of people react by saying … “this is much too serious to play a game about.” Then we explain that it is not a game, but a creative workshop method with a gaming approach. And then people relax… 550

Besides, the whole idea of “opportimism” is based on a language game. A playful, tricky combination of the words opportunism and optimism, a simultaneously negative and positive term for a person’s attitude towards the future.

Based on the above, one could claim that there seems to exist an element of playful humor in Venhuizen’s attitude. It could even be interpreted as ironical sometimes, if somebody takes his playful ways (as in the above quote on the “gaming approach to reality,” too seriously at face value. Representations of the Beuningen population within the projects are a good additional example. In a project report from 2001, the photographs of Beuningen girls and boys taken by students during their research should be regarded with humor by the depicted youngsters, if they are to appreciate their representations there.551 (Fig. 45) The same could be said of the entire Beuningen community, considering that “dog shit” and “identity” were accorded equal attention as important local themes in experts’ sessions. Not to mention that a KLIKO-bokaal and a photograph of Leonardo de Caprio visiting From Weurt to Deest were amongst prizes awarded to locals for the best answers.

Furthermore, the Bureau’s practice relies extensively on the use of models that simulate or experiment with reality. There is, for instance, the washland model, a model of thinking about spatial planning, transferred to political and social theory. And of course maps, ground plans, collages, and the computer design program used while the Game is played to show in virtual reality how participants’ suggestions would look, if applied as design solutions.

One could go on naming further aspects of play and games in Venhuizen’s practice. Consequently, from the perspective of his interests in combining the space shaping disciplines with art, in using space as a trigger of ideas for socio-political models (washland model), and from his playful attitude, Hans Venhuizen could comfortably be given a place in the ranks of the visionaries discussed earlier. Yet there is a stum-
bling block: Bureau Venhuizen really does not envision instigating any social change. For all the parodic exaggerations of Beuningen’s provinciality, with his culture-based approach Bureau Venhuizen Game’s ultimate aim was to give people what they seemed to collectively agree upon. In a sense, Venhuizen gave them what they wanted. The conditions’ brief for prospective spatial designs reproduces and represents the local mentalities in all their banality. From that perspective, and contrary to what I maintained in the previous section about the 20th century avant-gardes, play and games in Venhuizen’s practices seem to become a vehicle for overcoming possible differences and for reproducing and consolidating existing structures. So while “events” are produced in the sense of the Game - workshops, gatherings, meetings etc. - what is missing is the production of the abstract concept of the “event.” The event of transformation that was once manifested only within the domain of art, is activated by forms of play and games. Under these conditions, art and play appear here to be losing what previously demarcated their specialized place and function. While at the same time, if Bureau Venhuizen is accepted as hybrid professional agent in spatial planning, the implications would be that the contribution of play and aesthetics in general has a different content and role. But this should somehow have to do with what is happening within the professional field of the space shaping disciplines – the reception horizons of Venhuizen’s practice. Some principle of play seems to have penetrated the aesthetics of structural relations in the field of these disciplines, thereby also affecting the role expected of art.

A “jeux sans frontières” in the Dutch field of spatial planning
In an academic paper written in 1998 and published in 2000 under the title “Spatial planning in the network society – rethinking the principles of planning in the Netherlands,” Maarten Hajer and Wil Zonneveld explain that nowadays one should revisit one’s assumptions about the spatial planning system of the Netherlands. The authors set out by stating that “The Dutch system of spatial planning can rejoice in an almost mythical reputation in the international academic literature.” Amongst the main reasons behind this reputation are the system’s alleged institutional comprehensiveness, creativity, long history and, despite a staggering amount and complexity of involved agents, the effective coordination of their interests. Nonetheless, Hajer and Zonneveld put forth how conditions both in the institutional (professional, governmental) and the societal context of planning have changed, disempowering the traditional Dutch system of planning. The authors’ ultimate aim is to propose possible directions in which a revision of the system could be sought.

The parts of their positions that interest me here are those concerning the Dutch spatial planning system’s internal operation and governance, and certain directions in recent changes therein. Therefore, I will selectively sum up parts of their respective argumentation. The authors maintain that “the density of discourse is probably the most fundamental characteristic of spatial planning in the Netherlands.” Dutch planners were traditionally kept outside both economic interests as well as legal power in policy-making, so as to concentrate on communicating, consulting and negotiating expert concepts, plans and visions:

Planning is persuasive story telling about the future, according to the American theorist
Jim Throgmorton (1992). This most certainly holds true for the Dutch system. … much of the essential work of the planner is discursive: listening to people, making an inventory of problems and wishes, scanning preferences, developing concepts that can guide thinking about spatial development, assessing the possibilities of building coalitions amongst actors and thus in essence persuading actors of various kinds to think about the future developments in one and the same language.  

For all its institutional intricacy with multiple players at all governance levels, there used to exist a balance and coordination in the decision-making and implementation of spatial plans. A crucial parameter in achieving this was that spatial planning managed to align itself with prevailing interests of the housing and agriculture sectors. However, in recent years the control over spatial developments and the function of aligning interests have gradually fallen back due to fundamental changes at various levels. National housing policies have shifted towards a direction favorable for market forces. Agriculture has changed, for instance, because of advanced technologies in industrialized agriculture. Moreover, the accentuation in national spatial strategies on fostering the competitive position of the Netherlands has led to prioritizing economically-oriented spatial developments, such as the expansions of Rotterdam harbor and Schiphol airport. Alongside the above reshuffling of priorities and powers, Hajer and Zonneveld mention also an excessive production of planning documents published across all sector departments (e.g., various ministries) and mostly with an informal status. The authors maintain that all those documents “presented new policy approaches incongruent to the official planning policy.” Despite their lack of legal official status, they “were often effective in occupying the minds of policy makers and stakeholders.” Finally, one could add the introduction by the government of the so-called Interdepartmental Commission for the Strengthening of the Economic Structure (ICES). This commission was set up to play an inter-departmental coordinating role with a view to optimizing economic efficiency across the sector, which means that the spatial strategies it promotes are aligned with market interests. Inevitably, and despite it actually having unofficial status, the ICES “de facto started to overlap more and more with the official planning circuits.”

The authors link all the aforementioned developments in the institutional context of Dutch spatial planning with macro-societal changes that one could put under an interpretational concept of the “network society.” What characterizes the spatial planning system under these conditions is the lack of central co-ordination and supervision over the activities of involved agents, and over the realization of plans. For instance, “there is no built-in check that guarantees a selectivity in development. In various regions the planning induced a delay in construction activity leading to building activity elsewhere.”

Let me herewith give a résumé of the above characteristics of contemporary planning practices. Traditionally, the dynamics of persuasion and discourse played a central role in the work of planners, who had restricted access to financial or policy-making power. With the excess of structures and interests in the field they both appear much less aligned with each other than in the past. New actors (e.g., ICES) and policy documents appear with variable official validity and expressing incongruous interests, amongst which it is unclear what matters and what does not. Under these
circumstances, the professional field of planning is more and more sliding towards a condition where operations are significantly determined by the internal dynamics of its system as such, rather than by a coherent and reflective decision-making, concerned with what is important for the world outside.

These thoughts bring to mind Crimson Architectural Historians’ approach to the Dutch planning system referred to in Part I. They drew from Frank Ankersmit’s concept of “‘third power’ – orgware, bureaucracy, market forces (or whatever you want to call it)” – to explain how contemporary urbanist discourse has become an “urbanism of negotiations.”565 Crimson maintained that this third power is a dominant yet resented force within the planners’ profession. Resented, because planners spend almost their entire time negotiating with all possible agents and compromising their ideas, instead of drawing expert plans. Nevertheless, by using as example their own involvement in planning for the new Vinex area of Leidse Rijn, Crimson demonstrated that one might as well cleverly manoeuvre and use this “urbanism of negotiations,” rather than condemn it.566 Their office was invited as external consultant to a secondary player in the big game of the planning Utrecht’s satellite city of Leidse Rijn. They claim that they introduced a simple idea that nonetheless “upset all power relations, and then proceeded to try and influence these powers.”567 Crimsons’ strength in the game was that they had nothing to lose. Having no power position whatsoever, they could move freely. This was rendered possible exactly due to the “urbanism of negotiations” that allowed for various actors, big and small, to join the stage.

One could argue that this “urbanism of negotiations,” which Crimsons present as both a contemporary and resented state of profession, sounds like an amplified version of Hajer and Zonneveld’s traditional discursivity typical for Dutch planners. The kind of “opportimistic” handling of Crimson might start to appear somewhat less original then, though well in accord with the recent excess of actors in the field. Moreover, whether old or new, accepted or resented, the logic and operation of the urbanism of negotiations as the actual professional practice of planners, alongside their limited access to economic and policymaking power seem to resonate surprisingly much with the concept manager’s claimed role and practice. As the example of Crimson testifies, an “opportimistic” approach despite one’s status in the system and despite social, political or other principles external to the system as such, constitutes a most effective handling for professional planners. Then the sophisticated intricacy of the field seems to have been taken over by a reproduction of its own systematicity. The immanent dynamics have assumed governance over the system.

If we accept all the above, then arguably some logic of play seems to have been diffused within the administered world. In Crimsons’ story the power structures in Leidsche Rijn’s planning broke down into unexpected events. For Hajer and Zonneveld’s model of a disintegrated coherence, where “delay of activity in one region leads to construction activity elsewhere” without any in check selectivity, one could claim the same.

If the above speak of an intrusion of a certain play principle into the institutional operations of the Dutch planning system, a look into certain recent concepts and directions in spatial planning seem to echo the same view. Not too long after Rick van de Ploeg introduced the term culture-based planning (1998), further documents of policy making for the Dutch landscape resonated with his priorities. Most notably,
the Rijksnota Belvédère (1999) lay down the prioritization of accentuating the cultural-historical identity of the Netherlands in the formation of the landscape, whether built or natural. Of course culture-based planning and Belvédère could just be seen as attempts to care more about tradition. Yet their implementation looks rather like the invention of tradition: in the name of “authenticity,” it is negotiated which elements of a local cultural or natural identity should in essentially artificial ways be accentuated. One could add here also the so-called Ecological Main Structure (EHS) introduced in the government’s Policy Plan in 1990. Some 730 000 hectares of formerly agricultural land was to “return to nature.” As agriculture has been industrialized, and in line with ecological lobbying for a revitalization of biodiversity, the state decided that selected parts of the Dutch landscape should be given back to nature. Wherever necessary, it bought land from farmers and set out with bulldozers to make it look wilder. Interestingly, artists have also been invited to contribute with projects that should support this return to the authentic. To the already paradoxical situation of restoring authentic wilderness by landscape design, another oxymoron is added. As observed by art historian Jeroen Boomgaard: “While the constructed nature experience can pose as pure nature, art adds an unmistakable cultural element to nature.”

To some extent the above strategies for the return to authentic local identities, whether cultural or natural, come under what has been characterized as “amusement-parkification.” The term brings to mind Agamben’s formula about toys: something that loses its original function, regardless of what domain of culture, falls into a sphere of play. One can relate Agamben’s formula to any urban monument, archaeological or agricultural site, which is shaped up to be handed over to amusement-parkification, that is, to “play” at the service of the cultural and leisure industries. Then the transformation into play is inherently linked to the “consumption of leisure and pleasure” (Connor). This same path of thought, which has come to include also whatever roles artists are invited to perform, brings one straight to the arms of Adorno and Horkheimer’s pessimistic critique of culture under capitalism.

Conclusions
To conclude, taking into consideration everything that has been said about the institutional, conceptual and policymaking context of the Dutch spatial planning system, it seems reasonable to agree with Connor that “a certain principle of play has been diffused through the system, such that it constitute[s] the rule rather than the exception.” So much so, that the amusement-parkification of the country has become the contemporary cultural reality that Hans Venhuizen takes as the cultural background of his work, as architect Paul Meurs has observed. It would take a future author, or at least a differently specialized one, to formulate concrete proposals for a new conception of play in its relation to contemporary people and the worlds they inhabit. Yet there is something to observe about the triangle art-play-reality, with regard to the role and content of art and play in the example of Dutch public art.

As commissions and institutions for public art were flourishing when Bureau Venhuizen emerged in the late 1990s, it seems that political decision-makers and professionals in the space shaping disciplines saw some role that art seemed capable
of fulfilling. The critique of EHS policy, of amusement parkification and of the artists’ role there could also lead to some observations besides the Frankfurt School’s pessimism (though without denying its validity). The call for return of the landscape to a more authentic version came at the moment when there were hardly any visible traces remaining in nature for the so-called “authenticity” to be based on. Even more if it were polderlands, where authenticity was in invention and construction. So the return appears to have been based on conceptual, cultural, probably historical traces and wishes discovered or invented, amongst others, also by artists. This situation indicates that the “reality,” as it were, of the Dutch landscape was in essence the existence of overlapping layers of human intervention. Layers, each one of which may indicate overlapping logics, without necessarily a very obvious coherence between them. The outcomes of their intersection could be similar to the strange “phenomena” collected in Bureau Venhuizen’s brochure (Fig. 38-40). And such outcomes or phenomena could be described as resulting from the event of the encounter of different logics, interests and times. More interesting than the alleged strangeness of these phenomena – against which standards, after all? – is probably the interest in their systematic identification, collection and presentation as such. Venhuizen’s practice manifests that the “reality” of the landscape is inscribed in layers of construction and intervention that represent different, sometimes incompatible, rationalities. So the actual “unrealistic” aspect – for all the absurdity of this formulation - would be to maintain that today’s or yesterday’s planners have been too rational compared to some recognizably “natural” preceding situation, and in need for art to counterbalance their excessive rationality.

Nonetheless, EHS partly indicates the wish to return to some kind of order, or to bring some order to disparate events even if technologically and economically it may simply indicate that agriculture requires less physical space. Connecting the above with what has been suggested about dynamics of relations within the planning sector, then art is called upon to offer something missing, as it also was in earlier times. Only, instead of collapsing the existing structures into temporary events, it is rather called upon to draw up a structure out of existing situations regarded as phenomenal.

Venhuizen’s Game as a methodology of taking, on the one hand, selected social cultural phenomena translated into tasks, and, on the other, different stakeholders opinions represented by the players, and collapsing them all into a design brief, does just that. If reality seems to be constituted by paradoxical events, then it seems that Venhuizen’s practice does not react to structures by turning them into events. Rather, he takes “events” he finds ready in reality, whether these are “lies in which there is such strong belief that they pass for the truth,” (Bureau Venhuizen brochure, Fig. 39), or the excessive number of stakeholders and structures of planning. He channels them all into the logic of his practice with its culture-based planning and game-based methodology. Through that process, the events turn into a structured outcome that seems to offer the maximum degree of rationality and objectivity: the most widely accepted amongst stakeholders, conditions for a plan.

In the example of art in relation to urban spaces, earlier practices of artists, regardless how successful they proved, responded to an ideal of showing to planners some ways to overcome the constraints of their professional practices. However the practice of Bureau Venhuizen, implanted by its inspirer as part of professional plan-
ning processes rather than as an addition to them, is directed towards introspection, rather than utopia. - i.e. towards taking the varieties of irrationality existing within the assumingly rational system as departure point.

So in conclusion, the triangle of art-play-reality is still at work in the case of public art, as long as the role of the artists remains to contribute insights that professionals in the field seek an external agent to give shape to. What seems to have changed are conceptions of the content and internal operation of each one, and thus also of the relations between them. As art in the example of Venhuizen, or also of Jeanne van Heeswijk, selects and coordinates among existing layers and players, it is performing a temporary postproduction rather than producing something totally new. So the role remains, the content changes. Which is also a reason why, when narrowly thinking of art in terms of autonomy or innovation without examining the relations that structure conceptions of the content of these two terms, it often becomes difficult to justify the content of such projects as art. The content of what is taking place, of what is happening within these projects, i.e. the events that they produce, as art. All the while their proposals do match commissioners wishes, as was the case with Venhuizen’s selection by the Foundation From Weurt to Deest.