REUSE OF MODERNIST BUILDINGS: PEDAGOGY AND PROFESSION

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City of Permanent Temporality: incomplete & unfinished

FROM INSTANT URBANISM...

...TO PERMANENT TEMPORALITY

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Act one: Rotterdam is many cities 2001–2008

On July 22nd, 2001, there was the third shooting in a month. The municipality of Rotterdam declared the area around Rotterdam Centraal Station a zero-tolerance zone, installed 360° security cameras, and imposed the umpteenth ban on disreputable bars and clubs; thus, another twenty meters of boarded-up shop fronts. It was 2001; a strange year in which the rise of the right-wing populist politician Pim Fortuyn coincided with Rotterdam’s celebration of cultural diversity as the Cultural Capital of Europe and the announcement that multiculturalism was a failure in the Netherlands. And finally, there was 9/11. On the Hofplein, a major traffic junction in Rotterdam’s city center, these expressions of hope and hopelessness came into sharp focus. Citizens, in search of an appropriate city square, took to occupying the Hofplein roundabout to celebrate or to mourn. The administrative nervousness that arose in this confused period was repeatedly expressed in even stricter policies to keep the city and especially its streets ‘clean, well maintained, and safe.’ Ensuring a lively atmosphere on Rotterdam’s streets was difficult enough, never mind the additional measures being deployed to systematically remove the last traces of the informal use of the public domain.

While the newly implemented policy for public space increasingly established itself under the motto ‘Livable Rotterdam,’ behind the scenes the city’s development continued unabated. Since the eighties, Rotterdam was the mecca for investors and developers because enough space and opportunities were given for building large-scale offices and apartments. The surging capital market easily found its way into the city, which took no time in adopting the label ‘Manhattan on the Maas’. In keeping with this, the Rotterdam Central District (RCD) around Centraal Station was identified as an attractive business location – a VIP area – and one ambitious plan after another was developed. Multinationals including Shell, Unilever, Nationale Nederlanden/ING, and Fortis were already established on the Weena, a broad city-center avenue. The planned arrival of the High-Speed Line (HSL) railway to connect the Randstad – a megalopolis in the Netherlands comprising its four largest Dutch cities (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, and Utrecht) – with Paris and London, gave further impetus to these ambitions.

A third development began to emerge in the wake of this real estate speculation. With the newly developed urban areas, such as the Kop van Zuid and Stadshavens, there was a need for interesting cultural programs to inject these areas with the appropriate vibrancy. Within a few years, several cultural institutions relocated Kop van Zuid from the city center: the Fotomuseum, LantarenVenster cinema, and the Rotterdam Academy of Architecture. The already limited cultural infrastructure was thus further diluted, which did not benefit the city center’s quality of life.

This paradox of frenetic control over the public sphere on the one hand and unbridled real estate speculation on the other led to