Work, Body, Leisure

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Work, Body, Leisure

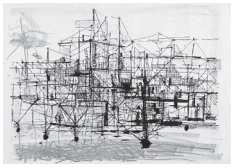
Marina Otero Verzier

The Netherlands is, arguably, a testing ground where the future of labor has been and continues to be reimagined. Meticulously shaped and designed, its landscape is the result of centuries of human-machine enterprises. So is its organization of society. Stressed in the ascetic rationalism of Calvinism, and still maintaining an exalted position in contemporary culture, an emphasis on work and discipline over leisure also manifests in its architecture, from the scale of the territory to that of the bed.

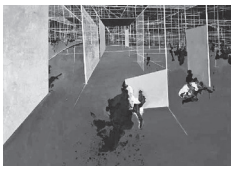
The flat horizon, managed and protected by flood control systems—including sand dunes, dikes, drainage ditches, pumping stations and canals as well as specialized technical and political bodies—is endangered by climate change, from sea level rise to aberrant rainfall. There is "no time to waste," argues Henk Ovink, Special Envoy for International Water Affairs for the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Both a plea as much as an exhortative reminder of what it takes to keep low-lying lands dry for habitation and production, Ovink's manifesto is ultimately translated in programs such as the Room for the River: a 2.4 billion-euro project that combines land excavation with social redesign. In addition to building forty new dwelling mounds and one of Europe's largest floodplain parks, 200 families were relocated in an attempt to allow less room for farmers, and more for entrepreneurship.

The regularity of Dutch land lots is reinforced by that of the greenhouses that fill them; enclosures where the productivity of the ground is controlled and maximized by automated technologies. Inside these "new Gardens of Eden," as coined by AMO, sweet tomato plants grow, assisted by climate control, artificial lighting, and water and nutrient distribution systems. They are unrestricted by exterior conditions, their immediate surroundings, and soon, human labor.

These open, flat, climate-controlled interior spaces seem to offer endless possibilities for experimentation outside of the greenhouse typology as well. The flexible office, and its ideology, here addressed and reimagined by MVRDV's Nathalie de Vries, has become a landscape of long shared tables and open office spaces where workers no longer have a reserved seat, but rather reinvent their personal workspace every morning. Assisting these ever-changing communal spaces, walls of lockers present the systemic counter-image of individualized,



Constant Nieuwenhuys, *Sketch for a Sector*, 1966.



Constant Nieuwenhuys, *Entrée du Labyrinth*, 1972.

Michel de Klerk, *Study of a Working Man*, 1909.

Van den Broek en Bakema, *Expansion plan Pampus: Linear city in IJ-meer for 350,000 habitants,* 1964–65.

Westland Greenhouses.

closed worlds for the administration of private identities and belongings. Populating factories, storage facilities, co-working spaces, as well as the leisure-oriented architecture of the changing room, the locker facilitates the nomadic and temporal reinvention of space, and that of the bodies that inhabit it. For the locker is an interface between the laboring and the non-laboring self, if any distinction between the one and the other remains today.

Artist Constant Nieuwenhuys attempted to resolve the dichotomy between work and leisure. In his seminal project *New Babylon* (1956–74)—an architectural paradigm of free space and time afforded by automation—society devotes its energy to creativity and play, including the design individuals' own environments. "Automation is a material condition and achievable," Constant claimed in May 1980 in a lecture at the Faculty of Architecture of TU Delft. By robotizing labor, Constant demanded the right to *not* labor. The interior of *New Babylon* is thus conceived as an architecture for a free and creative way of life. Its inhabitants, liberated from the obligation to be useful, have complete disposal of their time. In *New Babylon* there is no leisure time. Instead all time is play. Constant's proposal for an alternative architecture and an alternative society in which human labor is rendered superfluous—architecture historian and theorist Mark Wigley points out—visualized the imminent post-labor world: a world in which everyone is an architect.

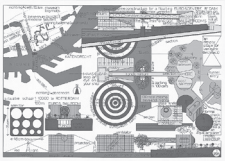
And yet, as Constant's oeuvre evolved, his optimistic vision on the possibilities and pleasures of automated labor gradually gave way to a more conflictual perspective. Violence would not be eradicated by the new technological order, mobilized to satisfy society's immediate needs; rather, it would reveal itself to be an intrinsic part of such an order's processes and aims. As Wigley puts it, "pleasure becomes painful, or pain becomes pleasurable, again."[1]

If, following Wigley's reading of *New Babylon*, architecture was not labor and the world beyond labor is all architecture, Constant not only envisioned "the end of the architect and architecture as we know it," but also acknowledged the inevitably violent and conflictual nature of its practice. More than thirty years later, the architecture of full automation is currently being implemented across agricultural clusters in the Netherlands and in cities like Rotterdam, from the self-managed logistical infrastructures of its port to the logic and relations that define its physical and social landscape. Analyzed in

1. Mark Wigley, *Constant's New Babylon: The Hyper-architecture of Desire* (Rotterdam: Witte de With, center for contemporary art / 010 Publishers, 1998), p.71.

LED greenhouse lighting, Koppert Cress.

Amsterdamse Bos, Amsterdam, 2018.



Carel Weeber, *Eroscenter (Pencil Sharpener)*, Design competition entry, Rotterdam, 1978.

Tippelzone Zandpad, Utrecht, 2016.

Marnix Schmidt, *Tippelzone Europalaan*, Utrecht, 2016.

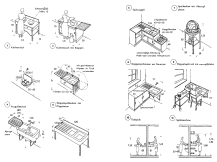
the research project Automated Landscapes, the logistical infrastructure of the new, fully-automated APM container terminal in the port of Rotterdam's Maasvlakte II—where self-driving vehicles, automated cranes, and diverse interfaces maximize the handling of containers with unprecedented performance and productivity—coexist with the architectures of port workers strikes and low-income neighborhood redevelopment projects. It is in these spaces where the architecture of Johan Huizinga's *homo ludens* is being reenacted and reimagined. Yet far from being the basis of a new creative way of life as envisioned by Constant, automation does not necessarily lead to a desired retirement for many workers.

Similarly, gaming has been embraced not so much as a cornerstone of inhabitation and relation, but rather as a growing industry around creative labor, and as a useful tool for managing the decisions of the many stakeholders involved in the development of urban areas. If in *New Babylon* there was only play, the architecture of the Netherlands could well be seen as its counterpart. A comprehensive architecture of labor, where city gaming has increasingly been employed to facilitate urban development and organizational processes, is illustrated here in the work of architect and founder of Play the City Ekim Tan. Beyond city games, factories, offices, and productive spaces, traditional recreation areas such as parks are also a result and site of intensive human labor. Amsterdamse Bos—among the largest city parks in Europe—for instance, was created from scratch with a twofold ambition: to respond to the lack of nature in Amsterdam and the high unemployment of the time. Between 1934 and 1940 more than 20,000 people were employed in forestation efforts as part of a work relief program.

The domestic space is not exempt from labor's sprawl. The bed, in the research of architecture historian and theorist Beatriz Colomina, is rendered as a unique horizontal architecture in the age of social media, a contemporary workspace transforming labor. Colomina takes us on a journey through a variety of spaces and times, from bed to bed, starting at Room 902 of the Amsterdam Hilton Hotel, the site of John Lennon and Yoko Ono's infamous *Bed-In for Peace*, held from March 25 to 31, 1969. More *Bed-Ins* would follow, in which Lennon and Ono attacked the society of achievement: "Work is a relative word you know. Work is pleasure," Lennon argued. "I hate that kind of concept because it is ruining the whole society, that is; achievement and

Tippelzone Zandpad, Utrecht, 2016.

The John and Yoko Suite at the Hilton Hotel, Amsterdam.



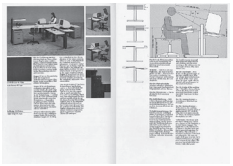
Scenes of domestic labor in Ernst Neufert, *Bauentwurfslehre* (Berlin: Bauwelt-Verlag, 1936).

result… But that is all hypocrisy. They don't have to have a result. They don't have to achieve anything… They don't have to work hard. Why do you have to work hard?" continued Ono, "It's an achievement to enjoy."[2] Yet by conceiving their honeymoon bed as a workspace where they would invite press and communicate with a global audience every day between 9 a.m. and 9 p.m., John Lennon and Yoko Ono also challenged the distinction between work and leisure. They "anticipated the working bed of today," Colomina stresses, that is, the scattered, pillowy office from which professionals regularly work, assisted by communication technologies and a growing digital infrastructure.

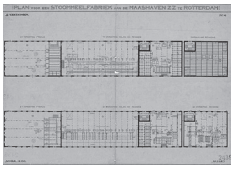
This dispersed infrastructure across domestic, private, public, and shared spaces in the city into which the office space mutates is served by the unassuming architecture of data centers. Densifying and clustering around particular areas, these spaces come to define an emerging landscape of enclosures where, as in the port or greenhouse containers, human presence is anecdotal. According to "Room for Growth," the 2017 Report by the Dutch Data Center Association analyzed here by Femke Herregraven, the digital industry is today one of the primary engines of the Dutch economy. Herregraven unpacks the imprint and larger implications of this postindustrial, digital infrastructure in the Netherlands: the digital gateway to Europe.

The clear demarcation of work and leisure time—between domestic space and the space of the office or the factory—is thus no longer a prerequisite for a postindustrial society that is enmeshed in pervasive digital infrastructure. Yet as architects and scholars Pier Vittorio Aureli and Maria Shéhérazade Giudici argue in their account of the place and form of work and leisure within ancient Greek and Roman domestic spaces, this dialectic of labor and *otium* did not result in a social model in which the house functioned as the sole realm of leisure and reproduction. Rather, the obligations of material life and the pursuit of doing nothing coexisted. This doing nothing, instead of being construed as a non-activity, can also be conceived, as Marina van Zuylen explains in her disentanglement of the various philosophical values boredom has been given in modernity, "a proper occupation." An occupation that is nevertheless afforded, too often, by forms of exploitation and the subordination of the other.

2. *BED PEACE*, dir. Yoko Ono and John Lennon, 1969.



Images from the Gispen ST company catalog for office furniture geared towards automated work processes, 1979.



Michiel Brinkman, Floorplan of the steam-powered flour mill "De Maas" in Maashaven, Rotterdam, 1913

A remote control room in the APM Terminal office building, Rotterdam, 2014.

Maasvlakte II, Rotterdam, 2016.

In this context, scholar and activist Silvia Federici's seminal work "Wages Against Housework," first published in 1975, continues to be relevant, and enters in dialogue with media historian Markus Krajewski's account of *Elektra-Technovision*, the first "fully automated kitchen" designed by Hasso Gehrmann between 1965-1970. Taking for granted the role of woman as housewife, the automated kitchen promised that "the woman 'no longer goes to the individual appliances. Rather, the appliances would come to her.'" If, in the words of Federici, "capital create[s] the housewife to service the male worker physically, emotionally and sexually," automated technologies are envisioned not to liberate, but to support women in the perpetuation of unpaid domestic and reproductive labor. "Reproduction, as feminism teaches us," write Aureli and Giudicci, "is not leisure; and work cannot be kept out of the house." And the bed—as Colomina argues while considering the bed as a site for protest, work, and production—becomes a "fucktory."

It is in the Netherlands that this notion finds its more prominent urban response. Amsterdam's red-light district epitomizes the architectures of sex work, and how it has become typologically defined and legally normalized. In her essay "Sex for Sale," curator Annemarie de Wildt leads us across the cultural history and architectural spaces of sex work in the Netherlands, including the *tipplezones* (street prostitution) that contained shared facilities for sex workers, the *afwerkplek* (drive-in infrastructures for sex, orchestrating the dance of bodies and machines), and window-brothels which, following the launch of Amsterdam's Project 1012 (2007), have been gradually transformed into temporal and sometimes permanent studios for creative workers, fashion designers, and artists. Their modernist, rationally designed interiors dressed in white, regular tiles and equipped with fixed single beds, bidets, sinks, and the omnipresent locker, describe not only an efficient working space but also the transformation of a body into a worker.

In addition to historical and present-day case studies in the Netherlands, the book analyzes spatial arrangements and protocols that are molded for the interaction between humans and machines. It explores urban developments where automated labor and leisure coalesce, addresses the ways in which evolving notions of labor have categorized and defined bodies at particular moments in time, and discusses the legal, cultural, and technical infrastructures that enable their exploitation. In his account of

OMA, *Timmerhuis*, Rotterdam, 2015.

Sheet 1: I work.
Sheet 2: The little rest.
Sheet 3: The big rest.
Sheet 4: I stand.
Anonymous, Anatomical studies of sitting and standing at the Institute for Applied Arts Education (IvKNO) Amsterdam, circa 1950.

Lida Licht-Lankelma, Scale model of the human figure, ca. 1960.

Foodora riders in the Vondelpark, Amsterdam, 2018.

the history of automated architecture of leisure in Palm Springs, California, architect and researcher Manuel Shvartzberg challenges the pervasive postwar narrative of national economic growth fostered by technological innovation. Shvartzberg unpacks how the standardization and automation of architectural production through a "unique techno-managerial system of housing for a life of leisure" had as a consequence the elimination of its own builders' jobs and homes. The case of Palm Springs collapses the techno-optimistic premises that automation would bring increasing bounty and luxury, the dystopian forecasts of rampant, machine-abetted human unemployment and inequality, and early calls advocating for the establishment of universal basic income.

Also analyzing automation technologies in the United States, in this case in prewar Chicago, architect and architecture theorist Francesco Marullo approaches the urban idea of "the jungle" through the work of Bertolt Brecht. Marullo suggests Brecht's approach to theater as a strategy to examine and be aware of the conditions of production within which we live, and as a first step toward overcoming their systems of oppression. "This does not mean," Marullo argues, "to abandon reality through an ascetic detachment but, on the contrary, to penetrate it in all its aspects through our own work, starting from recuperating an awareness of our self and beyond through bodily actions." It is precisely the fragility of the individual body and its actions in the face of corporate architecture and the skyscraper in the global neoliberal city that writer and philosopher Paul B. Preciado examines in his essay through an account of the struggle for survival and sovereignty of Wu Yongning, the Chinese rooftopper who accidentally fell to his death in a mediatized spectacle. The striving to be represented, gain visibility and agency within contemporary neoliberalism, Preciado argues, "is always done at the price of risking one's life." The image of the performing body, now rendered as an algorithm, he stresses, might be the only survivor in this process.

The production of these images and their progressive replacement of the body itself is at the core of designer and researcher Simone C. Niquille's work. Niquille unravels the parameters embedded in design software that are being used to optimize contemporary workspaces for efficiency, ergonomics and human/machine interactions, and thus shaping the body itself. The human body, first measured, then standardized and rendered as data, is

The Door of No Return, Gorée Island, Senegal, 2004.

Abyss Creations' Real Dolls factory in San Marcos, California, 2017.

The head of a Realbotix sex robot, 2017.

Amazon Industries Inc., *Wearable RFID devices with manually activated RFID tags*, 2014.

finally deployed via ergonomic simulation software for the design of factory spaces. In shaping architecture, Niquille suggests, our virtual models are ultimately defining what a human body is, while the unknown other, the non-standard body, that non-accounted for in the database— often marginalized in terms of class, gender, race, or disability—is rendered non-existent.

This architecture of interior, exterior, and virtual spaces, flexible offices, locker spaces, containers, control rooms, windows, and beds through which bodies are categorized, defined, and transformed, has a door. Curator, cultural programmer and radio host Amal Alhaag focuses on the Door(s) of No Return, a symbol of the slave trade, and analyzes the historical significance and implications for descendants of enslaved Africans. The Door(s) are a particular architecture for the brutal displacement, disposal, and transformation of bodies, languages, identities, and belonging. As archives of loss and longing, of diasporic consciousness, and sites that shape the realities of black beings, Alhaag argues, the Door(s) are present as a violent absence in front of the ocean; the Atlantic Ocean, and "every other body of water that carries the histories of the ongoing destruction of the migrant, poor, racialized, and gendered body."

These bodies of water and their histories are also at the center of artist Ayesha Hameed's reflection on automation and the labor by illegalized migrants, which unpacks the amalgamation of human and machine—migrant body and the boat—through the medium of the weather and across their transit along ocean currents. "The machine is inside of us," Hameed argues, thus inverting futurist notions of automatism; it is "produced by the combined forces of the state and sea." In this assemblage of the technologies of the body and that of the machine, it is possible to read the modes in which, throughout history, the concept of the enslaved body and ethnographic body as well as, as Alhaag suggests, the cyborg, has been constructed. According to Alhaag's account, the space between the Door(s) and the Atlantic Ocean is not only site for the engineered, racialized body, but also a site of science fiction and a space for acts of resistance.

The quest for spaces of resistance, the fight for a non-exploitative, non-discriminatory world, and the attempt to develop non-extractive technologies and economies are, as we have seen, at the core of many of the essays contained in this book, including the work

of culture critic and mediologist Jonathan Beller. Going beyond the dissolution of the right of property of human beings, cultural critic Egbert Alejandro Martina draws attention to the failures of slavery's abolition, and asks what it might yet mean. "Is it the abolition of the capitalist global order as such?" Martina's essay, a reflection on the Dutch colonial project in the Caribbean, charts the connection between the survival of the colonial project and the introduction of the waged labor system. Among the arguments raised in a 1862 legislative session pertaining to the abolition of slavery, Martina points out, it was claimed that in the Netherlands, Black people would "fail as 'free citizens' because they lacked a proper incentive to work," and that "their main idea of freedom is the right to do nothing." According to this account, the access to freedom was dependent on the introduction of the formerly enslaved in a new system of waged labor. Thus, the abolition of slavery, and the exploitation of the other, Martina asserts, "might mean the end of work itself."

A society liberated from the bondage of labor was also envisioned in *New Babylon's* initial proposal to inhabit a space where there are no windows, rooms, furniture, or storage; no greenhouses, offices, beds, or lockers; and perhaps most importantly, no doors. It was, nevertheless, an architecture serving a hegemonic order, founded on the exploitation and invisibility of working bodies, conceived of as automated machines. Would *New Babylon* be possible without the work of the other?

By reflecting on this spectrum of spaces and theoretical viewpoints, *Work, Body, Leisure* seeks to offer visions that could be deployed in the reshaping of contemporary and future labor structures, and ultimately, our capacity to redesign them according to a different set of ethical principles. Published in conjunction with the Dutch Pavilion at the 16th International Architecture Exhibition of la Biennale di Venezia, this book aims to foster new forms of creativity and responsibility within the architectural field in response to emerging technologies of automation, and also to imagine spatial configurations, living conditions, and notions of architecture itself that could engender disruptive changes in our current Cartesian landscape designed for the exploitation of all bodies.

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