

an office led by architect John Peterson, which has adopted similar strategies used, for instance, for the preservation and design of small public spaces in the area South of Market.

In the Netherlands, Jeanne van Heeswijk has been practicing her brand of urbanism for years. She is an internationally known Dutch visual artist partly based in New York City. Her longest and maybe toughest project has been in Vlaardingen Westwijk, a working-class community near Rotterdam built in the 1950s according to a High Modernist ideological scheme by the Dutch CIAM-affiliated urban planner Wim van Tijen.⁵ What is happening to Westwijk now is happening to most similar projects not only in the Netherlands but also in France, Germany, and even the United States. A whole generation of city fabric designed and built to the dictates of Modernist urban planning is being demolished and replaced by a new housing stock. This has resulted in more private ownership and parking facilities and less social housing, high-rises, and public green space.

Van Heeswijk uses her “innocence” as a visual artist to implement an entirely different urbanistic morality and vision. Under the guise of a community arts project leader, she immersed herself in Westwijk by setting up office in the area for three years, getting to know every inch of this economically poor but culturally rich community. She then convinced the housing corporation that owns most of the neighborhood to lend her the dilapidated shopping center for the period before its demolition. Displaying a guerilla-like resourcefulness, she turned the shopping center into a cultural and arts as well as social center. She played simultaneously on different levels, energizing the local inhabitants but also convincing the stately Boijmans Museum of Rotterdam to use the shopping center as a temporary auxiliary museum, organizing local handicrafts fairs but also inviting internationally renowned architects, artists, and thinkers to visit and work. She even managed to reanimate the Modernist architecture of the Van Tijen era by painting the whole structure fire-engine red, establishing it as a hip urban center. She worked “bottom-up” with the community itself but combined this with “top-down” cosmopolitan, sophisticated design, art, thinking, and entrepreneurship.

Starting as an innocent arts effort, the project became more and more problematic because with all the attention it attracted, it opened an unwelcome debate about how to treat Modernist high-rises. All the clichés about their anonymity, cultural poverty, ugliness, and economic hopelessness were proven wrong. The inhabitants became