

proud of their area and less inclined to follow top-down policies. Intellectuals from outside the neighborhood were forced to see and understand these areas as not just abstractions. Van Heeswijk, with her deep immersion into local communities and virtuosic use of urban institutions and policies, is practicing quite like Urban Think Tank in Caracas and Rahul Mehrotra in Mumbai. Revealing the hidden potentials as a cultural motor of just one example of the tens of thousands of similar Modernist buildings of the 1950s begs the question if this should not have been tried wherever similar neighborhoods have instead been given up and are now being demolished. If you can make it in Vlaardingen Westwijk, you can surely make it anywhere. Accepting this means having to completely reevaluate one of the most important urban notions and planning policies of the past decade: the hopelessness of Modernist housing developments. Van Heeswijk's highly elegant intervention carries an enormous, if indirect, urbanistic punch.

Unlike middle-of-the-road practices that conform to the organizational rules, Ditch Urbanists are oppositional. They have to constantly prove that things can and should be done differently by different people with different goals. They have to keep their master plans, visions, and ambitions tucked away—revealing them would blow their cover. They have to sneak in through the back door and create “facts on the ground,” so that when the powers-that-be recognize what is going on, it might be too late to stop them. Ariel Sharon, the architect of the Palestinian occupation, coined the phrase “creating facts on the ground” in 1973 when talking about building so many Israeli settlements on the West Bank that a future withdrawal from the Arab territory would be very difficult for his own government to realize. “Create new facts on the ground and your political opponents don't have to agree with your view of the world, they have to deal with it.”⁶

This brings to light a last element of Ditch urbanism: it is different from bottom-up urbanism and advocacy planning; it does not passively translate the will of local people. It brings to sites a fresh view of the world, not just the one used by official policy makers or market parties. That is what makes these practices Modernist, echoing a belief in the emancipatory powers of the urban collective that ran through urban planning from Patrick Geddes and Ebenezer Howard, through Lewis Mumford and Clarence Stein, Ernst May and Cornelis van Eesteren, George Candilis, Constantinos Doxiadis and Jaqueline Tyrwhitt, Victor