Liberation from work is an old desire. Today, however, when technological advancements bring us closer to that possibility, we start to witness the dark aspects of this idea. As a testing ground for new forms of labor and technology, the Netherlands allows us to evaluate those trajectories and the contemporary complexities of a life without work. Nonetheless, by putting the body at the center of this relationship, this project subtly reminds us we should still aim to counter the sadly famous slogan “work sets you free.”

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, and the regularity of 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 (Figs. 1, 2). 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.
#Office

These 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, 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, closed worlds for the administration of private identities and belongings (FIG. 3).

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.


FIG 2 Koppert Cress. © Jan van Berkel
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. 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 (1998) puts it, “pleasure becomes painful, or pain becomes pleasurable, again”. 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. As described in the research project Automated Landscapes, the
logistical infrastructure of the new, fully-automated APM container terminal in the port of Rotterdam’s Maasvlakte II (Fig. 4) – where self-driving vehicles, automated cranes, and diverse interfaces maximize the handling of containers with unprecedented performance and productivity co-exist 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 free and creative way of life as envisioned by Constant, automation does not necessarily lead to a desired retirement for many workers.

**#Bed**

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. A scattered, pillowy office from which professionals regularly work, assisted by communication technologies and a growing digital infrastructure.

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 post-industrial 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. “Reproduction, as feminism teaches us,” write Aureli and Giudici, “is not leisure; and work cannot be kept out of the house” (Aureli & Giudicci, 2018). And the bed – as Colomina argues while considering the bed as a site for protest, work, and production – becomes a ‘fucktory.’

![Image of a scale model of the human figure](https://example.com/figure.png)


This architecture of interior, exterior, flexible offices, locker spaces, containers, control rooms, and beds through which bodies are categorized, defined, and transformed, has a door. In her research on the Door(s) of No Return, a symbol of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, Amal Alhaag 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, belonging. The space between the Door(s) and the ocean signs the violence that precipitated the forced movements of the enslaved, and those still unfolding of the migrant and refugee. Yet the Door(s), or rather the threshold between being and no/being, is, according to Alhaag, also a site of science fiction. A space for acts of refusal. For the fight for a non-exploitative, non-discriminatory, non-racist world.

This quest for freedom, and for a non-exploitative world, cultural critic Egbert Alejandro Martina argues, “might mean the end of work itself.” Martina charts the connection between the survival of the Dutch colonial project and the introduction of the waged labor system. According to his account, the access to freedom was dependent on the introduction of the formerly enslaved in a new system of waged labor, a system that would prevent, as alleged in the legislative sessions pertaining to the abolition of slavery, that 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” (Martina, 2018).
A society liberated from the bondage of labor was, nevertheless, 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 foster new forms of creativity and responsibility within the architectural field in response to emerging technologies of automation, a domain of research and innovation that still lacks a critical spatial perspective. The project aims to open a discussion about this imminent future and the technological regimes that make it possible and, ultimately, to explore our agency and ability to accept or challenge it.

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**Bibliografía / Bibliography**


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**Notas / Notes**

FIG 8-9 Casilleros / Locker room
Rietveld Pavilion Venice Biennale.

FIG 10 Sala cama / Bed room
Rietveld Pavilion Venice Biennale.

FIG 11 Casilleros / Locker room
Rietveld Pavilion Venice Biennale.

FIG 12 Sala campo de juego /
Playground room
Rietveld Pavilion Venice Biennale.
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WORK, BODY, LEISURE

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