

# IMAGINING GLOBAL AMSTERDAM

EDITED BY MARCO DE WAARD

History, Culture,  
and Geography  
in a World City



CITIES AND CULTURES

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## Imagining Global Amsterdam

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# **Imagining Global Amsterdam:**

*History, Culture, and Geography in a World City*

Edited by Marco de Waard

AMSTERDAM UNIVERSITY PRESS

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## Acknowledgments

This collection of essays originates in the conference *Imagining Amsterdam: Visions and Revisions*, held at the Trippenhuis in Amsterdam on 19-21 November 2009. Most of the essays brought together here were first presented on that occasion, and subsequently revised and expanded for inclusion in this book. In preparing their papers for publication, contributors were asked to connect them to the themes of globalization, the modern urban imaginary, and Amsterdam as ‘global village’ in ways that they thought best given their expertise and conceptual interests and concerns. It goes without saying that a project of this scope and kind cannot take shape without incurring some substantial debts, which I am very keen to acknowledge here. First of all, my warm thanks go to Joyce Goggin and to Christoph Lindner for their encouragement, support, and tactical and practical advice throughout this project’s different stages. Back in 2008, Joyce joined me in organizing the *Imagining Amsterdam* conference. Her help in getting this project off the ground has been essential, and working together was good fun along the way. Christoph’s support and advice, too, have been crucial, and I consider it an honour that *Imagining Global Amsterdam* now launches the *Cities and Cultures* book series under his general editorship at AUP. Next, thanks are due to the Institute of Culture and History at UvA for supporting the conference organizationally and financially, and to Amsterdam University College for offering additional encouragement and support. I would also like to thank Miriam Meissner for doing an expert job on the images for this book in her role as editorial assistant, and AUP for their continued confidence in me and in this project despite some delays. My final debt is to the students at Amsterdam University College who took my undergraduate courses on ‘Literary Cities’ and ‘The Modern Urban Novel’ in the Spring terms of 2010 and 2011. Their readiness to discuss a range of ideas and texts with me that ended up having a role in the making of this book was exemplary and inspirational; I can only hope they learned as much from the experience as I feel I gained by it myself. I dedicate this collection to *all* the students that I have had the good fortune to work with at AUC, that most international of colleges – as another way in which to cheer them on as they give meaning to what it is to be ‘global citizens’ in Amsterdam.

MdW





## Introduction

### 1. Amsterdam and the Global Imaginary

*Marco de Waard*

#### Cultural Mobility, Global Performativity

A young woman – immersed, it appears, in her reading – sits on a large, beanbag-shaped stone chair on Amsterdam’s Dam Square. Her pose, if not exactly comfortable, seems balanced enough, although she may have had to put herself into a squat first over her sizeable black travelling bag. Behind her we see a museum poster, one of a series put up there by the Amsterdam (Historical) Museum to advertize its collection when a large bank building was temporarily fenced off in 2009 and 2010. The scene on the poster forms a striking contrast with the calm of the woman’s pose: a monumental canvas by Jan Abrahamsz. Beerstraaten, it evokes the fire that destroyed Amsterdam’s old town hall in the night of 7 July 1652. The inflamed sky, rendered in part in screaming colours, suggests the event may have seemed to spell apocalypse to some of those who witnessed it, including perhaps the painter himself. The fact that the Exchange Bank, too, was destroyed (it was housed in the same building) offers the potential of a stern cautionary tale in this city of Calvinists and commerce, of seventeenth-century republicans and burghers. In fact, a new town hall was already being built; seen in its entirety, the painting shows the scaffolding behind the *waaghuis*, suggesting that the fire only sealed the old building’s appointed fate – and so, could just as well be cast as a providential sign of benevolence, divine arrangements meshing nicely with worldly ones.<sup>1</sup>

The woman, in any case, is oblivious to the painting, as she is to the tourist draws near where she sits. We know that on her right stands the Nieuwe Kerk, which regularly houses art and heritage exhibitions. Just in front of her is the city’s Madame Tussauds; if she looks up, she is likely to see people queue up to see Rembrandt, Lady Gaga, and the Dalai Lama in wax. Just across from her is the Palace on the Dam, the building which Beerstraaten saw completed during his lifetime, and which now functions as a museum and a place for royal receptions. And finally, surrounding all this, we may sense the hustle and bustle and noise of Amsterdam itself: the shops, the street vendors and ‘living statues’ who often punctuate Damrak and Dam Square, and other city users, residents, and travellers. Strikingly, though, in the photograph the modern city is mainly there by suggestion: it only intrudes in the form of the litter on the woman’s side, on

the square's characteristic cobblestones. She, meanwhile, reads Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957) as if nothing could disturb her peace. What to make of this rich assemblage of images, sensations, and cultural markers? What kind of urban experience is conjured up by it? How should we understand the woman's somewhat enviable, but also rather curious moment of poise?

In the context of a collection of essays on 'imagining global Amsterdam', the point to make is that the photograph, which is shown in detail on the cover of this book, points to three different kinds of cultural mobility, each of which firmly belongs to the present 'age of globalization'. They are: the mobility of the tourist or corporeal traveller, moving across countries and continents to visit 'capitals of culture' (if not, to stay in Kerouac's beatnik idiom, to be simply 'on the road'); the mobility of the image – potentially any image – across time and space, a trend only intensifying now that the 'society of the spectacle' announced in the 1960s by Guy Debord has spiralled into hypermediacy and into incessant, neurotic re-mediation; and finally, the mobility of the 'city' as an imagined or mental construction in its own right, in the sense that it leads a life independent of its existence as a physical place, appealing to visitors, media users, and art and architecture lovers in contexts ranging from the Netherlands and Europe to America and Asia, and articulated by a spate of narratives and re-mediations. Paradoxically, this city as an imagined construct could be said to live a shadowy, shimmering existence while the images proliferate: under today's conditions, the most successful 'cities of culture' – at least in commercial or cultural-economic terms – may be those where one has 'always already' been, even if one has never actually set foot in them.

Indeed, if we stay with the example of the woman on Dam Square for just a little longer, we see several cultural scripts being played out in this photograph, none of which is unique to Amsterdam as a place. First, the 'romance' of a road novel like *On the Road* could be projected onto one's travel experience in many other places. The novel scripts the woman's encounter with Amsterdam in ways that make it 'American' or 'global' as well as Dutch or European. Second – and notwithstanding the special charm of this photo's composition – a thematically comparable photo of a similar situation could have been taken in any other 'capital of culture', hypermediated places such as Dam Square being available in every tourist city today. (It is worth recalling here that in their seminal book *Remediation*, Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin compare heavily mediated cities to 'theme parks'. Although the pull of historical gravity in this photograph is palpable, the Dam Square it gives us hardly escapes this 'logic of hypermediacy' [Bolter and Grusin 1999, 169]). Third and last, even my own reading of the photograph and the museum poster in the above could not entirely avoid slipping into the language of the art catalogue or travel guide, and thus into the conventions of a globally circulating script, best summed up perhaps as the master script of 'European cultural heritage' (more about which later). The point is that all these scripts are intensely repeatable across media and places, which means that none of them can define the singular experience of an urban space or place *in its uniqueness*. It is this free play of cultural mobilities and global performativities, of images on the move and people responding to their movements, that the present collection

seeks to address – using Amsterdam as a strategic lens for bringing into focus the dynamics of urban image formation under conditions of globalization in society and culture.

## **Imagining Amsterdam, Imagining Globality**

However, if the emphasis put here on the power and autonomy of images somehow suggests that Amsterdam is placed ‘under erasure’ in this collection, I should wish to disabuse the reader of this impression at once. *Imagining Global Amsterdam* turns to Amsterdam as a singularly fascinating case study for the manifold impact which globalization exerts, specifically in how it transforms urban life and culture, produces new relations to place, space, and travel, and generates new visions of both the city’s future and its past. In so doing, the collection takes as its subject not only articulations of Amsterdam as a ‘world city’ – indeed, ‘global Amsterdam’ as one may find it today, a major hub for international commerce and tourism and the place where nearly 180 nationalities cohabit<sup>2</sup> – but also globally circulating images of Amsterdam as produced and received over time, and finally, if somewhat elusively, what could be described as Amsterdam-themed imaginings of the ‘global’ as such – i.e., representations of the city that use it as a focal point for reflecting on the kind of global order which historically it has had a hand in creating, and, by implication, on that to which we now seem headed for the future.

The existing scholarship on Amsterdam as a global or world city is large and diverse, but so far, historical and urban-geographical studies substantially prevail over studies of city imagery; what is more, Amsterdam’s global dimension, both in the seventeenth century and today, is still more often assumed as part of the background of other and more specialized inquiry than submitted to scrutiny in its own right, as the subject of reflective practice and representation.<sup>3</sup> In brief, then, let me consider three compelling reasons why (the idea of) Amsterdam should offer a unique and exceptional case study for exploring the relationship between globalization, urban culture, and today’s ‘society of the image’ from a broad and international humanities perspective. The first is Amsterdam’s persistent, but dynamic and contradictory association with the ‘global village’ idea: i.e., of a city relatively free of the darker connotations of global citydom which attach to primary or ‘core’ world cities such as London, Tokyo, or New York, while intensely globally (inter)connected through various worldwide networks and flows. To some extent, Amsterdam may owe its ‘global village’ image quite simply to its physical geography and scale, as when it is dubbed ‘the world’s smallest metropolis’ or ‘the smallest world city’ (Westzaan 1990, 27; Deben et al. 2007, back cover); indeed, if world cities form the ‘faces’ of globalization, as has often been suggested, then Amsterdam provides it with a face that seems comparatively friendly and humane. To some extent, also, the image borrows continued resonance and appeal from the ‘global village’ concept so famously promoted by Marshall McLuhan in the 1960s, as a utopian metaphor for a democratic and egalitarian world society integrated by global media. That Amsterdam has

been considered directly in light of McLuhan's concept/ideal speaks from the Amsterdam-based films of Johan van der Keuken, among others – discussed in chapter 7 in this book.<sup>4</sup> However, if the 'global village' image of the city has long held special attraction, it is complicated by the international interest in contemporary Amsterdam as the epitome of an open society, or as a space where an unequalled degree of tolerance and permissiveness, and an historically evolved culture of legal pragmatism, can be seen to co-exist with the possibility of licentiousness or even the breakdown of social morals. Let me turn to Jonathan Blank's feature-length documentary film *Sex, Drugs & Democracy* (1994) for a particularly resonant example. Exploring 'the Dutch idea of a free society' to wide American media coverage when it came out, Blank's film documents Dutch policies regarding abortion and euthanasia, the legalization of 'vices' such as hashish, marijuana, and brothels, the Dutch wealth distribution system, and sex education for schoolchildren (among other subjects) through largely sympathetic interviews with local Amsterdammers, combined with evidence about low rates in teen pregnancy, HIV infection, and drug abuse. For many (foreign) online reviewers, the image that is conjured up approximates a paradise on earth, at least by suggestion, thereby setting up an implicit standard for comparison. As one American reviewer put it in 2002: 'I'm sure it is not a perfect society. ... But it is as perfect a society that we could ever hope to see. And the film really does make one re-evaluate what freedom, liberty, justice for all and democracy really mean. And how far the USA has so profoundly regressed from those utopian elements on which it was founded'.<sup>5</sup> Yet what also sticks is the image of a precarious balance, of a socio-cultural lifeworld highly dependent on participation and civic consensus – which throws up the question how proof this society is against difficulty and change and how capable it is of self-perpetuation.

If for a long time, the image prevailed of Amsterdam as a place of radical freedom from prohibitions and legal constraints, a laboratory for 'alternative' lifestyles, if one with a dangerous edge – typically popularized in such 1990s texts as Irvine Welsh's story 'Eurotrash' (1994) and Ian McEwan's noir novel *Amsterdam*, which carried the Booker Prize in 1998 – in the early 2000s new political developments and socio-cultural trends introduced a sea change in how the city was regarded, at home as well as abroad. In January 2000, Dutch publicist Paul Scheffer published a controversial article in *NRC Handelsblad* that questioned the multiculturalist consensus that had prevailed so far in Dutch public discourse. The ensuing debate – about the direction of the multicultural society, and on a deeper level about the meaning and constitution of 'community' in the Netherlands and about the terms of social inclusion, integration, and cohesion – gained further momentum in the wake of '9/11', as several essays in this collection note.<sup>6</sup> If initially this debate remained largely domestic, international media coverage of the murder of Theo van Gogh (2 November 2004) was quick to locate Amsterdam at the forefront of transformations that were felt to be underway or imminent in European society at large, specifically in terms of the 'dangers' posed to freedom of speech – of which van Gogh had styled himself a provocative proponent – and in terms of the pressures placed on tolerance by new fundamentalisms, real or perceived. No matter what degree of exaggeration

or misreading was involved, the global image of the city was changing for a fact, and so was its self-image at home. In the United States, readers with an interest in the Netherlands could now read Ian Buruma's *Murder in Amsterdam: The Death of Theo van Gogh and the Limits of Tolerance* (2006) as well as watch Blank's movie – even though, it should be added, the idea of Amsterdam as a *pars pro toto* of European-style social policy and welfarism also continued to have currency, and still does so to this day (e.g. Shorto 2009; Fainstein 2010).

I am, it must be obvious, sketching some highly complicated developments in very broad strokes here. In the context of the present collection, the point to make is that the cultural reorientation towards specifically Dutch traditions of liberty, tolerance, and civic life which was set in motion in the early 2000s has not only taken place in political forums and news media but also through literature, film, urban architecture, the visual arts, and graphic design, and that the impulse for this reorientation originates in international as well as domestic perceptions and concerns. Some of the essays that follow trace a response to the present cultural moment through re-imaginings and re-articulations of Amsterdam that are keenly alive to the utopian, dystopian, heterotopian, and various other inflections carried by the idea and image of the city in the eye of (inter)national beholders. It is hoped that such studies add to our understanding of the intensity of global exchange which has been invited by Amsterdam's city image over time, and that they expand the imaginative and intellectual space in which current socio-political discussions are being played out.

The second reason why Amsterdam's place in modern urban and global imaginaries deserves attention and study in its own right is its inscription, qua 'world city', in two historical moments that are powerfully linked by contemporary resonances. On the one hand, the idea of Amsterdam remains inextricably tied up with the Dutch 'moment of world hegemony' during the seventeenth century, when for some fifty years the city formed the heart of a capitalist world system maintained through the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie or VOC) and the West India Company (WIC), among others – the former, famously, often 'considered to have been the first transnational [trading] company in the world' (Nijman 1994, 211). As the historical sociologist and world-systems theorist Giovanni Arrighi has written, these 'Dutch chartered companies were both beneficiaries and instruments of the ongoing centralization in Amsterdam of world-embracing commerce and high finance ... [and] the medium through which the Dutch capitalist class established *direct* links between the Amsterdam entrepôt on the one side, and producers from all over the world on the other' (1994, 143; italics in original). This situation had a powerful impact on local self-images and on the 'global consciousness' that emerged in the city in the course of the seventeenth century – as Ulrich Ufer's essay in this collection attests. Nor was the Dutch mercantilist effort short-lived, even if by the late 1670s world supremacy was lost. By 1728, 'Daniel Defoe was still referring to the Dutch as "the Carriers of the World, the middle Persons in Trade, the Factors and Brokers of Europe"' (Wallerstein 1982, 102); the VOC took until the close of the eighteenth century to expire. A walk through Amsterdam's historic inner-city centre testifies abundantly to this global past and its legacy, as Michael Wintle's

chapter shows in discussing colonial iconography still decorating many buildings and gables in the city today.

On the other hand, Amsterdam and the Netherlands are in various ways caught up in the present ‘age of globalization’ – contemporaneous with that multiheaded gorgon now commonly known as neoliberalism, roughly stretching from the late 1970s into the present day (for periodization, see Harvey 2005). Neoliberal globalization makes itself felt in Amsterdam in various ways. It generates transformations of urban space, most notably in the Zuidas district and the city centre, which is often said – and feared – to fossilize into a ‘theme park’ of some kind.<sup>7</sup> It also works on the level of the (immigrant) neighbourhood or *wijk*, where it creates new kinds of urban literacy, new forms of urban identification, and new models of local and communal belonging. Finally, it makes itself felt through processes of city branding and city marketing that are omnipresent in some of Amsterdam’s lived, physical spaces, as they are in images in the media (the *I amsterdam* branding campaign, considered by Bharain Mac an Bhreithiún in chapter 14, being a conspicuous case in point). ‘Global Amsterdam’ provides us with plenty of examples, then, of the intertwinement of the local and the global so often discussed under the rubric of ‘glocalization’, in the term promoted by Roland Robertson (1995). ‘Glocalization’ refers to the local inflections – through urban spaces and practices, subjectivities and identities – given to globally circulating trends, and thereby to the intense and dynamic interdependence of the two. In this sense the concept throws up important questions about determination and resistance, about ‘strategy’ (hegemonic) and ‘tactics’ (from below). In Part III of this book, about global Amsterdam’s cultural geography, the reader finds in-depth discussion of examples of localized inscriptions in global processes: from the elevation to ‘global heritage’ status of Amsterdam’s inner-city *grachtengordel* in 2010, which Freek Schmidt considers in the conclusion to his chapter, to the place of Amsterdam’s Red Light District in the city’s image and self-representation at home and abroad, discussed from different angles in chapters 15 and 16.

If *Imagining Global Amsterdam* studies how globalization impacts on the city’s cultural geography, another – and closely related – aim it hopes to achieve is this: to show that some of the literary and artistic articulations of Amsterdam of recent years, specifically in the English-speaking world, go a long way towards throwing the current ‘age of globalization’, as a moment of critical conjuncture, into historical relief. Several essays in this collection suggest that the city’s hegemonic moment in the mercantilist era on the one hand, and the current moment of neoliberalism on the other encounter each other in recent re-imaginings of the city – as if Amsterdam has the capacity to inscribe itself in a double temporality which maps different historical layers onto each other. Let me refer to two notable trends in recent Anglo-American cultural production to elaborate on the idea. For nearly two decades now, one significant trend in historical fiction has been that of the Amsterdam-themed heritage novel which, characteristically, develops either an art-historical or a global-markets-and-finance plot that is set in the seventeenth-century ‘Golden Age’. These fictions can often be seen to mediate ambiguously between the readerly desire for ‘romanticizations of commerce’ and the need for economic ‘cautionary tales’ – an oscillation that has everything

to do, as Joyce Goggin and Erinç Salor show in an astute analysis of two novels of this kind, with current anxieties about volatile markets, risk financing, and the ‘financialization of everyday life’ (chapter 5). The other trend is that of the pronounced surge of interest, in the Netherlands but also in the English-speaking world, in the historical and cultural relations between Amsterdam and New York – an interest one could date back at least to Russell Shorto’s bestselling *The Island at the Centre of the World: The Epic Story of Dutch Manhattan and the Forgotten Colony That Shaped America* (2004), and which has gathered steam with the 400th anniversary of New York-Amsterdam relations in 2009. Let me emphasize the novelty of this interest, before considering its relevance for current urban and global imaginaries. From an American and New York perspective, it could be said as recently as 1999 that ‘the unflattering caricatures of backward and inept Dutch people that permeate our culture’ lent the ‘colonial Dutch’ who governed New Netherland ‘a timeless quality that tends to separate them from the stream of historical action’ (Goodfriend 1999, 19). Thus New York colonial history remained firmly Anglocentric, its Dutch episode a mere prelude to post-1664 or post-1674 English rule. The recent renaissance of interest, by contrast, marks a new desire to experience American history through the lens of other, intersecting continental and national cultural paradigms. That this trend has travelled from academic historiography to popular histories like Shorto’s, and from thence to representations in literature, film, and the visual arts, may indicate an imaginative need on the part of audiences and readers to ‘imagine globality’ or become ‘globally conscious’ in new ways. This would certainly go some way towards explaining the re-articulation of markers of ‘Dutchness’ in notable New York-based novels such as Joseph O’Neill’s *Netherland* (2008) and Teju Cole’s *Open City* (2011), or in a film such as *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* (2010), and it would suggest a global context for interpreting such cultural expressions and their role in cultural memory. (In chapter 6, the case of *Netherland* is used to explore how the idea and image of (New) Amsterdam mediates between different spatial and temporal orders, in ways that are formative of this novel’s ‘global aesthetic’ and of the cosmopolitan ideal expressed in it).

The third and final reason why Amsterdam merits special attention from the perspective of humanities-based globalization research is that articulations of the city – both in commercial and political discourses and in literature, film, and the visual arts – have in recent years become deeply implicated in Europe’s cultural heritage industries and in the processes of politicization and commodification with which they are tied up. In a recent study titled *Tracking Europe: Mobility, Diaspora, and the Politics of Location*, Ginette Verstraete has mounted a searching critique of the official, hegemonic discourses of European citizenship and transnational identification through which EU member states engage in the ‘worldwide marketing of unity-in-diversity’, specifically through the promotion and practice of cultural tourism that is centred on ‘cultural capitals’. European cities, Verstraete argues, are increasingly given to standardizing the cultural-historical markers of ‘difference’ and ‘authenticity’ that constitute their ‘identity’ within a geography which converts such markers into vital political/economic currency. In this argument, the European promotion of cultural mobility and



travel is seen as highly ideologically charged: ‘In a borderless Europe of cultural diversity, tourists from Europe and far beyond flock around with pictures and cultural narratives that connect Europeanness to a variety of unique destinations, sight-seeing (the viewing of images) to site-seeing (the viewing of places), and citizenship to imaginary transportation within a stereotypically differentiated geography of cultural heritage’ (Verstraete 2010, 10). In a sense, Verstraete’s argument forms a – richly contextualized – variation on the long-standing debate in globalization scholarship about the relations and tensions between cultural *heterogenization* and *homogenization*, inviting us to look at European heritage cities as invested in something like the standardized performance of ‘heterogeneity’. As will be seen, this argument is particularly relevant for the concerns of the present book, and it is important to keep in mind as a background for some of the critical questions that are asked in the chapters that follow – about Amsterdam’s place in Europe’s cultural economy and geography, but also about new subjectivities and performativities that can be seen to surface in the global heritage city. Indeed, from the ‘museumization’ of urban space in Rembrandt Year 2006 (chapter 8), to the commodified performance of the ‘authentically’ local or national in a popular neighbourhood like De Pijp (chapter 14), the incorporation of the culturally ‘different’ and ‘distinctive’ in a new dynamics of commercialization and branding throws up urgent questions about place and space, about identity and memory, and about cultural agency and power.

Imagining Amsterdam, imagining globality: in the fifteen essays that follow, (global) images of (global) Amsterdam are approached as forms of imagining, advancing one’s understanding of, or otherwise responding to ‘the global’ itself, both in view of the city’s past and in view of contemporary transformations. The essays are informed by perspectives ranging from cultural history, art and architecture history, and film studies to comparative literature, human geography, and urban planning. While they are diverse in terms of scholarly background, perspective, and approach, what unites them is a shared commitment to historicization – in the assumption that the dynamics of image making in regard both to Amsterdam and to ‘globality’ as such can be traced a very long way back, and that trying to do so enriches our critical sense. The combined effect, it is hoped, is to expand the repertoire of historical and cultural case studies that help us conceptualize the issues at stake in thinking about Amsterdam, globalization, and urban culture today.

## **History, Culture, and Geography in a World City**

*Imagining Global Amsterdam* breaks into three parts. The first part, ‘Historicizing Global Amsterdam’, puts the idea and image of Amsterdam as ‘world city’ in historical perspective in two different ways. On the one hand, it revisits early-modern Amsterdam to inquire how Amsterdammers conceived of themselves and their city as part of a larger, global or globalizing whole – specifically through their experiences with overseas trade and the changes it brought to their society and culture. What did it mean for them to be ‘globally conscious’, and how did

they express their emerging sense of ‘the world as a whole’ (or, what Roland Robertson and David Inglis have proposed to discuss in terms of a ‘global animus’ [2004])? How did it transform the image and self-presentation of the city that it knew itself ‘globally connected’? On the other hand, the section treats the question of Amsterdam as an historic ‘world city’ *retrospectively*, as a subject of cultural memory, asking how historical narratives – in literature, film, and popular culture – look back on the city’s early-modern hegemonic moment now and in light of the cross-historical resonances already suggested above.

The first three essays respond to the first set of questions by placing the role of commerce, capital, and cosmopolitanism in early-modern Amsterdam very firmly in the context of a nascent ‘global awareness’. Ulrich Ufer, in ‘Imagining Social Change in Early-Modern Amsterdam’, looks at early attempts by Amsterdammers to consider the city and themselves through the lens of three urban imaginaries with distinctly global dimensions: respectively, an urban imaginary that was largely affirmative of global economic enterprise and the logic of accumulation which it was seen to set in motion; an imaginary that was more ambivalent about global commerce and its impact on urban life; and finally, an imaginary that questioned the city as a site of accumulation and affluence through the use of dystopian imagery and tropes. The chapter intersects with, and builds on, the work so influentially conducted in this area by Simon Schama, among others (1987). At the same time it foregrounds – in ways that resonate with other chapters in this book – the emergence of new conceptualizations of history, change, and progress in early-modern Amsterdam, asking attention for the complex temporalities involved in imagining the global. Dorothee Sturkenboom, in ‘Amidst Unscrupulous Neighbours: Amsterdam Money and Foreign Interests in Dutch Patriotic Imagery’, focuses on eighteenth-century representations of the Dutch spirit of commerce and enterprise, of Dutch national finance, and of the idea of ‘Amsterdam money’ to consider the interaction of these elements in light of three frames of reference: the urban, the national, and the transnational or European. It is seen that cultural representations of Dutch finance and Amsterdam money struggled to reconcile the idea of national or patriotic interests with that of the city as a site of free exchange, open circulation, and transnational connectedness. This links the chapter to the general theme of urban cosmopolitanism which runs through this section – in Sturkenboom’s case studies, primarily the subject of cultural anxiety and critique. Finally, Michael Wintle’s ‘Visualizing Commerce and Empire: Decorating the Built Environment of Amsterdam’ traces some of the prominent ways in which the impulse to visualize global commerce and empire entered the built environment of Amsterdam. The popular historical writer Geert Mak has referred to Amsterdam as ‘almost an anti-monument turned flesh’ (2001, 3). But if it is true that Amsterdam lacks the ‘architecture of prestige’ which determines the image and self-presentation of various other European capitals, Wintle’s essay reminds us that it has not been free from monumentalizing impulses of its own, resulting in a (bourgeois) iconography of global prestige.

Part I is completed by two essays from the field of literary studies which connect to the previous three by foregrounding – again – the themes of capitalism, commerce, and cosmopolitan life, but which also differ from them in that they

approach ‘Golden Age’ Amsterdam as a global *lieu de mémoire*, investigating its place in cultural memory today and in relation to the commodification of national art and heritage. In ‘Romance and Commerce: Imagining Global Amsterdam in the Contemporary Historical Novel’, Joyce Goggin and Erinc Salor turn to the phenomenon of the historical novel situated in the Dutch ‘Golden Age’, most commonly in Amsterdam or Delft – a remarkable trend in English-language popular fiction that took a flight in the late 1990s with novels by Tracy Chevalier, Deborah Moggach, and Susan Vreeland, among others. Goggin and Salor open up a critical perspective on this voluminous corpus of fictions by exploring how they inscribe themselves in the European art and heritage industries, while at the same time responding imaginatively to the economic and financial crises that so strongly define the present cultural moment. The question how the ‘historical Amsterdam novel’ negotiates these two – to some extent conflicting – impulses is uppermost on this chapter’s mind. Finally, chapter 6, ‘Dutch Decline Redux: Remembering New Amsterdam in the Global and Cosmopolitan Novel’, seeks to propel the discussion forward as it considers the place of (New) Amsterdam in two recent Anglophone novels that, to some degree at least, resist and challenge the commodification of global cultural memory. It is found that both novels, in articulating memories of (New) Amsterdam and early-modern Dutch mercantilism in formally innovative ways, propose new ways for thinking and inhabiting the spatio-temporalities of the global, thereby contributing to cosmopolitanization.

Part II is titled ‘Amsterdam Global Village: (Inter)National Imaginings’. I have already noted how it was media theorist Marshall McLuhan who proposed the metaphor of the ‘global village’ in the 1960s – an optimistic notion, expressing a vision of worldwide togetherness-in-diversity to be facilitated by new media. It is a metaphor which at least two figures whose work this section discusses – Johan van der Keuken and Janwillem van de Wetering – connected imaginatively with Amsterdam; their response to it can be traced through the images they created. The section’s opening chapter, Patricia Pisters’s ‘Form, Punch, Caress: Johan van der Keuken’s Global Amsterdam’, turns to an acknowledged master of Dutch documentary filmmaking who died in 2001. Through a discussion of van der Keuken’s Amsterdam-themed films, Pisters traces three closely interlocked stories about globalization: one about the evolving ‘global consciousness’ of van der Keuken himself, who was widely travelled, from the 1960s until his death; one about globalizing Amsterdam, transforming under his gaze; and finally, one about how van der Keuken’s style and narrative technique became ever more attuned to the representational challenges involved in capturing life in a ‘global city’. Perhaps van der Keuken’s greatest achievement is the magnificent *Amsterdam Global Village* (1996), which Pisters discusses in terms of ‘the mosaic film’. That van der Keuken can be claimed as an early experimenter with mosaic narratives – currently also theorized as ‘network’ or ‘hyperlink narratives’, specifically in reference to contemporary fiction film – is a fascinating thought, one that gives the form a pedigree in politically engaged Dutch/European filmmaking. The next chapter, titled ‘Rembrandt on Screen: Art Cinema, Cultural Heritage, and the Museumization of Urban Space’, turns to a radically different filmmaker, be

it one who – like van der Keuken – is known to take a very political interest in questions of (urban) space and in the question of cinema itself: Peter Greenaway. The chapter analyzes Greenaway's Rembrandt films *Nightwatching* (2007) and *Rembrandt's J'Accuse* (2008) to argue that their construction of the memory of 'Golden Age' Amsterdam, while undeniably subversive and empowering in re-politicizing a distinctly Rembrandtian visual and spatial aesthetic, is at the same time vulnerable to cooptation by a globalized logic of museumization and commodification – a logic that threatens to constrain the political ethos which Greenaway's film art has often been claimed to revive. In developing this argument, the chapter also extends the existing scholarship on the tradition of the Rembrandt biopic and on representations of Amsterdam in studio films.

Chapters 9 and 10 deal with literary texts that treat Amsterdam as a literary and post-colonial 'palimpsest', or as an imaginative space that permits the staging of different literary and cultural codes in relation to each other. Sabine Vanacker's chapter on the detective fiction of Dutch-American author Janwillem van de Wetering discovers in his oeuvre an intriguing, if also rosy-coloured variation on the idea of Amsterdam as 'global village'. Van de Wetering's special situation as an author who was based in the United States, and who used to translate – and adapt – his fiction for English-language markets, affords a special opportunity for exploring the idea and image of Amsterdam as the site of transcultural transfer and mediation – involving touristic expectations and stereotypes of the city, but also the 'global village' vision for it as a place for relaxed, consensual multicultural living, where cultural difference and otherness can be affirmed without needing to become politicized. Vanacker finds in van de Wetering's work 'an early voice in the Dutch debates around immigration and multiculturalism', one that was mindful of Amsterdam's colonial past while also registering transformations in the city which, in the 1970s and 1980s context, pointed forward to the future. In chapter 10, Henriette Louwse turns to Dutch-Moroccan author Hafid Bouazza's Amsterdam as an occidental 'City of Sirens'. The Amsterdam palimpsest, in Bouazza's story 'Apolline' (1996), is overwritten simultaneously by the narrator's memories of his home village in Morocco, and by the language of the glossy magazines that make the Red Light District and a Dutch blonde first met in Vondel Park icons of (Western) urban modernity. Through a reading that combines literary formalism with alertness to the presence of history or 'context' in Bouazza's text, Louwse complicates the way in which 'Apolline' can be connected to the 'multicultural society' and to Dutch debates about its evolution. Her reading forms a salutary reminder that literature can claim highly autonomous agency in re-imagining the global and post-colonial city, making a difference precisely through its refusal to commit itself in terms that are not irreducibly its own.

In considering the final section, 'Global Amsterdam's Cultural Geography', it is worth recalling the distinction which spatial theorist Henri Lefebvre so famously made between physical, mental, and social space (1991). Lefebvre's 'conceptual triangle' has often been used to approach the 'social production of space' as a dynamic, internally conflicted process in which urban spaces, the conceptions we have of them, and finally their images and representations all have

varying, but always relative degrees of agency that need to be studied in relation to each other. In the context of globalization research, such a conceptualization seems to have undiminished urgency. Many scholars assume that globalization has shifted more agency to images and representations than they ever had before. Others would find it more sensible to think of images as sites of discursive struggle where agency may also be retrieved – in ways that chime with Arjun Appadurai's proposal that one defining characteristic of the present 'age of globalization' is that 'the imagination has become an organized field of social practices, a form of work ... and a form of negotiation between sites of agency ... and globally defined fields of possibility' (1996, 31). In one way or another, then, spaces and the images we have of them appear to be eminently the problem – one that looms large over the essays which this section brings together.

The section opens with Mark Denaci's essay 'Amsterdam and/as New Babylon: Urban Modernity's Contested Trajectories'. The visionary New Babylon project, developed by Dutch artist Constant between the late 1950s and the early 1970s, has long been the focus of critical debate. Seen in its initial context, it offered the utopian blueprint for an ideal city/society characterized by spatial fluidity, borderlessness, and openness. If considered in relation to Amsterdam's urban development in the 1960s and 1970s, it could also be seen as offering a kind of counter-discourse against urban modernization, critiquing ambitions to realize the ideal city by design or by imposition from above. Denaci's essay dialogues with the existing readings of New Babylon, but he is particularly interested in teasing out the metaphorical resonances that Constant's project obtains in light of changes affecting Amsterdam today, such as the socio-cultural changes that have been underway in it since the early 2000s and the development of a high-rise district in Zuidas since the early 1990s. In Denaci's reading, it is relevant to discover in New Babylon some distinctly dystopian aspects, which – he proposes – hold out a warning about the fragility of any open and inclusive culture of tolerance in the city. The dialogue with Constant urges us to reflect how precarious and indeed precious any social or spatial arrangement is that strives for equality, liberty, and social justice – and how difficult to sustain within contemporary neo-liberal urban discourse and practice.

The section continues with Freek Schmidt's 'Amsterdam's Architectural Image from Early-Modern Print Series to Global Heritage Discourse'. In Schmidt's chapter, the construction of the image of the *grachtengordel* – the historic inner-city canal belt – is traced through a long and remarkably contingent history, starting with the *Atlas Fouquet* and the *Grachtenboek* in the 1760s, and continuing with the latter's 'rediscovery' in the early twentieth century, through to UNESCO's 'global heritage' discourse and its influence in the present. Schmidt's discussion historicizes the 'sanctification' of the *grachtengordel* that is sometimes, rather too easily, assumed to be a phenomenon of recent years. It shows that the stakes involved in the image of the historic inner-city centre have always been high, that this image is far from easy to 'fix', and that we would do well to be open to further changes in the future. Jeroen Dewulf's chapter on 'Amsterdam Memorials, Multiculturalism, and the Debate on Dutch Identity' considers the cultural geography of memorials in post-colonial Amsterdam as an opportunity

for reflecting on the ongoing debate, already noted above, about multiculturalism in the Netherlands. Both advocates and critics of Dutch multiculturalism have wrestled with the problem that socio-cultural change places pressure on existing memory cultures, most especially on those that are constructed around the symbolically charged events of the Second World War. Dewulf's intervention takes the form of a narrative journey through Amsterdam that is both historical and spatial/geographic. His tour of a range of memorials results in a plea for re-inventing 'global Amsterdam' from the perspective of older, inclusivist visions for Dutch society: visions not confined to a potentially fragmenting identity politics, but rooted in mid-twentieth century conceptions of a pluriform and internally diverse national or collective life.

The dynamic relationships between multiculturalism, urban space, and the ideal of social inclusiveness return in a very different way as a concern in chapter 14. Bharain Mac an Bhreithiún, in 'Graphic Design, Globalization, and Placemaking in the Neighbourhoods of Amsterdam', uses three closely connected case studies to examine the role of graphic design in the processes of 'placemaking' that affect the urban neighbourhood or *buurt*: the well-known *I amsterdam* branding and city-marketing campaign, and some 'grassroots' attempts to critique its discourse or to subvert its visual code; visual culture in the streetscapes of the popular neighbourhood of De Pijp, where various historically accumulated visual languages can be seen to co-exist and intersect in highly complex ways; and the case of recent art projects that use street signage and urban photography to intervene in a debate about the multicultural society and how it transforms the *genius loci* of a place, specifically through the trope of 'translatability'. What connects these case studies, in Mac an Bhreithiún's analysis and discussion, is that hegemonic impositions of the city's 'sense of place' are in each case met by what Michel de Certeau has theorized as 'tactical' forms of resistance. In the process, what is held up for scrutiny is the dynamic of social inclusion and exclusion that characterizes the global city. The chapter concludes, with Doreen Massey and (again) de Certeau, that the *genius loci* of a *buurt* is perhaps best seen as forever in movement, forever in flux, making place an 'event'.

The last two chapters consider instances of urban transformation in Amsterdam from the perspective of human geography and discourse analysis. They give prominent attention to the inner-city's red-light district as a case that brings into focus the interplay between urban globalization, urban practices of regulation and control, and the agency of – again, increasingly globalized – city images in the urban economy and in local politics and government. In chapter 15, Michaël Deinema and Manuel Aalbers offer an historical genealogy of prostitution in Amsterdam that leads to a critique of the current municipal project, known as Plan 1012, to restructure the area of which the city's largest and most iconic red-light district forms a part. What emerges very clearly in the course of the discussion is that while prostitution in Amsterdam has a long and indeed a highly international history, the city has never before been so locked in a relationship of (commercial, economic) dependence on the 'Sin City' image which at the same time it is keen to shrug off – a double bind that is difficult to resolve without risking Amsterdam's historical commitment to a humane approach to the party

which, it appears, stands most to lose, that of the prostitutes themselves. In chapter 16, Markha Valenta also turns to the subject of sex in the city, setting it off against religion as the ‘significant other’ which studies of the global city still too often overlook. Considering sex and religion in relation to each other in the Amsterdam context – both inscribed in highly international circuits, both subject to the city’s regulatory regimes – Valenta asks us to rethink through the study of which fields of desire and regulation scholars should seek to bring urban modernity into view. Valenta’s chapter closes a collection which it is hoped will bring new insights, new material and examples, and new energy to discussions about globalization, the transformative power of images, and the cultural life of cities.

## Notes

- 1 My thanks go to the photographer, TESS (Tess Jungblut), for permitting the use of this photograph for the book cover. Thanks are also due to the Amsterdam Museum for providing detailed documentation about the poster that is included in the photograph and about the painting by Beerstraaten from which it quotes.
- 2 The most recent history of Amsterdam to date notes that in 2010, the city’s nearly 770,000 inhabitants comprised 178 nationalities, with 20 per cent holding double nationality and 12 per cent not holding a Dutch passport (Knegtmans 2011, 409).
- 3 Urban-geographical studies tend to focus on economic restructuring and on the new spatial and institutional configurations that attend the globalization, internationalization, or (it is sometimes said) ‘Europeanization’ of Amsterdam and the Randstad region/conurbation of which it forms a part. E.g., see Musterd and Salet (2003) and some of the essays in Deben et al. (2007). More cultural in its approach is Nell and Rath (2009), which offers detailed discussion of various kinds of cultural change in twentieth-century Amsterdam in relation to immigration and the city’s ever-changing ethnic diversity. On seventeenth-century Amsterdam as a (‘multicultural’) world city, see Kuijpers and Prak (2004) and also Ufer (2008). Finally, I should wish to mention the work that has been done over the past few decades in the field of post-colonial studies on Dutch society and culture. Although post-colonial approaches should not be conflated with approaches to globalization and/or the global city, they do intersect. For the English-speaking reader, of particular interest may be Oostindie (2011) and Boehmer and De Mul (2012).
- 4 Cf. Tsang, who points out that van der Keuken read McLuhan’s *Understanding Media* (1964) ‘immediately after its publication’, and who argues that the filmmaker kept up a sustained dialogue with McLuhan’s thought in his work (Tsang 2009, 78).
- 5 ‘User review’ posted on [www.imdb.com/title/tt0111135/](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0111135/) (by Zen Bones, 26 July 2002, acc. 31 May 2012).
- 6 I am admittedly giving the early 2000s debate about the multicultural society, so important for understanding contemporary Dutch society and culture, very quick treatment here. This is not the place, however, for providing a fuller sketch of the social and political context of the Netherlands in the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Suffice it to refer the reader, in the English-language literature, to Lechner (2008) and to the introductory but very informative Besamusca and Verheul (2010). Lechner discusses Paul Scheffer’s article and the response which it triggered at length (80–90). Also still worthwhile, for historical perspective, is the older van der Horst (1996).
- 7 In an important (if highly pessimistic) article, Jan Nijman discussed Amsterdam’s inner-city centre in terms of a ‘theme park’ devoted to sex and drugs (1999). In recent years, more attention has been paid to the possibility of the inner-city centre transforming into a *heritage*-themed ‘park’ (Deben et al. 2004) and to the economic pressure to reshape Amsterdam into a ‘creative knowledge city’ (e.g. see Musterd and Murie 2010, which pays ample attention to Amsterdam in various chapters).

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**Part I: Historicizing Global Amsterdam**



## **2. Imagining Social Change in Early-Modern Amsterdam: Global Processes, Local Perceptions**

*Ulrich Ufer*

This chapter considers some of the different kinds of ways in which citizens in seventeenth-century Amsterdam experienced palpable social changes in the city as the effects of larger global processes. From its sixteenth-century status as a relatively unimportant fishing port, by the early seventeenth century Amsterdam had risen to the status of a centre of global power, a change that took place within the span of a few decades only. In the course of the seventeenth century the city would develop further into a potent, in some accounts even hegemonic commercial empire (ca. 1625-75), whose proto-industrial capitalist economy and innovative administration of financial resources were geared towards the accumulation of wealth. Global processes, however, not only led to the establishment of new institutions and to a modernization of the economy, they also had a significant impact on how urban residents identified with the city ‘on the ground’. It was through changes in their immediate environment that Amsterdammers learned to see their city as a global hub. If this applies to the years of unhindered prosperity and growth, it applies in a different way to the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, when the patterns of world hegemony could be seen to shift to the city’s disadvantage: as Amsterdam witnessed the disintegration of its global networks, citizens encountered the effects of economic decline and political instability – reminded, once again, of how intricately the local and the global were intertwined.

The present chapter, following some brief theoretical reflections, will argue that one especially important way in which seventeenth-century Amsterdammers thought about social change in their city was to relate it to a novel logic of accumulation – a logic which, because of the city’s central position in a global network, worked largely in its favour. What was particular about Amsterdam was contemporaries’ awareness of how social changes within the locality were part and parcel of a larger, global dynamic of change, an awareness that profoundly affected people’s sense of time, history, and identity, as we will see. In what follows, this chapter will use seventeenth-century Amsterdam as a focus for studying the development of a global consciousness, or what I have discussed elsewhere under the rubric of a ‘global animus’, in Roland Robertson’s term (Ufer 2009). Specifically, the chapter will chart cultural articulations of this global consciousness in terms of different seventeenth-century Dutch ‘urban imaginaries’, that is to say, of the different ways in which Amsterdammers experienced and thought

of their city. In successive order, we will look at an imaginary that demonstrated a positive embrace of the city's global economic involvement and the accumulative logic in which it was inscribed; an urban imaginary that consisted of more ambivalent views and attitudes towards this; and, finally, a dystopian urban imaginary that presented a largely negative take on the city as a site of accumulation.

## **Globalization and Global Systems in Historical Perspective**

Academic debates on globalization often stress either its novelty or its historical longevity. On the one hand, approaches commonly referred to as Globalization Analysis understand it as the result of a relatively recent, qualitative break with the past, thus emphasizing the novelty and historical uniqueness of present-day flows of migrants, objects, capital, and culture (Clayton 2004). Practitioners of Universal History, on the other hand – in a way that resonates with nineteenth-century *Weltgeschichte* or 'world history' – concentrate on lateral comparisons of world regions during specific historical periods (Mazlish 1998). While both types of approach undoubtedly have their merits, the present chapter situates its discussion within a different framework, one that is best introduced as a social-anthropological form of World Systems Analysis. From its earliest inception in the 1970s, World Systems Analysis has argued for a systemic approach to both past and present global phenomena, maintaining that the only valid unit for analysis in the social sciences and the study of history is the global system as a whole (Wallerstein 1974-80). While initially criticized for overemphasizing macro-economics and the politics of hegemony at the expense of cultural processes, more recently this approach has been complemented by Global Systems Analysis. This has broadened the scope of the approach to look in a social-anthropological way at how culture, politics, and the economy all interact in the context of global processes of change (Friedman 1994; Friedman and Ekholm-Friedman 2008; Denmark et al. 2000).

In brief, what distinguishes Global Systems Analysis from other approaches is that it views social reproduction in all localities and at any time as both locally and globally embedded. Thus, the global is not seen as a larger space extending beyond a locality, but as part of 'a set of properties of the reproduction of any locality' (Friedman 2007, 116). It follows that the reproduction of local social structures, as well as their transformation, must be considered both in light of local variables and dynamics *and* in light of the locality's position within a larger, potentially global framework of interconnected places. How this applies to Amsterdam may be obvious: over the course of the early-modern period, Europe saw the emergence of a capitalist system whose mode of production, in particular its division of labour, would structure the future relations between different localities on a worldwide scale. By the seventeenth century a systemic drive towards growth and expansion had led to a unified, modern world system that comprised Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas. This system's inherent trend to concentrate wealth on the basis of its division of labour favoured the rise of powerful urban centres of accumulation – such as Amsterdam at its seventeenth-century

peak – and in these centres, a commercialized form of social organization developed that would later unfurl on a universal level.

However, while localities are constituted by both local and global processes in terms of their social organization and its reproduction over time, awareness of this ‘on the ground’ comes in degrees. What is more, the meaning attributed to the phenomenon of global interconnectedness by citizens and other actors – i.e., whether they regarded it favourably or in a negative light – varies from time to time, from place to place. In seventeenth-century Amsterdam, the growing awareness of global processes and networks found expression in a range of cultural representations, but also in cultural practices and ideas about the city as community – in short, in the entire complex of images, attitudes, and cultural sensibilities that this chapter considers in terms of the ‘urban imaginary’. The following sections will inquire into positive, ambivalent, and negative dimensions of the Dutch urban imaginary in seventeenth-century Amsterdam. First, however, the idea of social change itself in the early-modern context needs to be discussed.

### **Early-Modern Ideas of Social Change**

Due to its booming economy and growing interconnectedness, change was very palpable in Amsterdam during the seventeenth century. The German poet and linguist Philipp von Zesen hardly exaggerated when, in his festive 1660s description of Amsterdam, he described the city’s rise from a poor fishermen’s town to a globally connected place of wealth and fame as a development of just a few decades (von Zesen 1664, 163). By the 1630s the city had met the challenges attendant on its global status by setting up all the institutions necessary for the successful conduct of global trade: a Chamber of Insurance, specializing in marine insurance (1598), a fleet for the protection of maritime convoys (1598), the East India Company, in which Amsterdam was the best represented of the six cities that had a say in it (1602), a Bank of Exchange (1609), a stock market (1613), a credit bank (1614), and the West India Company (1621). In addition, Amsterdam had become a hub of knowledge and learning by virtue of its central position in various European and global information networks, and through the foundation of its Illustrious School, the Athenaeum Illustre (1632). The question arises on the basis of which general notion of change contemporaries perceived – and made sense of – the momentous transformations accomplished in those decades. The modern linear timeframe with its developmental, stadial, and evolutionary conceptions of change did not rise to prominence until well into the eighteenth century, and traditional cyclical notions of change still dominated the popular mindset. At the same time, early-modern Amsterdam’s role as a global hub, where material wealth and knowledge increased at a remarkably fast pace, also invited an understanding of change that would acknowledge – and account for – the idea of continuing accumulation.

Early-modern notions of change must be discussed with prudence, paying attention to the contemporary semantics of words such as innovation, renovation, and progress. In his dictionary of foreign words, the mid-seventeenth cen-

tury Amsterdam scholar Adriaan Koerbagh understood the two Latinized words *Renovatie* and *Innovatie* synonymously, translating the first as ‘*vernieuwing, verversching*’ (renewal, refreshment) and the second as ‘*vernieuwing, verandering, weerbeginning*’ (renewal, change, restart). As for the words *Progres* and *Progressie*, he glossed them as ‘*voortgang, vordering*’ (continuation, advancement) and ‘*voortgang, voortgaaning*’ (continuation, increase).<sup>1</sup> Those semantics are corroborated by contemporary French usage. Antoine Furetière’s *Dictionnaire Universel* (1690) explained the word *Progres* merely as a spatial movement from one point to another, and noted that *Innovation*, in a societal context, was considered to be dangerous and destabilizing. This brief etymological digression seems to confirm the idea that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, innovative social change had not yet acquired its positive modern meaning, and that the term ‘progress’ did not yet connote a developmental or evolutionary concept of time (Godin 2010). Social change was still largely presented as a reformation, a return to a previous state, and not as innovation or future-directed development. As Benoît Godin has argued, even in the works of Francis Bacon the concept of innovation was not yet clearly tied to the future, since, as he argued in his *Magna Instauratio*, all new insights were ‘copied from a very ancient model, the world itself and the nature of things and of the mind’ (qtd. in Godin 2008, 10–11).

Thus, within the framework of seventeenth-century semantics and philosophy, future-directed, linear development was, it seems, difficult to conceive for experts and had but limited cultural currency on a wider scale. However, there was a noticeable and growing tension between traditional concepts of cyclical change on the one hand, with the penchant they encouraged for looking to the past for retrospective benchmarks, and the steadily growing awareness of accumulation on the other. Particularly in the fields of knowledge production and material wealth, accumulation was increasingly perceived as a process that seemed to continue from the past via the present into the future, thus fostering a novel understanding of change.

Against the background of a widespread perception of social change and innovation as negative or even evil, it is remarkable that in the spheres of knowledge and technology the seventeenth century saw the emergence of a positive discourse on innovation. New inventions, as well as the import of new products and production processes, were surrounded by a rhetoric that emphasized the potentially beneficial nature of those novelties for the public and the market (Thorndike 1951; Cipolla 1972). This may have had something to do with contemporary discussions that cast knowledge as an inexhaustible resource, one that permitted or even necessitated ever new discoveries. In the introduction to his dictionary of foreign words, Adriaan Koerbagh was very much concerned with the question how humanity might gain access to the vast expanses of knowledge. In fact, his motivation for compiling the dictionary lay in his ambition to facilitate such access: his work would enable people to pursue their studies in the vernacular rather than in Latin, the contemporary *lingua franca* of science (Koerbagh 1668, vii).

The emerging notion that knowledge was infinite, that learning was a cumulative process taking place over time, and that it involved a continuing series of new

insights rather than a (re)discovery of ancient authorities and texts was tangible in many spheres of seventeenth-century European society. It grew prominent, for example, in France, where the Moderns argued against the Ancients that literary style was open to improvement beyond the level of venerated classical authors. It was also in France that Blaise Pascal, in his *Fragments*, advanced the idea of a collective memory of man, which permitted one to think of human knowledge in terms of a progressive transmission of acquired assets, unfolding in the course of time. The implication was that the present was more knowledgeable than the past, which raised the expectation that this trend would continue into the future (Schabert 1979, 126). Likewise, René Descartes, who lived in Amsterdam during the 1630s, provided a philosophical framework in which the progress of learning would result from the conscious, critical interrogation of ancient wisdom and insights through a process of individual reasoning and radical doubt (van Doren 1967, 34; Delvaile 1977, 191).

Naturally, the global activities of the Dutch contributed greatly to an increase of knowledge. In Amsterdam this was particularly palpable: based on the global exchange of information, and the collection and analysis of imported artefacts and species of flora and fauna, the city was a hub for the generation of world knowledge (Smith 1984). That Dutch global expansion had a direct role in the development of a cumulative and innovatory conception of knowledge appears from the example of Abel Tasman's logbook, kept during his Pacific voyage of 1642. The maritime explorer described the mapping of the world as an ongoing enterprise, noting that a conclusive cartography of all the coastlines and hinterlands of the world depended on 'the sagacity, penetration, and application of this and of succeeding ages' (qtd. in Pinkerton 1812, 463).

While an emergent logic of accumulation and expansion was applied to the domain of knowledge, contemporaries brought similar ideas to bear on the economic sphere. In his economic treatise *The Interest of Holland*, published originally in 1662 as *Interest van Holland, ofte Gronden van Hollands Welvaren*, the textile entrepreneur Pieter de la Court described the generation of material wealth in the cities of the United Provinces. Anticipating that the trend of steadily rising incomes would continue into the future, he wrote:

the riches and plenty of many cannot be kept within the walls of their houses; ... over and above their costly and stately buildings, they are visible in their coaches, horses, and other tokens of plenty in every part. There are but very few in the cities of the foresaid Province [of Holland] that do not yearly increase their capital. Yea, if the foresaid complainers and murmurers look but into their own books, I assure myself that most of them (unless they are profuse, negligent and debauched) shall find their stock one year with another, considerably increased. (de la Court 1746, 410)

To contemporary observers, the phenomenon of accumulating wealth, so clearly visible in the Dutch Republic (or at least in Amsterdam), was closely related to the globally interconnected and innovative character of Dutch society. Notably – and aptly – a few years earlier, in 1659, the same Pieter de la Court remarked that



the Dutch finishing industries and carrying trades depended on distant markets both for the acquisition of raw materials and for the sale of products:

Since our manufactures are separated from trade, we have to compare them to a clockwork whose key and mainspring or weight, which drive it, are situated in a foreign country or city. Thus our clockwork must stand still, if foreigners are unwilling to wind up the mechanism or pull up the weights. (de la Court 1911, 53)<sup>2</sup>

Speaking from the point of view of a local consumer, no lesser commentator than René Descartes remarked in 1631 that ships were bringing the plenty of both the Indies and Europe to Amsterdam (Adam and Tannery 1974, 202-4). In a similar vein, Josiah Child, an English merchant, member of parliament, and shareholder in his country's East India Company, extolled in 1668 that the Dutch were 'giving great encouragement and immunities to the Inventors of New Manufactures, and the Discoverers of any New Mysteries in Trade' (4). Two decades later, Child's compatriot Nicholas Barbon, economist and speculator, lauded the Dutch promotion of new fashions as a driving force which would keep 'the great Body of Trade in Motion' (1690, 65-6) and would continuously advance the accumulation of wealth and profit.

In what follows, I shall be interested in the ways in which this novel culture of accumulation impacted on contemporary understandings of social change in the urban environment. To this aim, the following sections will consider how the idea of accumulation was in turns favoured, critiqued, and rejected in the urban imaginaries of seventeenth-century Amsterdammers.

## **Positive Imaginaries of the Global City**

As sites of social change, cities constantly fashion and refashion their image. They are composed of multiple layers of memory and experience – as urban representations and the built environment reflect. In this sense, cities can be thought of as palimpsests that are constantly being overwritten, or as 'urban imaginaries' that evolve over time. As Andreas Huyssen puts it, an 'urban imaginary' is the 'cognitive and somatic image' that citizens carry within them of 'the places where [they] live, work, and play'; thus they are 'part of any city's reality, rather than being only figments of the imagination' (Huyssen 2008, 3). Urban imaginaries also reflect the larger cultural context, including the values and meanings that inform urban life. As such they involve different languages and vocabularies, differences in class, ethnicity, and gender, and a multiplicity of cultural identities. In regard to a situation where citizens are strongly aware of how their locality is tied to global processes, to focus on the 'urban imaginary' may reveal how they responded to the many, positive as well as negative changes that globalization brought to their environments.

Let us start by looking at official perspectives on seventeenth-century Amsterdam. Clearly, representations that were officially commissioned did not just

reflect a growing awareness of the global and accumulative logic governing Amsterdam's economy and social organization – they also celebrated it. By the mid-seventeenth century, the city had become deeply involved in the administration and amassment of capital. The city's culture of objects, too, expanded significantly over the course of the century, as is testified by the lush representations of household goods on many paintings of domestic interiors, and by the increasingly large numbers of those paintings themselves (van der Woude 1991, 315). Amsterdam's sevenfold demographic rise between about 1580 and 1660 and the successive phases of city extension also fortified the idea of accumulation and expansion in people's minds. The idea of accumulation was expressly thematized in the allegorical cornucopia imagery that adorned official representations of the city: we find this imagery in architecture, in paintings, on the frontispieces of celebratory descriptions of the city, and in theatrical performances put up on the occasion of urban festivities.



2.1. Clavichord Lid showing an Allegory of Amsterdam as the Centre of World Trade (1606).  
(Collection Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam).

A first indication that the city's global interconnectedness formed an important point of reference, permitting it to self-identify in terms of innovation and prosperity, dates back to 1602. In that year, the city ordered a clavichord with painted lid as a prestigious embellishment for the (old) town hall. The artist, Pieter Isaacs, decorated the lid with a bird's-eye view of the four continents, showing a female allegorical figure of Amsterdam in the central foreground (Figure 2.1). Significantly, the figure, who is seated on a throne, rests one hand possessively on a celestial globe, while using the other hand to embrace a cornucopia that is pouring out the riches of the world. The representation also featured a Latin caption which emphasized the historical significance of recent global expansionist

enterprise, pointing out that the Dutch had ventured into parts of the world that had been unknown to the ancients. The same link between the three related ideas of progressive accumulation, of being at the heart of a process of global expansion, and of being innovatory in the sense of transgressing boundaries that had limited previous ages is also in evidence in the interior and exterior decorations adorning the new town hall (dating back to the 1650s and 1660s, when most of the original decorations were completed). Again, the cornucopia occupied a central place, among others on the town hall's rear tympanum. Here, the accumulation of wealth, objects, and knowledge in Amsterdam was placed within a global context, with representations of the four continents handing their riches to an allegorical personification of the city (Fremantle 1959, 64; see also Michael Wintle's chapter in this book). The *Hoorn van Weelde* (horn of plenty) was also put in a global context in other visual representations of Amsterdam, for example in Gerard de Lairesse's painting *Allegory of Wealth* (ca. 1670) and in a mural by the same painter for the residence of the wealthy merchant family Trip (Fokkens 1662, A5-A9). The horn also featured as part of the frontispieces to numerous eulogies about the city written in the 1660s (Dapper 1663; von Zesen 1664).

A theatre play, directed in 1662 by Jan Vos, elaborated on this allegorical imagery; the play employed images of global interconnectedness, accumulation, and progress beyond traditional boundaries as elements of an official urban imaginary. The play was performed during the festivities that were held to celebrate the completion of Amsterdam's most recent urban extension. Descriptions of the stage design and the stage directions emphasized the fact that Amsterdam's merchants now traded in places in Africa 'where the Greeks have never been'; in distant East Asia, which 'had denied access to Alexander's armies'; in the northern seas, the zone 'that Argus, Jason's ship, did not dare to reach'; and in hitherto unknown Western parts of the world, where Amsterdam's merchants 'had tamed various wild people and turned them into traders'. While the presence of 'numerous strangers' on stage attested to the city's demographic increase, the world's riches were described as pouring out over Amsterdam from the mouth of a cornucopia, once more surrounded and supported by the continents (Vos 1662, 5-6).

Cornucopian allegories, then, were prominent in visual representations of Amsterdam's civic identity. Highlighting the unprecedented advances that were being made, they emphasized the novelty of Amsterdam's global role, suggesting that the city's status was innovative and progressive measured by the benchmarks of previous civilizations. Their prominent visibility also underlines how the logic of accumulation and expansion that drove the city's economic ascent was incorporated in the official urban imaginary, stimulated by city elders and office holders.

## **Ambivalent Imaginaries of the Global City**

We have seen that the notion of continued expansion and accumulation gained increasing importance in official representations. At the same time, some contemporary observers were especially alert to the remarkable contradictions of this

newly emerging paradigm. Indeed, an ambivalent attitude towards the unfolding paradigm of accumulation and global expansion was as much part of the urban imaginary in this period as the celebratory attitude of officials. To some extent, this ambivalence reflected apprehensiveness about the increasing commercialization of modern life and the outward superficiality – the preoccupation with appearances – in the city. Additionally, it reflected conservative concerns about the stability of the social order and anxiety about the possibility of moral decline. Where the previous section focused on cornucopian allegory, in what follows the main focus is on the allegorical figure Schynschoon (‘nice appearance’) in seventeenth-century Dutch literary sources. This figure was often an object of attention for the contemporary public, as it sought to come to grips with its ambivalent feelings about a society organized around the logic of accumulation.

Pieter Bernagie’s morality play *De Mode* (1698) is one of the most telling examples of how, from a conservative point of view, the ‘nice appearance’ afforded by wealth and affluence could be seen to represent a threat to social stability and order. To briefly rehearse the play’s story line: a poor young woman named Armoë (Poverty) is corrupted by the intrigues of the character Schynschoon (Nice Appearance). Eager to promote her social standing, Poverty dresses after the latest fashion, thus disguising her poor social background. Under the alias of *De Mode* (Fashion) she marries another allegorical character, *Overdaad* (Pomp). She believes to have made a good match, but her husband’s seemingly elevated social status is soon revealed to be just as pretentious as her own, since he has squandered his father’s and grandfather’s riches and finds himself on the verge of bankruptcy (94-7). While Poverty symbolized society’s doubts over the wealth behind ostentatious consumption, Pomp’s story of transgenerational economic decline put into question the sustainability of accumulative processes and the likelihood of their continuation in the future. The themes of feigned social status and the difficulty to distinguish between reality and appearance were also developed by Eduard Sijbrands Feitama, writing in the same decade as Bernagie. In his poem ‘Eerste Kuyering in Gedagten’, a poem about an imaginary stroll through the city, Feitama describes how he beholds the prestigious new residential buildings on the *Herengracht*. To him this was not an architecture of plenty. Rather, looking at the embellished façades and adorned gables he felt provoked to question if this conspicuous display of status and wealth was, in fact, truly backed up by financial means; he feared it might be economically unviable pretence, based on ‘*losse borg*’ or ‘loose credit’ (Feitama 1684, 176).

For some contemporaries, an important threat posed by Schynschoon – pretentious outward appearance – was that it ignored existing customs in regard to outward apparel, thereby undermining the possibility of a clear identification of social status and rank. As one character put it in another play by Bernagie, *De Huwelijken Staat* (1684): ‘The disorder of dress is a great pity, it has become impossible to tell the different estates apart’ (qtd. in van Vloten 1881, 247). For the most part, the concern that traditional social order was under threat was projected onto the lower social strata. Two novels by Timotheus ten Hoorn, *Het Leeven en Bedryf van de Hedendaagsche Haagsche en Amsterdamse Zaletjuffers* (1696) and ‘*t Hollig Bollig Leeven van Verscheide Hedendaag-*

*sche Kameniers met de Comptoir-Knegts* (1707), illustrated at length how maid servants and clerks who held the lowest ranks rebelled against their lot by pretending to be of higher social status. The accumulation of wealth was here placed in contrast with the accumulation of debts: the ostentation of the servant and clerks was based on habitual overspending (ten Hoorn 1707, 149-50).

But was this threat to social order solely caused by individual failings, or was it rather to be explained by the conditions of growing commercialization and by the effects of a globally interdependent economy? From the perspective of a detached observer like Nicholas Barbon, the increasing commercialization of modern life and rising consumption patterns played an important, and actually advantageous role in the Dutch accumulation of wealth. From a critical local perspective, however, it was questionable whether increased spending patterns, an increased need for money in everyday life, and constant chasing after profit were a desirable form of social change. As one observer noted:

all time spent on things other than earning money, regardless how it is spent, is seen by the people (so it seems) as time wasted. Because it is for money, that the teacher teaches and preaches the gospel; the advocate protects his master for reasons of money, illnesses are healed for money, the merchant and shop-keeper trade their wares for money, etc. In short, it is solely to gain money that one should spend one's time. So that it appears to me that the utmost goal of all things is to earn money. (Koerbagh 1668, vii-viii)

The inordinate pursuit of gain could even be perceived as a threat to the moral community of the city. In his poetic diatribe of 1675, 'Op Amsteldam', Willem Godschalck van Focquenbroch evoked the image of the Whore of Babylon when he described Amsterdam as a place forsaken by virtue, love, and honour, one whose inhabitants knew no greater pleasure than that of scraping money together (van Focquenbroch 1946, 17-18). Thus doubt and ambivalence entered the urban imaginary. It was asked whether in a monetized society the 'nice appearance' of accumulating wealth, with all its opportunities for further increase of profit, did not come at the price of social feeling and responsible social action. Would non-profitable social relations, such as love, friendship, or solidarity, not get relegated to a second-best place in such a money-driven environment?

The larger issue behind such considerations was the question in how far the improvement of material conditions went hand in hand with man's moral and cultural refinement. As Simon Schama has shown, cultural and moral scepticism in the Dutch Republic were strongly influenced by religious sentiments: the commercialization of life, and the vanity and regard for status and outward appearance it induced, were regarded as detrimental to the civic community's spiritual well-being and the individual's eternal soul; Christian virtues such as faith, purity, love, and peacefulness seemed to be relegated to second rank (Schama 1987, 219-20). In the context of Dutch global activity, the moral relation between local affluence on the one hand, and the global means employed to foster and sustain this affluence on the other, was thrown into question. Some compatriots, while participating in the logic of accumulation and profit, felt that the means by which

such profit was realized entailed an ethical regression. Others emphasized the spiritual harm which the Dutch were inflicting upon themselves to direct the flows of global wealth to Amsterdam's cornucopia. Writing about his experiences on the small VOC off-shore trading post of Dejima in the harbour of Nagasaki during the 1690s, the German physician Engelbert Kämpfer described the numerous debasements he and his colleagues had to suffer in their efforts to procure Japanese silver for the company – silver being of the utmost importance to the Dutch Asian trade cycle. Kämpfer noted that

we had to endure many shameful restrictions imposed by those proud heathens. We may not celebrate Sundays or other festivities, we may not sing religious songs or speak our prayers; we never pronounce the name of Christ, nor may we carry around the image of the cross or any other symbol of Christianity. In addition we have to endure many other shameful impositions, which are very painful to a sensitive heart. The only reason which induces the Dutch to live so patiently with all these pains is the pure and simple love for profit and for the costly marrow of the Japanese mountains. (1964, 72)

It might be objected that such experiences at the fringes of the Dutch economic empire did not impact on the urban imaginary at the centre. Other authors, however, bear witness that an ethics of accumulation was submitted to criticism in local discourse, too. Local controversy over the ethics of global trade began already during the early years of the Dutch East India Company, the VOC, when the company was permitted armed intervention as an adequate means to further Dutch commercial interests in Asia (Boxer 1965, 95; Chaudhuri 1985, 88). An anonymous pamphlet of 1645, occasioned by belligerent conduct of the Dutch in Asia, drew attention to the discrepancy that seemed to exist between those distant perpetrations of unlawful violence and locally held notions of civilized conduct and righteousness:

Would it be possible that this government, which only has gain and profit in view, could cause anything other than injustices, molestations, injuries, slander, unjustified wars, disputes, alien and unchristian procedures and acts, murder, robbery, betrayal, unjust verdicts and all other evil, misdeeds and sins? [This] justly attaches world-wide blame to the Dutch renown. (*Discovers*, 18)

But the question of means and ends was also posed with regard to the maltreatment and precarious living conditions of the VOC employees themselves. The 'ant-like' labour of miserably paid sailors who endangered their health on the oceans could be seen as a reckless sacrifice to vain consumer desires at home, it was said. There was no actual need for porcelain, tea, and other East-Indian commodities: only urban pomp and the craze for luxuries had turned those into necessities (Gargon 1717, 300-1).

It is against the background of this idea of a deplorable renunciation of established standards of virtue and ethical behaviour being at the heart of the city's

economy – both on the level of the individual and on that of the wider moral community – that we should understand other critical comments made about Amsterdam as a hub of global commerce. As early as 1632, the scholar Caspar Barlaeus had used the occasion of his inaugural speech as president of the newly founded Athenaeum Illustre to remind his audience of city elders and businessmen of their ethical obligations. He evoked the figure of the ‘wise merchant’, the *Mercator Sapiens*, but he knew that

[s]peaking to merchants – people who lust after profit, in a place where gold coins jingle, in a city which is geared to the earning of money – I would aim too high, if I spoke of anything other than trade, profit and wealth. Not to instruct them how to earn money, but to teach them to do it in a wise manner; not to give prescriptions about the art of making a profit (I frankly have to admit that I know nothing thereof), but to investigate the best and wisest ways to this aim; not to condemn the drive to accumulate riches, but to rein it in through a just insight. (qtd. in van der Woude 1967, 60)

Some years later, in a private letter to Constantijn Huygens, Barlaeus concluded more pessimistically that commercial interests had long prevailed over matters of religion or spirituality, and that ignorance, ambition, and avarice reigned supreme in the world (Wicquefort 1696, 2).

## **Dystopian Imaginaries of the Global City**

While the positive urban imaginaries discussed above testified to an affirmative embrace of the material wealth that was consequent on the globalization of the Dutch economy, ambivalent imaginaries revealed a critical contemporary stance in regard to feigned status display and social disorder in the city and also in regard to moral failings overseas. As this final section seeks to show, from ca. the 1670s onwards, unfavourably changing economic and political conditions emphasized and intensified already existing dystopian urban imaginaries. These went beyond ambivalent attitudes towards the globally embedded, economy-driven city, warning against the degrading effects of the urban environment both on the individual and on the community, and comparing it negatively with an idealized, Arcadian form of sociability.

While the 1660s had still seen the publication of encomiums on Amsterdam’s rise and remarkable increase in economic power and wealth, the decades that followed witnessed a shift of appreciation away from the city towards Amsterdam’s hinterlands. This is clearly registered in Holland’s regional Arcadian literature. Contrary to adaptations of the Arcadian topic in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European aristocratic societies, authors in the bourgeois Netherlands conceived the mythical Arcadia as a refuge for disaffected urbanites and not for disillusioned or ostracized courtiers. In the imagined Dutch Arcadian landscapes, city dwellers found a retreat from the vicissitudes of an urban society which they perceived to be degenerate. Here, life was marked by social equality, by reconcili-

ation with nature and God, and by the absence of such apparently symptomatic urban vices as competition, deceit, pretence, and spiritual alienation.

In fact, Dutch Arcadian works of the early 1700s revived a literary tradition dating from the mid-seventeenth century and even earlier. The tension between life *intra* and *extra muros* had been discussed for the first time in Dutch literature by the late-mediaeval Frisian scholar Jacobus Canter. In his *Dialogus de Solitudine* of the late fifteenth century he had contrasted two rival ideals of the city, represented by the dialogue's speakers. Philodem, on the one hand, saw the urban environment as the only social setting that was favourable to the prospering of what was good in human nature: the city's material wealth, the safety provided by its walls, and the mutual inspiration of harmoniously cohabiting, civilized urbanites allowed an advancement of knowledge and of the arts. Hyppolit, on the other hand, saw nothing but degeneration, human alienation, and deceit in the city. Opposing his friend, he put forward the view that a solitary and self-sufficient life in the countryside or in the forests, unrestricted by the complex interdependencies of urban civilization, would permit a better and more original form of existence (Enenkel 1995, 267-91). The subject of urban versus rural forms of social organization was taken up again during the late 1620s and 1630s, when the United Provinces went through a phase of intense urbanization. At this point, the subject was explicitly expressed with reference to the myth of Arcadia. Jacob Cats and Johan van Heemskerck wrote long poems and bestselling novels on the Arcadian theme. The following years also witnessed the publication of a large number of shorter poems in praise of the country estate (*Hofdichten*) and of pastoral scenery (*Harder Liedt* or *Harder Klachte*).

Jacob Cats's 'Galathea, ofte Harders Minne-klachte' ('Galathea, or the Shepherd's Lament over Love') of 1627 juxtaposed urban and rural life by opposing two suitors, a shepherd and an urbanite, who competed for the love of a shepherdess. Telling the story from the shepherd's point of view, the city was negatively portrayed as a location ruled by vanity, deceit, social instability, mutual mistrust, economic dependence, overcrowding, and neighbourly intrusion. Notably, Cats's shepherd noticed the detrimental effects of Amsterdam's global interconnectedness on its inhabitants' well-being. He warned that the merchant – as ideal-typical representative of the *homo urbanus* – could never sleep quietly, since his globally dispersed property and investments were always threatened by risks that lay outside his control. How much more peaceful was the idealized life of the country dweller, who could keep his premises under close watch (van Vloten 1862, 579-90). The shepherd depicted the social organization of country life as a wholesome and virtuous experience, liberating man from urban vices. Where the globally interwoven city economy made people dependent on commerce and monetary speculation, country dwellers were leading self-determined and self-sustained lives through their devotion to honourable manual labour – or so it was claimed. The shepherd also held that exotic importations – such as Asian spices, Chinese silks and porcelains, Indian calicoes, Japanese kimonos, American tobacco, or Arabic perfumes – needed to be viewed very critically (Ufer 2010, 14-16). The suggestion was that there was a strong connection between the global market, the consumption of luxury goods, and moral corrosion in the city:



Things seem to be considered nice,  
It seems they achieve the highest price,  
If they go by an exotic name,  
And certainly a man must claim,  
That they come from Moorish lands  
Or from the Barbaric strands,  
That from shores in India  
They've been brought here from afar.  
Bad people only hold things dear  
If from afar they're brought to here. (van Vloten 1862, 587)

In fact, none of the authors of Dutch Arcadian literature were permanent rural residents. Constantijn Huygens, Caspar Barlaeus, or Jan Jansz. Starter, to mention but three, were politicians and men of letters who wrote with their own experiences of the city in mind. Their dystopian urban imaginaries and reveries about an alternative social condition reveal in more or less serious manner their own sense of dissatisfaction with urban life.

Contemporary observations that urban life might have a corrupting effect on the soul of citizens, and alienate them from their religious beliefs and moral sentiments, also motivated a search for spiritual reconciliation *extra muros*. The *Hofdichten* of the 1630s and 1640s bear witness to a search for communication with God, specifically by embracing his creation in a more natural environment. Caspar Barlaeus, for example, found detachment from the city, consolation from urban disappointments, and reconciliation with God on his country estate Oostwijck in the Beemster-Polder, where he contemplated nature's splendour. He dedicated a poem to the simple description of a lime tree in which he saw revealed the essence and beauty of creation:

This tree is the beautiful palace through which God reveals  
His wisdom, his power and the goodness of his command.  
Whoever touches the painted leaves, the bark, feels  
The Creator as with his own hand. (Schull 1835, 64)

This proto-transcendentalist idea that reconciliation with nature would provide a refreshing and even spiritually purifying wellspring for worn-out urban souls was central to many of the Arcadian publications. It was most explicitly expressed by one of the characters in the *Amstellandsche Arcadia* (1737). Having left the city's throng, and having taken residence on the country estate, he 'learned how to see the great Creator's hand in all this greenery, in the birds and even in the smallest animal' (Willink 1737, 109).

Later examples such as Abraham Rademaker's *Hollands Arcadia* (1730), Claas Bruin's *Noordhollandsche Arkadia* (1732), and Daniel Willink's *Amstellandsche Arkadia* (1737) need to be understood in the context of Dutch decline during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Military defeats suffered by the Dutch Republic in the third Anglo-Dutch War (1672-4) had been accompanied by the well-nigh defeat of the city of Amsterdam by French troops

during the Franco-Dutch War (1672-8). In addition, Dutch engagement in the Nine Years' War (1688-97) and in the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-13) had negative economic repercussions and led to the bankruptcy of the United Provinces in 1713. Diminishing profits from global trade, due to increasing competition with other European nations, further challenged the urban imaginaries of Amsterdam as the site of a prospering economy, sustained wealth, and a peaceful life. Arcadian literature of the early eighteenth century discussed more or less openly the moral superiority of country life over life in the city, pointing to the threat of the moral decline of urban civilization or even to its imminent regression. Criticizing the unscrupulous search for profit in the city, the *Amstellandsche Arkadia* drew an analogy with the biblical story of Belshazzar to evoke God's pending punishment of urban blasphemy and spiritual impurity (Willink 1737, 239). Perhaps one of the most drastic dystopian images of urban regression was developed by Claas Bruin in his *Noordhollandsche Arcadia*. Leaving Amsterdam for a country stroll, and looking back towards the city from outside its gates, one of Bruin's protagonists exclaimed:

... but should I not fear  
That she [Amsterdam], alas! was already at her peak ...  
Demise comes sudden, without notice,  
If you attempt to rival God  
Through arrogance, riches and other shortcomings. (Bruin 1732, 13)

## Conclusion

Seventeenth-century Amsterdam's central position in an extensive, worldwide network of information exchange and economic interdependencies favoured the emergence of a paradigm that revolved around a logic of accumulation. This paradigm could be traced through the rise of new social and economic institutions, but also through contemporary debates about knowledge, technological innovation, and economic growth. It is against the backdrop of this larger paradigmatic shift that the present chapter has analyzed local identifications with, perceptions of, and experiences in Amsterdam as a global city, looking specifically at what it meant to see the city as being caught up in the dynamics of global change. These identifications have been discussed here on the basis of allegorical and symbolic representations in literature and the visual arts, and with reference to the concept of 'urban imaginaries'. As we have seen, urban imaginaries that reflected the new logic of accumulation were most prominently expressed in official representations of the civic identity of the city: for the most part, allegories that presented the city as receiving the cornucopian blessings of its global trading ventures. At the same time, we have seen that ambivalent attitudes to a changing urban economy, and anxiety over the city's devotion to material wealth, were at the heart of rivalling imaginaries. In their most extreme form, these involved dystopian elements, criticizing the city as a site of declining virtue, and articulating the idea of the mythical retreat of Arcadia as a counter-image to alleviate the

new urban disaffection. Taken together, these variegated imaginative responses to the city as a global place testify to the inner diversity and dynamism of the early-modern ‘global consciousness’ that took shape in Amsterdam in the course of the seventeenth century.

## Notes

- 1 While *voortgang* and *vordering* come closest to the idea of advancement and progress, particularly in contemporary usages relating to advances in the sciences and the accumulation of knowledge, the exhaustive database on Dutch Golden Age literature, the *Digitale Bibliotheek voor de Nederlandse Letteren* (DBNL), surprisingly does not show any usages of the word *voortgaaning*.
- 2 Unless stated otherwise, all translations from Dutch or German sources are the author’s own.

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### **3. Amidst Unscrupulous Neighbours: Amsterdam Money and Foreign Interests in Dutch Patriotic Imagery<sup>1</sup>**

*Dorothee Sturkenboom*

Any discourse articulating the idea that other countries may profit from the content of Dutch purses is bound to affect the Dutch: that much became clear in June 2005, when in a national consultative referendum a majority of Dutch citizens voted against the treaty that meant to establish a constitution for Europe. When Dutch media tried to explain the nationwide rejection afterwards, among the factors they highlighted were the economic arguments that had been deployed against a constitution – and against the European project more generally – in national public debates during the previous months. Campaigners for a no-vote had booked success, the analysis went, by propagating the idea that due to a serious undervaluation of the old Dutch currency, the gulden, the Netherlands had been fleeced at the introduction of the euro. Moreover, as the largest net per capita contributor to the European Union, the Netherlands had allowed other member states to live at its expense. Lastly, because of the increasing economic integration of the Union, immigrants and companies from Eastern Europe were on the brink of ousting the Dutch from their own internal labour market, or so the charge went. Spurred by this analysis of the referendum's outcome – whether accurate or not – Dutch prime minister Jan Peter Balkenende refused to endorse the long-term budget plans of the European Union on attending a top-level meeting in Brussels a few weeks later: the bottom line was that 'Europe' was too expensive for the Dutch tax payer. Together with Great Britain, which also refused to give the budget plans its consent, the Netherlands arguably caused the first political crisis about the European budget and European finances since the introduction of the euro as physical currency on 1 January 2002 (Giebels 2005; Halsema and Buitenweg 2005; van Praag 2005).

Today we know that while this may have been the first serious crisis the European Union faced in the twenty-first century, it would not be the last. Obviously, reluctance to support other countries financially is not an exclusively Dutch phenomenon, nor should it be assumed that distrust of international cooperation expresses itself through economic protectionism alone. Since 2005 we have witnessed plenty of manifestations of population groups or entire electorates turning inwards in times of crisis, even when their political leaders leaned towards a more international orientation. Indeed, it is a fact to reckon with that people who live in globally integrated economies are not necessarily more cosmopolitan in out-

look. As several other contributions to this book point out, rather the contrary may hold true: in many contexts, globalization can be seen to lead to a resurgence of political and cultural nationalism(s) in new forms. What is more, over the past few decades political agitators have amply demonstrated that nationalist imagery that appeals to citizens' economic interests can be an effective rallying point for mobilizing them for various other goals.

One might think that broad popular support for the kind of nation-centred arguments that I have mentioned was rare before the rise of modern mass media in the twentieth century, or even before the emergence of the modern nation-state in the nineteenth. In fact, the claim that the Dutch economy was at risk because of foreigners' avid interest in Dutch money was popular as early as the eighteenth century: in pamphlets, papers, plays, and prints, authors and artists related Dutch economic decline quite directly to the greediness of European neighbours, and they rallied against foreign interests for the sake of a stronger Dutch nation. Textual and visual references to the open coffer of an unsteady Dutch Republic, beleaguered by unscrupulous French, Germans, and Englishmen, cast the country as economically vulnerable and open to predation. The parallels with twenty-first century political-economic imagery seem obvious. Indeed, the images used by Dutch campaigners against a European Constitution in 2005 form just one case in point; the popular rhetoric surrounding the 'Greek crisis' that started in 2011 would seem to form another.

With historical parallels like these in mind, the present chapter offers a critical analysis of patriotic imagery deployed in Dutch political-economic discourse just over two centuries ago, paying special attention to the role played in it by the image of Amsterdam as one of the financial centres of the world. We will discover that, despite the passage of time, certain patterns have remained stubbornly the same: patriotic and nationalist imagery tends to be populated by distinct, popular ethnic and social stereotypes, which may remain remarkably constant over time. Specifically, we will focus on an eighteenth-century Amsterdam production of two cartoons and on a drama pamphlet in which Amsterdam money and foreign interests figure prominently. Published in 1780, on the eve of the fourth Anglo-Dutch War – declared by the British because of Amsterdam's support for the insurgent Americans across the Atlantic – those sources introduce us to the logic of 'economic patriotism', a mode of thinking that commonly gains influence when international economic processes are thought to be at the root of national problems. In a previous essay, I discussed my triple source primarily in the light of this context of late-eighteenth-century economic patriotism (Sturkenboom 2008). At this place, in the framework of a collection on Amsterdam as a world city, the aim is rather different. The question that I shall address here is: what is the symbolic role and position of Amsterdam as a world city within the larger narrative about the Dutch nation presented by those eighteenth-century patriotic prints and the related drama pamphlet? Put differently, what do the articulations of the city of Amsterdam that I shall be looking at tell us about the way in which urban, national, and transnational (or European) frames of reference were related and held together in the consciousness of the Dutch civic population, in the period under discussion?

## The Amsterdam Coffe

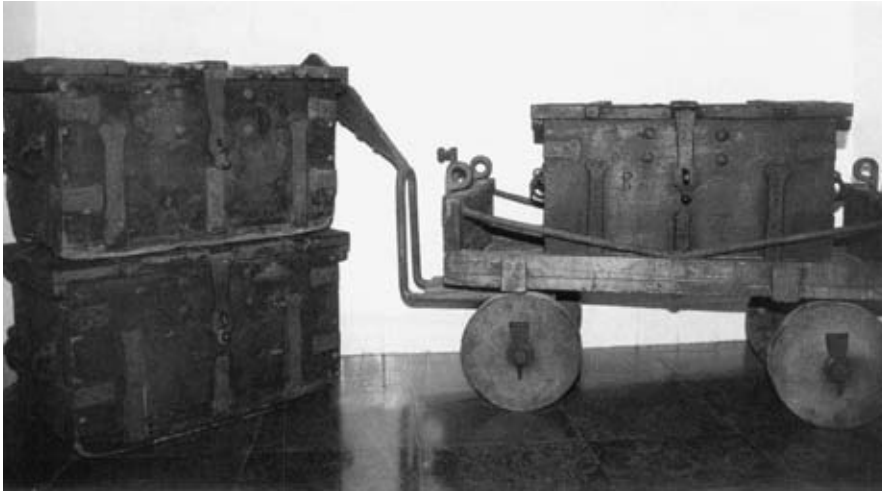
For centuries, the Amsterdam merchant functioned as the embodiment of the Dutch commercial and entrepreneurial spirit, forming a highly iconic image that lent itself well for textual and visual representation. As is well-known, the image dates back to the Dutch ‘Golden Age’, when the Dutch Republic emerged as the leading commercial economy in the world and, for a period of some fifty years, surpassed all its neighbouring countries in economic, maritime, and military power (Israel 1995; de Vries and van der Woude 1997; Adams 2005). Amsterdam merchants had an active, indeed a defining role in this achievement (Lesger 2006).

Commerce requires the easy circulation of money, the availability of credit, and readiness to invest in adventurous enterprises where profit is not guaranteed (Spufford 1995). Hence seventeenth-century Amsterdam not only became home to many merchants; it also became the place to be for financiers, bankers, brokers, speculators, and other ‘paper money men’. It would remain so until the end of the eighteenth century, when London took over the leading role in international finance, after the Republic had already lost its absolute primacy as a trading nation in the period before (opinions differ on the precise moment or timeframe of this shift). The so-called *Amsterdamsche Wisselbank* (Bank of Amsterdam or, literally, Bank of Exchange) was founded by the city fathers of Amsterdam as early as 1609. It was widely known for its solidity, and it played an essential role in Amsterdam’s rise to eminence as the financial centre of the world (Spufford 1995, 306). Indeed, merchants from all over the world readily deposited money and bills in the bank in exchange for financial services that facilitated international trade and shipping. The bank became famous enough to be mentioned by numerous visitors in their travel accounts, impressed as they were by the bullion rumoured to be accumulated in its vault (*Remarques d’un voyageur*, 1728, 13; Pöllnitz 1734, 3:305; Temple 1673, 83-4, 194; Boussingault 1665, 110). Thanks to its stabilizing impact on exchange rates and its impressive solvency, the Bank of Amsterdam soon became the model for public banks in other countries, such as the Bank of England, which was founded in 1694 (van Nieuwkerk 2005, 112-13, 120, 138-44).

Unlike the Amsterdam Stock Exchange, established in 1611, which had a separate and newly erected building in the city, the Bank of Exchange was housed in Amsterdam’s town hall, together with other municipal functions. When in the middle of the seventeenth century the municipality built a new town hall – known today as the (Royal) Palace on the Dam – the bank was moved into the new building as well. Because it lacked its own building to symbolize its importance, a heavily loaded coffe, resting on a cart, became the bank’s iconic image. It referred to the business and financial transactions that were facilitated by the Bank of Amsterdam, and was widely recognized. Specifically, within this image it was the cart that came to form the defining component: such little wagons were in fact used frequently for the transport of money inside the town hall. The carts even had their own rail-track system, connecting the first floor with the cellar where the bank’s vault was located (van Nieuwkerk 2005, 118-25) (Figure 3.1).



The eighteenth-century drama pamphlet to be discussed in this chapter revolves around this iconic image of coffer and cart, symbolizing the money ac-



3.1. Money Cart of the Amsterdam Bank of Exchange. Amsterdam Museum and Palace on the Dam. (Photo: C. van Nieuwkerk-de Vries).

cumulated in the Bank of Amsterdam. In addition, the same coffer and cart are also at the centre of the two graphic prints which preceded and inspired the writing of the pamphlet. Appealing as they are, the two cartoons have not gone unnoticed in the historiography of the Dutch ‘Patriottentijd’, the revolutionary era between 1780 and 1787 that forms the backdrop of these visual expressions of economic patriotism (Kloek 1987, 81; Fritschy 1988, 67; Lesger 2005a, 227; Koolhaas-Grosfeld 2010, 16-18). The ‘Patriottentijd’ was named after a group of reformists (the so-called Patriots) who fought for major changes in Dutch politics and economics in the hope to reverse the downward spiral of decline in which the Dutch Republic was perceived to be caught since losing its leading international position in the late seventeenth century. As contemporaries saw it, the decline was not only a matter of economics but also one of morals, culture, and politics: the idea was that wealth and luxury had corrupted the standards of behaviour, and that a process of moral degeneration had set in to which an increasingly oligarchic administration failed to provide a satisfactory response (Mijnhardt 1992; Sturkenboom 1998, 200-14). The Patriots and the Orangists, their more conservative political adversaries, got engaged in a true media war about the situation in the Dutch Republic, manifesting itself in a steady stream of political periodicals, pamphlets, prints, and other commentaries (Hanou 2002, 143-85; van Sas 2004, 195-223; Klein 1995). The two cartoons were unmistakably part of this war. Published without titles, but with elaborate legends that made their message of economic patriotism clear enough to the eighteenth-century public, they were dubbed ‘the first economic print’ and ‘the second economic print’ by a

contemporary when they were reprinted alongside twelve other political prints in the assemblage print 'Algemeene Staatkundige Konstplaat van 't Jaar 1780' later in 1780 (*Uitlegging*, 24-5, 36-7).<sup>2</sup>

In the meantime the twin prints and their legends had also served as source of inspiration for the drama pamphlet *Toneel-spel in twee afdeelingen* (1780). We can deduce this from its lengthy title – typical for the eighteenth century – starting with 'Play in two acts, in view of the two art plates dedicated to...' and asserting, a bit further on, that this was 'a piece, highly necessary to arrive at a true understanding of the plates mentioned and of the Dutch interests [at stake]'. A piece of some forty-eight pages, written by a nameless author who identified himself later on in the title as 'a Friend of the Fatherland', the *Toneel-spel* was brought on the market by bookseller and publisher Dirk Schuurman, who ran his business at the Rokin in Amsterdam. Although presented as a theatre play, the text was probably never meant for performance on stage.<sup>3</sup> In those politically turbulent years it was not unusual to style political pamphlets as dialogues or plays to make them more accessible for the reader (Worp 1907, 179-82). The author's view of his country's economic and social problems is represented by one of his characters, Petrus, a Dutch retail trader who functions as the author's alter ego.

As we will shortly see, both the prints and the pamphlet offered – visually and textually – a captivating socio-political analysis of the dangers which contemporaries believed were threatening the Dutch Republic, and more especially its economic security, in 1780. They tell of the schemes of unscrupulous foreigners who were after the hard-earned money of the people in the Dutch Republic, and they articulate Dutch responses to those foreigners and their perceived intentions. Significantly, in so doing, this late-eighteenth-century narrative also testifies to an internal Dutch divide. As I will argue, the creative use of particular stereotypes helped to frame the youngest generation of Amsterdam men of fortune – the former heroes of the Dutch 'Golden Age' – as naïve and elitist traitors to their country, while at the same time, in an interesting twist, people from other parts of the Republic were depicted as true patriots who availed of much better judgment with regard to foreigners' (predatory) motives and intentions. Thus Amsterdam and the Republic, the urban-cosmopolitan and the national, passive retention of wealth and active citizenship were placed in symbolic opposition to each other: a structure that organizes much of the plot of the dramatic play.

### **Picturing Dutch versus Foreign Interests**

The drama pamphlet starts with a scene in which Petrus, the Dutch retail trader, offers his manufactures from Delft, Leiden, Hilversum, Hoorn, Haarlem, Groningen, and Friesland to Klaas, who is described as 'a rich young Hollander' (*Toneel-spel*, 2). We can see the scene pictured at the right side of the first economic print with the young Dutchman seated on the Amsterdam coffer and cart, and Petrus in front of his stall with stockings, gloves, hats, cloth, baize, wallpaper, and – still in their packing – stoneware and carpets (Figure 3.2). Tellingly, however, cart and coffer are being pulled away from Petrus. In the play, Klaas rejects Petrus's com-

modities because he thinks they are too plain. When asked why he himself, then, has donned a simple Dutch suit – in which, it is added, he resembles his father – he explains: ‘we used to see no difference, but now I notice very clearly that with my money I can obtain a much better standing than by buying from your stall’ (6). That is why he prefers to lend his money to an English banker. The banker, ominously called Master John Always Short, can hardly wait to take the money out of the coffer, as we can see in the print. In the play he poses as a friend to the



3.2. First economic print. (Stichting)

Dutchman, promising a steady interest for the loan without the risks that come with investments in commercial or industrial ventures, and without the ‘worming and slaving’ which he declares are attendant on such economic investments (13). Klaas, who did not earn the money himself but who inherited it from his father, a virtuous merchant of the old school, is rather enchanted with the prospect of receiving a guaranteed income without having to work. And so are his three female companions, depicted to the left of his coffer, who expect to get their share of his



Atlas van Stolk Rotterdam, no. 4318).

money if their combined attempts to persuade Klaas into an easy life of Luxury, Lechery, and Lust for Liquor – the vices they personify – would succeed.

This would be the life that we see depicted at the left side of the print, the morally questionable life that aristocratic elites are understood to lead in ‘the World of the Great ... where people are banqueting, fornicating, and duelling’, as Petrus tells us in the play (in the legend of the print, playing cards are added to this negative list of ‘manners’ [22]). In the left corner a character called Charles Always Somewhat Foolish is making inviting gestures, but before Klaas can pass the broad archway and make a successful entry, he has to take off his simple suit and learn how to dress like a ‘born gentleman’ – as we see in the scene in the middle of the print (17). Here Jean Poli and other Frenchmen enter the picture. Better than anyone else they know how to dress for success – at least, that is the impression they succeed in making on the naïve Klaas. Hence the various ‘Modes de Paris’, the French fashions that Klaas has to make himself familiar with if he wishes to pass for a man of the world. Haughtiness and Foolishness, the two male figures who are pulling his chest in the direction of the archway, are certainly engaged in leading him to that goal. It does not deter Klaas that Foolishness is a jester while Haughtiness, pictured as a slightly effeminate Frenchman, may not be the ideal role model for a Dutch merchant’s son either. Encouraged by Foolishness and the other companions in vice, Klaas starts to behave like ‘a Man of Birth, which shows from the contempt he displays for factories and commerce’ and his newly acquired taste for lust, liquor, and lechery – ‘matters that merchants and manufacturers do not understand’ (17).

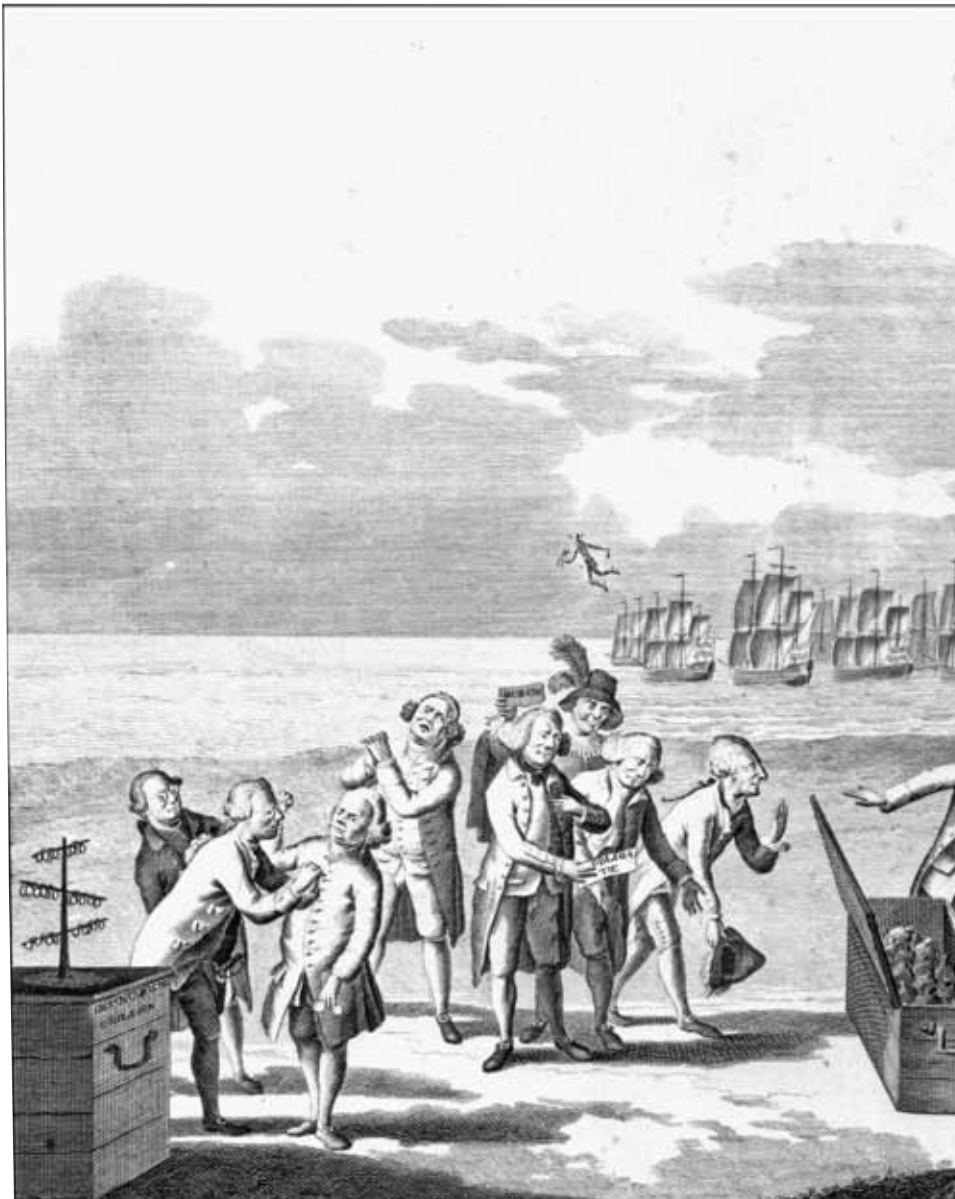
It is up to Petrus, the embodiment here of Dutch level-headedness, to talk sense into Klaas, an undertaking in which he ultimately sadly fails. In the play he tries to explain to the naïve youngster that in the long run, one cannot make money without Diligence and Knowledge, the long-time friends of his respectable father. Furthermore, he draws Klaas’s attention to the smirking Fool’s mask, to the monkey with the French feathered hat, to Mr. Grub and his flourishing stall of earthenware and other English commodities that drive the Dutch out of the market thanks to Klaas’s ill-considered financial decisions, and finally to the British privateers who attack Dutch ships in the Channel, proving that ‘ally’ England – alluded to as ‘Hostile Friend’ in legend and play – cannot be trusted (14). (We should recall, when considering this, that it was 1780, at the end of which year the British would indeed declare war on the Dutch for supporting the Americans in their War of Independence by smuggling contraband between the Caribbean Islands and North America). In spite of all these bad omens, Klaas refuses to listen. Though warned by Petrus, he cannot be bothered with the ramshackle state of the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands – ‘the House of your Father’ – represented by the seven-pillared temple, visible in the background at the right side of the print (11). The construction, badly maintained by Carelessness, whom Klaas has chosen as his friend and servant, is on the brink of collapse. The Dutch Virgin has fled to its roof. Yet Klaas, misled by Carelessness, believes that the building will last his time. He flatly refuses to invest any of his money in the solid Dutch products from Petrus’s stall, dismissing them as ‘rags that are totally out of fashion’ (16-17). Because the young man intends to pose as a gentleman,

he then foolishly gets involved in a fatal duel and loses his life at the end of the first act. Petrus has no choice but to admit his defeat and to consider the liquidation of his business.

Up to this point, the unfolding narrative illustrates its moral by negative example, functioning somewhat like a cautionary tale. In the second act of the play and in the second economic print, however, the *mise-en-scène* has drastically changed (Figure 3.3). Again we find ourselves at the ‘free Dutch seaside’, a long-standing symbol of Dutch liberty (*Toneel-spel*, 2; cf. Kempers 1995, 94). But this time the central character is not a foolish rich youngster who lends his ears too easily to foreigners, but a mature and honourable citizen who has heard of Petrus’s adversity and realizes that the country is at risk: if Petrus cannot continue his trade in products from the Dutch Republic, ‘what then should the poor inhabitants do? What will become of the countryman? What are the craftsman and artist to do?’ (23). He therefore promises Petrus to provide the money withheld by Klaas and to contact his like-minded friends in Haarlem and Hoorn.

A bit later in the play, this same Burgerhart – the name literally means ‘Citizen’s Heart’ – is confronted with a line of foreigners, full of flattery, trying to win his friendship because they are in need of his money. Alongside Master John Always Short, here cast as an evil genius who tries to sell Burgerhart English bonds, we hear and see a bowing Frenchman (Jean Poli), an eager Spaniard (Don Sebastian), and a subservient German (Squire Hans). They all have spectacular new plans for investments and promise the highest profits to the Dutchman if he will buy their shares in German gold mines, in a Spanish channel to be delved near the city of Murcia, or in French governmental debts. For well-informed insiders, these were all easily recognizable as risky investments – to say the least – since the French government had recently gone bankrupt, similar channel construction projects in Spain had been unsuccessful, and the German gold and silver mines were clearly past their prime.

Unlike Klaas, however, Burgerhart sees what the foreigners are up to and bluntly rejects all their proposals, thus stepping into the role of the model economic patriot. He makes clear that he prefers to invest his capital in ‘the rather better gold mines’ of the Republic, that is, in the various industrial, agricultural, and reclamation projects with which three of his industrious Dutch fellow citizens in the middle of the picture plan to reanimate the Dutch economy – though, of course, only after Burgerhart has submitted their business plans to some close scrutiny, because he is a prudent man (39).<sup>4</sup> The flourishing merchant fleet in the background of the print, led by the figure of Mercury, the god of commerce, visually represents the belief that Dutch commerce will also benefit in the end from Burgerhart’s wise policy. Moreover, thanks to this citizen’s example, demonstrating the bold decisions, patriotism, and spirit of enterprise that are required, the flock of stray compatriots will come to its senses and recommit itself to the common good of the Dutch Republic. Reason, the female figure at the head of the procession, armed with the attributes of the goddess Athens, is to lead them back to the temple of the Republic that is no longer in a state of ruin but in the process of renovation. The Dutch Virgin has already returned, and gesticulates to other



3.3. Second economic print. (Stichting)

Dutch citizens that they should join her inside the building. In the skies above, more allegorical figures – representing Devoutness, Truth, Love, Perseverance, and Fidelity – are waiting for the moment they can return home.

However, one of the Dutchmen present is still not entirely convinced: ‘but do we not run the risk, you think, that the foreigners, upon noticing that we are no longer willing to help them, will take away with force what we do not wish



Atlas van Stolk Rotterdam, no. 4322).

to give them readily?' (43-4). In a marvellous display of wishful thinking, alluding to the symbolic scene in the front, Petrus then assures his fellow citizen that under such circumstances the Dutch lion would easily chase off the English dog: the anxious dog is hardly able to fight off the French cock, let alone the much more awe-inspiring lion. The lion, all skin and bones, may have gone through a rough time but he is in charge again – or so Petrus confidently claims. And if



this prospect still does not persuade other well-to-do Dutchmen to invest their money in Dutch projects, then obviously their ‘eyesight, with moving among foreigners and considering their goods, has gone bad’ (42). Therefore, they need an aid to clarify their vision. Hence the box at the left, which contains a large number of ‘economic eyeglasses’, free to try for any man of fortune who suffers from myopia.

### The Patriots’ Economic Eyeglasses

Tellingly, the pair of spectacles called ‘economic eyeglasses’ by the playwright, following the inscription on the box, was referred to as ‘native eyeglasses’ in the original legend of the print. The revision underlines the close semantic relationship that existed between the Dutch words ‘*economisch*’ and ‘*inlands*’: to view something from an ‘economic perspective’ was just another way of saying that one was viewing it from a domestic, that is, a native or national perspective. The Dutch word ‘*vaderlands*’ (meaning both national and patriotic) was another near synonym in this semantic field, virtually interchangeable with the terms mentioned above (Krol 1991, 237-40; Kloek 1987, 85, 88, 90).

Given their patriotically charged meaning, it is no surprise that the same words return in the names of the reformist societies set up by eighteenth-century economic patriots, such as the *Vaderlandsche Maatschappy van Redery en Koophandel* (National Society of Shipping and Commerce) at Hoorn and the *Oeconomische Tak der Hollandsche Maatschappy der Wetenschappen* (Economic Branch of the Holland Society of Sciences) at Haarlem, both founded in 1777. Haarlem and Hoorn were cities in the province of Holland that had suffered greatly from the national decline in trade and industry. The proclaimed goal of these societies was to develop and discuss plans to counter the enormous problem of unemployment both on a local and on a national level (Sturkenboom 2008, 106-9; van den Eerenbeemt 1977, 98-113; Bierens de Haan 1952). Thus, when Burgerhart talked about the help he knew he could expect from his ‘loyal brothers at Haarlem and Hoorn’, he was referring to those initiatives (23-4). The affinity was even more clearly expressed in the legends of the cartoons: they were officially dedicated to the members of the societies in the two cities.

The metaphor of the ‘economic eyeglasses’ was therefore a very apt find by the nameless artist(s) behind the prints and the play. Yet it was not entirely novel. The same metaphor had been popular in Dutch pamphlets since 1600 (Meijer Drees 2006). And two years before, in 1778, another Dutch author, writing under the pseudonym Doctor Schasz, had made use of ‘economic eye drops’ in *The Verdrukte Wildeman* (The Oppressed Savage), a political play published by Gisbert Timon van Paddenburg in Utrecht. In terms of its characters, theme, and plot, moreover, the *Toneel-spel* shows a remarkable resemblance to Schasz’s *De geplaaide Hollander. Of de lastige nabuur vertoond in vier bedrijven* (The Tormented Dutchman, or, The Difficult Neighbour Presented in Four Acts) published in 1779. Apparently our anonymous ‘Friend of the Fatherland’ tried to capitalize on Schasz’s ideas and popularity. The last part of the *Toneel-spel*’s title underlines

this: it asserts that the text was written ‘in the taste of the astute Count of Nassau la Leck and Mr. Schatz [sic] in a fluent and attractive style’. This definitely sounds as a sales stunt, because in the years prior to 1780 both the Count of Nassau la Leck – an actual historical figure – and Mr. Schasz had started to establish a name as authors of political letters and entertaining plays in the same patriotic vein of which the *Toneel-spel* is an example. The complicated history of the pen name Doctor Schasz demonstrates his enormous appeal to the public: invented by the Dutch patriotic author Pieter ’t Hoen (1744-1828) who was using it in the years 1778-80, the pen name was later adopted by another famous Dutch hack, Gerrit Paape (1752-1803) (van Vliet 2003, 193-6; Theeuwens 2001; Kloek 2001).

It does not seem over-imaginative to suppose that publisher Schuurman and his play-writing buddy, too, tried to cash in on the success of the two economic prints: after all, they may well have been the talk of the town following their publication in large folio format in 1780. The fact that the cartoons were incorporated and reproduced in the assemblage print published later that year can be seen as evidence of their impact and commercial success. Guesswork at the identity of the anonymous pamphleteer, meanwhile, directs us to the person of Nicolaas François Hoefnagel (1735-84), a hack who linked his career to the Patriots’ cause when their reformist campaign began to gather momentum.<sup>5</sup> Hoefnagel published numerous political and political-economic pamphlets with publisher Dirk Schuurman, including some more drama pamphlets (Hanou 1973). He also wrote more than one national plan of reform, including the *Plan ter verbetering van Neêrlands Zee-weezen* (Plan for Improvement of the Dutch Sea System) that figured prominently in the *Toneel-spel*, where it was abundantly praised (30-1). At the time, Hoefnagel lived in Amsterdam, though he had not been born or raised there and remained a relative outsider to the city. He would later move to Utrecht, where conditions for patriotic hacks like him were even better. Having started his career as a painter, and occasionally still publishing political pictures in 1782, Hoefnagel also comes in view as the possible designer of the two cartoons, which were published without initials or other references that would give away the identity of the draughtsman. However, since Hoefnagel’s talents as a graphic artist seem to have been limited, whereas the cartoons definitely testify to a great talent for drawing, we may not want to put our money on this possibility (Hanou 1972-3, 69-70; Hanou 2004).

Whatever the identity of the artistic double talent or the collective behind the prints and drama pamphlet, it is obvious that we should see them as patriotic contributions to a political-economic debate that was shot through with cultural nationalism – even though the main reason for producing the cartoons and the play may have been the livelihood of their creator(s). What concerns us here is the way in which the ‘economic eyeglasses’ of the Patriots influenced their ideas about Amsterdam as a world city, and more particularly their ideas about the people with money – rich burghers and urbanites – living in this metropolis.

## Metropolis versus Country

To understand the function and symbolic meaning of Amsterdam in the patriotic imagery that is under discussion here, we will need to look behind the surface of text and prints. After all, except for the coffer and cart in the first economic print, symbolizing the money accumulated in the Amsterdam Bank of Exchange, Amsterdam is nowhere explicitly mentioned – even though its economic and financial role and cosmopolitan climate can be assumed to form an important part of the context. Amsterdam is also conspicuously absent from the second print and from the second act of the play. The coffer in the second economic print is not placed on wheels, and does therefore not represent *Amsterdam* money. This is not a coincidence, as I will argue later on: its absence here is as meaningful as its presence would have been. To understand this we first need to take a brief look at the economic situation at the time.

As we have seen, the first economic print and the first act of the play are clearly set against the symbolic background of Amsterdam as a centre of global finance and banking. This is hardly surprising, as in the Netherlands most capital was accumulated in the province of Holland, and within Holland in Amsterdam (van Zandvliet 2006, xxiii-xxv). In smaller quantities money and credit were available elsewhere as well, but Amsterdam was the dominant capital market (Spufford 1995, 307-8). Foreign governments such as the British, French, Austrian, and Swedish knew that this was the place where they could obtain loans to finance their wars and industries; likewise, stockbrokers knew that this was the city to trade their securities, and entrepreneurs knew that the chances to find shareholders for mutual funds were nowhere as substantial as here (van Nieuwkerk 2005, 67-83).

Amsterdam had already been known for its low and therefore attractive interest rates in the seventeenth century, and the availability of capital only further increased in the eighteenth. Forced by global economic developments, Amsterdam merchant families had begun to combine their traditional activities in commodities trade and shipping with specialized services such as commission trading, and with more passive investments in foreign government debts or securities in order to secure their profits. In effect, since the second half of the seventeenth century the city's merchants had started to act more and more as international bankers, brokers, and financiers. To be sure, in the eighteenth century they were still active in import and export, too. Yet, owing to several internal and external factors, the demand for Dutch home manufacture dropped dramatically in the second half of that century. For Amsterdam merchants those domestic industrial products were no longer an interesting or rational investment (Jonker and Sluyterman 2000, 118-24; Lesger 2005a and 2005b; Spufford 1995, 305 and 327-8).

Clearly, this major shift in economic activity is at the basis of some of the anxieties articulated in the prints and the play – including the anxiety over the marketability of Dutch home manufacture with which the play opens. Critics, mistaking cause and effect at the time, blamed the perceived economic downfall of the Republic on precisely this development (Lesger 2005a, 226). They declared that the once hard-working merchants had become idle and rootless rentiers,

unwilling to invest in the Dutch economy. The ‘monied interest’ of the Amsterdam elite no longer coincided with the interests of the country but – as radical commentators argued – with foreign interests (Fritschy 1988, 66). As Karl Marx would later comment in a little-known study, published by one of his daughters after his death: ‘Its fatherland had begun to lie there where the best interest for its capital was paid’ (Marx 1969, 93).

It is not difficult to see how the character of Klaas, a man of leisure who preferred to live off his passive investments, embodied this development. His obvious lack of interest in the condition of his own country, his inclination to spend his money on fashionable luxury products imported from abroad, and his willingness to associate with foreign financiers looking for loans, threatened to ruin the Republic. In the play Petrus even called Klaas a ‘traitor’ of his fatherland, an accusation that followed upon a reference to the ‘degenerate’ nature of Klaas (*Toneel-spel*, 20). Klaas behaved as a very weak man, giving in to the temptations of a wealthy life, emulating the nobility abroad, and thus exemplifying the degenerating effects of luxury on the morality of Dutchmen. His moral failure was the sorry consequence of what the more radical among the economic patriots believed to be the typically selfish and short-sighted attitude of the mercantile regent aristocracy.<sup>6</sup> In that sense, Klaas may not only have represented the financial elite of Amsterdam, he also stood for that larger part of the Dutch population that had an international and cosmopolitan outlook and was open to the charge of neglecting the interests of the rest of their country. This group may have been represented by the group of stray compatriots in the second print and in the second act of the play. In contrast to Klaas, these citizens are pictured as having regained their clarity of perception and sense of judgment, and as having learned to distinguish more clearly between Dutch and foreign interests.

It is worth pointing out that when the list of characters in the play introduced Klaas as ‘a rich young *Hollander*’, this sharply contrasted with the introduction of Burgerhart as ‘a rich honourable *Netherlander*’ (2; italics added). While Amsterdam and Holland were (and still are) often used as a *pars pro toto* for the entire country, clearly that was not the case here. The message was that one needed the national orientation of a Burgerhart to help the country reinvent itself as a superpower. Interestingly, this national orientation was presented as a vision rather broader than the cosmopolitan orientation of the elite, which – paradoxically – was denounced here as more narrow-minded and restricted in vision. The wider range of Burgerhart’s vision was demonstrated in his interest in various land reclamation, agricultural, and industrial projects, planned for other parts of the Dutch Republic: the playwright mentions, for instance, the reclamation of heathland near Amersfoort, the empoldering of the Haarlemmermeer, support for the porcelain factories in Delft, and the manufacturing of high-quality knives in Den Bosch and Schagen (26-31).

We can now finally understand why the coffer in the second print was not positioned on a cart resembling those that were used in the Amsterdam Bank of Exchange: the investment capital envisioned to rescue the Dutch economy was not likely to come from Amsterdam, and had to be raised in other parts of the Netherlands, or so the economic cartoonist imagined. The symbolic dissociation

from the city of Amsterdam in the second print – underlined by the drama in the play – thus reveals an anti-metropolitan and anti-cosmopolitan strand in the argument, which suggests that a significant fault line running through the political-economic discourse considered in this chapter turned on the distinction between capital city and country, Amsterdam and the provinces, as competing centres of ‘true’ patriotism.

### **Amsterdam Money and the Transnational Imagination**

Again, there is an interesting parallel to be drawn with today’s political imagery, in the Netherlands and elsewhere, in which the cosmopolitan elites living in the larger cities are denounced for their political myopia – or even for a deficient sense of political reality – by the rest of the country. Other parallels include the stereotypical way in which foreign countries and their citizens were depicted. In the drama pamphlet, the foreigners looking for investors were fitted out with ‘barbed hands’, and they were consistently referred to as ‘parasites’, ‘birds of prey’, or ‘bloodsuckers’ to underline their allegedly predatory nature (*Toneel-spel*, 4, 24, 33, 43). In the second economic print, the proud representation of the Republic as a superior lion sharply contrasted with the rude representation of England and France as, respectively, a submissive bulldog and an overly arrogant cock. This imagery was in keeping with a long-standing iconographic tradition to depict countries as animals. Interestingly, other states, such as England and Spain, also used the heraldic symbol of the lion in reference to themselves, while using the frog to depict the boggy Netherlands. In turn, the Dutch represented the Spanish as gluttonous swine (Kempers 1995; van Sas 1995, 157). This tradition is still not entirely extinct, as the recent use of the acronym ‘PIGS’ for Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain (or ‘PIIGS’, with an extra I for Ireland) underlines: financial analysts and political commentators resort to such rhetoric to group countries together on the basis of rough similarities in the management of their government debts, and because of a general expectation that they are all equally unable to maintain the monetary standards required to keep the euro solvent.

At the same time, ironically, the discourse and imagery of economic patriotism could hardly be seen as something typically or exclusively Dutch. The disputes that were held in the Dutch Republic – over private materialism versus communal interests, and over the moral explanations that might account for a state’s economic and political ‘decline’ – recurred in various forms elsewhere, for instance in London and Hamburg (Pocock 1985, 108-9; Aaslestad 2007, 589-91; Lindemann 2008; van Sas 1992, 119). Time and again, complaints about how local interests were losing out in the context of a global economy used similar stereotypes: the scheming and shady foreigner, the selfish and short-sighted elite, and the sane and sensible citizen as the only one who sees clearly and behaves responsibly. Even today, this type of rhetoric and imagery is used to influence the public, not only in Dutch public debates but also in books like *Who Runs This Place? The Anatomy of Britain in the 21st Century* by British journalist Anthony Sampson (van Nieuwkerk 2005, 187). The obvious paradox at work here ena-

bles us to put this nationalist imagery in a transnational perspective: it appears that even in their cultural imagination, nations are much less unique than their patriotic and nationalist leaders would like us to believe. Just as the theme of migrating money underlying this imagery, those stereotypes seem to migrate from one country to another.

One last irony should not be lost here: the money accumulated in the coffers of the Amsterdam Bank of Exchange was in fact only partially Dutch. After all, merchants from all over the world had made deposits in the bank, and even the profits made by Dutch merchants had their origins across the globe. One wonders, therefore, whether the socio-political narrative told by the cartoons and the play was not a rather creative reversal of what others might perceive as reality: indeed, what was framed as Amsterdam money to be lost to foreigners in the first print, was actually global money to be claimed for a rejuvenation cure of the Dutch economy in the second print. Clearly, such a ‘resistant reading’ of the scenario played out by the international cast of characters who circled the Amsterdam coffer is quite different from what the eighteenth-century cartoonist and playwright must have had in mind. Yet it does underline the relativity of perspective and, indeed, the striking reversibility of the positive and negative connotations articulated in their patriotic statements – dependent as those connotations ultimately are on the urban, national, and transnational vantage points that lend them weight.

## Notes

- 1 This chapter has its origins in a joint writing project with Henk Reitsma, my former office mate at VU University Amsterdam. I wish to express my thanks for the different ways in which he has contributed to my knowledge on this subject over the years.
- 2 The two prints have been preserved in the national print collections Atlas van Stolk in Rotterdam (as no. 4318 and no. 4322) and Atlas van Frederik Muller in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (as no. 4367 and no. 4370). The assemblage print is archived as no. 4329 in the Atlas van Stolk and reproduced in van Sas (1995, 147-50).
- 3 I am indebted to Henk Gras and Klaartje Groot for checking the archival sources containing the playing lists of the theatres in Rotterdam and Amsterdam (1774-1811). The play also remains unmentioned in the playing lists published by Bordewijk (2005) and in Ruitenbeek (2002).
- 4 The reference to gold mines was an allusion to an economic essay, titled ‘Hollands Goudmijn’, that was written in response to an essay competition organized by the Oeconomische Tak der Hollandsche Maatschappij der Wetenschappen (Economic Branch of the Holland Society of Sciences) in 1771 (Bierens de Haan 1952, 2-3).
- 5 I owe this hypothesis to Henk Reitsma. Ton Jongenelen, who is presently writing a double biography of Klaas Hoefnagel and Willem Ockerse, another Dutch commercial writer, confirmed the validity of the hypothesis to me (email, 20 Feb. 2008).
- 6 In fact, the relationship between the Patriots and the mercantile regent aristocracy was more complex. Many merchant regents supported the Patriots or were Patriots themselves (van Sas 1992, 93, 106-10).

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## 4. Visualizing Commerce and Empire: Decorating the Built Environment of Amsterdam

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In considering the ‘imagining of Amsterdam’ in the context of globalization, the focus of this book falls on how the city has at various times been involved in and affected by globalizing tendencies in politics, economics, and, more especially, culture. The present chapter, taking an historical approach, will consider some of the ways in which Amsterdam has viewed *itself* over several centuries in the light of various waves of globalization. It is concerned with Amsterdam’s view of its own position in the world, including its position in the emerging Dutch nation, as a European capital, and as the centre of a global trading and financial empire. The interaction between these different levels of self-perception and self-representation is of particular importance: the principal objective in what follows is to uncover and unpick the kinds of ideas Amsterdammers have entertained about their city’s position in the world in terms of their self-image or perceived identity, and in contexts ranging from the municipal, through the regional and the national, to the European and the global.

In doing so we shall concentrate on Amsterdam’s status as an icon of commercial capitalism over several centuries, and particularly on the city’s self-image in a colonial context at various points since the seventeenth century, right up to the twentieth. We shall be principally concerned with self-images in the sense of visual, graphic images in the public spaces of the city, on the façades of private houses and business premises, and decorating the great public and commercial institutions that have been built in the centre of Amsterdam, always a city more of burghers and merchants, of civic rule and civic pride, than of princes and sovereigns. In many academic disciplines, especially where an interest is shown in visual culture, there is an increasing recognition that many of the images which surround us in our daily lives are charged with meaning, and as a whole can be highly active in the social, cultural, and political process. Historians have perhaps been more reluctant than other scholars to branch out into using visual sources, but there has been a developing discussion over several decades; it is now widely accepted that a systematic use of visual images as historical evidence is not only illuminating and interesting, but perhaps even essential.<sup>1</sup> This ‘visual history’ cannot, it goes without saying, operate in isolation: the pictures, emblems, and icons must be taken alongside the written evidence in order to come to a balanced conclusion. But we can analyze images used to decorate the built environment and public space of the centre of Amsterdam to trace the ways in which the city

envisaged itself and its role in the Netherlands, in Europe, and in the world at large. As is usually the case with visual culture, complex discursive mechanisms have been involved: knowledge has been selected and encoded into the images, ideologies are represented and reinflected, and hegemonic positions are either contested or naturalized and reinforced. If rigorous source criticism is applied, then these sources can be as informative as any others, including the written ones.

These arguments about the power of images apply to all manner of visual representations and, as well, to the media involved in their production and distribution: maps, paintings, cartoons, icons, flags, currency, and other representations and symbols. In this case we shall concentrate on the buildings of Amsterdam, and in particular the decoration of them with iconographic material, usually representing nations, peoples, and continents.<sup>2</sup> Personifications of the city, of trade, of the sea, and of other parts of the world will be sought out on the façades of the city, together with the iconography that accompanies them. The way in which the builders, artists, civic officials, city fathers, and patrons of Amsterdam made their choices about public space over several centuries tells us a great deal about the mentality behind those acts of representation, and about the processes of identity construction in which they were involved. Indeed, iconographic material operates as a powerful agency, both reflecting and acting upon public and political life through the medium of public opinion. It is important to stress that the communication in these images between artists, patrons, and audience has always been a highly interactive one, constantly changing and modifying over time the self-imaginings held by Amsterdammers. Here we shall pinpoint some of those interchanges centred on the idea of the city's role in the world of trade and empire. It was the capital city of a global commercial empire, manifested partly in formal colonies, but also in a vast, largely unregulated and informal commercial and financial network; these, then, are images and memories of Amsterdam as a cradle of global capitalism. Amsterdam and indeed the Netherlands projected or imagined themselves in these roles. Amsterdam was imagined in a national framework, as one would expect, but also in a European context: the levels of civic, national, and continental identity are irrevocably entwined, and lend each other strength.

Perhaps the most iconic building in Amsterdam is the Royal Palace on the Dam; it is certainly one of the most famous of the seventeenth-century monuments, admired by tourists and locals alike. It is at the centre of the town, and witness in the media to some of the most important showpieces of national reflection and self-imagining, for example the remembrance ceremonies which have taken place on 4 May each year since the Second World War. It was built between 1648 and 1665 by the celebrated architect Jacob van Campen as Amsterdam's Town Hall, intended to serve as the ultimate emblem of republican civic pride at the height of the Dutch 'Golden Age'. It became a royal palace in 1808, during the reign of Napoleon's brother, Lodewijk Napoleon, but as essentially an office building, without gardens, it probably never made a comfortable royal residence. It has always retained, however, its pivotal function as a focus of national feeling. The sculpted decorations on this neoclassical *lieu de mémoire*, both inside and out, were designed by the Antwerp sculptor Artus Quellinus, and Figure 4.1

shows the west or rear tympanum, which is (literally) a tribute to Amsterdam. The four continents of the world are shown as female figures bringing their gifts, or tribute, to the personified ‘Maid of Amsterdam’, who holds centre stage. From the time of the Roman Empire onwards there was a widespread tradition of using geographical imagery to glorify a town; often, such imagery pointed to the transfer of wealth and tributes from one area to another, from colony to metropolis. Here the object of the exercise is to glorify the city of Amsterdam, personified. She sits with arms outstretched to acknowledge the tributes, wearing the winged helmet of Hermes, the patron of trade, with a sailing ship behind her and with the maritime commercial theme emphasized by the anchors and nautical instruments at her feet. Supporting her are two river gods (the Amstel and the IJ) with their symbolic urns of flowing water.



4.1. Artus Quellinus, Amsterdam and the continents, frieze in west (rear) tympanum of the Royal Palace, the Dam, Amsterdam (ca. 1650).

On either side of Amsterdam we see the continents, also personified, offering their tribute to the centre of world commerce. On the right Asia and America are featured. Asia stands immediately next to Amsterdam, instantly recognizable by her turban and swinging incense burner. She holds the bridle of a camel in her right hand, and is accompanied by servants with boxes of jewels and precious items. This kind of iconography had been well established as early as 1600, for example in the pattern books by Cesare Ripa and others – published in many languages and editions from the 1590s onwards – which provided a guide for artists and craftsmen on how to portray personifications and their various properties or accoutrements: the seasons, the virtues, the zodiac, or – in this case – the four continents or parts of the world (cf. den Boer 1995, 53-8). These representations of towns, countries, and continents grew out of a medieval tradition which included decorating the triumphal arches erected to welcome the prince or sovereign into a town during a *joyeuse entrée* or *blijde inkomst*. The temporary ceremonial arches through which the prince would ride on formal procession to

the centre of the town would be decorated with all sorts of tributes, including personifications of the parts of the world that he or she ruled; in the Habsburg case in the Low Countries, that meant entire continents (Forster 1988, 105-15).

Here, in the tympanum on the Palace on the Dam, between the figures of Asia and Amsterdam, a child is offering a tulip to the city, referring to the Turkish (Asian) origin of this famous national Dutch flower, and of course casting a line in recent living memory to the ‘tulip mania’ that peaked in 1636-7, when tulip bulbs changed hands for fortunes and many speculators and investors were ruined when the bubble burst (Goldgar 2007). To the right of Asia, America is personified by Indians with feather headdresses and an alligator (also prescribed by Ripa), with accoutrements of silver mines and tobacco: this includes both South and North America. On the left of the tympanum, Europe and Africa are depicted, again instantly recognizable by their iconography. Africa is a naked black woman; her identifying animals are a lion and an elephant, and she brings ivory and other trade goods. We see Europe directly to the left of Amsterdam, on her all-important right, holding a huge cornucopia to indicate the plenty of her dominions. She alone of the continents is crowned, indicating her sovereignty over the world, with a war horse, and bulls to associate her with classical antiquity through the famous myth of Europa and the bull. A *putto* at her feet offers bunches of grapes, a sign of her sophistication in the cultivation and consumption of the fruits of the vine. Books indicate her wisdom and learning. Significantly, there is a clear and intentional hierarchy of the continents in place here: Europe is the sophisticated and senior continent, and she is most closely linked with Amsterdam (Vanvugt 1998, 23-7; van den Boogaart 1992, 125-7). The Maid is also a European; this scene thus combines Amsterdam’s commercial leadership with a portrayal of European superiority, underlining how both draw strength from each other. This image was commonplace in the seventeenth century, on buildings, paintings, maps, prints, and book illustrations, and thus runs as a familiar trope through the visual culture of the period.



4.2. The Maid of Amsterdam, by Ludwig Jünger, Central Station façade, Amsterdam (1880s).

This image was not confined to the seventeenth century: its use continued through the modern age right into the nineteenth century and beyond; equivalent scenes adorn the buildings of many of Europe's capitals, but there is no better example than Amsterdam. Take, for example, the Central Railway Station, built in the 1880s; it is virtually a Dutch Victorian update of the Town Hall's imagery of 230 years before. Like so many of the city's great architectural set pieces of that period, it is covered with stone reliefs calling attention to the nobility and industriousness of the city. In pride of place, above the main entrance, there is a series of semi-circular tableaux in stone by Ludwig Jünger, again taken up with personifications of the continents bringing their goods to Amsterdam. In Figure 4.2 we see the Maid residing in the central tympanum; here she is crowned, and accompanied by her two water gods, with rudder and oar. Immediately to our right on the façade there is a tableau containing personifications of Asia and America; Asia is shown as a mandarin with coolies, and America as an Indian girl with a feather bonnet and an alligator (van Leeuwen and Romers 1988, 20-7). In the panel to the left of the centre, Europe and Africa are presented. Europe is carrying a wine jar, her child attendants holding bunches of grapes (as in the Town Hall tympanum) and a book of learning. To the rear, exotic black Africans bring to the Dutch capital their ivory, a parrot, a lion, and a bale of produce. It appears that the imagery and iconography had hardly changed over two centuries and more. Indeed, there is little doubt that the station is intended to echo the Town Hall in this respect: a vector of remembrance and identification is being drawn down the Damrak between the two buildings.

Here on the front elevation of Central Station, the continents are paying tribute to a city, the Dutch capital. This edifice was erected in the high noon of romantic nationalism in the later nineteenth century; along with other monuments of the period in the capital (such as the Rijksmuseum and the Royal Tropical Institute) its didactic purpose is clearly to glorify the Dutch nation.<sup>3</sup> But the worship of the nation is occurring in tandem with the glorification of the capital city and the hegemony of the hierarchy of the continents, with Europe firmly at the top; the three levels interact and reinforce each other. The ode to the capital, Amsterdam, relies on the fervour of nationalism, which in turn draws strength from the Eurocentrism of the worldview portrayed in the representations of the continents. The identity that is being promoted here is not simply that of the city: the way that this kind of identity tends to work is that it contains a number of interlocking components, each of which is important. For example, one can feel allegiance to country, religion, and family, with each of these components supporting each other. Sometimes elements within this 'identity matrix' can work against each other, for example in time of civil war, but more often than not the various components are mutually supportive (Wintle 2009, 4). That is what is happening here on the front of Amsterdam station, with the city, the nation, and Europe all making up part of the same message of self-assertion. That interrelatedness and indeed interdependence of civic, national, and continental imagery is a major burden of this chapter.

We now move on to look at specifically commercial projections of the identity of Amsterdam. Several hundreds of houses in the centre of the town and indeed



in other Dutch towns have illustrative plaques or gable stones on them, many of which – referring to bales of sugar, the name of a foreign port, or the like – indicate that the family fortune was made in a particular trade. Sometimes the decorations are draped around the famous Dutch gables at the top of the house: many have animals, or dolphins, or gods. Here we shall take just two examples from central Amsterdam, and they both concern Africa. There was a well-established tradition of visualizing Africa in a racially recognizable personification – a negro – and the associations were seldom complimentary. It fitted into the hierarchy of the continents already discussed, and Africa, along with America, was always placed at the bottom of the scale of civilization and sophistication. European superiority was a given. Figure 4.3 shows a merchant’s house on the Oudezijds Voorburgwal (no. 187), built in 1663 in the style of Dutch architect Philips Vingboons, with an elaborately decorated front gable. We see the usual sculptures of trade goods and naval stores, indicating maritime trade, but the main and unusual feature is the presence of slaves. In two mirrored pairs, either side of the brick pilasters crowned by Corinthian capitals, we see black African figures holding plants which appear to be tobacco, indicating and indeed broadcasting that this is the home of a family which made its fortune by trading slaves who were probably transported to work on tobacco plantations in the Americas. This house has been known to excite outrage on the part of some visitors, especially from America, and it is not hard to see why. Amsterdam was certainly a centre of financing the slave trade, and the general trade on West Africa in the seventeenth century. This image says to the viewer: behold, here lives not simply a slave trader, but an Africa merchant, a merchant of the first hand. This is Amsterdam in commerce with (or at least financing commerce with) western Africa as part of the slaving triangle, personified by the black man.



43. House with black Africans in the gable, Oudezijds Voorburgwal 187, Amsterdam (1663).



4.4. Personification of Africa at the top of the gable of Rokin 64, Amsterdam (ca. 1700).

Not very far away, on the central thoroughfare of the Rokin (no. 64), there is a splendid figure of Africa sculpted in the gable (Figure 4.4).<sup>4</sup> The house probably dates from the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century, and the gable decoration is a sculpted human figure mounted on vertical boards, with a good deal of rococo embellishment and strap-work around. The figure is male, black-skinned, with stereotypical negroid facial features and tight curls. Authoritative documentation is not available, and the iconography is slightly confused: this stereotypical black African is wearing a feather headdress, with the feathers in vertical position, and carries a bow and arrow, all of which are usually attributes of America. The Amsterdam town archive website calls him a ‘moor’, which usually refers to an African (often from the Maghreb), and indeed the house is next to an alley which apparently used to be called the Mooresteegje, quite likely named after the house (Gemeente Amsterdam Stadsarchief). It is possible that it may represent African slavery in America, but that would be an unusual way to employ such iconography. It is also possible that the figure was painted black later on, and was originally meant to indicate America, but the facial features belie that possible explanation. The most plausible reading is that this is the house of another ‘Africa merchant’, showing off the origins of the family fortune. Whether it refers more directly to America or Africa, Amsterdam is picturing itself as a collection of merchant burgher-princes, controlling the commerce of vast swathes of the world, and getting very rich in the process.

In terms of visualizing Amsterdam as a capital of global trade in a more specifically colonial or even imperial context, many of the most telling images date from a later period, at the end of the nineteenth century and especially the early decades of the twentieth. With the 1880s began the period of New Imperialism, including the ‘Scramble for Africa’, when existing colonial empires such as the British, French, and Dutch were joined by enthusiastic newcomers like the Belgians and the Germans, and when the whole enterprise, in all European empires, intensified from a loose network of trading posts and commercial interests to a system for exporting industrialization, transport infrastructures, political systems, religions, and especially culture from Western Europe to the remoter parts of the world, particularly in the tropics. The Netherlands participated fully in this development with the military extension of territorial control over the ‘Outer Provinces’, especially in the East Indies, followed by the imposition of its own legislative codes and forms of administration and by the so-called Ethical Movement (a movement devoted to the project of exporting Western values to the Indonesian archipelago). In tandem with this surge of ‘cultural imperialism’ in the colonies (Said 1994), Amsterdam in the early decades of the twentieth century saw an unprecedentedly successful way of expressing it in the built environment, through the architectural movement known as the Amsterdam School. This movement is best thought of as a successful campaign to integrate the construction of buildings with the figurative and applied arts, mainly by placing all sorts of sculpture and other decoration, often in the Art Deco style, on the outsides of buildings. The movement also had a strong public housing wing, responsible for some of the most attractive workers’ housing of the 1920s in the near outskirts of the city, including the Rivierenbuurt and De Baarsjes. The other aspect of the Amsterdam School’s activities concentrated on the great public building showpieces, in the centre of the city, many of them commissioned in a colonial or imperial context.<sup>5</sup>

One of the best examples is the *Scheepvaarthuis* (or Shipping House) on the Prins Hendrikkade east of Central Station, built during the First World War by Jo van der Mey as the headquarters of six major shipping companies. It is now a luxury hotel, and it has been restored to much of its former glory. The outside of this ‘temple’ for the colonies is literally covered in carvings and reliefs reflecting the Dutch colonial empire, for the shipping companies gathered there were all involved in servicing the Dutch global capitalist operation, with their combined lines circumnavigating the earth in several directions, and with their hub points in the Dutch West and East Indies (Vanvugt 1998, 63-4). Clustered around the main entrance there are sculpted personifications of the oceans over which the shipping companies plied their trade, shown as exotic, mysterious women. Figure 4.5 shows the Pacific Ocean, together with some of the decoration in the stonework which is so characteristic of the Amsterdam School: as the location of the East Indies, she is oriental, exotic and passive. This and the other statues suggest receptive, alluring, and enticing places, where the shipping lines could sail in and make their fortunes in the colonial mould.



4.5. Statue of the Pacific Ocean, Scheepvaarthuis, Amsterdam (1916).



4.6. External decoration (rubber plantation) on the Royal Tropical Institute, Amsterdam (1920s).

The Royal Tropical Institute or Colonial Museum is similarly striking as an example of Amsterdam's self-image as the nerve centre of one of the great commercial world empires at the beginning of the twentieth century: it has aptly been called a 'cathedral of modern Dutch colonialism' (Vanvugt 1998, 77). It was built at the same time as the Scheepvaarthuis, between 1912 and 1926, and again it is covered, inside and out, in iconographic decoration and sculpture. Many of these major public buildings, not only in the Netherlands but in other countries too, had a committee of notables set up to oversee the symbolism of the decoration. Artists did the actual work, often several different ones, but the designs were submitted to and coordinated by the symbolism committee. And the committee had a very definite message in mind: the greatness of the Dutch Empire, the wonder of European achievements set off against the primitive exoticism of the East, and the glory of Amsterdam. Again, in such a message the civic, the national, and the Eurocentric combined in force to strengthen each other. High atop the façade over the front entrance on the Mauritskade there are three female statues. The top one in the centre is the Netherlands; the crowned figure of Queen Europe appears on the left; and on the right we see Asia standing alluringly by, with bare torso and in the pose of an exotic dancer. In many of the stone friezes on the outside of the building, designed by Wijnand Nieuwenkamp, the 'erotic promise of colonialism' is emphasized, showing 'the beckoning East as a sexual paradise', as we can see from the illustration of a rubber plantation in the Dutch East Indies (Vanvugt 1998, 81, 86) (Figure 4.6). Indigenous peasants are shown working the rubber trees, with both sexes naked to the waist and without head covering. The woman's breasts are exposed (as in several panels) in ways that would have been exceptional in the East, and the other emphasis is on the fecundity and lush foliage of the tropical vegetation, which is being harnessed in modern plantations for Western industries. The othered Orient is being fashioned here largely from fantasy, but it is a fantasy concerned with defining a place in the world for Amsterdam, the Netherlands, and Europe.

Another principal icon of the Amsterdam School in the centre of the city is the massive bulk of the headquarters built for the Dutch Trading Company (Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij or NHM) on the Vijzelstraat. It was built in the early 1920s, following a design by K. P. C. de Bazel. There was a very strong colonial connection: the old Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie or VOC), with its profitable exploitation of much of the maritime eastern tropics, had gone bankrupt and ceased to be operational in 1798; the Dutch Trading Company, which replaced it in 1824, was set up by King Willem I to farm the East Indies trade and to run a domestic cotton industry. It was this immensely successful organization that established the infamous 'Culture System' on Java and elsewhere in the archipelago, where it became a model for how to exploit a colony in the tropics on the basis of plantation agriculture worked by draft labour in the service of the state (which the company represented). This, the NHM, was the institution whose centenary was being celebrated by the construction of a new headquarters on the Vijzelstraat in 1924. In the course of the later nineteenth century, the commercial activities of the company had been privatized, in tune with the liberal sentiments of the day, and by the early twentieth

century it was essentially a bank, specializing in colonial business (van Goor 1997, 219-77; Wintle 2000, 214-25). In recent decades the building has served several Dutch banking houses, as a result of intense merger activity in the sector; it now hosts the city archives, and does so most elegantly. This hymn to more than three centuries of Dutch colonialism has huge external sculptures of three of the military strong men of Dutch rule in Indonesia, Jan Pietersz. Coen, Herman Willem Daendels, and J. B. van Heutsz, and typically for the Amsterdam School, there are also many reliefs, some by Lambertus Zijl, of trading and shipping activities, industry, commerce, and the like. Above the front door (it is a feature of Amsterdam School buildings that their main entrances are exquisitely worked but modest in size) the name of the first proprietor, the NHM, still appears very clearly (Figure 4.7).



4.7. Main entrance to the Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij building, Vijzelstraat, Amsterdam (1920-5).

A revealing feature is made up of the female figures representing Europe and Asia on either side of the entrance. They were designed by J. Mendes da Costa, and his portrayal of their body language is very telling: in the case of Europe – or, by association, the Netherlands – on the right, her eyes and palms are open, and her whole pose is much more assertive than that of Asia or Insulinde, who is barefoot with eyes downcast, eroticized, and submissive (Vanvugt 1998, 46-8). Asia's arms are crossed, almost reminiscent of the attitude of a corpse. Mendes da Costa's preliminary drawings for the figures are on display inside the city archive; they reveal that he first envisioned placing small, skeletal, but human figures, some of them clearly oriental, in the skirts of the two personifications of

the continents. This aspect of the design was apparently rejected by the directors because it was thought to suggest oppression. If anything, the original designs suggest even more open- and closed-posture language in Europe and Asia than the final versions outside on the street. Again, Amsterdam is projecting itself, in the main for its own benefit but also to the world at large, as the control centre of a Dutch, European, and indeed Eurocentric world empire.

Particularly in the period of New Imperialism, from the 1880s to the First World War and beyond into the interbellum, much of the self-image of the imperialist was associated with transport technology. Shipping and airplane offices, freight forwarders, telegraph offices, railway termini, and all forms of transport buildings were festooned with images of the superiority of Europeans and their legitimating technology. Europeans, and Amsterdammers in particular, used their views of technology and scientific progress to bolster their self-image vis-à-vis the other parts of the world: it was an important component of what might be called the identity matrix of Europe, the Netherlands, and Amsterdam, in juxtaposition with the rest of the world. A fine local example in the Dutch capital is the Magna Plaza shopping mall behind the Dam, which was completed in 1899 by Cornelis Hendrik Peters as the main post office. The building as a whole is an eruption of exuberant neo-gothic fantasy in brick; it was known for a time as the Pear Palace (Perenburg), because of its crown of elongated onion-domed or pear-shaped turrets (Hageman 2007, 161).



4.8. China, corbel in the Magna Plaza building, Amsterdam (1899).

All over the outside of this building and especially on the inside, heads are carved on the corbels, personifying all the countries to which the Dutch postal service could send packages and epistles, ranging from the Congo and the Transvaal to the Netherlands itself. In Figure 4.8 we see China as a human bust on a stone corbel on the ground floor of the interior. It is stereotypically oriental, with almond eyes, a droopy moustache, a fat pigtail coming around in front of his neck, and a coolie's hat. Dozens of comparable images adorn the building; the whole of 'North America' is represented as a noble savage, with feathers and all, and this in 1899, even after the U.S. victory in the Spanish-American War. What we see here, then, is the establishing of an identity of Amsterdam and the Netherlands through cultural nationalism, technology, and empire. It is also, clearly, using that major tool of identity construction, 'othering', through portraying exoticism and difference in order to establish the 'self' as superior.

There are many examples in the city of this visualization of the position of the Dutch capital of Amsterdam as the civilized, technologically advanced ruling centre of a Eurocentric world of commerce and empire. In the Hobbemastraat, near the Rijksmuseum, there is a fairly ordinary building which probably originated as a travel agent: in the stonework there are panels showing various forms of transportation, including train, car, airship, sailing ship, and horseback. Such buildings are to be seen in many large European towns – for example in Leeds, London, and Vienna – dating from the early part of the twentieth century (Wintle 2009, 355, 379, and 417-19). In the Hobbemastraat, there are also personifications of the five continents, in which the emphasis is on European sophistication and learning, Asian spirituality, and the primitiveness of the others: imperial Amsterdam is claiming a privileged position for itself within the continental hierarchy.

In the spirit of muscular Christianity and its links with empire, sport was also roped in to assist in the process of demonstrating to Europeans and Amsterdammers that they were superior in every way to the other parts of the world. Opposite the Munt Tower on the Bloemenmarkt (or Flower Market) stands what is now the NH Carlton Amsterdam Hotel, originally built by G. J. Rutgers for the Amsterdam Olympics of 1928 (Casciato 1996, 109-10). Another Amsterdam School building, its frontages on the Bloemenmarkt and the Vijzelstraat are heavily decorated in stone reliefs of symbolic figures, which include statues of the continents, attributed to Theo Vos (Figure 4.9). On the front façade, Europe is shown with her characteristic bull, and America has a bison as her identifying animal. On the side elevation, on the Vijzelstraat, Asia has an elephant, and Africa a lion. All are highly stylized, and all the facial features, except those of Europe, are drawn to emphasize their primitive natures. But this particular instance is not especially laudatory of European sophistication; more important, in terms of the mechanisms of visual culture, is to note that it is the thousandth repetition of a well-rehearsed hierarchy of the continents, emphasizing the exoticism and strangeness of the others, all centred in European Amsterdam, the Dutch capital of a global empire which encompassed them all.





4.9. Carvings of the continents, NH Carlton Amsterdam Hotel, Amsterdam (1928).

We can conclude, then, that Amsterdam, like many other major cities in Europe and elsewhere, is quite simply awash with these kinds of images. Nowadays we are hardly conscious of this banal background, this wallpaper, but it is part of the visual culture all around us. It is no less powerful for that, and actually helps set the parameters for our discourse, as is so well explained by Michael Billig (1995, 12ff.) in his study of national imagery: who would deny the power of the flapping flag in the background? The decorative tendencies of Amsterdam's well-preserved built environment, especially from the seventeenth century and from the Amsterdam School period at the beginning of the twentieth, make it a particularly fine laboratory in which to study the city's self-image or identity in its national, European, and global contexts. That image was highly self-laudatory, and drew particularly on the city's role in the world as a centre of commerce and then of a colonial empire.

This multilevel identity formation and bolstering of the self-image operated in three main arenas: the city within the nation, the nation within Europe, and Europe within the global order. The co-existence of the different levels is mutually reinforcing, and indeed the levels merge into one another in the iconography of the capital's built environment. The ubiquitous Maid of Amsterdam, who attracts tribute from all over the globe, is clearly associated with the personification of Europe, at the pinnacle of the global hierarchy of continents. At the same time, the greatness of commercial and colonial/imperial Amsterdam is linked to the self-image of the nation through the national heroes and achievements memorialized in the capital's colonially connected buildings. Amsterdam is certainly not the only imperial city in Europe to carry such images; the link between city, nation, and continent is cast in stone in many a European capital. Indeed, a good study of the imperial city across Europe in the age of New Imperialism at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, emphasizing its visual aspects, treats the metropolitan visual culture of imperialism as a pan-European phenomenon (Driver and Gilbert 1999).<sup>6</sup> Europeans gained strength from mu-

tual association with each other in the context of interaction with the rest of the world, despite their national differences on the home front. In the colonial context it was a case of ‘Europeans’ and ‘others’; it is no coincidence that the time of most intense national competition in Europe, just before the First World War, was also the era of the most audacious Eurocentrism that we have ever witnessed (Wintle 2009, 399-405). And in Amsterdam in particular, the three roles of great city, national capital, and European centre of a world empire all combined to reinforce each other in forging this visual, Eurocentric identity.

## Notes

- 1 A selection from the evolving literature: Clark (1973); Rotberg and Rabb (1988); Haskell (1993); Rose (2001); and especially Burke (2001). See also Wintle (2004 and 2009, 12-22).
- 2 Much of this material is treated at a European level in Wintle (2009). The present chapter approaches the issues exclusively from the point of view of the city of Amsterdam. I was first inspired in the Amsterdam register of this subject by Ewald Vanvugt’s excellent but little-known work on colonial monuments in the city (Vanvugt 1998), and I am keen to acknowledge my initial debt to his book.
- 3 The general literature on national identity is vast; of particular use for the Dutch case are Cubitt (1998), Herb and Kaplan (1999), and Leerssen (2006).
- 4 I am most grateful to Tijdo van der Zee for originally pointing this figure out to me.
- 5 The colonial context of some of the more monumental works of the Amsterdam School has been noted in Casciato (1996, see esp. 18, 30, 50, and 214). See also Vanvugt (1998, 14-21).
- 6 Driver and Gilbert inexplicably (and unforgivably) lack a chapter on Amsterdam.

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## 5. Romance and Commerce: Imagining Global Amsterdam in the Contemporary Historical Novel

Joyce Goggin and Erinç Salor

The central undertaking of this essay is to address the topic of Amsterdam-based historical fiction, and to ask how two different subgenres of the contemporary historical novel – the visually oriented, ‘museumized’ heritage novel on the one hand, and the cyberpunk-inflected ‘history-of-science’ novel on the other – present aspects from Amsterdam’s ‘Golden Age’ past to present-day audiences. Specifically, this essay seeks to relate examples from those two subgenres to the cultural heritage industries that have become such a vital feature of the current cultural and economic landscape. At the centre of our concern is the nexus between the global economy, cultural heritage and tourism, and the various forms of cultural expression – film, television, popular fiction, popular history, art books, and the like – that stand to profit from a globalizing heritage and tourism market and which inscribe themselves in its discourses, in ways that remain to be explored.

In recent years, the heritage industry has received particular attention in film studies, where it has been described as ‘transform[ing] the past into a series of commodities for the leisure and entertainment market’, in many cases turning ‘the commodity on offer’ into ‘an image, a spectacle, something to be gazed at’ in ways replacing ‘critical perspective ... by decoration and display’ (Higson 2006, 95). In this sense, heritage film can be said to have a generally conservative and hegemonic character, ‘legitimizing the *spectacle* of one class and one cultural tradition and identity at the expense of others through the discourse of authenticity, and the obsession with the visual splendours of period detail’ (100; italics in original). As noted, our examples here will be taken from novelistic fiction, in this case fiction published over the last few decades which is set in or around Amsterdam in the seventeenth century. Significantly, these texts, while contributing to Amsterdam’s own heritage traditions, primarily address foreign – mainly Anglophone – readers, playing specifically on their interest in the city’s history, art galleries, and museums. In so doing, they differ from the customary focus of heritage film on national treasures such as, most typically, literary authors whose works are seen as masterpieces; they rather draw on a larger, transnational cultural heritage – even if the logic of commodification may work in similar ways. Indeed, the novels under discussion here can be said to lend strength to various aspects of the Amsterdam ‘brand’ that presents the city as an important node in the global circuit of cultural tourist destinations. The result, in the cases we will discuss, is a sort of pastiche fictional form constructed from a potpourri of

famous historical figures, distinctive national architecture and sites, and a visual aesthetic perceived to be specifically Dutch – in short, from various elements of the seventeenth-century Republic that have come to signify ‘Dutchness’ in the eyes of global audiences.

Of such possible markers of national heritage, we want to study what might seem an odd feature of Amsterdam’s history to celebrate in popular fiction, but which is pivotal to the novels to be discussed here. Both texts, Deborah Moggach’s *Tulip Fever* (1999) and Neal Stephenson’s *Quicksilver* (2003), are punctuated with customary signifiers of seventeenth-century Dutch culture such as genre painting and windmills; yet their stories focus on the market and, as Diana Wallace points out in an important article on the subject, on ‘the beginnings of capitalism, not as heroic exploration or trade, but as financially risky and morally ambiguous’ (Wallace 2006). Hence, of the many possible ways to imagine Amsterdam in cultural production, both texts enlist familiar references and tropes from Dutch art history in the backdrop rather than at the heart of the narration, revelling primarily in the ‘glory’ of seventeenth-century finance and trade. As Wallace emphasizes, however, the fascination for this ‘glory’ is not unqualified: at times, the narratives about speculation and economic risk-taking in the Republic slide from a romanticization of commerce into something like a cautionary tale. Indeed, an ambiguous relationship to ‘Golden Age’ finance and economics characterizes both novels, throwing up important questions as to how the memory of early-modern capitalism articulates the economic anxieties – and related cultural sensibilities – that characterize the present moment.

While both novels represent trade, commerce, and finance, however, they do so in distinctly different ways, differing both in terms of genre and in terms of how they generate readerly appeal. Deborah Moggach’s *Tulip Fever* is a page-turning romantic mystery that is set entirely in Amsterdam. It features an unhappy young wife, Sophia Sandvoort, who is seduced by a handsome artist, a fictive contemporary of Rembrandt’s, and the plot that unfurls touches both on the art market and on the market in tulips that has become such an iconic feature of the Dutch seventeenth-century economic landscape. Of the two novels we have singled out for discussion, this ‘airport novel’ seems most clearly connected to the contemporary global heritage industry. Through sixteen reproductions of Dutch seventeenth-century masterpieces, bound into the text as colour plates at key junctures in the plot, it appropriates a large number of features of Dutch history and culture, using them like story boards to suggest a particular mise-en-scène. The art reproductions effectively act as objects of nostalgia that help readers to ‘focus on the visual’ (Wallace 2006), as if to whet their appetites – and train their gaze – in advance of a touristic visit. In this regard, *Tulip Fever* may be classified with Rosalind Laker’s *The Golden Tulip* (1989), Susan Vreeland’s *Girl in Hyacinth Blue* (1999), Tracy Chevalier’s *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (1999), Will Davenport’s *The Painter* (2003), and many other Anglophone novels that have revisited Dutch ‘Golden Age’ culture in recent years: all eminently visual, ‘painterly’ texts that highlight the domestic, the feminine, and the everyday in romantic plots which commonly involve an artist who is now world-renowned.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, while those novels all flirt with the visual codes of the art gal-

lery, many of them look forward to their own film adaptation. As we will see, *Tulip Fever*'s visual descriptions and gestures could be analyzed as heavily pre-mediated, adopting a filmic language as if to court the interest of film directors and producers.<sup>2</sup>

Neal Stephenson's *Quicksilver*, on the other hand, was written as the first installment in the author's swashbuckling, three-part *Baroque Cycle* (2003-4), in which various characters visit Amsterdam over the space of a few chapters. Like *Tulip Fever*, *Quicksilver* features a striking heroine through whose eyes readers experience the hustle and bustle of the seventeenth-century Amsterdam market. Yet whereas Moggach's account of the Dutch tulip craze of the 1630s is indulgently romanticized – presented as it is through the baffled eyes of a naïve focalizer – Stephenson offers a more hard-boiled view of the early-modern market through his heroine Eliza, who values commerce above romantic dalliance and who stops in Amsterdam to 'make money' while giving financial advice to local traders (2003, 557). Another salient difference between the two novels involves the question of genre and narrative form. In this light, it is worth recalling that Stephenson became famous for *Snow Crash* (1992), a pioneering cyberpunk novel, and that he has since developed an interest in what one reviewer has called 'history-of-science fiction', i.e. fiction that specializes in self-consciously anachronistic plots that centre on the history of computer science, artificial intelligence, complexity theory, data management, fictional technology, and the like (Shulman 2003, 11). Exemplary of this strand in Stephenson's work, the *Baroque Cycle* tells a story of early Leibnizean computing technology, thus implicitly addressing science fiction and cyberpunk audiences as well as heritage consumers. For the purposes of this essay, it is likewise important to stress the transnational scale of Stephenson's narrative. *Quicksilver* ambitiously uses cities from all over (Western) Europe and the United States for its setting, taking readers on a *tour du monde* across countries and capitals while highlighting various cultural connections and transfers between them. In terms of the articulation of Amsterdam in globalizing contexts, this makes the novel an interesting second case study. Placed alongside Moggach's *Tulip Fever*, Stephenson's novel sheds more light on the role of contemporary popular fiction in what could be called the globalization of European cultural memory – understood here as the transmission of historical memories which, for a long time, were primarily articulated in the context of the nation-state, to global frames of references. Among others, this transmission entails the incorporation of such historical fictions within a new, vaster scale or geographical logic.

Given the element of cultural and historical 'translation' that is clearly involved in both novels, the question of readership is integral to our argument here. For example, one wants to ask who might be interested in stories set in an imaginary Amsterdam of nearly four centuries ago, and why? And why would Anglo-American authors develop a special interest in Amsterdam in the first place – an interest that necessitates that they embellish their stories with hackneyed clichés and tropes about 'Dutchness' so as not to alienate their international readers? While it would be simplistic to argue that either author has a direct, expressly conceived role in the more generalized touristic project of showcasing Europe's

major historic settings and cultural offerings, it does not seem far-fetched to suggest that both cater to – and seek to profit from – the massive flow of tourists to European capitals that is increasing yearly. Indeed, Europe’s reputation as an ‘open air museum’ is an enormous economic resource, and it is this European calling card upon which certain strands of contemporary cultural production draw, including the novels under discussion here.

In what follows, then, this essay will investigate in detail how both novels imagine the Amsterdam they seek to show their readers, while relating this imagining to the current climate of cultural heritage tourism and branding. In the process, we will also explore how both authors mobilize signifiers of the Dutch ‘Golden Age’ to suggest historical analogies with the current, crisis-stricken global financial market. As we will see, there is a fascinating tension between these novels’ interpellation of the contemporary cultural tourist – i.e., the tourist-reader who is beckoned by what might be referred to as the historical theme parks formed by Europe’s capital cities – and the more critical, self-reflective project to use the detour of the past for trying to think through, and come to grips with, the predicament of our present financial-economic climate. To unravel and clarify this tension is a major underlying aim of this essay.

### **Gambling, Speculation, Heritage**

Over the past few decades, historically minded depictions of gambling and of the great speculative crazes of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries have become a prominent feature of both ‘high’ and ‘low’ cultural production. Tellingly, in the Louvre, such a famous representation of gambling as Georges de La Tour’s *Le tricheur à l’as de carreau* (1635) has become the emblem for the museum’s entire Sully wing. That this formerly obscure painting now serves as a path-finding icon for the Louvre’s seventeenth-century collection, gracing the cover of various guides in the museum gift shop – not to mention calling cards, calendars, coffee mugs, and other merchandize – indicates an acute public awareness of this image and underlines its contemporary resonance. Indeed, *Le tricheur* and other representations of early-modern gambling have become familiar fare at a time when gaming is a major and still growing industry in many countries, as well as an important source of government revenues in the form of state lotteries, state-run casinos, and gambling machines. Moreover, as the perception deepens that the current global financial system itself incorporates high-risk forms of gambling, links are increasingly made in film, advertizing, television, and literature between famous moments in the history of gambling, speculation, and finance and today’s critical markets.

The relevance of these considerations for the Amsterdam-based historical novel has been summed up by American novelist David Liss, who has reflected explicitly on the role of gambling and speculation as a plot driver, selling point, and structuring metaphor in his own fiction. Liss has explained that he is aware of the public interest in the history of gambling and finance, and that he sought to cater to it in his first novel, *A Conspiracy of Paper* (2000), which fictional-

izes the events surrounding the South Sea Bubble of the early eighteenth century. Asked if he saw parallels between this historic economic moment and the ‘internet frenzy’ of the late 1990s, Liss – who previously wrote a dissertation on the subject of eighteenth-century finance – commented that ‘[i]n recent years, a number of scholars have begun writing about eighteenth-century financial markets, and the fact that so many people are suddenly drawn to this topic suggests that something in our own cultures makes it relevant’ (Liss 2000, 447). Not surprisingly, Liss’s next novel, *The Coffee Trader* (2003), was set in seventeenth-century Amsterdam and articulated similar cross-historical parallels. Likewise, Deborah Moggach has said that she was ‘impressed with the parallels’ between the Dutch tulip craze at the historical juncture which her novel attempts to represent and the global economy now. If, however, by her own account she ‘was unaware of [these parallels] when [she] wrote’ *Tulip Fever*, and did not recognize them until later, the point is nonetheless striking: her novel is representative of the important role that gambling and speculation play in the current social and economic imaginary, as part of the zeitgeist that influences cultural production.<sup>3</sup>

Examples of this trend in fiction have continued to come to light since Liss’s and Moggach’s novels were published, borrowing new momentum from the 2008 market crash. To give just one telling example, in Oliver Stone’s *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* (2010), the notorious arbitrageur Gordon Gekko, played by Michael Douglas, holds forth at length on the subject of ‘tulip fever’ in Amsterdam in the mid-1630s as a perfect parallel to the hiccups and speculative crazes of the current financial market. As he delivers his monologue on the topic, he moves to a historical chart decorated with tulips, underlining how ‘Golden Age’ Amsterdam resonates with modern Wall Street as a birthplace of today’s late-capitalist order (Figure 5.1).<sup>4</sup>



5.1. Michael Douglas in *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* (2010). (Twentieth Century Fox).



## Fictional Gambles and Other Risky Endeavours

In light of the perceived similarities between the globalizing market in which the Dutch Republic and its merchant-burghers were such central players, and the global financial markets of today, we now turn to an examination of *Tulip Fever*. The principle historical element of Moggach's narrative is, as its title suggests, the bizarre economic panic that took place in the Dutch Republic between 1634 and 1637. Over this period a futures market grew up around tulips which, at that time, were a new, exotic import into Western Europe from Turkey. Tulips became enormously popular and outrageously expensive due to their exotic provenance and the many shapes and colours that could be artificially bred (MacKay 1980, 89-97; Dash 1999, 36-64; Pavord 2000, 56-102). At the peak of the mania, when an average year's salary ranged from 200 to 500 guilders, people paid more than 5,000 guilders for a single bulb.<sup>5</sup> The market in which tulip bulbs were sold involved a system of trades carried out in brown cafés along the Kalverstraat; here, abstract paper futures were written on the bulbs, which then circulated as commodities in and of themselves, as a means of making more money from money.<sup>6</sup> As an episode in economic history, then, tulip mania invites reflection on the processes of financialization and dematerialization which have accompanied Western capitalism in its evolution over time, allowing the novelist to reconsider the pervasive influence of modern finance on everyday life. As the background material for a romantic plot, its attraction is enhanced by its shared momentum with what is often seen as a period of stark moral conflict, that is, Dutch Calvinism sitting uneasily with the affluence enjoyed by Amsterdam's burghers. It is well-known that it was only in the seventeenth century – in the wake of Calvin's decision to permit interest on commercial loans – that the age-old Aristotelian warning against the 'unnatural' use of money to beget money began to lose ground; it is this disputed financial 'sin' that lay at the heart of the tulip trade and which lends it its adventurous, transgressive nature in the fictional world inhabited by Moggach's characters.

*Tulip Fever* commences just before the market collapses, and it is to the futures market that the protagonists turn as a solution to their dilemma. The story opens on Cornelis Sandvoort, a wealthy Amsterdam shipping merchant, and his young wife Sophia as they dine in their 'large, echoing house on the Herengracht' (2). Over their meal of bread and herring, Cornelis asks his wife, '[in] this transitory life do we not all crave immortality?' – an obvious ploy to introduce the notion that they should have their portrait painted and their images preserved (1). Cornelis then hires Jan van Loos, a respected still-life, landscape, and portrait painter who, according to the novel, has been recommended by the art dealer Hendrick Uylenburgh and his protégé Rembrandt van Rijn. As Sophia poses beside her decrepit husband, she contemplates a table with curios that forms a portion of their portrait: 'draped with a Turkey rug', the table 'carries a globe of the world, a pair of scales and a human skull', thus speaking to her in the familiar syntax of seventeenth-century vanitas paintings (10).<sup>7</sup> Over the course of the long sitting needed to complete the portrait, Sophia also has the opportunity to observe the handsome young portrait painter as he plies his trade. Unsurpris-

ingly, an affair ensues, spurring her on to hatch a plot in which she pretends to be pregnant with Cornelis's heir while concealing the pregnancy of her maid and cohort, Maria. On the night that Maria gives birth, they plan to stage Sophia's death in childbirth and to present Maria's baby to Cornelis who will keep her on as a nurse, while Jan and Sophia sail away to the colonies.

Significantly, the 'terrible gamble' that Sophia and her lover undertake is financed through a market on which one Semper Augustus bulb is sold 'for six fine horses, three oxheads of wine, a dozen sheep, two dozen silver goblets and a seascape by Esaias van de Velde' (27). The lovers concoct an investment scheme that involves pawning Sophia's jewellery so that Jan can 'buy a considerable number of bulbs, to spread ... speculation and cover ... inevitable losses' (137). Over the course of the novel, however, Jan leaves more 'controlled' speculation behind; he becomes '[consumed] by his fever, [spending his] days in four different taverns, whispering the password to enter the rooms where the trading takes place ... in a feverish fog of tobacco smoke' (152, 147). It comes as no surprise, then, that the gambling plot falls through, in ways that are reminiscent, as Wallace points out, of *commedia dell'arte* and Restoration comedy (2006). The characters are once more left to ponder the vanity of things, which each does in a different way – wrapped up lightly by Moggach in the pastiche-like manner that is the hallmark of her prose.

In 1999, the year Moggach's novel was published, a number of detailed popular histories of the tulip craze appeared, including Anna Pavord's *The Tulip* and Mike Dash's *Tulipomania*. These books all shared a common indebtedness to scholarly studies such as Simon Schama's *The Embarrassment of Riches* (1987), where the tulip craze is discussed in the context of a general inquiry into early-modern Dutch capitalism and its moral and cultural implications (Schama 1991, 350-71).<sup>8</sup> The remarkable confluence between popular fiction, popular histories, and scholarly histories on the same topic was observed widely in the press, in terms that allow us to historicize Moggach's project in more specific ways. Generally, what prevailed was a strong sense of recognition. *The Economist*, for example, spoke of 'tulipmania-mania', citing the coincidence of the books just mentioned as a sign that 'the rickety global economy has reawakened our interest in financial disasters' ('The Queen of the Night', 1998). Likewise, *The Guardian*, reviewing Moggach and Pavord in tandem in 2000, complimented both on having 'found the perfect millennial metaphor' with their discovery of tulip mania as 'the prototype example of inflated market optimism' (qtd. in Wallace 2006). Another commentator called the surge of interest in the tulip craze 'a cliché of the frenzied Internet era', exclaiming further that '[few] pundits could resist comparing high dot-com stock prices to the historic craze for fancy flowers' (Tischler 2003). Such sustained historical parallels underline that in periods of economic experimentation such as the seventeenth century and the present, methods of generating wealth become more complex while instruments of credit (and indeed, paper money itself) go hand in hand with a willingness to accept intangible signifiers of wealth such as tulip bulb futures, shares in companies which one never sees, or, today, 'patents, copyrights, and goodwill' (Davis 2003, 20). In a dematerializing economy such as our own and, to a limited extent, that of

the Dutch Republic, intangible commodities, like instruments of credit, begin to supplant tangible assets such as real estate or precious metals. This brings with it a tendency to erase the line between gambling and speculation and a propensity to embrace systemic risk while expanding credit as leverage for traders.

Deborah Moggach's interest in the seventeenth-century Dutch bulb market clearly plays on a heightened cultural awareness of financialization and dematerialization and their social repercussions – as do other popular novels that have fictionalized tulip mania, such as Philippa Gregory's *Earthly Joys* (1998) and the first volume in V. A. Richardson's *Windjammer* trilogy, *The House of Windjammer* (2003). Her account of the 'Golden Age' economic landscape appropriately includes not just the tulip craze but various other forms of financial speculation and credit, along with folk who will gamble on everything from the sex of a child to the time of day. As Jan meditates: 'how stolid we look, but underneath we are all gamblers. We are a people possessed' (143).

The question arises as to what effect Moggach's revisitation of this episode in the history of early-modern finance produces. In view of postmodern critiques of the 'nostalgia mode' and the penchant of so much (recent) historical fiction for toothless, uncritical pastiche, it may be asked what perspective the novel opens up on this period and – by implication – on our crisis-ridden present. How does it situate readers in regard to both? Although some critics have found in *Tulip Fever* a 'morality tale' for modern times, a 'moral critique of the dangers of capitalism' (Wallace) – a reading that is lent support by the novel's refusal of a happy ending – many aspects also neutralize the novel's allegedly salutary potential. For example, the recycling of *commedia dell'arte* plot conventions, the novel's general style and tone with its shifting focalization and refusal of deep interiority, and finally the painterly, tableaux-inspired aesthetic all combine to make *Tulip Fever* an implicit celebration rather than a critique of the culture of excess and risk-taking which it revisits. For the most part, what prevails is a romantic and indeed 'feverish' interest in the extremes of the 1630s market. Moggach's choice to place Sophia and her lover Jan in the group of 'floristen', or secondary traders on tulip bulbs, underlines this. Floristen never saw the flowers but simply traded up, buying futures and re-issuing them in the form of paper sold at a higher price. As Sophia explains with excitement: 'We have long ago lost sight of bulbs; they have become an abstraction. We are buying bulbs we have never seen and for which we have not yet paid, gambling on new varieties, that [sic] their price will rocket, trading onwards and upwards' (151). *Tulip Fever* is manifestly about the transgressive, libidinous energy and desire which it associates with the financial-economic culture that drives its plot – not so much offering a cautionary tale, as romanticizing 'Golden Age' commerce in counterpoint to the moralizing vanitas theme with which it flirts. In all of these ways, then, Moggach's novel both contains and soothes the economic and financial anxieties on which it plays.

## The Painterly Novel and the Heritage Business

Not only does *Tulip Fever* offer a fictionalized re-telling of the Dutch tulip craze, the text also implicates the visual arts in its romanticization of ‘Golden Age’ finance and commerce, in ways that connect it to today’s cultural heritage market. To begin with, the novel does this on a thematic level – most obviously so through the figure of Jan van Loos who, both a gambler and a painter, reminds readers that art, too, is a risky and ethereal commodity.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, as Jan risks his and Sophia’s entire fortune along with a still-life in which tulips bloom in concert with daffodils and lilies, the text links painting, sexual excess, and volatile trade practices. As Sophia notes – here, as elsewhere, Moggach uses her characters’ speech to sketch in the historical context – the still-life shows ‘[f]lowers from different seasons bloom[ing] impossibly together’ (85). Likewise, her husband remarks that the *Tulipa clusiana* which he bought for the marital portrait were ‘forced under glass’, yielding a botanical impossibility that offered an opportunity for ostentation (26). As Moggach is aware, the techniques necessary for growing and forcing flowers from other, vastly different climates were pioneered in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic, where the floral still-life symbolized the fantastic wealth pouring into Amsterdam through colonial trade. These bouquets of flowers, imported from around the globe and then grown in Holland, were the privilege of the wealthy to enjoy, and paintings of them were displayed as the tokens of one’s wealth (Bryson 1990, 130-3). That the van Loos still-life finances the romance at the heart of the text, however, is also indicative of a fictional world in which all relationships are somehow connected to wealth flowing from a collective gamble on volatile markets, all of which are part of the exotic wonders of global trade. *Tulip Fever*’s interest in the art market is thus on a par with its interest in the trade in tulip bulbs. Indeed, the novel casts both markets as analogues of each other to sustain a general buzz of excitement. Hence, as one bulb grower says to Jan, ‘[s]trange isn’t it? That flowers are transient but a painting lasts for ever ... Yet one bulb of that tulip is three times more precious, in financial terms, than your painting of it’ (142).

Yet the novel’s engagement with the visual arts is not restricted to its thematic treatment of them; it also extends to the text’s formal self-presentation, techniques for characterization and description, and modes of readerly address. As we noted above, the novel has a distinctly painterly quality, which is most clearly in evidence in its evocation of everyday life in the Republic by means of prosed ‘establishing shots’ that recall famous Dutch seventeenth-century paintings:

A woman plays the virginal; she catches the eye of the man beside her. A handsome young soldier lifts a glass to his lips; his reflection shines in the silver-topped decanter. A maid gives her mistress a letter ... The mirrored moments are stilled, suspended in aspic. For centuries to come people will gaze at these paintings and wonder what is about to happen. (25)

This kind of self-conscious commentary is repeated throughout the text, drawing the reader into two worlds simultaneously: the picturesque Amsterdam of the

‘Golden Age’, but also, folded into that historical world, the mediated Amsterdam that has come to readers through a museumized collective memory comprised of streetscapes and domestic scenes by Nicolaes Maes, Pieter de Hooch, and other famous Dutch painters. Hence, the novel frequently oscillates explicitly between both worlds, with proleptic references to the future glory of art works which the reader catches a glimpse of as they are still in the making. One example is contained in a chapter titled ‘The Painting’, where the narrator conjectures with almost metafictional irony that, in centuries to come, ‘people will stand in the Rijksmuseum and gaze at [van Loos’s] canvas’ featuring Cornelis’s exquisite *Tulipa clusiana* (31). A second chapter by the same title opens on a description of Rembrandt’s unveiling of his Danaë waiting for Zeus to ‘descend on her in a shower of golden rain’; the painting, the reader is informed in passing, now ‘hangs in the Hermitage, the loveliest nude [Rembrandt] has ever painted’ (115). Similarly, a parallel is drawn between Rembrandt’s *Danaë* and van Loos’s fictional portrait of Sophia, which ‘[c]enturies later ... will hang in the Rijksmuseum. Scholars will quarrel about her identity ... [and] [p]apers will be published about her place in van Loos’s work’ (116). In passages such as these, Moggach anticipates readers’ desire to view seventeenth-century masterpieces, and accommodatingly discloses their locations in the museums and galleries of Europe. In so doing, her novel effectively extends an invitation to readers to visit the Rijksmuseum and the Hermitage, while reproductions from the London National Gallery’s collection of Dutch masterpieces included in the text promote the excitement of world travel for purposes of art tourism.<sup>10</sup>

In this regard it is important to note that the reproductions, placed strategically throughout Moggach’s novel, interact with the text by establishing the dominant aesthetic code for its descriptions and characterizations rather than by taking on a function in the plot. The colour plates rarely coincide with particular moments in the text as a means of illustrating a specific event or a scene in the narrative, as one might well expect. Rather, they saturate the novel with a generalized seventeenth-century atmosphere that appeals to readers’ knowledge of ‘Golden Age’ art works, and which predetermines their visualization of *Tulip Fever*’s fictional world. For example, the vanitas scene, part of the Sandvoort portrait, occurs at the outset, whereas the reproductions of paintings by Steenwyck and Heda that answer to the description are provided at the close of the novel, after the ‘vanity’ they symbolize has passed. There is one point in the text however where word and image powerfully collide: just after the dénouement, a detail of de Hooch’s *Musical Party* is inserted at the precise moment that the focalizer surveys the Herengracht, providing the reader with a compelling description of the wealth commanded by denizens of the Dutch Republic (184-5). The combined effect is a thoroughly pre-mediated visual aesthetic, and a persistent articulation of today’s topography of cultural heritage, which are ostensibly intended to add lustre to the historical romance plot. Indeed, as a book that lends itself to skimming as well as close reading, *Tulip Fever* seems to aspire to the condition of the glossy art catalogue or the museum shop commodity. As one critic glossed such practices in reference to this and other ‘Golden Age’ novels, they offer ‘Vermeer with veneer’.<sup>11</sup>

## A Baroque Universe: Stephenson, Finance, Systems

Where Moggach romanticizes early-modern trade and commerce, the art market, and, by implication, today's cultural heritage industry, Neal Stephenson's interest, as an author of cyber- and steampunk fiction, is in complexity, abstraction, and information overload. Stephenson also takes a more sustained interest in the transformation of modern governance and statecraft, the rise of mercantile states, and the emergence of complex systems. When he gives interviews, it is about topics such as the nexus between the state, science, and technology, terrorism and military security, and what he calls the 'power disorders' that sporadically disrupt the body politic (Godwin 2005). In this regard, his work forms an interesting case study to consider alongside Moggach's museumized heritage fiction. For Stephenson, the Dutch 'Golden Age' is not a self-contained world to indulgently bring to life for the space of some 200 pages. Rather, his ambitiously plotted fiction revisits the Dutch seventeenth century in order to advance daring, speculative historical theses about the modernity we inhabit. In doing so, he takes a special interest in what Randy Martin has characterized as the ongoing 'financialization' of everyday life and, in particular, the ways in which finance persistently colonizes things once thought intangible (risk, good will, intellectual property, experience, fun) and which then become saleable as commodities.

*Quicksilver*, the first volume of the *Baroque Cycle*, has been described as a 'great fantastical boiling pot of theories about science, money, war and much else, by turns broadly picaresque and microscopically technical ... something like a Restoration-era *Gravity's Rainbow*' – albeit substantially longer at 927 pages (Poole 2003). Together with the second and third volumes, *The Confusion* (2004) and *The System of the World* (2004), it is set in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and spans the entire known globe at the time – from the Mogul kingdom in India to the 1683 Siege of Vienna, from the ballrooms of Versailles to the witch burnings of Boston. Among Stephenson's interests is the story of Leibniz and his designs for early computational engines, a strand that establishes the *Cycle* as a distant prequel to the novelist's *Cryptonomicon* (1999), a techno-thriller about cryptography, computing, and information technology in the 1940s and the present 'internet age'. While Stephenson uses Leibniz to offer a fictionalized account of early attempts to invent a computer, he is also interested in the coincidence of these attempts with modern finance, and particularly 'the triumph and spread of universal market rationality' that can be traced back to those days (Langley 2008, 7). Thus we also get to see Newton take his place as the head of the Royal Mint, London, marking the moment at which the endless possibilities of modern finance became manifest. The volume takes us likewise through the founding of the Royal Society, the Plague in 1665, and the Great Fire of London in 1666, and it includes a study of the lives of pioneers of modern science such as Robert Boyle, Christopher Wren, and Robert Hooke along with an adventure story about the fictional character Daniel Waterhouse, son of a fanatical Puritan, Drake Waterhouse, and Newton's roommate at Trinity College, Cambridge. Yet another strand in *Quicksilver*'s crowded and encyclopaedic narrative focuses more directly on early-modern markets and the financialization

of the quotidian that necessitates ever greater complexity and abstraction. This feature of the text centres on the fictional characters of Jack Shaftoe, King of the Vagabonds, and Eliza, a slave of Scottish descent whom Shaftoe rescues from the ruins of an Ottoman harem during the Siege of Vienna. It is to this third strand in *Quicksilver*, which takes us to Amsterdam in the 1680s, that we now turn.

Given Stephenson's interest in the processes of financialization that were taking root in early-modern Europe and many of its colonies, it is of no small consequence that *Quicksilver* includes Amsterdam in its spectacular, wide-ranging world tour. Stephenson describes 1680s Amsterdam as well as a contemporary cyberpunk guru might, as a sort of deconstructed commercial metropolis where '[t]here were tolls everywhere, but no centre of power' (466). Indeed, he visualizes the Republic as being populated by 'the Dutch, who worshipped motion above all. For whom the physical element of Earth was too resistant and inert, an annoyance to traders, an impediment to the fluid exchange of goods' (483). In other words, Stephenson's Dutch Republic is a sort of dematerialized, thoroughly liquid non-place through which goods pass to be miraculously converted into paper. In keeping with this view, as Eliza and Jack make their way to Amsterdam, the Dutch Republic is described as an ever-complexifying system of canals whose sole purpose appears to be the transport of colonial luxury goods. Their approach follows 'nearly unbroken queues of carts laden with goods, fighting upstream against as heavy traffic coming from the north', as they take in 'long skinny slabs of flat land divided one from the next by straight ditches full of standing water'. As Stephenson goes on to explain – in a way befitting the contemporary image of Amsterdam and the Netherlands as unconventional, libertarian, drug-tolerant places – 'what happened on that land was always something queer: tulip-raising, for example', and '[o]dd-looking fields growing flax, hemp, rape, hops, tobacco' (466-7). And while this passage lights on many of those racy commodities currently associated with Amsterdam, it goes on to connect the city to its artistic tradition as the protagonists encounter stables filled 'with *painters* – young men ... who sat before easels making copy after copy of land- and seascapes' to be 'stacked and bundled and wrapped into cargo-bales' (467). Here again, Amsterdam is imagined as a commercial city that equally embraces dubious commodities and questionable practices, but still resonates with the kinds of cultural heritage for which the Dutch seventeenth century is known.

Once they are in Amsterdam, Stephenson allows his characters to passively focalize the busy scene of commerce and speculation, and to linger over the startling panorama to which they are treated in the centre of town:

[T]he city's new weigh-house [was] almost completely obscured by a perpetual swarm of boats ... Sloops coming in duelled for narrow water-lanes with canal-barges taking the weighed and stamped goods off to the city's warehouses, and every few minutes a small heavy cart clattered away across the Damplatz, laden with coins the ships' captains had used to pay duty, and made a sprint for the Exchange Bank, scattering wigged, ribboned, and turbaned deal-makers out of its path. (481)

For the rest of their stay in this vividly imagined global commercial centre, Jack pretends to be an invalid so as not to be forced to work by the industrious Dutch. At the same time we read that Eliza, the self-proclaimed ‘money-market speculator’, ‘seemed content to while away time in a coffee-house alongside the Damplatz’ that ‘straddled an important migration-route’ where traders gathered to ‘[flock] down the street to a large courtyard called the Exchange’ (479). From the outset of the novel, Eliza displays remarkable intelligence and an intense interest in the workings of commodity trading and financial markets. The first indication of her unusual gift is her instant understanding of the ‘bourse’ of Leipzig, which is already characterized as promoting global trade. Here, she and Jack watch as money-changers fling ‘assorted coins’ into a melting pot just under ‘a wall chart of exchange rates’ for ‘Louis d’or, Maximilian d’or, souverain d’or, rand, ducat, Louis franc, Breslau ducat, Schildgroschen, Hohlheller, Schwertgroschen, Oberwehr groschen, Hellengroschen, pfennig, Goldgulden, halberspitzgroschen, Engelsgroschen, Real, Ratswertmark ... English shilling, ruble, abassid, rupiah’ (422). The currencies of a growing international trading community materially meet and merge here, just as francs, guilders, and marks are now consolidated in the euro. Also worthy of note is that in describing the Leipzig ‘bourse’, Stephenson finds in it early intimations of the progressive dematerialization of a market wherein ‘[t]here were no goods in evidence, only bits of paper’, as metal is magically transformed into this more abstract medium (422).

The Amsterdam-based chapters continue this exploration of the ‘coming of age’ of modern finance and, by implication, the global economic trajectory in which we currently find ourselves. Hence, while Eliza chats with traders and learns the ins and outs of the futures market, Stephenson has her educate the reader in the niceties of bridge loans and the construction of ‘ducat shares, which have one-tenth the value of proper VOC shares and are far more liquid’ (528). And importantly, as in *Tulip Fever*, much of the context is filled in through the characters’ detail-filled speech and dialogue – as if they are not just there to carry the plot, but also to function as tour guides, propelled back into the time where the narrative is set but essentially modern in their response to the action.

At this point the question of genre and readership reasserts itself. While Moggach’s romance describes its characters in vaguely commercial terms against a background of ‘Golden Age’ visual splendour, Stephenson’s hybrid ‘history-of-science fiction’ whole-heartedly embraces money as Eliza, untrammelled by love or gendered relations with finance, brazenly refers to herself as ‘a trader, not a shareholder’ who has come to Amsterdam to ‘make money’ (528, 557). Eliza embodies the pivotal moment that lies at the crux of Stephenson’s history of technology and finance, while Jack represents the old, realist economic order and is, therefore, made uncomfortable by the lack of metal circulating in the market. In Amsterdam he worries that he sees ‘no goods or money changing hands’ on a stock exchange which Eliza knows the Dutch call the ‘*Windhandel*’ or ‘wind business’ because it is driven ‘by a trickle of paper passing from hand to hand’ like ‘a breath of air on the blades of a windmill’ (482, 483). As Jack complains that ‘this money [she] speaks of is but a chimæra – a figment of the collective imagination of ... rabble bellowing at one another out on the Dam’, Eliza wel-



comes the new economy like ‘the warm wind that you feel on your face’ (557, 483). Loath to hold money in reserve, she happily trades low-value shares, which have the advantage of being ‘far more liquid’ than the more stable VOC shares (528). And she is equally happy to borrow money for leverage and to ‘use options so that [she] will make money if the price [of VOC shares] falls’. No stranger to insider trading, Eliza explains that this ‘is called short selling’ and announces that an investor ‘will begin betting that VOC stock will drop soon. And rest assured, it will’ (529). In a moment of almost Rabelaisian grotesque, she even describes her birth in financial terms, explaining that she ‘bear[s] the same relationship to [her] mother as a dividend does to a joint stock corporation – viz. a new piece of wealth created out of the normal functioning of the old’. In short, Eliza explains, she ‘was liquidated’ when she left the womb (439).

Again with regard to the question of readership, it is certainly also significant that the critical debate surrounding Stephenson’s work has discovered in it the same ambiguous relationship to Enlightenment modernity that is often said to characterize cyber- and steampunk fiction. A recent discussion of his neo-Victorian novel *The Diamond Age* (1995) links it to the ‘tendency to “idealize complete knowledge” and mastery’ that informs most steampunk novels, even while also seeking to appraise the author’s attempt to recover the ethical potential of the relationship between humans and material things (Forlini 2010, 73). The encyclopaedic *Baroque Cycle* bespeaks a similar aspiration to mastery and totality. Although the ostensible motivation behind the project is that of critical genealogical work, its desire to offer an all-inclusive popular account of the beginnings of modern finance seems to overrule its critical or investigative impulse. The author of *Quicksilver* seems to relish the excitement of the mechanisms of dematerialization heralded by the *Windhandel*, and often indulges in prolonged, meandering descriptions and dialogue that serve no other purpose than to revel in the spectacle and drama of early-modern global trade. Indeed, as Eliza enjoys the anonymity afforded by Amsterdam’s booming market, through which she passes incognito, she is not so much a moral or critical centre in the narrative, as the vehicle of a kind of displaced tourist gaze that has been transposed back in time. At one point, she and Jack stroll past ‘Damplatz’ and the Stock Exchange, comparing the relative virtues of the Paris and Amsterdam markets, when she suddenly proclaims: ‘I belong in Amsterdam’ (483). This establishes her – with anachronistic irony – as the neoliberal subject par excellence, the model of today’s tourist-visitor who says ‘I amsterdam’ in between a gallery visit and a shopping spree on Kalverstraat. Just like Moggach’s Sophia, then, Eliza is essentially modern – as close to the present-day reader or Europe-bound traveller as to a ‘Golden Age’ female prodigy escaped from the clutches of an Ottoman vizier.

## Conclusion

This essay has focused on the representation of early-modern Amsterdam as a source of fascination, romance, and entertainment in two subgenres of the popular historical novel. We have discussed how various aspects of the Dutch

'Golden Age' – genre painting, the tulip craze, early-modern finance – have been adopted as plot drivers and selling points to charm and beguile readers. Deborah Moggach's *Tulip Fever* is a period piece that seeks to provide visual and sensual pleasure, unfolding a narrative about risk-taking and gambling along the quaint canals of seventeenth-century Amsterdam that treats readers to an intimate view of the city's past. Pre-mediated by the visual codes of the art gallery, its cultural eye-candy cheers readers on to hop on a plane and catch a little of this historical sense of place for themselves. Neal Stephenson's *Quicksilver* is more ambitiously historical in its attempt to historicize modern science, technology, and finance. In its fictional world, modern finance is a Dutch invention, and Dutch finance is rapidly making its way into Leipzig and Paris as it gathers steam to go global, hastening headlong towards increasing speculation and dematerialization. In dwelling on this historic episode, the novel seeks to rethink the consequences of the 'financial revolution' (North and Weingast 1989) for modern culture and everyday life – even if, like *Tulip Fever*, it also projects an aura of excitement around aleatory economic practices, succumbing to the very charms from which it seeks to (re)gain distance.

All things considered, then, what is one to make of the Amsterdam- or Holland-based heritage novel that has formed such a sustained hype in the market for popular English-language fiction since the early 1990s? For many readers, there must be something reassuring about the possibility suggested by those novels to situate the beginnings of disaster capitalism very precisely in space and time – as if to anchor it safely in a foreign, slightly exotic and romanticizable *lieu de mémoire*. Amsterdam's historic role within the genealogy of modern finance is well-known, while the cozy, village-like character of its inner-city centre, the picturesque setting offered by its canals, and the whiff of foreignness that it exudes for Anglophone readers make it an easy vehicle onto which concerns about contemporary urban and economic life can be displaced. In this regard, this trend in popular fiction may indeed be close – politically and ideologically – to heritage film and to earlier literary forms of postmodern historical representation, as its generous use of pastiche would seem to underline. At the same time, it should be considered that the heritage depicted in this fiction no longer belongs to the Netherlands, but rather to a globalized world and a cultural economy that are characterized by the international circulation of urban images and place-bound cultural markers. In this context, the Dutch Republic is an historical signifier that refers to an open, internationally connected economy and market, and it should come as no surprise that Amsterdam's age-old association with the modern 'world system' now pushes it to the fore in the global cultural memory that is taking shape today, specifically around economic and financial themes. Notwithstanding their Eurocentrism and their commodified character, both novels foster a sense of global interconnectedness through which fates and fortunes can be seen as closely, even intimately linked. In this sense, they contribute to the cosmopolitanization of cultural memory, raising awareness of the volatility of the economic and financial system through which we are connected.

## Notes

- 1 This corpus of texts is also expanding outside the English-speaking world: a notable French contribution is Sylvie Matton's *Rembrandt's Whore* (1997, English translation 2001).
- 2 Filmmaker Steven Spielberg still owns the rights to *Tulip Fever*, although the 2004 attempt to bring the story to the screen was unsuccessful. Meanwhile, Moggach herself has focused increasingly on heritage screen adaptations and teleplays (e.g., in 2008, she authored a BBC adaptation of *The Diaries of Anne Frank*).
- 3 These quotations are taken from an email correspondence between the author and J. Goggin, dated 9 Jan. 2005.
- 4 The parallel is complete if one considers that Wall Street is a name with a Dutch pedigree: it figures as Walstraat on maps of New Amsterdam from the 1660s (Frijhoff 2006, 262-73).
- 5 When, after three years, the bubble burst, the government stepped in and ordered that outstanding contracts be liquidated at 3.5 per cent of the original price of purchase (Pavord 2000, 156). For more details concerning tulip fever, including an index of prices at the time, see Schama (1991, 350-66) and Zumthor (1959, 291-312).
- 6 Cf. John Kenneth Galbraith, who refers specifically to this period as the moment at which the Amsterdam Bank and others 'saw money as a way of making money' (1975, 13).
- 7 Vanitas paintings were intended to remind viewers of their mortality as an antidote to hubris, financial or otherwise. These paintings regularly contained a display of familiar *memento mori* such as skulls, pipes, and playing cards with which viewers were familiar. See Koozin (1990), chapter 1.
- 8 More recently, Anne Goldgar has published *Tulipmania* (2007), probably the most comprehensive scholarly work on the topic to date.
- 9 This historical parallel, too, was recognized in the press: in 'A Second Tulip Mania', Lewis and Ford refer to the contemporary art market as another tulip craze, seeing how it is characterized by 'incredible tulip-like increases in the value of the hottest artists' (2008).
- 10 Note as well that most editions of the text include a complete list of the sixteen reproductions intercalated in the text and their locations.
- 11 Joanna Briscoe, qtd. from the *Sunday Times* in Wallace (2006), with specific reference to *Tulip Fever* and *Girl with a Pearl Earring*.

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## 6. Dutch Decline Redux: Remembering New Amsterdam in the Global and Cosmopolitan Novel

*Marco de Waard*

There is no memory of the global past. But there is an imagination of a globally shared collective future, which characterizes the cosmopolitan society and its experience of crisis.

– Ulrich Beck, ‘The Cosmopolitan Society and Its Enemies’ (2002, 27)

The world has lost its capacity to ‘form a world’ [*faire monde*]: it seems only to have gained that capacity of proliferating, to the extent of its means, the ‘un-world’ [*immonde*], which, until now, ... has never in history impacted the totality of the orb to such an extent.

– Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization* (2007, 34)

### ‘Signs of Autumn’

This chapter examines the idea of (New) Amsterdam as a *lieu de mémoire* of early-modern global finance, trade, and commerce from the perspective of recent theories of cosmopolitanism and global citizenship, considered here more especially in their bearings on novelistic representation and literary form. Put briefly, what is at issue here is the question how the remembrance of an older capitalist world system – in this case, the Dutch commercial empire of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – exerts an impact on, and may contribute formatively to, the articulation of cosmopolitan and ‘globally conscious’ subjectivities in the present. Far from submitting to a hegemonic discourse of globalization, however, I will argue that literary evocations of the idea of (New) Amsterdam have recently begun to elaborate forms of historical (dis)identification that are not just highly pragmatic and self-consciously post-national, but also uniquely capable of interrogating the politics of ‘thinking globally’ as such. This argument places this chapter squarely in a contrapuntal relationship to that which precedes it: while Joyce Goggin and Erinç Salor examine the idea and image of Amsterdam in historically situated popular fictions which are deeply invested in the ‘romance’ of global commerce, the present chapter seeks to foreground the counter-hegemonic possibilities of some of the more experimental and self-reflective novels which use (New) Amsterdam as an important space of reference and in which early-modern Dutch colonialism is articulated as a theme. This is not to suggest that the novels

under discussion here fully extricate themselves from modern capitalism's historic wreckages; yet it does mean to stress their achievement of reflective distance from capitalism's inherited, historically accrued burdens – in line with the insight that cosmopolitan ethics is nothing if not worldly, and indeed, that the only cosmopolitanisms which are viable today may be those that acknowledge how they are 'always already' compromised through the conditions of possibility (money, power, knowledges, traditions) that enable them in the first place.<sup>1</sup>

My main case study here will be Joseph O'Neill's acclaimed novel *Netherland* (2008), although for the sake of comparison and juxtaposition the argument will branch out to include David Mitchell's *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* (2010). What unites these two novels, in spite of many formal and aesthetic differences, is a remarkable combination of two significant features. First, both situate their plots at the historical cusp of one of capitalism's critical moments of systemic transition. More precisely, both are located at the end of what Giovanni Arrighi has theorized as the third and final stage of capitalism's recurrent cycle of implantation, productive development, and financial expansion (or simply 'financialization').<sup>2</sup> On this theory – and its appeal at the present juncture would be difficult to overstate – the stage of financial as opposed to productive expansion is the moment when a capitalist 'hegemon' nears the limits of its reach and begins to overstretch itself. The surge into monetary abstractions and speculative bubbles that attends this stage could hence be seen, as Arrighi likes to repeat from Braudel, as a 'sign of autumn', as the harbinger of a geopolitical transference of hegemony from one state (or system of states) to another (Arrighi 1994, 6). As we will shortly see, it is just this sort of atmosphere of pending decline and loss of hegemonic clout that *Netherland* is suffused with. While initially hailed in the reviews as a '9/11' trauma novel, its choice for a Dutch-born, English-educated, and New York-based equities analyst and former employee of Shell Oil as its narrator and witness-persona firmly ties its plot to the operations of transnational capital and of American global power. Indeed, *Netherland* is as obsessed as *The Great Gatsby* – to which it is often compared – with the promises of freedom, mobility, and status that capital holds out, bringing up-to-date what it means to inhabit the world of American and transnational finance just when the wheel of global power turns and intimations of financial crisis are in the air.<sup>3</sup> *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*, by contrast, places its critical moment back in the late eighteenth century. For the most part situated in 1799 and 1800, it evokes the last stages of disintegration of the Dutch East India Company (the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie or VOC) as seen from the vantage point of Dejima, the historical Dutch trading stronghold in the Japanese bay of Nagasaki. Arguably, the resulting narrative resonates no less forcefully with the demise of the American hegemon which it is often said we may be witnessing today. Insofar as it foregrounds the VOC's vulnerability to external threats and to implosion through corruption, it forces us to consider the transience of any commercial or financial empire in the face of capitalism's perennial cyclic movements of rise and decline. By extension, it also asks attention for the dramatic human dislocation and unsettlement that are consequent upon the relocation to new contexts of the management of global economic and cultural flows.

Second, *Netherland* and *The Thousand Autumns* are comparable in that they seek to repossess, as somehow relevant to the present moment of globalization, the memory of an episode in Dutch overseas mercantilism which long held marginal status in colonial and world historiography.<sup>4</sup> In so doing, both novels ambitiously seek to locate their respective ‘moment of finance capital’ (to stay in Arrighi’s idiom) within a transnational *longue durée* that does not easily lend itself to novelistic representation. Perhaps it is only inevitable, then, that the result should be fraught with paradox and ambiguity. To begin with, the fact that both novels cater to international and Anglophone audiences raises the vital question of the readerly community they seek to address and to construct. As I want to suggest, the most immediately relevant communal model which insinuates itself is that implied by the notion of ‘global heritage’: what else, one might ask, could move a novelist to take up planet-spanning narratives which transcend national and continental boundaries than a keen recognition of the need to think through, and affirm the binding potential of, the history of our present world system in all its interconnectedness and in terms of a ‘heritage’ that includes us all? Yet – and here is the caveat – no literary ambition is more easily co-opted. Cultural critic Ginette Verstraete, in a recent study of current ideologies of cultural mobility, has argued that the present neoliberal moment, at least in the European context, generates its own transnationally mediated mode of affirming ‘national’ or ‘regional’ difference and otherness as privileged – i.e., highly marketable and profitable – forms of cultural capital (Verstraete 2010). With regard to Amsterdam this is neatly illustrated by the model of the historically situated airport novel which, in a bid for high sales among Europe-bound cultural tourists, re-mediate the ‘Golden Age’ treasures on display in Dutch and Flemish (art) museums in an accessible, straightforward narrative form, repackaging cultural-historical ‘particularity’ and ‘uniqueness’ in full conformity to touristic expectations.<sup>5</sup> If O’Neill’s and Mitchell’s prose could be seen as resisting this type of pre-mediated and commodified ‘global heritage’ produce – and their dissatisfaction with it seems everywhere in evidence, as I will seek to show – I would still insist that their novels cannot shake off the problem that differential thinking has very effectively been hijacked under neoliberalism, to the extent that the redemptive agency which was long, but rather too habitually attributed to it by cultural and literary scholars can be seen to be placed under serious, erosive constraints. An ambiguous, at times even tired relationship with cultural particularity characterizes the work of both authors, as if not so much cultural ‘otherness’ as the *difference* of this otherness eludes them. We will shortly see what implications this has for their respective projects to stage cosmopolitan selfhood for the present ‘global’ age.

No less problematic than the processes of cultural standardization and homogenization with which current practices of global remembrance so easily align is that the very strategy to focus attention on capitalism’s *longue durée*, while doubtless conducive to reflective distance from the present global order, implicates *Netherland* and *The Thousand Autumns* in ideological assumptions that run contrary to the commitment of any viable postmodern cosmopolitanism to critiquing or dislodging the Eurocentric metanarratives of the West. To vest the economic world system of the past five hundred years or so with the interpreta-



tive leverage of the single long-term historical framework which global capitalism itself would acknowledge – i.e., that which starts with the ‘discovery’ of the ‘New World’ in the late fifteenth century, and presents a series of stages or ‘waves’ of globalization from thence to the neoliberal ‘freedom of movement’ zones in the present – would threaten to lock us in a unilinear view of globalization that obfuscates alternative scenarios, and, in so doing, to regress into those well-intentioned affirmations of the singularity, oneness, and ‘unicity’ of the world which – as many advocates of a renewed and critical cosmopolitanism have recognized – tend to prevent rather than foster accounts of globalization that truly have the capacity to engage with otherness. It is in this regard, however, that I believe O’Neill and Mitchell, far from buying into hackneyed historiographical tropes, are doing important imaginative work. If on the one hand, they are inscribing their plots in the most co-optable of *longue durée* conceptions – O’Neill by articulating the idea of historical New Amsterdam as a symbolically charged substratum of present-day New York, and Mitchell by making the collapse of the VOC around 1800 resonate with the current decline of U.S. world power – on the other hand I would argue that in the very same gesture they submit the category of the historical as such, understood in terms of our Western temporality, to substantive critique, questioning in particular its contribution to a cosmopolitan project that strains itself to move beyond Western ‘centrism’. The paradox is that both novels are re-imagining global capitalism’s *longue durée*, while on a deeper level recognizing how globalization propels us into ‘post-historical’ time. Indeed, what both novels acknowledge, if in different ways, is that globally situated subjects are no longer bound by the laws and interpellative force of Western history as national subjects used to be of old. In a telling phrase of O’Neill’s, they are rather being swept along by various ‘temporal currents’ which, through their very pluri-linearity, promise to de-link them from the temporalities of the West (2009b, 83).<sup>6</sup>

In what follows, the point I want to develop is that O’Neill’s and Mitchell’s novels have a critical edge insofar as they privilege the category of space over that of history and time in the staging of the new cosmopolitanism which they envisage. *Netherland* especially I propose to analyze as a thoroughgoing re-imagining of Western spatio-temporality in view of the crisis of cosmopolitan selfhood that drives O’Neill’s text. Rather than a novel that repossesses New York’s Dutch episode *historically* (for whose history would be at stake in such an enterprise, and which community would it seek to hail?), I argue that it repossesses it by way of a *spatialized* articulation of the city’s seventeenth-century New Amsterdam past, setting space off against time as the preferable experiential mode through which global subjects may achieve cosmopolitan selfhood. *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* is unlikely to sustain a similar argument. Yet, if it seems a more conventional historical novel in form, I argue that it is still uncommonly sensitive to the geohistorical and spatial dimensions of the present global moment. Indeed, its invitation that we transport ourselves to the imagined (New) Amsterdam of Dejima – the comparison is Mitchell’s own (2010, 16) – entails a forceful de-centring of the ‘Golden Age’ Amsterdam that is recreated in such excited and rose-coloured prose by popular novelists David Liss and Deborah Moggach,

among others. In the process, it subverts the geography of Euro-centrality which these airport fiction writers allow to pass unquestioned. Both *Netherland* and *The Thousand Autumns*, then, participate in what Walter D. Mignolo has so usefully described as ‘the restitution of space and location’ under globalization – globalization, in his analysis, creating ‘the conditions to think spatially rather than chronologically’, or, instituting a social imaginary in which a multiplicity of histories, memories, and temporalities are no longer synchronized by a single forceful narrative of progress but in which they can be seen to co-exist and co-relate through *spatial* coordinates (1998, 36-7).

## **Cosmopolitanism, Authorship, and Literary Form**

So far I have sought to introduce a general critical framework for understanding the formal challenges taken up by the novels under discussion here insofar as they qualify as ‘global’ and cosmopolitan. Before submitting O’Neill’s and Mitchell’s novels to closer critical scrutiny, however, some remarks are in order about the terms in which both authors conceive of the novel as a cosmopolitan literary form. Put differently, the question to address is how their authorial practices – and, on another level, their authorial subjectivities – form instances of cosmopolitanization, fashioned in response to the globalized, transnational mode of citizenship which both O’Neill and Mitchell so self-consciously – even flauntily – inhabit.

In interviews and elsewhere, both Mitchell and O’Neill define their authorship in terms that recall the established modernist trope that yokes together literature and exile. Mitchell, writing on his publisher’s website, feels it is a ‘lack of belonging’ that ‘encourages’ him ‘to write’: ‘I lack a sense of citizenship in the real world, and in some ways, commitment to it. To compensate, I stake out a life in the country called writing’. He thereby defines his cosmopolitan detachment as positive, as a kind of freedom from communal claims that drives his creativity.<sup>7</sup> O’Neill, by contrast, experiences his cosmopolitan detachment largely negatively, as a threat to a stable sense of self. For him the most appealing model of identity seems to be that of national belonging; he idealizes it because of how it speaks to our affective need for inclusion within a larger communal whole. That the characters in O’Neill’s work who respond most keenly to the fantasies of nationhood are darkly tragic figures – Chuck Ramkissoon in *Netherland*, the author’s Irish grandfather in the autobiographical *Blood-Dark Track* – does not detract from the point. It is in the shadow of these figures’ capacity to bestow meaning and narrative coherence on their lives that O’Neill’s witness-personas experience their post-national state in terms of a second-order loss, as a default condition that does not offer the fulfilment which they ascribe to the experience of an ‘imagined community’.<sup>8</sup>

If there are important qualitative differences between how both authors experience and assess the cosmopolitan condition, how does this bear on their experiments with literary form and narrative technique? In the most general terms, both strive to give expression to the need to recover agency and a sense of community

in the face of the disjointed, disorientating spatio-temporalities of the global. In so doing, both are interested in patterns and tropes of fragmentation, but only to place them in tension with an ideal of totality or wholeness. In this regard it is relevant to recall that Mitchell established his reputation with planet-spanning, composite narratives held together by ‘a kind of synthetic or sutured omniscience that transcends any single individual’s experience and spans [the] disjunct mise-en-scènes’ (Barnard 2009, 212). *Ghostwritten* and *Cloud Atlas*, for example, are *tour du monde* novels in which the ‘apparent brokenness’ of the narrative strands paradoxically asserts a sense of global solidarity and oneness across the different layers of space and time. As Berthold Schoene has put it, each of Mitchell’s novels ‘needs to be reviewed as an elaborate compositeness, caught in an ongoing process of self-constitution. Opposed to postmodernist fragmentation, this compositeness is designed to preserve the singularity of each segment as an integral building block’ (Schoene 2009, 98). O’Neill, in contrast, meets the challenge to achieve coherence and oneness on the level of tone and style, through a sophisticated use of the ‘interior voice’. In a brief meditation on ‘The Relevance of Cosmopolitanism’, written for *The Atlantic*, he emphasizes how cosmopolitanism poses challenges for first-person narration and the evocation of inwardness, particularly because the cosmopolitan novelist cannot take ‘communal legitimation’ for granted but relates to something larger than himself by making himself a moral centre. Hence, the task at hand is to ‘internalize’ what it means to live in, and indeed belong to a global community: ‘it does seem that those who internalize the new world have every chance of writing something newly interesting’ (O’Neill 2009c). The result is a lyrical realism that recalls F. Scott Fitzgerald and Saul Bellow, and which is heavily invested in an ideal of deep subjectivity.

The Dutch strand in *The Thousand Autumns* and in *Netherland* needs to be understood in light of these substantive differences between both authors’ cosmopolitan aesthetic. While *The Thousand Autumns* does not have the composite and hyperlinked character of Mitchell’s *tour du monde* novels, it uses Dejima as a focal point for exploring various forms of cultural (re)translation and doubling – which is to say that it realizes its author’s transnational multiperspectivism in other ways. As a trading outpost Dejima was wedged (in the late 1790s) between Japanese, Chinese, Dutch, and British parties, which regarded each other with intense curiosity and mistrust. Through a technique of largely external focalization, Mitchell’s reader sees a whole crowd of characters play out the tensions, inequalities, and struggles of a global playing field – stark reversals of fate stressing the volatility of history and suggesting the deeper interconnectedness of individual lives. The Dutch strand in *Netherland*, too, is complexly interwoven with other threads of historical significance – 9/11, the financial crisis that is about to erupt – and has a macro-historical resonance with the theme of ‘Dutch decline’. However, the narrator’s Dutchness remains curiously external to him; for all his introspective attempts to repossess his past as a child in The Hague, it remains uninhabitable from across the gulf of time and space – its exoticism only enhanced by the pre-mediated quality of the descriptions of Dutch scenery that saturate his flashbacks. In effect, the Dutch strand in *Netherland* has a distinctly spectral quality to it, just as that in *The Thousand Autumns* appears strangely

unmoored. In the following analysis, then, articulations of (New) Amsterdam and other signifiers of ‘Dutchness’ in both novels will need to be treated in terms of their place within the global imaginary as a whole – as strategic lenses through which the very idea of the ‘global’ is being interrogated, specifically in the dimensions of memory, time, and space.

### ***Netherland*: Tracing Memories of New Amsterdam**

No discussion of *Netherland*, it seems, can afford to ignore the comparison with *The Great Gatsby* which so quickly established itself as an obligatory trope in the early reviews. Not only does O’Neill’s narrator, Hans van den Broek, play a twenty-first century Nick Carraway to Chuck Ramkissoo’s Jay Gatsby, the different modes of Hans’s and Chuck’s socialization and self-reinvention as newcomers to the United States bring up-to-date Fitzgerald’s critique of the American dream. Indeed, *Netherland* asserts the persistent relevance of this critique by transposing it onto a global scale and by re-articulating it within a post-colonial, post-national, and even (in O’Neill’s phrase) ‘post-American’ framework. The novel insists throughout that the American dream has gone global, as if unstuck from American space.<sup>9</sup>

For Hans and his wife Rachel, the dream’s appeal makes itself felt in London: in 1998 they decide to ‘drop in on New York for a year or three’ because they enjoy a cosmopolitan lifestyle (2009b, 1). Pre-9/11 New York also speaks strongly to their sense of entitlement and easy way with money; it is certainly telling that when Hans, on arrival, got the ‘impression ... that making a million bucks in New York was essentially a question of walking down the street’, this is left to speak for itself, as if his sizeable fortune came as easy to him as this (120). Chuck, meanwhile, is hailed by the American dream from the other side of globalization’s dividing force. For him, an immigrant from Trinidad, the dream stands more nakedly for possibilities that can only be pursued through relentless competition and at great personal risk – a process in which being West-Indian and black ‘like Coca-Cola’ is a distinct disadvantage (21). To make his way up Chuck skillfully trades in one identity for another, as Gatsby did before him; yet the scheme that is to make his fortune – he plans to build an international cricket stadium in New York, and to capitalize on the global television rights – founders on lack of access to contacts and money and, underlying that, on his own grandiose belief in ‘thinking fantastic’ (104). As a business associate puts it on looking back on Chuck’s life and death: ‘There’s a limit to what Americans understand. The limit is cricket’ (332-3).<sup>10</sup> One of the important things which the contrast between Hans and Chuck underlines, then, is how a globalized Americanism determines economic and social life trajectories in radically different and unequal ways. It redeems Hans that awareness of this inflects his voice as a witness-narrator – if not always on a conscious level. Like Nick Carraway, he is the epitome of the privileged bystander and observer, a kind of compromised moral centre who – his own emotional susceptibility notwithstanding – is more likely to survive misfortune and mishap than the man whose tragedy he narrates.

It is a measure of O'Neill's engagement with Fitzgerald's work that the parallels with *The Great Gatsby* extend to the way in which *Netherland*, too, anchors its diagnosis of cultural crisis in a richly textured understanding of the past, investigating the value of history for purposes of identity work and cultural critique. It is well-known that Fitzgerald initially meant to situate *The Great Gatsby* in the immediate aftermath of the American Civil War. Yet in its final form, as one critic has written, the novel 'does not cast [its] meditation' on American history 'in the form of a traditional historical novel'; rather, it 'achieves a more powerful effect by rooting the novel solidly in the immediate present and juxtaposing that corrupted present with the luminous possibilities of a rapidly receding past' (Rohrkemper 1985, 153). On the one hand, it does this by means of allusions to historical figures such as Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, whose moral codes form (ineffective) models for Gatsby's socialization; on the other, it achieves its effect by alluding to spaces and landscapes which resonate historically with the American dream narrative, as in the novel's famous closing reference to Dutch sailors' sighting of (soon-to-be) New Amsterdam on board Henry Hudson's ship *De Halve Maen* in 1609 – 'face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to [man's] capacity for wonder' (Fitzgerald 1991, 140). If *Netherland* brings a similar historical sensibility to bear on its project, I should not wish to suggest that O'Neill merely transposes Fitzgerald's project to a more recent period, as if simply to propel it forward into the early twenty-first century. On the contrary, *Netherland* is astutely aware that globalization creates new kinds of alienation that can only very partially be expressed through the traditional dimensions of national history, time, and space – filled as the novel is with non-places, aerial perspectives and views, and images of macro-geographical disorientation or 'disjuncture' (in Arjun Appadurai's term). If *The Great Gatsby* is about 'the tragedy of time', as O'Neill has put it in an interview with *The Guardian*, the 'tragedy' in *Netherland* 'is more concerned with space, or dislocation. Time washes back and forth like the tide, but the real struggle is for a sense of place' (Anthony 2008). It is in this regard that the novel's articulation of New York's Dutch heritage is relevant to our inquiry; by unravelling the geographized, spatialized use it makes of the city's New Amsterdam past, we may be able to clarify the globalized spatio-temporal structures of the text more generally.

Perhaps the most self-conscious indication that O'Neill uses images and markers of Dutchness to express historical or temporal disjuncture is Hans's comparison of himself to Rip Van Winkle, the eponymous hero of Washington Irving's 'Diedrich Knickerbocker' tale who wakes up to a post-revolutionary America after a sleep of twenty years (115). The immediate context for the comparison is a flashback in the novel's second part, where Hans recalls a visit made to Holland shortly before his mother's death in the spring of 2000. As he meditates on the orderly, predictable, almost stationary condition of the residential area in The Hague where he grew up, and on the ghostly character which so many places and people have come to assume for him since his departure for New York, Hans feels doubly alienated in the country of his childhood. The streetscapes of The Hague remind him of a miniature city, making him feel Gargantuan in-

side his mother's house (112). What makes this moment truly Knickerbockerian is its intensely painterly and visual quality – Hans being a scopophilic narrator who is 'constantly looking – glancing through windows and peering under things',<sup>11</sup> and whose pointed lyricisms shatter habituated responses to the urban and natural environments, blowing vision out of proportion through expressive, almost cubistic visual vignettes ('The rinsed taxis, hissing over fresh slush, shone like grapefruits' [88]; 'Snowflakes like coffee grinds blackened the insect screen' [124]; 'Clouds like rats ran across the sky' [153]). Intriguingly, Hans's Rip Van Winkle moment in *The Hague* illuminates another one earlier on in the novel. Travelling to Albany-Rensselaer on the Maple Leaf Express, the first thing Hans sees on waking up from a nap are the Tappan Zee Bridge and a view of Tarrytown, which he evokes through lyrical landscape descriptions that strongly recall Washington Irving's Hudson River Valley tales. Characteristically, Hans himself is not aware here of having entered Knickerbocker country, with its strong association of ghosts and haunted places (cf. Richardson 2008). There resides a supreme irony in the fact that he gets distracted by an anthology of *Dutch Nursery Rhymes in Colonial Times*, issued by New York's Holland Society, which makes him realize that he 'knew next to nothing about the ancient Dutch presence in America' (79). In fact, the book – a gift from Chuck – contains rhymes and songs that connect directly to the area Hans is passing through, the old patroonship of Rensselaerswyck, as if to insist on the uncanny reality of the Dutch traces which punctuate this landscape.

Considered together, both Rip Van Winkle moments in *Netherland* show how the novel superimposes layers of Dutchness onto a landscape that is seen through eyes which are strangely indifferent – even oblivious – to such heritage. The novel sets different sets of cultural signifiers off against each other, but only to insist on their failure to form a meaningful whole in the eye of the cosmopolitan beholder. *Netherland's* evocation of New York City, too, is animated with residues and survivals of Dutch heritage which are spectral and unreal, making eery claims to the reader's attention if not to Hans's own. Such survivals are most conspicuously present in the form of street and place names; they range from Van Cortlandt Park – where Rachel sees cricketers play in ways that remind her of a Brueghel painting – to Dutch Kills Playground, Amsterdam Avenue, and Gansevoort Street (10, 103, 119, 121).<sup>12</sup> What, it should be asked, is the meaning of such resonances and allusions in today's context of globalization/cosmopolitanization? What is the point of making New York's geography so highly symbolically charged and suggestive of historical significance, while the narrator does not begin to feel hailed by the Dutch past – neither his own nor his newly adopted city's? On one level, *Netherland* is a bold and experimental revisitation of the Dutch 'founding mythology' of the city that was established by Irving's Knickerbockerian *History of New York* of 1809: a satirical-historical text that established the 'New Amsterdam genre' which flourished in New York for much of the nineteenth century, and which, like O'Neill's novel, took ample interest in the markers of Dutch heritage that had survived in the city's geography and street names. (Elizabeth Bradley, writing about the Dutch heritage vogue that emerged from the Irvingite paradigm, speaks aptly of 'a kind of roadside concordance to actual city fathers,

offering clues for contemporary New Yorkers to the people and events that had shaped the Dutch colony' [2010, 28-9]). On another level, however, *Netherland* seems to take precious little interest in this 'founding mythology', aware as it is that the appeal and resonance of New York's Dutch heritage have waned in an age of globalized multiculturalism – indeed, that knowledge of it is hardly an important component of New Yorkers' social and urban literacy anymore. Intriguingly, however, it is precisely on this level that the Rip Van Winkle connection asserts its continuing relevance. What it brings into focus is that history and memory are categories that cannot be relied upon to constitute the self – politically, morally, existentially – in today's global and cosmopolitan age. Whatever interpellative force Dutch markers of history and identity can be said to have retained in the world of the novel is de-activated through the filter of Hans's strangely passive, detached narratorial stance, as if *Netherland* proposes to see the cosmopolitan self as thrown into a heritage-less state where it has ceased to feel ownership of the memories and legacies it is entitled to call its own. Like Rip, Hans is radically disconnected, or dispossessed, through time.

However, if we read *Netherland* as staging a crisis in cosmopolitan memory formation, as I propose we do, it is certainly puzzling that the novel repeatedly articulates its interest in Dutch heritage through the intervention of Chuck – the more historically minded of the two friends, whose 'pedagogic streak' is responsible for many lengthy historical excursions (214). In view of the novel's critique of post- or neocolonial inequalities and their persistence in modern urban settings, the strategy to make Chuck, not Hans, the centre of historical awareness is responsible for many tragic ironies. After all, many of the geographical markers of Dutchness to which Chuck alerts us are tied to the history of Dutch colonial mercantilism; they are birthmarks of today's capitalist order, focusing our attention on the role which the Dutch United Provinces played in establishing the geographies and spatialities of capital in the region. Indeed, the very area that Hans travels through when he unwraps Chuck's gift to him, the book of Dutch nursery rhymes, recalls the policy of the United Provinces to delineate areas where the Dutch West India Company could monopolize trade; Rensselaerswyck, a product of the 'privatization' of foreign policy that gave the company its short but impactful span of power, was the only settlement or 'patroonship' of New Netherland that successfully maintained itself against the claims of indigenous residents (Gehring 2000). Likewise, the Gowanus Canal, where Chuck's remains are dredged up in 2006, points back to one of the first real-estate deals in New York history, the purchase of land by Dutch settlers at 'Gowanus' in 1636, and thus to the history of colonial dispossession that attended the introduction of European forms of land ownership (Stiles 1867, 23). Of the many ways in which New Amsterdam and New Netherland may speak to us in the present, then, *Netherland* emphasizes their historic role in instituting modern colonial and post- or neocolonial relationships – a resonance which is all the more striking as old structures of privilege can be seen to reassert themselves in the novel, with Hans, the Dutchman, being firmly included in a closed bulwark of privilege to which Chuck, the ultimate outsider figure, fails to gain admission. Indeed, while Hans is oblivious to New York's Dutch heritage, as we have seen, he is deeply

implicated in the early twenty-first century neoliberal order, being an expert in ‘large-cap oil and gas stocks’ who advises on ‘the oil production capacity of an American-occupied Iraq’ around the time of the U.S.-led invasion of 2003 (130). O’Neill has written elsewhere how, for him, ‘the urge to uncover the past’ forms ‘a component of the inextinguishable and tormenting urge for justice’ (2009a, 323). That he makes the memory of early-modern Dutch colonialism speak to today’s context of neoliberal geopolitics is one of the finer points that *Netherland* makes about the pressures on global remembrance. The novel’s overriding message is that the promise of equal opportunity and social mobility which the American dream holds out is now effective transnationally, across borders – but also, that in the final vision it is a sham, unable to hide the persistent historical imbalance by which a colonial dynamic of disentitlement, exclusion, and ‘othering’ has stubbornly remained in force.

*Netherland* articulates New York’s Dutch heritage, then, to ask incisive questions about the politics of memory in today’s global age. The problem the novel dramatizes is how individual, national, and localized memories may preserve their morally constitutive power in an age that has introduced unprecedented experiences of rupture and disjuncture to modern urban life. Let me turn to a final example of this before considering, in conclusion, the question how *Netherland* achieves some kind of redemption from its predicament by means of Hans’s post-realistic style and voice.

The example occurs towards the end of the novel’s second part, where Chuck takes Hans to the cemetery of a Reformed Protestant Dutch church near Flatbush Avenue in order to visit, as he tells him, ‘the graves of Brooklyn’s original settlers and their descendants’ (203). Chuck, of course, exemplifies a different – and arguably less modern – kind of memory culture than Hans: a national/American memory culture against Hans’s post-national/cosmopolitan one. The contrast is thrown into relief when Hans does not respond to the Brooklyn cemetery as Chuck expects him to. While the place is held up to him as a *lieu de mémoire* that ought to speak to his Dutch roots, his thoughts testify to his deepening alienation and incapacity to find a community of belonging:

We walked among the headstones. A few names had not yet been completely effaced: Jansen, van Dam, de Jong ... I practically heard clogs ringing on the flagstones. But then what? What was one supposed to do with such information? I had no idea what to feel or what to think, no idea, in short, of what I might do to discharge the obligation of remembrance that fixed itself to one in this anomalous place, which offered so little shade from the incomprehensible rays of the past. Also, it had quite recently struck me with force that I did not want to join the New York dead. I associated this multitude with the vast burying grounds that may be glimpsed from the expressways of Queens, in particular that shabbily crowded graveyard with the monuments and tombs rising, as thousands of motorists are daily made to contemplate, in a necropolitan replica of the Manhattan skyline in the background. A quality of abnormal neglect and dismalness attached to this proliferation of urban graves, and each time I hastened by, invariably on my way into the city from JFK, I was



reminded of the tradition of oblivion in force in this city – in which, howling ambulances aside, I went for years without ever seeing a sign of funerary activity. (The moment came, as everybody knows, when that changed.) (203-4)

In an irony that is typical of the novel, Hans participates in New York's culture of 'oblivion' even while indicting it, seeing the inscriptions on the tombstones as mere 'information'. In this regard, the scene chimes with the novel's programmatic opening passages, where Hans says 'that New York City insists on memory's repetitive mower – on the sort of purposeful post-mortem that has the effect ... of cutting the grassy past to manageable proportions' (2). Notice that memory is here evoked as *purposeful* rather than *purposive* (i.e., imbued with intrinsic purpose): Hans's New York is less a place of mourning, of coming to terms with loss, with ghosts from the past, than of a utilitarian kind of maintenance work which reduces the workings of memory to a routine hygienic procedure, leaving the inner turmoil and conflicts of the self unalleviated and unaddressed. The paradox is that Chuck, the worshipper of the American dream, the believer who finds in American history a narrative about personal destiny, is less caught up in this crisis of memory or 'working through' (*Durcharbeitung*) than the thoughtful and intellectualized Hans. But then, as one critic has put it, Chuck takes on the role of an 'authenticity fetish', a figure whose understanding of the world appears to have a wholeness and a freshness to it to which Hans can only aspire (Smith 2008). As in *The Great Gatsby*, there is a sense in which the two men are bound together by an unconfessed elective affinity – a deficient sense of the real that manifests itself as 'dreaming' on the tragic hero's part, and as disenchantment on the part of the narrator.

In one of the most astute discussions of *Netherland* to date, British author Zadie Smith has considered O'Neill's novel in terms of a crisis of literary realism. 'In *Netherland*', Smith writes, 'only one's own subjectivity is really authentic' (2008). As a description of the witness-narrator's perspective and mental state this seems very apt; but if it is meant as an aesthetic criticism of the novel, I would add that the profound unreality with which so many relationships and events in *Netherland* are suffused appears to be consistent with the text's rather bleak assessment of the condition of cosmopolitan selfhood, specifically in terms of the possibilities it offers for successful interiorization. I have already noted the visual descriptions and similes that form such a striking feature of O'Neill's lyrical realism. Smith and other critics see the similes as overshooting the mark, as cramped attempts to breathe life into a first-person narrator whose voice they find unconvincing.<sup>13</sup> In the reading advanced here, however, the visual flourishes of *Netherland* are fully motivated: they result from the novel's search for objective correlatives to match the strangely vacuous subject position of someone whose cosmopolitan, moneyed lifestyle has placed him outside history and the social. The novel's aerial aesthetic may illustrate the point. When Hans's wife and child move back to London, Hans starts to cross continents and time zones by means of digital as well as physical travel. This leads to some dizzying evocations of the globe as a non-place which casts the most personal and intimate connections in a falsely sentimental light:

flying on Google's satellite function, night after night I surreptitiously travelled to England. Starting with a hybrid map of the United States, I moved the navigation box across the North Atlantic and began my fall from the stratosphere: successively, into a brown and beige and greenish Europe bounded by Wuppertal, Groningen, Leeds, Caen ... that part of England between Grantham and Yeovil; that part between Bedford and Brighton; and then Greater London, its north and south pieces, jigsawed by the Thames, never quite interlocking ... From my balloonist's vantage point, aloft at a few hundred metres, the scene was depthless. My son's dormer was visible, and the blue inflated pool and the red BMW; but there was no way to see more, or deeper. I was stuck. (162-3)

Many other images in *Netherland* evoke 'the mishmashing of spatial dimensions' to strengthen this sense of isolation and disconnection (337). The result is a kind of visual deconstruction of the privileged cosmopolitan gaze, the jet-setter's 'view from above', which discovers in the logic of globality the 'profound nihilism' which philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, for one, has found in it in theory. For Nancy, 'accessing the planetary, the covering of the world in all its totality, [makes] the world at the same time disappear, as the meaning of the totalizing movement also disappears. The access to totality, in the sense of the global and of the planetary, is at the same time the disappearing of the world'.<sup>14</sup> This, in a nutshell, is the predicament to which Hans's Dutch-inflected voice seems to strive to give expression: moving between different spatio-temporalities, in his memory and in the imagination, his challenge is to think through what it means to be globally de-linked and disconnected, and to recover strategies for interiorization that help reconstitute the self as a moral centre. This is what makes his voice so urgent and unique, in spite of the odd hotchpotch of ingredients that go into its making. An unlikely blend of Nick Carraway, Diedrich Knickerbocker, and Pico Iyer, supplemented with a liberal admixture of post-9/11 melancholia and existential angst, Hans van den Broek is yet strangely compelling as a poet of interstitiality and global disjuncture.

### ***The Thousand Autumns: Remembering Dejima and the Spectre of 'Dutch Decline'***

David Mitchell's *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* evokes the final years of the Dutch East India Company from the perspective of the trading stronghold of Dejima, located on an artificial island in the bay of Nagasaki in Edo-period Japan. For the most part, the novel takes place between July 1799 and October 1800: that is, in the months following the VOC's nationalization by the former United Provinces, but preceding the final expiration of its charter in December 1800. The atmosphere that is conjured up is appropriately one of crisis, disorientation, and decline. The Dutch mercantile empire nears an inglorious end – one that looks all the more uncertain because of the shifting post-revolutionary situation at home. The Japanese are shown to be vulnerable, too, as their tradition

of isolationism has made them otherworldly and unsavvy – Dejima, at the time, still forming their only window on the world. The British, finally, back up their commercial threat to the Dutch with a strong display of naval power, while the novel's final part insists that their ascent to hegemony would by no means bring progress – that it would only give a new face to moral rot. Like *Netherland*, then, *The Thousand Autumns* threads images and markers of Dutchness through a larger historical canvas – but more directly than O'Neill's novel, it takes as its thematic concern the cataclysmic changes wrought by a pending world-hegemonic shift. To clarify how *The Thousand Autumns* represents an alternative trajectory for the cosmopolitan novel, specifically in terms of how it fosters a cosmopolitan memory culture, let me consider two aspects that stand out: Mitchell's multiperspectivism and his treatment of the theme of 'Dutch decline'.

By Mitchell's own account, the choice to make Dejima the focal point in his novel stemmed from his long-standing interest in interrogating and subverting (national) cultural stereotypes and clichés:

We think of Japan at the time as a closed-off country, but it wasn't – Japan possessed the keyhole of Dejima to peer through, to keep abreast of international events and observe the fate of countries and races that tried to ignore the rise of Europe and its new technologies. Moreover, Dejima inverts the common Orientalist terms – on this tiny man-made island, it was the whites who were corralled, fleeced, and exoticized. Cees Nooteboom says that all countries are different, but Japan is differently different. Dejima is a differently different cultural abnormality ... How could I not want to write about it? (Begley and Mitchell 2010, 192)

If for a long time, Dejima was used exclusively by the Dutch, whose habits and doings were jealously watched by the Japanese authorities, Mitchell's cast of characters is designed to bring out to the full this state of heightened intercultural sensitivity and alertness. For the most part, events are focalized through the eyes of a young clerk from Domburg, the pastor's son Jacob de Zoet, whose religiosity and conscientiousness place him at a moral distance from the corruption that is hollowing out the VOC from within. Meanwhile his fascination for a scientist and medico, Dr. Marinus, opens his eyes to the literature of Enlightenment: Jacob reads the Bible, but also Adam Smith. At the same time, Mitchell's choice for a clever Japanese midwife, Orito Aibagawa, as the woman Jacob falls in love with allows him to explore the idea of in-betweenness also from the other side. As Jacob and Orito are caught between two worlds, their thwarted love lays bare a drama of cross-cultural distance – gesturing, by implication, and melodramatically, to a utopia of global oneness and togetherness where such distance would no longer be a hindrance.

Many features of *The Thousand Autumns* combine to foreground and complicate the multiperspectivism of its plot and structural design: e.g., the juxtaposition of different temporalities (in the novel's chapter headings, the Gregorian calendar alternates with Japan's lunar calendar and Japanese era names), and the thematization of translation and the problem of (un)translatability (Mitch-

ell renders extensive conversations between Dutch and Japanese characters in self-consciously Englishized direct speech, to the point that the novel sometimes smacks of a translation). The result is that *The Thousand Autumns* achieves a clear break with the historical novel's traditional investment in a single national perspective. Indeed, while Mitchell's treatment of interculturality often veers to the corny and the clichéd, and while the encounter of civilizations that he stages is somewhat platitudinous and schematic – he indulges in crude orientalist pastiche by featuring a subplot about a Japanese nunnery which turns out to be the gothic location for sex crimes and infanticide<sup>15</sup> – this has not prevented his readers from finding in his inversion of the conventions of traditional historical fiction a 'cosmopolitan' quality or message. *The Guardian*, for example, has praised *The Thousand Autumns* for its 'transmigrations of empathy' and its commitment to English self-othering: 'In the Dutch world you feel the Dutch-ness; in the Japanese world, you feel events taking place from within the consciousness of the Japanese characters. And when the English arrive, it takes a moment to realize that you are experiencing them as the aliens in the diplomatic triangle' (Linklater 2010). Likewise, the scholarship on Mitchell's earlier work identifies a certain ethical potential in his characteristic strategy to inhabit various localized, subjective voices so as to subvert or deconstruct cultural stereotypes 'from within' (Nihei 2009; cf. Dillon 2011).

But the novel's most remarkable gesture towards 'globality' surely lies in its thematization of the historical cliché of 'Dutch decline' – a byword, conventionally, for the pronounced economic decline that may follow a period of hegemony. That Mitchell plays liberally on the idea of Dutch decline is obvious: as Lieutenant Hovell, Captain Penhaligon, and other characters on board the HMS *Phoebus* put it in the novel's burlesque and stormy final part, when the bankruptcy of the VOC is the topic of the day, the Dutch 'are too rooted in their Golden Age to notice the changing world': 'This is why the VOC collapsed, and why their much-vaunted Dutch Republic looks set to join Poland in History's dustbin of extinct nations' (380). The irony is that Mitchell's readers know to be suspicious of the onset of British hegemony that is being announced here: while Hovell and Penhaligon look forward to 'the British Nineteenth Century' and even to a 'British Dejima' (385, 408), the reader understands that the bell will toll for the British Empire, too. Mitchell's persistent use of perspectival doubleness makes only too clear that his 'tale of Dutch lassitude' is repeatable, the roles and fates reversible (381). Indeed, *The Thousand Autumns* is a typical David Mitchell novel in that it articulates a cyclical conception of history which strongly emphasizes moral decay – only to offer glimpses of redemption when a (mock-)heroic role is forced upon someone by circumstance, or when historical events that are only half fathomable bring out a character's gift for suffering. In this sense, Jacob de Zoet is a typical Mitchell hero: unknowing without being naïve, perceptive but unable to see the situation as a whole, he is a centre of consciousness that focuses the reader's thoughts on larger economic and political currents whose contours may be clear only in the hindsight of history. The historical process itself emerges from Mitchell's narrative as a kind of tragi-comedy, as a tale that figures the bleakest examples of alienation and dehumanization but which still, somehow, can be told in the registers of melodrama and the burlesque.

While the theme of economic decline has obvious resonance in today's context, it may be asked what the politics is of this kind of historical representation. How does it situate the reader in relation to today's systemic crises? To what extent does it promote a cosmopolitan ethos? First, it is worth stressing that the reversibility of roles and fates is an established historiographical trope in the literature on economic (and moral) decline. Giovanni Arrighi's insight is relevant, adopted from Marx and Braudel, that the decline of one hegemon inaugurates the rise of another: 'autumn becomes a spring elsewhere, producing a series of interconnected developments' (2009, 72). To this, Immanuel Wallerstein has added the further relativization that the 'autumn' of an economic world power does not need to involve drama or rupture. Indeed, Mitchell's trope of a 'thousand autumns' is very apt for conjuring the idea of protracted decay and self-survival which Wallerstein invites us to associate with hegemonic demise: 'The fruit of hegemony is "decline", but the process is not as painful as one might think because it is scarcely perceived until long past the peak' (1982, 122). These words throw interesting light on *The Thousand Autumns*, where, for all its fast-paced plotting, the real action always seems to take place elsewhere. (When Jacob returns to Zeeland for some final meditative years, the novel's conclusion has to labour to make us forget how weightless he is, for we realize that he was always already living through the tail end of an 'autumn', always already a mere cipher of history). Next, and on a more critical note, while *The Thousand Autumns* speaks to present-day anxieties about the fragility of economic systems, Mitchell's dependence on cliché and his flirtation with postmodern flatness and historical pastiche must be said to mark the limits to this kind of 'globally conscious' representation. Risking a large generalization, I would venture to say that introspective first-person narration in the vein of *Netherland* may be the more promising narratorial register for the global or cosmopolitan novel, if we wish this category of fiction to do more than take globalization and its discontents as a theme – that is, if we want the challenges of a global modernity to be met by new narrative and aesthetic forms that are ready to match its complexity. In this sense, there is a critical choice to be made between Mitchell's paratactical technique versus O'Neill's interstitial one, between the former's commitment to multiperspectivism and the latter's to deep interiority and to a struggle for new forms of perception and experience: two kinds of global aesthetic are opposed, which suggest different directions for the global novel and for the articulation of global memories.

### **Conclusion: Towards a 'Memory of the Global Past'?**

In 'The Cosmopolitan Society and Its Enemies', sociologist Ulrich Beck asks what globalization and the cosmopolitanization of modern social life 'mean in the dimension of *time* and (*collective*) *memory*' (2002, 27). The question is a pertinent one in view of the fact that globalization theory has had a kind of conjoined momentum with the 'spatial turn' in the humanities and social sciences, relegating the emergent temporalities and historicities of the global to the margins of inquiry. Intriguingly, Beck's answer is that 'people all over the world' are now 're-

flecting on a *shared collective future*' instead of the 'nation-based memory of the past' which dominated social imaginaries for so long. In his view, the 'definition and construction of collectivity in cosmopolitan societies' is future-oriented to an unprecedented degree: 'It is the future, not the past, which "integrates" the cosmopolitan age' (27, italics in original). It is true that there are several problems with Beck's thesis. Apart from the fact that globalization does not only erode national thinking, but can also be seen to generate the opposite effect, leading to resurgent nationalisms in new forms, it is problematic that the new orientation towards the future which Beck observes is, by his definition, crisis-bound. Yet what Beck does help bring into focus is the role which the historically minded novel, as a custodian of collective cultural memory, may play in the development of a new cosmopolitan sensibility or in what he calls the 'internalization' of globalization. What role does historical fiction play in this process? What kind of agency does it have in it (surely, a ticklish question, given the commodified logic of modern global culture)? How does it participate in the shift in temporal awareness which Beck has signalled and in which he places a utopian hope?

Three points are in order, and in making them I wish to keep the idea of a nascent global 'time-space', as articulated in my reading of *Netherland* and *The Thousand Autumns*, at the back of my mind. First, it should give pause for thought that both novels discover in the themes of economic decline, geopolitical crisis, and the (pending) collapse of commercial empires an uncanny resonance with the present moment of systemic transition. While these are all time-honoured themes, what is remarkable is that both novels treat them within a conception of the *longue durée* that replaces the naturalized, seemingly 'neutral' temporalities and developmental models of the traditional national novel – anchored in Benedict Anderson's 'meanwhile' principle with its assumption of homogeneous, 'empty' time – with various and pluriform modalities of time that are only loosely held together by global economic trends and business cycles, while the disjunctures and interstices between them are submitted to conscious elaboration and thought (e.g., the 'temporal currents' in which Hans van den Broek senses himself to be caught up; the calendric confusion created by Mitchell). Seen in this sense, both novels certainly form a new departure: far from simply enlarging the historical novel's temporal scale, they are de-linking it from its traditional, unilinear, and deeply ideological timeframe, proposing to treat temporality itself as a pertinent challenge in the formation of cosmopolitan societies and selves.

From this point, the second follows. *Netherland* and *The Thousand Autumns* show today's global and cosmopolitan novel engaged in a kind of 'cognitive mapping' (Fredric Jameson) that aims to make the spatio-temporalities of the global, no matter how abstract and intangible, more visible and comprehensible through experiments with narration and form. That a secondary world city like Amsterdam and its spectral shadow, the historical New Amsterdam that shimmers through the geography of modern-day New York, should form attractive sites for this kind of experimenting is not without significance. Both novels use (New) Amsterdam as a point of articulation within larger signifying structures that have the capacity to affirm cosmopolitanism as 'an ethos of macro-interdependencies, with an acute consciousness ... of the inescapabilities and particularities of places,

characters, historical trajectories, and fates' (Paul Rabinow, qtd. in Cheah and Robbins 1998, 1). That (New) Amsterdam can take on this function is due, I argue, to its historically ambiguous status as a de-centred centre of colonial governance and world trade. In the context of contemporary Anglophone fiction, this makes it an attractive hinge around which more or less contrary *tours du monde* can be shaped – evocations of it revisiting one-time centre-periphery nexus, re-tracking trade routes outside the reach of the British Empire, and stressing the contingency of capital's (macro)geography along the way.

Third and last, Beck's claim that the cosmopolitan imaginary is by its nature both crisis- and future-bound may be nuanced and qualified in light of the previous remarks. Particularly in its more experimental guises, and *pace* Beck, the cosmopolitan novel resists apocalyptic templates and scenarios – even when it conjures bleak and apocalyptic moods. It rather historicizes and contextualizes the systemic crises with which it deals by asking attention for their cyclical nature, and by considering individual lives and fates as subject to macro-historical trends, rhythms, and flows. It may be an overstatement, then, to maintain that there 'is no memory of the global past' (Beck 2002, 27). True, the emphatic way in which *Netherland* sets off individual against collective or 'global' memory, staging a crisis in memory 'ownership', may appear to underline Beck's very point – memory emerging from the novel as quite incapable of totalization, as only deepening the fragmented, partial, or solipsistic view. Yet memory works in many ways, and if one accepts from Derrida and Nancy, among others, that there is a strategic distinction to be made between globalization and the imaginative 'world making' which they refer to as 'mondialization', the idea of cosmopolitan memory formation (re)gains critical purchase.<sup>16</sup> Collective memory, considered under the rubric of the 'mondial', cosmopolitanizes in tension with the standardization of 'difference' and the commodification of 'otherness' which a modern globalizing culture must be seen to bring along. If O'Neill's and Mitchell's novels are anything to go by, the cosmopolitan novel has an important role to play in this dynamic field of tensions: its capacity to problematize global memory work – to render it dynamic, rooted, local, and particular – allows it to prefigure other futures than those which capital's trajectories seem inclined to lead towards.

## Notes

- 1 The literature on cosmopolitanism is voluminous. For the purpose of this chapter, the seminal volume edited by Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins has been particularly useful (1998).
- 2 The first section of this chapter was inspired by the retrospective literature on Giovanni Arrighi's life and work that appeared shortly before and after his death in June 2009, esp. the interview which David Harvey conducted for the *New Left Review* (2009) and the 'in memoriam' essay by Tom Reifer for the same journal (2009). Also useful was Fredric Jameson's appraisal of Arrighi's *The Long Twentieth Century* in 'Culture and Finance Capital' (see 143, from which the present summary takes some of its terms).
- 3 Cf. James Wood's observation that in the year of its publication, *Netherland* 'was consistently misread as a 9/11 novel, which stints what is most remarkable about it: that it is a post-colonial re-writing of *The Great Gatsby*' (2008). While I agree that categorizations of *Netherland* as a 9/11 (trauma) novel are facile and unproductive, this chapter also seeks to nuance the sense in which the novel can be understood as a 'post-colonial' text. As I read it,

- the novel is engaged in rethinking several ‘post-prefixed’ categories and conditions, including the post-national, the post-urban, and the post-historical.
- 4 That this marginal status is now subject to revision speaks from Benjamin Schmidt’s recently proposed notion of the ‘Dutch Atlantic’ (Schmidt 2009).
  - 5 E.g., I am thinking here of the historical fictions of Tracy Chevalier and Deborah Moggach, which conspicuously repackaged and re-digested ingredients from art catalogues and tourist guides so as to graft the reading experience onto a prior (real or imagined) experience of art tourism or travel. Cf. chapter 5 in this book for discussion of the pre- and re-mediated qualities of Moggach’s *Tulip Fever*.
  - 6 Cf. Saskia Sassen, who remarks that the global, in contrast to the national, ‘does not (yet) fully encompass the lived experience of actors or the domain of institutional orders and cultural formations; it persists as a partial condition’ (2001, 260). As Sassen’s qualified ‘(yet)’ underlines, this problem may be structural now that the ‘unified spatiotemporality’ of the nation-state has been superseded by ‘multiple spatialities and temporalities that are at best organizable into something approximating a spatiotemporal order’ (260).
  - 7 Mitchell in ‘Japan and My Writing’ in *Boldtype* (2000), an online publication of Random House.
  - 8 If in *Netherland*, this is illustrated by Hans van den Broek, an expatriate Dutchman who unconvincedly follows in Chuck’s footsteps in the attempt to acquire American citizenship, in *Blood-Dark Track* it is illustrated by O’Neill himself as memoirist: researching his grandfather’s life, he reads an Irish anthem with a strong sense that the republicans who acted in its name ‘were undoubtedly *superior to me as moral agents*’ (2009a, 246; italics in original). Significantly, although O’Neill goes on to pick this response apart as falsely sentimental, or even as a dangerous interpellation, he does allow it to define his cosmopolitanism as incapacitating. For him, the problem of cosmopolitanism under late or global capitalism is defined by the idea that post-national, hyphenated identities undermine one’s ability to function as a moral and political actor. Ultimately, the problem of cosmopolitanism figures as a problem of moral self-constitution in O’Neill’s work.
  - 9 ‘Post-national’ and ‘post-American’ are labels proposed by Joseph O’Neill himself apropos of his novel. See the interview with Travis Elborough that is appended to the Fourth Estate edition of *Netherland* (2009b, 8), and also that with Charlie Reilly in *Contemporary Literature* (2011, 14). The idea that the American dream narrative has survived into a ‘post-American’ age is not as contradictory as it may sound, considering the extent to which American-style capitalism and cultural globalization can be seen to converge. McNeill generally supports readings of *Netherland* as an ‘update’ of Fitzgerald’s novel, albeit with some important qualifications; see Bacon (2008) and Reilly (2011, 12–13).
  - 10 Space forbids a discussion of the role of cricket in *Netherland*. Suffice it to say that cricket brings into focus some significant contrasts between the cosmopolitan Hans, who finds in it a symbol of social justice, and the Americanized Trinidadian Chuck, who accepts it as a colonial model of socialization or of the inculcation of imperial ideas. For further discussion and contextualization of cricket in *Netherland*, see Tadié (2010).
  - 11 O’Neill, speaking about Hans in the interview appended to the novel’s Fourth Estate edition (2009, 4).
  - 12 In a neatly chiasmic variation, O’Neill also Americanizes the geography of The Hague: he has Hans’s mother die in President Kennedylaan.
  - 13 Zadie Smith is not the only critic to find fault with the more lyrical aspects of Hans’s introspective voice. See also Garner, who finds that the scenes in the Chelsea Hotel ‘carry cheap metaphorical freight’ (2008), and Kunkel, who opines that the ‘old-fashioned lyrical decorum of O’Neill’s prose’ deprives it of ‘real plausibility’ (2008).
  - 14 See the ‘Translators’ Introduction’ by Raffoul and Pettigrew in Nancy (2007, 3).
  - 15 Many critics have noted how Mitchell’s dependence on national and cultural stereotyping, guiltily self-parodic, belies the ambitious cosmopolitan design of his novels. E.g., this internal contradiction has been identified in *Ghostwritten* (Barnard 2009, 213) and also in the middle section of *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* (Reynolds 2010).
  - 16 See Derrida (2011) and Nancy (2007). Disappointingly, the only book-length study to date that promises to instrumentalize Jean-Luc Nancy’s insights for the analysis of contemporary ‘cosmopolitan’ novels in English – David Mitchell’s included – fails to take account of this vital critical distinction. In so doing, it indiscriminately conflates the ‘cosmopolitan’ and the ‘global’, leaving the former term devoid of critical/ethical meaning (Schoene 2009).



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## **Part II: Amsterdam Global Village: (Inter)National Imaginings**



## 7. Form, Punch, Caress: Johan van der Keuken's Global Amsterdam

Patricia Pisters

After many years of travelling the world with his camera, in the early 1990s documentary filmmaker Johan van der Keuken expressed his surprise at the many changes that had taken place in his hometown of Amsterdam: 'To tell the truth, I didn't recognize all the cultures that had settled there in the past few decades, nor the subcultures and "gangs" that had sprung up'. At the same time, he realized that 'my city, Amsterdam, was the place where everything that I could see everywhere else was represented', and that in order to understand the world, all he needed to do was direct his camera to his own neighbourhood (van der Keuken, qtd. in Albera 2006, 16). This is when he decided to make *Amsterdam Global Village*, a four-hour documentary filmed in Amsterdam in the mid-1990s. He made it in his characteristic fashion, travelling through the city with his camera, visiting some of its inhabitants in their homes, listening to their stories, and sometimes following them to places elsewhere in the world – but always to return.

Johan van der Keuken captured Amsterdam with his camera from the very start of his career, following his studies at the Institut des Hautes Études Cinématographiques (IDHEC) in Paris in the late 1950s. As he regularly applied his camera to Amsterdam through several decades, his work forms a rich – and very personal – archive of historical impressions of an ever-changing city. Looking at some key films situated in Amsterdam, such as *Beppie* (1965), *Four Walls* (1965), *Iconoclasm – A Storm of Images* (1982), and *Amsterdam Global Village* (1996), this essay presents a double portrait of the Amsterdam corpus within van der Keuken's oeuvre. On the one hand, it charts the development of van der Keuken's different camera eyes, looking at how he cast in turns formal, angry, and loving gazes on the city, and exploring the social and political implications of these different stylistic registers. On the other hand, the portrait to be presented here is that of Amsterdam itself and its inhabitants in their development over time, with a special focus on the increasing intrusion of the 'global' in the everyday life and culture of the city. In the final part of this essay, van der Keuken's vision of Amsterdam as a 'global village' will be considered in terms of a number of formal aspects, including the interest in 'mosaic narration' which is now a salient feature of many transnationally oriented films, and which van der Keuken was one of the first filmmakers to explore.

First, however, let me say a few introductory words about Johan van der Keuken's style and about the different phases that can be distinguished in his work.

To begin with, it is noticeable that as a documentary filmmaker van der Keuken always defied any strict distinction between realistic and fictional representation. While he always turned his camera on the 'here and now' – in a strictly thematic sense, many of his films come close to a form of social realism – he never made a secret of the fact that he often asked people to perform their role for him, that he sometimes restaged a scene, or that he used the presence of his camera to provoke a 'coincidence'. A documentary about van der Keuken's work, *Living with One's Eyes* (Ramón Gieling, 1997), exposes this method explicitly. It follows van der Keuken during the shooting of his beautiful short film *To Sang Photo Studio* (1997), a portrait of a Chinese photographer who was asked by van der Keuken to make family portraits of several shopkeepers and retailers in his own street, the Ferdinand Bolstraat in the vibrant, diverse neighbourhood of De Pijp. In succession, we encounter the shopkeepers of Hollywood Hair, a Kurdish restaurant, a Dutch grocery shop, and a Pakistani clothes shop as well as a Surinamese travel agent and a jeweller from Hong Kong. They are all portrayed by van der Keuken in their own store and then followed into To Sang's studio, where Mr. To Sang takes their picture. Both van der Keuken's filmed portraits of the shopkeepers and To Sang's photographs of them are clearly staged, and the doubling of those different acts of staging self-consciously foregrounds the constructedness, the *mise-en-scène*, of what the viewer gets to see. Nonetheless, van der Keuken's film succeeds in offering a fascinating insight into the multicultural Amsterdam of the 1990s. This play in the border territory between fiction and reality, between staging and spontaneity, but also between control and coincidence, was always part of van der Keuken's style. 'Reality is not something that can be captured in images', he once said in an interview, 'but you can create a kind of structure, and claim: within this structure I can have a notion of what reality could be. In this sense, this Amsterdam is my reality'.<sup>1</sup>

An important clue regarding van der Keuken's style is provided by the filmmaker's own comparison of his camera action with, successively, a musical performance, a boxing punch, and a caressing touch. First, as musical instrument, the camera allows the player to play a part, to improvise, and to transform reality into abstract forms. But the camera can also give a punch in the face, produce an angry gesture, or denounce injustice in response to the hardships and painful scenes to which it is a witness. Finally, the camera can be gentle, caressing what it films, especially when it zooms in on the human figure or the face (van der Keuken 2001, 99). These three different functions of the camera – each a blend of aesthetic, political, and human values – always interact in van der Keuken's work and form the basis of his style. For the purpose of this essay, it is important to add that in different periods of his career, one of these camera functions could be seen to prevail. In the first period of his work, in the late 1950s and 1960s, he used film predominantly as a formal and aesthetic medium. Then, from the 1970s until the mid-1980s, the 'punch' function prevails; not coincidentally, this is also the most directly political period in his oeuvre. In the last period, which stretches right up to the filmmaker's death in January 2001, the human touch and the 'caressing' camera are the most salient features. In focusing on images of Amsterdam from those different phases in his development we will see that van der

Keuken's camera eye captured and constructed different cities – even if the 'form, punch, and caress' functions always combined in different ways, the distinction between them not always being crystal clear.

### **Form: Cramped Spaces, Cramped Minds**

In the early years, the 1960s, van der Keuken's dominant concern was with the formal aspects of film. In this period he made several television films that have become classics of Dutch cinema, such as *Blind Child* (1964) and *Herman Slobbe, Blind Child 2* (1966), where he seeks to render the world of blind children in dynamic images and sounds. At the end of *Blind Child 2* van der Keuken comments in voice-over, in his characteristic thoughtful voice, that everything in film is form. Saying farewell to his little protagonist he says: 'Herman is a form. Bye bye, dear form'. Films of this period that are shot in Amsterdam show the same interest in formal aspects. Most famous at the time was *Beppie* (1965). Beppie was one of van der Keuken's girls next door on the Achtergracht, where the filmmaker then lived. In the film he follows the lively and talkative girl as she walks to school, rehearses multiplication tables, hangs out in the street, and plays ring and run with her friends; we also see her in the swimming pool and at the hairdresser's.<sup>2</sup> Important here is that everything is told through the dynamics of the film, including the rhythm of the framing and cutting of the images. The film is also a good example of how van der Keuken fashioned his own role as filmmaker and interviewer, quietly drawing attention to the 'outsider' role he played in the lives of those he filmed. Beppie lives with her mother and seven sisters in a very tiny apartment. While the girl talks freely about how they cope in their small and overcrowded rooms, Beppie's mother would not allow the camera to enter the house; she speaks with van der Keuken outside, visibly ill at ease.

The cramped spaces in *Beppie* point to the persistently bad housing situation in Amsterdam in the 1960s. Following the war there was a serious shortage of social housing residences, and the quality of the available units was poor. In 1969, a memorandum on 'urban renewal' would conclude that of a total of 260,000 social housing residences in Amsterdam, no fewer than 100,000 stood in urgent need of renovation while another 44,000 would have to be demolished – telling figures indeed (de Liagre Böhl 2010, 84). The problem is addressed head-on in another short film of this period, *Four Walls* (1965). *Four Walls* opens with some drawings, scale models, and sketched designs by the Dutch structuralist architect Herman Hertzberger. Van der Keuken's voice-over comments emphasize the utopian promise held out by those beautiful forms: 'There is a world of forms, human and rich in imagination, within our reach. But most people live in gloom, countless of them in misery, without protection'. At the last sentence the image cuts to a door that resembles the squared windows in some of the architectural sketches. As it turns out, however, this is the door of the Social Housing Office. We see people walk busily in and out or line up in front of a desk, while the soundtrack offers snippets of conversation between city dwellers and office staff: accounts of bad living conditions, complaints about the absence of a heat-



ing system, requests for ‘certificates of urgency’ that would entitle one to a place on a waiting list. A long scene halfway through the film shows how desperate many of those urban residents are, how without hope, apparently resigned to the situation. While the camera shows them passively waiting, van der Keuken lets Cliff Richard’s song sum up the prevailing attitude: ‘Pretend You’re Happy When You’re Blue’. From a present-day perspective, what is striking is the strict, even exclusive focus on local issues and problems as well as the absence of any form of protest on the part of the urban dwellers. This narrow perspective and introspective approach can be seen as characteristic of Dutch film generally in the post-war years. (Another important documentary of this period, Bert Haanstra’s *Everyman* of 1963, shows a similarly narrow focus on national and local concerns, be it in a more humoristic and friendly way). Van der Keuken however does offer an implicit protest against the conditions his camera sees. He depicts the harsh urban reality of the 1960s by steering the camera through some of the inner city’s neglected houses, many of them small and cramped. Towards the end of the film, a girl on a squeaky swing in a narrow corridor symbolizes how the limitations of those physical spaces also constrain one’s mental space. The swing squeaks angrily as the camera rests on it to let the sensation of discomfort sink in (Figure 7.1). It is a great example of how van der Keuken’s ‘formal’ camera eye in the early films was uniquely equipped to register both the spatial and mental ‘narrowness’ involved in the contemporary urban experience.



7.1. The squeaky swing in *Four Walls* (1965).

### **Punch: Global Parallels**

Van der Keuken’s focus was soon to expand dramatically. Towards the end of the 1960s the situation in Amsterdam changed, and so did the mentality of its residents; likewise, the filmmaker changed his style and opened his work to the outside world. *The Spirit of the Times* (1968) brings together two significant

international trends of this period: on the one hand, the widespread yearning for ‘inner liberation’, expressed in the sexual revolution and the hippie movement; on the other hand, the desire to liberate society from injustice and social constraints, which found expression in political manifestations, left-wing student revolts, and emancipatory struggles of all sorts. In this film, formal images are intercut with more directly political images that take on global issues. The film starts with pro- and anti-America demonstrations held in Amsterdam during the Vietnam War and following the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. (Figure 7.2); it also features music and theatre performances and staged street and office scenes – some of a hallucinatory character – to underline the desire of the hippie movement to break with traditional lifestyles. But we also see more abstract images: clouds, raindrops falling in water, a field of waving grain, empty streets, rocks, iron bars. Thus poetry and politics are interlaced in this film, which van der Keuken saw as transitional within his oeuvre. An anecdote, told many years later, affords some insight into how the filmmaker’s political consciousness was developing. Remembering the summer of 1968, van der Keuken recalls how at that time his house in Amsterdam was always full of people ‘from the scene’. One day in August he received a phone call from the VPRO broadcasting company with the request that he join a film crew as cameraman to make a documentary about the war in Biafra, Africa. He took the advice of his hippie friends that you can take your ‘free internal universe’ with you wherever you go, and accepted the job: ‘After eight days of witnessing the famine and the panic, I understood what was going on in the world. During my absence [my wife] Yvonne had a cosmic experience with some sort of guru. That was the end of our marriage. She left, first for London, and then for India, where she had a baby with this guru ... I found Nosh, with whom I’m still together. And I found my way to a much more directly political type of filmmaking, which then seemed absolutely necessary’ (van der Keuken 2001, 100).



7.2. Street demonstration in *The Spirit of the Times* (1968).

What followed was a period of politically engaged filmmaking, in which van der Keuken took on the power imbalance between ‘North’ and ‘South’, between rich and poor, between sustainable development and capitalist exploitation and abuses. This often resulted in harsh, even grating images, filmed with a lot of anger. He went to Palestine to express support for the Palestinian cause (*The Palestinians*, 1976); he filmed the fishermen of the Waddensee, in the north of the Netherlands, to raise awareness about ecological problems and the exhaustibility of natural resources (*The Flat Jungle*, 1978); he also travelled to South America, Africa, and elsewhere to denounce poverty, inequality, and other kinds of social injustice. While his interest in questions of form clearly never waned, what prevailed in this period was the ‘force de frappe’ of his camera, leading to politically outspoken images. Van der Keuken’s interest in Amsterdam during this period changed accordingly: in his films of the 1970s and early 1980s it becomes a place of transition, a place that is connected to the world in its own typical ways – or one that simply runs parallel to other places, but without directly intersecting with them, in ways that can only be evoked through a kind of loose juxtaposition.

*The Way South* (1980), the record of a long journey from Amsterdam to Egypt, is a case in point. The opening scenes of this film make an interesting comparison to the treatment of Amsterdam’s housing problems in *Four Walls*. While the people in *Four Walls* suffered mostly in silence, the generation of city dwellers that is portrayed in *The Way South* no longer accepts the housing situation, challenging the fact that many large, expensive buildings stand empty while numerous people go without a decent place to live. This leads to the squatters’ movement that has become such an integral part of Dutch cultural memory of the 1970s and early 1980s, and to the violent riots that marked the coronation of Queen Beatrix in Amsterdam on 30 April 1980, and in which the housing shortage figured as an issue (‘*Geen Woning, Geen Kroning*’, ‘No House, No Crown’, was the much-heard slogan). Van der Keuken films the squatters from the day of the coronation onwards, regularly returning to them in subsequent months in between his extensive travels abroad. In June 1980, he interviews a squatter who has newly joined a community he has been following, a recently divorced elderly lady who is welcomed by the collective. She expresses her admiration for the fact that the new generation no longer accepts to endure the city’s dismal housing policies; admitting how easily her own generation was pushed into a rut, she is in awe of the squatters, and feels inspired by them to do and speak as she wishes. The spirit of the times that van der Keuken captures, then, is one in which revolution, resistance, and protest have become meaningful concepts. What stands out from a present-day perspective is how idealistic the squatters’ motives are, how well they manage to operate collectively, bound together by solidarity, and how they get support from others such as lawyers who offer *pro deo* help to deal with legal issues.<sup>3</sup>

However, *The Way South* only uses Amsterdam as a starting point and home base in the larger narrative of the filmmaker’s journey. From Amsterdam, van der Keuken travels via Paris, the south of France, Rome, and southern Italy to Cairo and finally southern Egypt. ‘I go from face to face, in the treadmill of over-

production, madness, and profit for the few', he comments in voice-over. Apart from the individuals he films and the stories he collects while making his way south, he also pays constant attention to housing conditions, turning this into a unifying theme of the film: in successive order, the viewer gets to see neglected immigrant apartments in Paris, an old peasant shed in the south of France, the high staircases which an elderly Eritrean woman in Rome needs to climb to get to her apartment, and the overcrowded shelters that house the Egyptian poor. In all those cases, dismal housing conditions or sheer lack of space jeopardize the chance of a fulfilling life. The people in Egypt, however, do not complain. One man maintains that in spite of everything, the government is beyond reproach; in a family that lives in abject poverty, we see family members sustain the fiction that everything is OK ('Let's keep the truth between ourselves', we read in the translation of the Arabic they speak among them). The contrast with the protesting, rebellious generation in Amsterdam around the same time is striking, raising the question to what extent those highly different situations and struggles are comparable. *The Way South* resists easy answers to this question. The film ends with a scene in a crowded Cairo street, showing a family on the pavement in front of a grocery store, eating bread. The camera then zooms in on the abstract figures painted on the outside of the shop (recalling the opening shots in *Four Walls*). 'Back in the city, I think it is rather difficult to touch reality', van der Keuken says in voice-over, while his hand reaches out to the wall to touch it. Then the film cuts back to a wall in Amsterdam which shows the punk slogan 'No Future'. While the soundtrack continues with traffic noise from Cairo, more cross-cutting occurs between images from Cairo and Amsterdam: we see another wall text, saying '*Doorgaan*' ('Carry On'), then the busy street in Cairo again. By means of this restless, shifty montage, van der Keuken seems to ask what connects the subversive and revolutionary subcultures of Amsterdam and the marginalized and dispossessed in the southern parts of the world. One may conclude that there is a connection, on some level of experience, in how one's agency is always constrained by larger structures of power; one may equally conclude that those cultures run parallel without ever really meeting, as if separated by a kind of global 'disjuncture' which is also difficult to overcome in the medium of film.

Other films of this period deal separately with Amsterdam and with instances of injustice and inequality elsewhere in the (non-Western) world. The rebellious countercultures of the north are portrayed more extensively in *Iconoclasm – A Storm of Images* (1982), which is centred around the Amsterdam club De Melkweg (The Milky Way) (Figure 7.3). Here van der Keuken follows a young punk girl who lives in a squat and who talks to him about her choices in life, her resentment against the establishment, and her dreams. He films her in the streets of Amsterdam, in her room, and at music performances in De Melkweg. Together with the other artists and visitors who frequent this famous former milk factory, this yields a portrait of an Amsterdam generation which differs significantly from that of the 1960s; especially when seen alongside other films of van der Keuken, *Iconoclasm* registers profound changes in the life of the city and a new mentality, a new 'spirit of the times', in which the filmmaker shares. The trilogy *North-South* – consisting of *Journal* (1972), *The White Castle* (1973), and *The New*



73. De Melkweg in *Iconoclasm – A Storm of Images* (1982).

*Ice Age* (1974) – explores the differences and parallels between various forms of injustice that can be seen around the world, using a camera or montage that punches the viewer in the face but never forgets to look for the beauty of a form or the softness of a touch. In *The New Ice Age*, van der Keuken films exploited mine workers in Peru, parallel to a strand in which he follows three sisters and a brother who work in an ice cream factory in the north of the Netherlands. Images of the two worlds are often cut together to reveal stark oppositions: the cold in the ice cream factory versus the heat of the ovens in the Peruvian mines, relative security versus poverty and everyday struggle for survival. At the same time the filmmaker looks for parallels, primarily on the formal level of a rhythm, a visual pattern, or a movement: the elevator taking the miners up and down corresponds to the movement of the factory machines, for example. An interest in aesthetic, formal beauty here expresses political anger and commitment, with the balance of power between North and South, but also within the North and within the South, being questioned. Generally speaking, in this middle period of van der Keuken's oeuvre, the global is increasingly articulated as the defining horizon of the political, also *within* the Netherlands. (Not coincidentally, a similar development is notable in the so-called VPRO documentary school of 1970s Dutch television, a school that sought to counter the narrow-mindedness of Dutch public opinion by means of satire and contrary historical perspectives on, for instance, the Dutch colonial past in Indonesia).<sup>4</sup>

### **Caress: The World Nearby**

The period of Johan van der Keuken's 'punching' camera concludes with *I ♥ \$* (1986), a film about the abuses of global capitalism set in the Netherlands, Geneva, Hong Kong, and New York. In retrospect, *I ♥ \$* marks another turning point in the development of the filmmaker's style and perspective on global relations.

During the shooting he fell ill, and after a slow recovery his vision of the world had changed. This is not to say that his political concerns receded to the background; yet his camera became more open to the flows of life, more ‘caressing’, and also less angry and less certain of the truth it wanted to tell. The first film of van der Keuken’s final period, *The Eye Above the Well* (1990), neatly illustrates this: shot in India, it employs framings and reframings that are less strict and formal than in earlier work. The camera follows what it encounters, without insisting on a revolutionary ethic or any other message. As van der Keuken explained in an interview in 1997:

I have the feeling that over the last few years I have learned a lot about the camera. I used to reframe very often: not to make a completely new shot, but to make variations on the same shot, with something remaining just off-screen, just outside the frame, waiting to be discovered. ... Right now, I no longer have the feeling that I’m the one in charge of the framing, but rather, that I simply need to follow the camera. It goes its own way, and I follow. The Dutch are great ice skaters. When I was a child I had these wooden ice skates which one had to strap very tightly underneath one’s shoes. But the great ice skaters in Friesland wore those skates just underneath their socks, only very loosely strapped. The moment I really got the knack of ice-skating, I understood that it is indeed better to loosen the straps ... When one has found the right balance, one does not need tights straps. The same goes for the camera. The last few years I’ve been able to just ‘slide’ with the camera ... following the rhythm of what the camera gets to see. (van der Keuken 2001, 99)

This organic and fluid way of filming is also evident in *Amsterdam Global Village* (1996), the great achievement of van der Keuken’s final years. It has already been pointed out that in the early 1990s van der Keuken became aware that the city had changed quite drastically: it had turned into a ‘global village’, absorbing people from a range of cultural backgrounds. In consequence, his construction of Amsterdam in respect to the global no longer took the form of tracing parallel or contrasting developments between North and South, ‘here’ and ‘elsewhere’, focused on neocolonial power imbalances; rather, he started to bring the global into focus as having entered the city itself, where it invited him to be globally engaged ‘at home’. Van der Keuken’s new camera style was highly suitable for articulating this new vision of the city: a camera that is a passive receptacle, ‘following’ rather than leading, is well equipped to register the global in all its localized manifestations.

The complex structure of *Amsterdam Global Village* has been compared to the circular shape of the city’s seventeenth-century canal belt, to the movement of the water, and even to the layeredness of an onion. There are many shots in which the camera literally slides over the surface of the canals, observing the houses and the life of the city from that low level, so particular to Amsterdam’s geography. From this basic movement, the camera pauses for several people the filmmaker encounters and whom he follows into their homes and sometimes to their home countries far away, connecting Amsterdam to other parts of the world within the

film's flowing rhythm. Film scholar Serge Toubiana elucidates the film's structure and rhythm very eloquently in his description of it as 'a magnificent travelogue':

Johan van der Keuken lets his gaze drift over the surface of the world. From his home town of Amsterdam, he takes in its movement, its visible and secret currents. The film's movement is therefore circular and lateral, conveyed alternately through tracking shots, along the canals and streets, and in successively wider circles that end up rendering a sense of the world. We are taken to Bolivia, Chechnya, Sarajevo, Thailand in the course of encounters; motifs and stories develop in a film that, despite its length, maintains an incredible sense of lightness as it constantly drifts toward the outside world, interspersed with homecomings. There is grace in the way the film ceaselessly pivots on its own axis to embrace new horizons, then returns to its departure point from where it strikes out in new directions. It is this perpetual motion, from the centre moving outward, then from the outside toward the centre, that makes *Amsterdam Global Village* a fantastic global film. It is as though the film 'peels away' reality, removing successive layers of representations and forms. ... The world according to Johan van der Keuken could thus be described as an onion, and his film saga allows us to see the peelings. The circulation of images resembles the canals that weave through Amsterdam and lends the city the aspect of a rhizome. (Toubiana 2001, n.p.)

Insofar as the film can be said to have a separate Amsterdam narrative, it privileges the young Dutch-Moroccan delivery boy Khalid, sometimes seen as van der Keuken's alter ego. Khalid crisscrosses through town on his moped in ways that supplement the film's 'canal perspective' with another intense and very physical rendering of Amsterdam's rhizomic geography. The result is a four-hour long, dynamic and multifaceted portrait of Amsterdam as 'global village' in the mid-1990s. Among the numerous places the viewer gets to see are a Chinese school in the city centre, a Thai boxing school, a Ghanaian community centre in the Bijlmer (the scene of a funeral ceremony), nightclub Escape on Rembrandt Square, city parks where the homeless spend the night, and many other spaces that people share in this 'smallest of world cities'. Taken together, the stories and encounters constitute a 'mosaic narrative', a form now often seen as typical for transnational and global storytelling structures (cf. Pisters 2011).<sup>5</sup>

In regard to the 'global consciousness' that is articulated in *Amsterdam Global Village*, three strands in the narrative are particularly revealing. At the beginning of the film we meet Roberto, a Bolivian musician and cleaner, as he and his Dutch wife get an ultrasound scan to check on the wife's pregnancy. Later on, van der Keuken visits them in their apartment in the Bijlmer. An ambitious city development project in south-east Amsterdam, the Bijlmer was developed in the late 1960s and 1970s to alleviate the pressing housing problems that we remember from *Four Walls*. Although conceived as a modern and comfortable residential area, the plans for the neighbourhood were compromised and it soon gained the reputation of a problem area and no-go zone. What is beautiful about the encounter with Roberto is that van der Keuken looks beyond the external

harshness so often associated with this part of the city. While Roberto is holding his baby son Ayni, he talks about the experience of becoming a father, the hospital, the differences between life in Amsterdam and in the small Aymara village where he grew up and where, he recalls, there was no hospital, no tap water, no opportunity to attend pregnancy classes. Roberto likes the ethnic and cultural mix of the Bijlmer, but he misses the neighbourly spirit which he associates with Bolivia – a longing underlined by the meaning of his son’s name, which means ‘mutual help’ in Aymaran. In a beautiful transition sequence, Roberto plays the flute, and the sound of the air becomes the wind that then takes the viewer to Bolivia through the sky (Figure 7.4). This aerial perspective connects Amsterdam with other parts of the world, not as a parallel structure, but rather on an affective level, making us consider the pain and unsettlement involved in transnational stories of migration and separation. In Bolivia, we meet Roberto’s grief-stricken mother who talks about the hardships in her life. She is filmed just as van der Keuken films her son: mostly in close-up, with a loving and respectful camera eye that almost touches or strokes the faces of the people it encounters. Although the setting is far removed from Amsterdam, the story of Roberto’s Aymaran roots plays an integral role in the film; it underlines how the spaces and people of Amsterdam can be points of departure for opening up fresh perspectives on the world at large, potentially including every individual and community. In this sense, *Amsterdam Global Village* is a globalized response to the line from Dutch poet Bert Schierbeek which it quotes as its motto: ‘I always thought that life was 777 simultaneous stories’.



7.4. Roberto in *Amsterdam Global Village* (1996).





7.5. Khalid in *Amsterdam Global Village* (1996).

The second strand to be considered revolves around Khalid, the Dutch-Moroccan courier who speeds through the city to bring rolls of film and photos from professional labs to studios and editorial offices (Figure 7.5). I have already pointed out how Khalid's movements contribute to the film's structure and rhythm; he is an important formal and rhythmic element in van der Keuken's *Amsterdam*. In voice-over we get to hear his dreams and thoughts about the city, his work, and his friends. Two scenes connected to Khalid are very touching and revealing. In the first, van der Keuken films him in his small apartment. While we hear the beat of house music in the background, we see Khalid in close-up, his face bathing in low-key light against a sea of darkness; some of his friends, too, occasionally pop into view, their faces also key-lit. Part of the interest of the *mise-en-scène* here is intertextual: it recalls some of van der Keuken's earliest work, the photo albums *We Are 17* (1955) and *Behind Glass* (1957), in which he portrayed youngsters in Amsterdam in the 1950s. These photographs were controversial at the time because they did not conform to the dominant post-war mentality in which hard work and a spirit of 'rebuilding the country through united effort' were crucial components; instead, they announced a generation and a youth culture intent on finding its own path in life; staring out of a window, smoking a cigarette, doing nothing, those youths resisted the call on them to fit in. Khalid seems a modern update of these other youngsters in van der Keuken's work. With a gentle, lightly Moroccan-inflected voice he talks very openly about his life: about how he lived in a home from the age of nine, how he had to go to Morocco at the age of fifteen when his parents wanted to return, how he missed Amsterdam until he was allowed to come back, how he found a living, learned to drive a moped, deliver pizzas and now film rolls, working eleven hours a day, and how he looks forward to building a life for the future. In the other important scene, van der Keuken observes the daily gathering of a group of couriers

at Museum Square, most of them Dutch-Moroccan, Khalid among them. While they arrive on their mopeds or can be seen to smoke a joint, another group of youngsters, skaters, are engaged in their performances. Different worlds co-exist on the same square, in a choreographical ensemble of different bodies, musical preferences, and interests that simultaneously inhabit this public space. Not only do these two scenes counter the many clichéd negative images of Dutch-Moroccan boys seen in contemporary Dutch media discourse, they also universalize this multicultural group. As van der Keuken commented in an interview with *Cahiers du cinéma* conducted in 1996: ‘When we [first] tackled the idea of their group [of Khalid and his friends], I was unable to grasp what it was made up of. In fact, what mattered to them was simply being together, with their bikes, touching one another, smoking joints, in other words being part of a group’ (Toubiana 2001).<sup>6</sup> He even compares them to the group he belonged to when he himself was seventeen. Even if van der Keuken and his peers were preoccupied with rather different things (existentialism, poetry, bad red wine, heavy tobacco, jazz, French *chansons*), the basic pattern is the same: spending time with one’s peers, speaking a kind of coded language, being caught up in a group dynamic. Again, then, van der Keuken is looking for resonances with his earlier work and his own life. In so doing he affirms the universal dimension of the global city, emphasizing how it is of all times and places and how different generations can connect in it in spite of cultural change.

The themes of generational change and intergenerational connectedness also inform the third and final strand in the film to be considered here. It centres on the Dutch-Jewish Hennie Anke and her son, who are followed as they visit the apartment where they lived during the German occupation some fifty years before. They lived there until Hennie’s husband was called up to report to a work camp, which eventually led to his deportation; the mother and her son survived the war in hiding. In the mid-1990s, when van der Keuken was filming, the apartment turns out to be inhabited by a Surinamese mother and her son. While the Surinamese lady shows the former occupants around, she explains that the apartments in the block have all been renovated and enlarged; in her case, two former apartments were converted into one – living standards having improved significantly since the time of *Four Walls*. Usefully, with reference to the same scene, Thomas Elsaesser has proposed the term ‘double occupancy’ to describe the contemporality of different generations, the contemporaneity of different archives of memory and experience, within the spaces of the city:

As Hennie recalls the terrible years and the deportation of her husband, in this space we sense the lingering presence of two generations who have nothing in common either culturally or ethnically, and yet, whose succession and coexistence in memory and spoken record illuminate in a single image Dutch history of the twentieth century, from occupation to deportation, from colonialism to post-colonial immigration. Even if the fate of a Dutch-Jewish ‘*onderduiker*’ (a person in hiding during the Occupation) and of a Dutch-Surinamese immigrant are not strictly comparable, but amount to another asymmetry, the gesture of their farewell embrace shapes a fragile bond across

the cultural differences, establishing an image of double occupancy, as well as of life's transience that lends an almost utopian hope to these stories of exile, migration, and necessary homelessness told in *Amsterdam Global Village*. (Elsaesser 2005, 210)

Thus, while nothing in the apartment recalls the difficult lives of its former occupants, the space, as the scene of the emotionally charged encounter, creates a link between multiple historical events that function as temporal layers in the global city.

There is another sense, however, in which the notion of 'double occupancy' bears on van der Keuken's work. According to Elsaesser, the notion has a second sense that is specifically media-related: it refers to the way in which we increasingly occupy both the real, physical world and the world of the mediated image that adds so importantly to the layering of global and local connections in contemporary urban space. In the first half of the 1990s, new internet and screen cultures were slowly 'occupying' the city. While this new media reality was not of direct interest to van der Keuken when he was filming *Amsterdam Global Village*,<sup>7</sup> it forms an important subtext that allows us to clarify one important way in which the film may speak to us today. As Elsaesser indicates, by the early twenty-first century, following the events of 9/11, the new media reality had become all-pervasive in its 'performative dimension of ... acts of barbarity deliberately staged to produce shocking media images'; in this sense, 'modern media spaces have acquired the force of a first-order reality, by comparison with which the world of flesh and blood risks becoming a second-order realm, subservient to the order of spectacular effects' (113). It needs no arguing that this statement applies to the Amsterdam context, too: global politics after 9/11 changed the local Dutch situation, which saw the brutal murder of filmmaker and journalist Theo van Gogh in an Amsterdam street by a young Dutch-Moroccan Muslim fundamentalist in November 2004. It is precisely because the image, the spectacular, has gained such exuberant prominence under conditions of media globalization that it is worthwhile to revisit van der Keuken's films of the 1990s. The image of double occupancy in *Amsterdam Global Village* is part of the utopian dimension of his work – a dimension one may link to the tradition of tolerance for which the Netherlands historically is famous – and in this sense it offers a perspective on the globalized city that can counter some of the more stereotypical images of migrants, strangers, and other 'others' in the urban environment today.<sup>8</sup>

## Conclusion

Van der Keuken's mild, mellowed camera eye in *Amsterdam Global Village* shows that behind the many faces one sees in the city, behind the façades, windows, and closed doors, the global has entered the local: an intertwinement which he uncovers and picks apart by listening to a mosaic of stories, some of which he traces to their origins elsewhere in the world. By way of conclusion, it is worth considering the recent television series *A'DAM & E.V.A.* (2011) – directed by Norbert

ter Hall from a script by Robert Alberdingk Thijm – as an example of how van der Keuken’s legacy continues. Each episode follows the love story between Eva (a typical Amsterdam city girl) and Adam (a man in his early twenties who has moved to the capital from provincial Zeeland). Along the way the series drifts off to reveal the stories of other residents in this global city: an Antillean public servant who lives in the Bijlmer, elderly amnesiacs in a retirement home, Polish construction workers who mourn for a lost colleague, a pregnant Chilean woman and her boyfriend who work as cleaners in a hotel, a well-to-do gynaecologist who crosses the borders of medical ethics, and many others whose paths intersect with Adam and Eva’s in the streets and spaces of Amsterdam (a narrative device that is nicely captured by the pun in the title: A’DAM is short for Amsterdam, while E.V.A. stands for ‘*en vele anderen*’, ‘and many others’). The camera follows all these characters during one day in their lives, offering the viewer intriguing glimpses of the rich store of life stories which the city contains: touching, caressing, and celebrating in the form of a fictional mosaic the evolving reality of Johan van der Keuken’s global village.

## Notes

- 1 Johan van der Keuken, qtd. from an interview in 1996 on the website of the International Forum of New Cinema (see [www.arsenal-berlin.de/forumarchiv/forum97/f003e.html](http://www.arsenal-berlin.de/forumarchiv/forum97/f003e.html)).
- 2 In *Living with One’s Eye*, Beppie, now an adult woman, is interviewed to look back on the making of *Beppie*. She explains how she was promised ice cream or potato crisps as an incentive to perform her actions.
- 3 In the following years, the squatters’ movement would fall apart because of infighting and loss of idealism. Its pending collapse however is not yet evident at this point.
- 4 The VPRO school mentioned here includes documentary makers such as Hans Keller, Cherry Duyns, and Roelof Kiers. For discussion of the Dutch documentary tradition and the role of the VPRO in Dutch culture in the 1970s, see Cowie (1979), chapters 5 and 10.
- 5 In ‘The Mosaic Film: Nomadic Style and Politics in Transnational Media Culture’, I argue that mosaic narratives and multiple, fragmented storylines in contemporary cinema typically articulate different perspectives on transnational connections (Pisters 2011).
- 6 Serge Toubiana’s interview was first published in French. A Dutch translation is included in van der Keuken’s *Bewogen beelden* (2001, 87-99). An English translation was published by MoMA on the occasion of its Johan van der Keuken retrospective in New York in April-May 2001. For information on MoMA’s tribute to the filmmaker, see [www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2001/jvdk/](http://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2001/jvdk/).
- 7 Drawing on Elsaesser’s work, Jaap Kooijman observes an Americanized transnational style at work in modern Dutch cinema (Kooijman 2008). Van der Keuken, however, does not follow American narrative and media formats, even if the American ‘mosaic style’ has emerged very prominently as a general cinematographic style in the years following the production of *Amsterdam Global Village*.
- 8 In ‘Altijd maar schrijven over Marokkanen’ (2010), Joanne van der Leun argues that the Dutch media report very one-sidedly about criminality among young Dutch-Moroccan men.

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## **Television**

*A'DAM en E.V.A.* (Norbert ter Hall, 2011).



## 8. Rembrandt on Screen: Art Cinema, Cultural Heritage, and the Museumization of Urban Space

*Marco de Waard*

### 'Rembrandt 400' as Global Mega-Event

In 2006, Amsterdam and Leiden celebrated Rembrandt Year. For both cities the quatercentenary of Rembrandt's birth formed a major chance to showcase the 'Golden Age' painter and his orbit – and, in so doing, to shore up their status as centres for cultural heritage and destinations for cultural tourism. Amsterdam especially stood in dire need of an opportunity like this. If in previous decades its position in the European market for tourism and travel had weakened in the face of sharply increased inter-city competition, by the mid-1990s its reputation as a 'theme park' devoted to 'sex and drugs' seemed difficult to turn into a more positive city image or 'brand' (Dahles 1998; Nijman 1999; Kavaratzis and Ashworth 2006). What is more, the city's ambition to fight its way back into the race for dominance of Europe's geography of cultural capitals was complicated by the protracted – and costfully prolonged – closure for renovation purposes of both the Stedelijk Museum and large parts of the Rijksmuseum from 2003. In short, the city could do with a boost. The Rembrandt Year that crystallized was a truly global event, staging 'local' heritage in thoroughly place-bound ways while catering to national and, even more so, international publics. It squarely qualifies as one of those 'mega-events' which sociologist John Urry, following Maurice Roche, has proposed are characteristic of globalized cultural economies: events that form 'spatio-temporal moments of global condensation, involving the peculiarly intense "localization" of ... global events' in cities that present both themselves and the event which they host as irreplaceably 'unique' (Urry 2002, 154). In this sense, Rembrandt Year was arguably as much a global mega-event as any World Expo or Olympic Games.

Before considering the 'Rembrandt 400' project in more detail, it is worth giving some more thought to the special nexus between cultural heritage, place, and global cultural flow in the context of Amsterdam and the Netherlands since the early 2000s. Two points are in order. First, it has justly been said that for a variety of reasons, Dutch cultural tourism is uncommonly dependent on early-modern or 'Golden Age' heritage. This relative one-sidedness demands a ready inventiveness on the part of local tourist organizations, as it means that the same historic episodes need to be re-narrativized time and again; the bouquet of period styles on which tourist bureaux can draw is simply 'less visibly varied' in Amsterdam than



in cities like London, Paris, or Rome (Broomhall and Spinks 2010, 273). Given this situation, the possibilities afforded by the anniversary of a world-famous artist such as Rembrandt are of course invaluable: Rembrandt's life and work form just the kind of focal point through which a visitor's relationship with a place can be shaped into an 'experience' – a place-bound form of identification that seems to connect one to the real, 'authentic' past – that is culturally satisfying while also good for merchandize (Broomhall and Spinks 2009).<sup>1</sup> Second, while Dutch tourist narratives need to cater to foreign visitors who crave a 'Golden Age' experience, they need to take caution not to alienate domestic residents. The needs of cultural tourism and urban self-marketing create a special performative situation in which a collective cultural identity is negotiated both as a selling point abroad and as a narrative of belonging 'at home'. In this regard, it is highly relevant that Rembrandt Year 2006 took place not just against the backdrop of growing inter-city competition in Europe, as noted above, but that it came on the cusp of a renewal of public interest in national Dutch canons. Indeed, in the same year an officially instituted Canon Commission published its recommendations for a new canon of national history and culture to wide public debate: a project meant to serve purposes of cultural education and socialization that were charged with meaning in the post-9/11 context, marked as it was by critique of the multicultural society, the rise of conservative and right-wing populisms, and a generally felt decline of social cohesion (Lechner 2008, 90-102). If critics faulted the Canon Commission for making 'fatherlandish' choices in an old-fashioned, perhaps even reactionary sense, interest in the new canon was sustained; various publishing spin-offs, supplementary canons, and counter-canons testify that the project hit a vein.<sup>2</sup> The anxiety of 'Rembrandt 400' to include native Dutch visitors and city dwellers in the programme for Rembrandt Year 2006 underlines that it played on a kind of resurgent national sentiment and nostalgia, among others – a function not so much at odds with its primary appeal to foreign tourist visitors, as intricately linked to it through its general discourse of historical 'experience' and 'authenticity'.

The marketing and promotion campaign of Rembrandt Year was supervised by the Rembrandt 400 Foundation and carried out by the Netherlands Board of Tourism and Conventions (NBTC) under the auspices of Queen Beatrix in the role of patroness.<sup>3</sup> The range of projects which the NBTC coordinated involved many actors and settings, aiming – through their combined effect – to maximize visibility and to increase the inward flow of visitors and profits. Among the highlights on view in Amsterdam were the 'Rembrandt-Caravaggio' and 'Van Gogh and Rembrandt' exhibitions in the Van Gogh; the "'Jewish" Rembrandt' exhibition at the Jewish Historical Museum; four separate exhibitions in Rembrandt House Museum in Jodenbreestraat; and the 'Really Rembrandt?' and 'Rembrandt's Pupils' exhibitions which the Rijksmuseum put up at Schiphol Airport (using an arrangement that was meant to keep highlights from the collection in the public eye while some of the museum's main wings were closed).<sup>4</sup> In Rembrandt's native Leiden, the largest visitor draw was 'Rembrandt's Mother: Myth and Reality' in De Lakenhal, one of three Rembrandt-themed exhibitions organized there in that year. In addition, there were various kinds of theatre, mu-

sic, and multimedia productions to mark the occasion, such as the crowd-puller *Rembrandt: The Musical*, which ran for nearly half a year in the Koninklijk Theater Carré, and a commissioned play and installation in the Rijksmuseum by visual artist and filmmaker Peter Greenaway, whose Rembrandt films of the following years I will be analyzing shortly.<sup>5</sup> Outside the Netherlands, exhibitions were held and events took place in a range of places, including Auckland (New Zealand), Berlin, Brussels, Braunschweig, Bucharest, Budapest, Cambridge (Massachusetts), Cincinnati, Copenhagen, Dayton and Toledo (Ohio), Hamburg, Kassel, Kraków, London, Los Angeles, Melbourne, New York, Paris, Philadelphia, Phoenix, Portland, San Francisco, St. Petersburg, and Washington, D.C. While some of the exhibitions and events taking place here were important in their own right – e.g., the ‘Strokes of Genius: Rembrandt’s Prints and Drawings’ exhibition in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. – most of them were minor and small-scale. Yet they could all function as ‘tasters’ that whetted the appetite of the Amsterdam-bound cultural tourist, testifying to the NBTC’s skill in situating the city as a nodal point in a globalized cultural economy where it could hold its own against other cultural capitals (Esman 2006; Dickey 2006).<sup>6</sup>

Precisely how globally oriented Rembrandt Year was, and how successful it was in economic terms, appears from the figures. As the NBTC calculated in a press release in 2007: ‘A total of around 1.7 million unique visitors made more than 2.1 million visits to exhibitions or events from the core programme. Of these visitors, 69 per cent were from abroad, the majority of which – around 70 per cent – were European. ... Of all foreign visitors, 16 per cent (190,000) indicated that they had come to the Netherlands especially for Rembrandt 400’. The total amount spent by visitors on the official programme was 623 million euros, and the extra revenues from ‘additional spending’ by foreign visitors alone was 190 million euros, exceeding the 100 million euros estimated beforehand. As J.-M. Hessels, chairman of the Rembrandt 400 Foundation, commented in looking back: ‘this was the most successful cultural event ever held in the Netherlands’, one that ‘shows that a relatively modest investment can lead to a sizeable extra economic impetus’.<sup>7</sup> For a large part, the revenues consisted of the sale of food, drinks, admission tickets, hotel bills, and excursion fees. The sale of Rembrandt-focused merchandise must have been substantial too, judging from the spate of buyables launched on the market in 2006. They ranged from the scholarly to the comically ludicrous, from art catalogues and well-timed book publications by Rembrandt scholars Ernst van de Wetering and Gary Schwartz to Rembrandt t-shirts, mugs, and mousepads, and, at the very low end of the scale, the home-grown porn movie *Rembrandt’s Passion*. As Schwartz commented with some amusement, with Rembrandt the Netherlands has a very strong card to play, and playing it well means playing on all levels: ‘It’s like poker: You play your hands. When the cards aren’t there, you toss it in; and when you have a good hand, you play it for all it’s worth’ (qtd. in Esman 2006).

## 'Rembrandt 400' and the Museumization of Urban Space

For the purposes of this essay, it is important to historicize how Rembrandt Year 2006 was unique as an international event – that is, other than simply in terms of the scale of the revenues or the intensity of the mobilities involved. After all, any survey of Rembrandt in cultural memory over the past two centuries would incline one to argue that Rembrandt was always already an international invention, always already a *transnational* locus for defining 'Dutchness' and negotiating images of it at home and abroad.<sup>8</sup> It is worth recalling that the Rembrandt festivities of 1906 were also instigated with a view to Rembrandt's appeal abroad – and with such a keen eye for the commercial interests at stake that the *Algemeen Handelsblad* could complain that 'empty poses, hollow-sounding words, and publicity madness' put the tercentenary at risk (de Rooy 2007, 26-7).

At this place, the point to emphasize is that among the most notable features of Rembrandt Year 2006 was how it transformed the cultural geography of the city, tapping into an urban imaginary in which a city must be easily understandable or 'legible' by visitors who have no relationship with it as a place of work or residence – indeed, with the *genius loci* of the city, seen as an anthropological place – but only with its established art and heritage canons as legislated by publishing houses, museums, art galleries, and merchandize. If one concedes that this development was a defining feature of 'Rembrandt 400' (I will consider examples in a moment), it makes sense to approach it in terms of a double process of intervention in the built environment and in the spaces of the city. The first is what I call the 'geographization' of the artist's biography and the various narrative elements into which it breaks down, a process by which the city is used as a palimpsest onto which – real and virtual – articulations of Rembrandt as 'heritage' can be grafted. The second is the 'museumization' of urban space that results from this special use of the city's geography, a process by which city spaces come to occupy a continuum with gallery and exhibition spaces as it opens them up to inscription by the same textual and visual markers. Simply put, what the combination of both processes amounts to is the deployment of the urban spaces of the 'city of culture' as a text, put together by locally specific components but 'rewritten' so as to be legible – or, in a more interactive idiom, 'rewritable' – for global visitors or 'readers'. Following Jonathan Culler and John Urry on the semiotics of contemporary tourism, one might want to speak of a globalization of urban literacy that is driven by forceful economic and commercial interests, and which results in the re-presentation of the built environment of heritage centres like Amsterdam in the language of the theme park, the art catalogue, or the cultural tourist's guide (Culler 1988; Urry 2002).

In Rembrandt Year 2006, the double process I have sought to delineate could be seen to materialize in at least three ways. First, there was the transformation of the urban environment into, quite literally, a theme park or open-air museum. Leiden for example decorated the façades of some iconic buildings with banner-like reproductions of paintings and etchings from Rembrandt's early (pre-Amsterdam) period, selected for the occasion by Rembrandt expert Ernst van de Wetering. The result was a kind of heritage-themed environment art which,

although it was presented as an outside ‘exhibition’, came close to a form of guerilla marketing that aimed to shore up the city’s culture and heritage sectors. (Indeed, one only needs to consider the 1,100-square-meter billboard that was erected between Leiden’s train station and its city centre, depicting a huge bookshelf holding titles related to the ‘Golden Age’ and other historical themes, to realize how thin the line between guerilla marketing and outside ‘exhibitions’ is).<sup>9</sup> In the second place, there were smaller, more locally confined interventions in the urban environment such as the bronze *Night Watch* in 3D that stood on Amsterdam’s Rembrandt Square from 2006 till 2009. The Russian makers, who produced this ‘sculptured painting’ as an independent initiative, liked to present it in terms of a democratization of Rembrandt’s work – emphasizing how they struggled to get it accepted and placed, and how the interactive nature of a 3D museum piece contrived to return an old master ‘to the people’.<sup>10</sup> What this example underlines is that the radius of appeal of commemorations of this kind is very wide, exceeding official or ‘imposed’ forms of city (re)branding, and extending to bottom-up processes that are globalized in their own way. Third and last, Rembrandt Year intensified the practice of new, heritage-themed forms of historical learning and ‘experiencing’ in the city – corporeal as well as virtual ones. The website ‘Rembrandt in Amsterdam’ is a case in point. Highlighting places from the artist’s life on a modern city map, with a movable and clickable time axis to establish them as historical markers of authenticity, it used identification with ‘Rembrandt the person’ to unlock the city and its past.<sup>11</sup> The website resonated with publications that geographized Rembrandt’s (after)life by suggesting themed walking or cycling tours by which visitors could follow ‘in his footsteps’.<sup>12</sup> What is remarkable about such themed trajectories or geographized narratives is that they allow a fair degree of choice in regard to the narrative one prefers about the artist’s life. Whether it is the narrative of the philo-semitic Rembrandt, the contemporary of Menasseh ben Israel and Spinoza; the narrative of Rembrandt the tragic ‘genius’ whose loyalty to his art entailed his downfall and financial ruin; or that about Rembrandt the womanizer whose ‘turbulent’ love life with Geertje Dirckx and Hendrickje Stoffels, following Saskia’s death, is said to have scandalized Amsterdam’s burgher-regents: all these (more-or-less mythical) narratives the tourist-visitor is encouraged to map quite literally onto the city’s structures (e.g. the Jewish quarter, the ‘suburban’ Jordaan to which Rembrandt relocated from Jodenbreestraat in 1658) in ways that produce a geographized *effet de réel* and thus permit a sense of mastery over the city.

For the sake of historical perspective, let me stress one important qualitative difference which sets the events and practices described here off against earlier Rembrandt-themed events, such as the civic ‘Rembrandtfeesten’ of 1906: i.e., the difference between political *mobilizations* of Rembrandt within national, civic discourses of commemoration and remembrance, and distinctly less politicized *articulations* of the artist in the globalized, post-national language of historical ‘experience’ and ‘authenticity’, occurring within heritage discourses that only qualify as ‘national’ to the extent that, to cite Thomas Elsaesser, they offer ‘imperoNations’ of the nation(al) for globalized cultural markets (2005, 61).<sup>13</sup> For me, this issue of the erosion of the political under conditions of cultural globalization

is a vital one, and in what follows I shall be concerned to show how contemporary articulations of Rembrandt's life and work, as they inscribe themselves in the proliferating discourse of global cultural heritage, register a shift – in my view, a reduction – in the very possibility for political imagining in memory practices, urban representations, and art. My case study here will be Peter Greenaway's diptych of Rembrandt films, comprised of the biopic *Nightwatching* (2007) and the 'mockumentary' *Rembrandt's J'Accuse* (2008). Both films, I argue, respond to – and participate in – the geographization of artists' lives and legacies, the concomitant museumization of urban space, and what I have described as the rise of a new kind of globalized cultural literacy which is firmly tied up with the commercial promotion of 'cities of culture'. In so doing, both films allow us to gauge in all its complexity the relationship between cultural heritage tourism, art cinema itself as a privileged form of reflection on all things 'heritage' (privileged because of the distance it keeps from heritage film proper), and the transnational discourses of citizenship – or, more broadly, of political identification – which characterize the present moment of globalization in the Dutch and European contexts.

Central to my argument will be the spatial dimension. As I contend, it is especially by interrogating current notions and uses of (urban) space that Greenaway's Rembrandt films are doing important critical and imaginative work, even if they should also be seen as relying heavily, in terms of their conditions of production, on the 'cultural capital' with which the spaces which they re-imagine are suffused. Specifically, I want to make two spatial journeys through Greenaway's Rembrandt films and the larger corpus of Rembrandt biopics in which they take up position. The first journey centres on the studio and the exhibition space as leading themes or motifs in the filmmaker's art. Taking the lead from the ongoing critical debate about the relation between aesthetics and politics in Greenaway's oeuvre, I will focus on articulations of 'publicness' in the director's spatial imaginary and on the question how, and to what extent, he manages to re-politicize contemporary notions of urban and public space. The second journey takes a more external perspective on Greenaway's work: by revisiting the spatial structures of some of the older Rembrandt biopics to which his films are responsive, it seeks to provide his supposedly 'political' approach to space with a genealogy that should help to submit it to deconstruction and critique. In my view, critique is in order because the *politics of space* in the globalized, museumized 'city of culture' may leave little *space for politics* – in ways from which Greenaway's work, even if it can be said to resist the logic of de-politicization, is in the final end not exempt.

### **Peter Greenaway's Rembrandt Films and the Idea of Public Art**

The Rijksmuseum's invitation to Peter Greenaway to produce a series of works around Rembrandt and his *Night Watch* was no doubt a masterstroke. Greenaway is an English filmmaker, painter, librettist, multimedia artist, and 'veejay' (video jockey) who has been resident in Amsterdam since the late 1990s and

whose work is well-known for its sustained creative engagement of early-modern Netherlandic art history and culture (cf. Pascoe 2008). Among the defining concerns of his film art are the figure of the artist, especially in relation to the conditions of artistic production; the possibilities of exhibition making, curatorship, and the museum; and an interest in city spaces, castles, and country estates as the sites for politics – or at least for ‘publicness’ – and for the transmission and maintenance of collective cultural memory and heritage. In recent years, these concerns can be seen to have been reconfigured, and intensified in relation to each other, by Greenaway’s acceptance of many public commissions for site-specific art, such as the *Stairs 1 Geneva* project for Swiss television (1995), an installation in Fort Asperen in Southern Holland (2006), the *Peopling the Palaces* project at Venaria Reale (2007-10), and a multimedia installation at Castle Amerongen in the Dutch province of Utrecht (2011). This development is perhaps best understood in terms of Greenaway’s evolving relationship to the European film and heritage industries: if in an earlier phase he could still be presented as a kind of exile from Thatcherite Britain – an independent filmmaker who had stopped to rely on British government funding in the mid-1980s, and who has since financed his feature films with ‘creative international funding packages’ worked out by his Dutch producer Kees Kasander – in recent years the extent of his involvement with various ‘EC [or EU] schemes and directives’ has become notable, and with it the close convergence between his aesthetic and thematic interests as a film auteur and a European heritage culture that is focused on Europe’s ‘cultural capitals’ and most iconic sites and artworks (Willoquet-Maricondi 2008, 7-8). As I will argue, the projects that came out of the Rijksmuseum commission participate in this shift from autonomous ‘outsider’ – indeed, a late exponent of the European auteur tradition, and often an iconoclast and provocateur – to an artist who sees a role and responsibilities for himself in a transnational, pan-European public sphere. These responsibilities concern maintenance work on cultural memories seen as ‘defining’ in today’s ‘Europe of the regions’, but also, quite simply, maintaining a high level of accessibility in the face of sometimes forbidding art. As Greenaway himself has put it in recent interviews and lectures, his mission with commissioned public art is to ‘present material that is true to our received notions of history’, but also ‘to make it entertaining, to make it lively, ... to make it grab people’s attention’.<sup>14</sup> In doing so, the audience he keeps in mind is international, mobile, and not necessarily as ‘visually literate’ as the highbrow audiences implied by his 1980s and 1990s feature films.<sup>15</sup> In this sense, invitations that he repackage, reinvigorate, or re-present famous heritage sites or iconic artworks are incentives for his creativity – the commercial stakes involved by no means offending his sense of autonomy and auteurship. I will have more to say later on about how the persona of the public educator inflects Greenaway’s voice in his film art.

The three projects which Greenaway developed around Rembrandt and his *Night Watch* were: a play; an installation for two rooms in the Rijksmuseum’s Philips wing, to coincide with the Holland Festival of 2006; and the film diptych *Nightwatching* (2007) and *Rembrandt’s J’Accuse* (2008). By producing a series of intersecting, closely related projects Greenaway used a characteristic and

much-trying method: one of creative proliferation by which one master project, shaped around an historical or fictional character (i.e., Rembrandt van Rijn, his alter ego Tulse Luper in the *Tulse Luper Suitcases* project of the early 2000s), breaks into a string of composite projects which on the one hand may achieve a kind of cumulative effect between them, diversifying and intensifying the ways that audiences can respond, but which, on the other hand, can also baffle and confuse viewers as they refute attempts to distinguish between a ‘central’ artwork and its subordinate ‘spin-offs’ – in the process, disrupting the auteur-centred temporality through which the filmmaker establishes a pace or rhythm for his project that can be seen as uniquely his own.<sup>16</sup>

With this proviso in mind, let me consider *Nightwatching* and *Rembrandt's J'Accuse* as a self-contained pair of films. Arguably the most central piece in the list of Greenaway's Rembrandt projects, *Nightwatching* is the one to engage Rembrandt's life and work most fully, with *Rembrandt's J'Accuse* following in its trail as an ironic, pastichey re-telling of – and commentary on – the more political/critical strand contained in the biopic's plot. The story in both films centres on the year 1642, the year in which Rembrandt finished the painting known as the *Night Watch* and, as well, the year that his wife Saskia died. According to a long-standing tradition, Rembrandt's career took a peripatetic, even tragic turn in this year: the *Night Watch*, a commissioned group portrait of Amsterdam's ‘Kloveniers’ militia of civic guardsmen, allegedly caused such a scandal that it cost the painter the good will of many burghers and city regents, marking at once a high point in his artistic career and the moment of his downfall, leading inexorably to his bankruptcy in 1656 and his burial in an unknown grave in the Westerkerk in 1669. The story of Saskia's death has often been incorporated in this ‘fall from favour’ plot: with her, a cousin of the art dealer Hendrick Uylenburgh, Rembrandt lost not only a wife but important connections; his free lifestyle of subsequent years would often be used against him. Given Greenaway's interest in the themes of sex, death, and artistic hubris, it is not surprising that both these storylines should have found their way into *Nightwatching* – Martin Freeman offering a Rembrandt whose energetic provocations of the Amsterdam bourgeoisie and naked somersaults in the bedroom alternate with meditative sessions on the roof of his house in Jodenbreestraat, where he ‘watches the night’ and mourns for Saskia. Yet Greenaway's approach also differs distinctly from other (filmic) accounts of Rembrandt's life. To grasp its novel quality, we need to trace the copious references the two films make to an array of intertexts, not just including artist's biopics but also police procedurals, BBC-style ‘television history’, and heritage films.

First, it is worth pointing out that while artist's biopics are typically intensely painterly, borrowing their language and energy from dialogue with the biographees' visual style, *Nightwatching* shifts the interest from ‘painterly’ filming and editing to the expressive and theatrical possibilities of music, choreography, décor, and set design. The film's prevailing tone is established by minimally if stylishly furnished studio spaces, where dark-toned studio lighting, a dramatic film score by Włodek Pawlik, and Freeman's expressive but also self-consciously actorly (even hammy) voice create a sense of the unfolding drama of emotion

and feeling as emerging from the director's carefully planned design rather than from the interiority of the character or from his struggle for creative expression and recognition. *Nightwatching* refutes the painterliness of, for example, Jos Stelling's *Rembrandt Fecit 1669* (1977) or Charles Matton's *Rembrandt* (1999), or, outside the tradition of the Rembrandt biopic, Derek Jarman's *Caravaggio* (1986) and John Maybury's *Love Is the Devil: Study for a Portrait of Francis Bacon* (1998). Rather than place cinema in a continuum with the visual arts, the film asserts connections with the performing arts – in particular, exploring elective affinities with the theatre.<sup>17</sup>

Second, and on a closely related note, *Nightwatching* acknowledges the importance of theatre and theatricality as metaphors for a number of thematic and metacinematic concerns: for the vitality of film as a medium; for the idea, so persistently affirmed in Greenaway's oeuvre, of cinema as a public art; and for the experience of the artist who finds that 'all the world's a stage' and who therefore has reason to be weary and distrustful of the theatre. An example of the first kind of metaphoric usage would be Greenaway's voice-over comment in *Rembrandt's J'Accuse* that the *Night Watch* 'has to be seen as a painted piece of theatre', implying that film should recuperate the drama, the 'theatricality', of the painted composition. (On this metacinematic level, the film aligns with Greenaway's often rehearsed and well-known argument that 'cinema is dead' [cf. Shoard 2010]). An intriguing example of the other types of metaphoric usage would be the confusing scene with which *Nightwatching* opens: in it, Rembrandt is abandoned by a violent crowd on what appears to be an empty stage, bare except for the curtain; as the mob withdraws, and Rembrandt voices the fear that he has been blinded, viewers recognize that they themselves are addressed as theatregoers who are complicit in the violence of which they have seen the staging, as if it was their gaze that willed it into being – an indictment of audiences that recalls the biting metacinema of Greenaway's *The Baby of Mâcon* (1993), even if *Nightwatching* continues as a much mellower film and as one that works harder to invite the 'suspension of disbelief'.

Third and last, it is in line with Greenaway's theatrical approach to Rembrandt that he should break with the interest of previous films, most notably Alexander Korda's *Rembrandt* (1936) and Bert Haanstra's *Rembrandt, schilder van de mens* (1957), in casting the painter as an emblem of creative and spiritual autonomy and inwardness. Greenaway's Rembrandt is not a moral centre in the sublime, Romantic and Shakespeareanized sense to which Korda's Charles Laughton gave expression, '[working] from a psychological and emotional concept of the character, which then informed ... the character's entire external affect' (Bingham 2010, 43). Rather, his Rembrandt offers a focal point for guiding viewers' attention as they are made to wonder at the marvels of colour and sight, the miracles of procreation, pregnancy, and mortality, and, finally, the depth of human depravity and the duplicity of Amsterdam's regent-burgers. It is these subjects that Freeman meditates upon as he sits on the roof of the house in Jodenbreestraat, 'nightwatching'. In effect, this brings Greenaway's Rembrandt closer to Simon Schama's interpretation of him as a 'metaphysician' – someone whose gaze saw into the heart of everything, and whose genius was, in that sense,

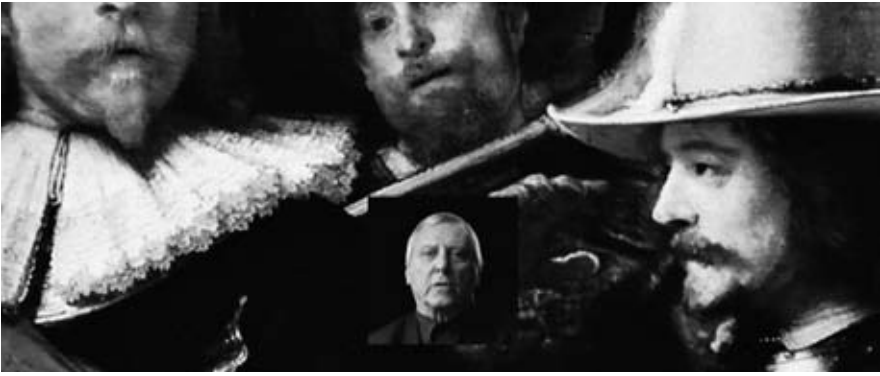


transindividual – than to Korda and Laughton’s Christian-inflected and rather sentimental humanization.<sup>18</sup>

It is Greenaway’s follow-up film, *Rembrandt’s J’Accuse*, that brings his interest in urban and exhibition spaces most clearly into focus. Released in 2008, the ‘mockumentary’ rewrites (or overwrites) the feature film, putting a forceful explanatory frame around its plot – more precisely, around the strand in it that floats a conspiracy theory involving the *Night Watch*. Not a biopic, it is closer to the experimental documentaries of the director’s early television work, a kind of mock-shadow of British television history in the vein of Simon Schama and John Guy. In addition, its argument that the *Night Watch*, when properly decoded, lays bare a conspiratorial murder covered up by Amsterdam’s bourgeoisie – indeed, that the painting is ‘Rembrandt’s forensic enquiry in paint, his Crime Scene Investigation in the Breestraat’ (Greenaway 2006, 3) – also lends it aspects of the police procedural and of art- and heritage-themed mystery thrillers in the vein of Ron Howard’s *The Da Vinci Code* (2006); as in Howard’s film, the dominant semiotic code here is ironical, postmodern, post-historical pastiche. Finally, the various intertexts which *Rembrandt’s J’Accuse* engages come together in the hybrid, crossbred persona that Greenaway brings onto the screen by means of the technique of rectangular insets which he first developed in *Prospero’s Books* and *The Pillow Book* in the 1990s. In these films, he deployed HDTV technology and ‘digital imagining software known as an “electronic paintbox”’, which allowed him ‘to fill the screen with an intricate series of intertextual multiple exposures and overlays’ (Ostrowska and Roberts 2007, 140). In the mockumentary, the insets show Greenaway in a characteristic deadpan appearance, belittling the viewer (‘most people are visually illiterate; why should it be otherwise?’), interviewing actor-witnesses about the alleged crime, and advancing his theory about the *Night Watch* by presenting ‘evidence’ from the painting and from early-modern Dutch history in thirty-one steps (Figures 8.1 and 8.2). In the process, he ironically merges the voices of the art educator and the biographer-historian with those of a Dan Brown and a Sherlock Holmes and, finally, with that of a public intellectual such as Émile Zola, whose ‘j’accuse’ is given an antecedent in Rembrandt’s (more about which later).



8.1. Peter Greenaway’s *Rembrandt’s J’Accuse* (2008).



8.2. Peter Greenaway's *Rembrandt's J'Accuse* (2008).

If the spatial structures of *Rembrandt's J'Accuse* deserve special discussion, it is because they go beyond pastiche and because they reveal how Greenaway is committed to historicizing, genealogical work – in so doing, interrogating the processes of ‘museumization’ to which Europe’s cultural centres are subject today, as discussed above. Let me take a closer look at the film’s opening scenes, before considering its spatial structures in relation to Greenaway’s notion of audiences and public art. The first ten minutes or so – a kind of prologue to the director’s exposition of his murder theory – offer a playful corrective to commodified expectations of the museum or the art gallery such as, it is implied, the tourist-traveller’s. The film opens with a long, moving establishing shot – rare for Greenaway’s oeuvre – that focuses on the Rijksmuseum as seen from Museum Square. While a female voice-over somewhat mechanically reads out the names of major figures from the art world of seventeenth-century Amsterdam, police cars sounding the siren define the place as the scene of a crime (or, as Greenaway more ambiguously puts it, of ‘a shooting’). With this overlay of borrowed associations, visualized by the electronic paintbox like superimposed tattoos, Museum Square is presented as a kind of postmodern ‘non-place’, an urban space defined by ‘remediating relationships with multimedia’ and the world wide web (Bolter and Grusin 1999, 169). However, the sense of non-placeness fades as the film cuts to museum rooms while Greenaway, now the sole voice-over, lectures the viewer on the history of the *Night Watch*, which is defined here – following some mock-serious clichés about it – as an early specimen of a new kind of public art. Paintings, Greenaway stresses, were rarely produced for public exposure ‘until the creation of public museums’ in the nineteenth century; yet ‘the *Night Watch*, unusually, has been on very public display from the moment the varnish was dry’. This presentation is in line with the historic evidence: Gerrit Schaepe Pietersz., the member of the Amsterdam town council to whom we owe the earliest reference to the painting, wrote in 1653 that it was part of a series of ‘public paintings’ on display in ‘the 3 *doelens*’ – more specifically, in the great hall of the Kloveniersdoelen, home to a company of civic guardsmen known as the Kloveniers and the site of many public events and social occasions, including an annual banquet

held by the city government (Schwartz 2008, 9-12). Importantly, Schaepe's use of the term 'public' ties the *Night Watch* firmly to the history of public exhibiting as a cultural practice belonging to early-modern *burgherdom* – one rife with social and political meaning in the context of the Dutch republic in the 1630s and 1640s.

In this historical narrative about 'publicness', Rembrandt figures as someone who defined the new type of public space of which the *doelen* hall forms such a resonant example through the – satirical, subversive, 'accusatory' – use that he contrived to make of it. In *Double Exposures*, Mieke Bal has proposed a notion of museums as places of 'apo-deictic' discourse, i.e., places where the subject claims epistemic authority, engaging in acts of public demonstration or indeed 'exposition' (1996, 2-3). I would argue that Greenaway's Rembrandt is an apo-deictic hero in this metaphoric sense. For example, in a scene that is included in both *Nightwatching* and *Rembrandt's J'Accuse*, a defining moment occurs when Rembrandt is shown around the Kloveniersdoelen at night, with nothing but a torch to light up examples of the *schuttersstuk* genre, group paintings that show local burghers doubling as civic guardsmen. His exuberant mockery of the rather deferential depictions of the burghers that he sees around him points forward to the language of 'accusation' and unmasking which the *Night Watch* speaks so eloquently, in Greenaway's reading of it; it is certainly significant that Rembrandt's decision to accept the commission for a new *schuttersstuk*, to hang in the same hall, comes precisely at this point. Indeed, the suggestion is that the publicness of the *doelen* rooms, the special opportunity afforded by this new spatial paradigm, inspires Rembrandt to redefine his art as a political tool, one capable of 'pointing to the truth' about the burghers – that is, of assuming what Bal calls 'expository agency', working specifically through what she calls 'the constative use of signs' (8).

It should be added that in making Rembrandt's originary motivation for the *Night Watch* so overtly critical/political, Greenaway achieves a significant reversal of the Rembrandt bio's traditional plot, where the key moment conventionally is the unveiling of the militia painting following its completion, and the instant rejection of it by uncomprehending or even angry burghers. (I am thinking of Korda's and Steinhoff's biopics here – all the more so as they let the story of the *Night Watch* unfurl entirely within the interior spaces of Rembrandt's house in Jodenbreestraat and not in a more public space). While these traditional accounts stress the painter's failure to gain access to the Amsterdam bourgeoisie, Greenaway's Rembrandt, in contrast, is shown to obtain privileged access to the early-modern public sphere – only to be cast out again because he has done so on his own terms, and because his 'j'accuse' is rather too pungent and too savvy for the burghers. Considered within the tradition of the Rembrandt biopic as a whole, this certainly is an original and politicizing gesture on Greenaway's part.

However, the question arises how and to what extent Greenaway succeeds in extrapolating the political or agoric energy which his exercise in urban archaeology has yielded to the cinematic and urban spaces that he envisages for the present. Put differently, if we consider that his concern to historicize the *Night Watch* ultimately aims to revitalize cinema as a public art – in a sweeping state-

ment in *Rembrandt's J'Accuse* that has much been commented upon, Greenaway claims that Rembrandt's painting 'anticipated' cinema through the special interest it took in artificial light and artificial staging; the *Night Watch* thus becomes a point of anchorage for rethinking the possibilities for cinema today – then the question cannot be avoided: what room for agoric energy, for 'expository agency', do the Rembrandt films manage to carve out for cinematic and urban spaces *now*? In this regard, I would argue that Greenaway's political or 'democratic' claims for his art are more problematic than he concedes, and that his reliance on apo-deictic discourse is in fact deeply ambivalent. On the one hand, it is certainly true that his revisitation of Amsterdam in the 'Golden Age' asks important questions about the role of public spaces in sustaining audiences as a socio-political body; in this sense, his project in both films is only consistent with his politicized conception of film and its publics in earlier work. (For critical context, it is worth recalling Thomas Elsaesser's argument in a 1996 essay that while European cinema generally after fascism 'has a rather traumatized relation to the notion of audiences', Greenaway stands out by his 'willingness to engage in a [new] debate about what might be the place of art in contemporary public space' [2005, 188-9]. As Elsaesser argues, this is particularly visible in his choice for gallery and museum spaces, as well as for 'cityscapes and civic architecture as the medium against which to "project" the cinema, fashioning a series of interrogatory building-signs or ironic sign-buildings' which, taken together, constitute a visual 'Space-Encyclopedia' [181]. The fact that the *Nightwatching* installation for the Rijksmuseum was the first in an ongoing series of 'Classical Paintings Revisited' – all site-specific projects – underlines that this trend in the director's work continues undiminished).<sup>19</sup>

On the other hand, there is a strong sense in which Greenaway's changing relationship with 'European space' as such, as considered above, threatens to undermine or even undo the critical and interrogative potential of his work. If the cinema and the city function as a kind of twin poles in the director's political imaginary, as Elsaesser suggests, with his ideal agora-space insinuating itself uneasily in the interstices between them, then much of his recent work evidences – I assume, *malgré lui* – how his art tends to monumentalize and 'fix' the agoric energy which it seeks to retrieve, especially when inscribing itself in discourses of heritage and cultural education.<sup>20</sup> Let me return to *Rembrandt's J'Accuse* to clarify the point with an example. The 'mockumentary' develops its conspiracy-and-murder plot with reference to rivalling factions within the Kloveniers militia, which took a royal visit by young Princess Mary Stuart in 1642 as an occasion to fight out their feud. In Greenaway's dense and fact-studded reading, the *Night Watch* hints at this moment by quoting an imitation stone victory arch that was used on the occasion – 'a piece of municipal fakery' – in the architecture it deploys for staging the company of musketeers. Yet, if the film casts Rembrandt as an *enfant terrible* of the Amsterdam bourgeoisie, it is certainly puzzling that it leaves the motivation and stakes behind his 'j'accuse' underexplored – and that insofar as the 'j'accuse' does have a political target, it is bestowed on it retroactively, when Hendrick Uylenburgh fills Rembrandt in on the reasons for Floris and Clement Banning Cocq, cousins of the Lord of Purmerland who is the paint-

ing's captain and leading figure, to decide on Piers Hasselberg's (i.e., the previous captain's) removal and murder. What, it may be asked, does this 'staging' of a murder plot achieve, other than to rehearse the established language of political spectacle? How viable a kind of 'publicness' is it, where an urgent political accusation concerns an empty referent – empty insofar as it is a matter of indifference to Greenaway's Rembrandt, and indeed to the film as a whole, how two religiously and diplomatically differentiated factions within the Kloveniers militia compared? Finally, how could Greenaway rely so heavily on tropes of fakery and simulation, if the film's declared intention is to do more than blankly assert the institutional power – here imagined as the 'constative' authority – of art?

## **A Spatial History of the Rembrandt Biopic**

To move beyond an 'internal' discussion of Greenaway's Rembrandt films, a different approach is needed to their characteristic spatial structures and to the idea of publicness which they seek to affirm and explore. What if we consider the diptych of Rembrandt films, not in its own terms, as an exercise in urban archaeology, but in terms of the history of spaces used for mobilizing and articulating 'Rembrandt'? Indeed, what if we inscribe the diptych in a spatial history of the Rembrandt biopic? For a start, such an approach would need to distinguish between four, not just three spatial paradigms or orders: that is, apart from the artist's studio and domestic spaces, the exhibition room or gallery space, and the public spaces of the city, we would need to take account of the idea and image of the city as a whole, understood as the larger social and political entity in which the other spaces are embedded. Next, a spatial history of the Rembrandt biopic would ask us to give more thought to the complex relationship between the city and the studio: specifically, we would have to acknowledge that they relate not just metonymically, as Greenaway's feature films and his investment in site-specific art suggest, but also metaphorically, i.e., in terms of a relationship of displacement by which the studio encroaches on the city as a lived, anthropological space.

Let us briefly turn to some earlier Rembrandt films, then – specifically, to Korda's and to Steinhoff's. The first great Rembrandt bio for the screen, Alexander Korda's of 1936, neatly exemplifies what I have in mind in speaking of a dynamic of displacement.<sup>21</sup> Korda, a cosmopolitan modernist with Hungarian and Jewish roots, believed that foreigners could make the best 'national' films: they had the sharpest eye for what was characteristic or typical (Walker 2003). On this principle, the set design by art director Vincent Korda, the filmmaker's brother, was meant as a tribute to a visual aesthetic seen as 'typically' Dutch. The film was thoroughly researched: 'Weeks and months of exhaustive research went into the preparation of the film. Almost everyone on the staff spent some time in Holland, poring over paintings, engravings, books, any source which would afford information on details of seventeenth-century Dutch architecture, furnishings, and costuming. ... Even the music, composed by Geoffrey Toye, was actually based in part on traditional Dutch folk melodies' (Kulik 1975, 154-5).

The house in Jodenbreestraat that was reconstructed in Korda's Denham Studios in Buckinghamshire figured interior spaces that were especially reminiscent of Vermeer: 'embellishing' sets which to a large extent determined the film's narrative pace and atmosphere (cf. Bergfelder et al. 2007, 19 and 240-2). Likewise, the film's reconstruction of 'Golden Age' Amsterdam formed a realistic – albeit highly stylized – articulation of the historic inner-city centre, seen as appropriate for the time period evoked. Ostensibly 'outdoor' scenes show a Rembrandt (Laughton) who watches the hustle and bustle of the city's port activities, as well as streetscapes with burghers in ornate dress and other views that situate the painter in a world replete with markers of the locally 'typical' and the 'authentic' (Figures 8.3 and 8.4). It may be interesting to recall here what Peter Wollen has written about the role of set design, in the context of an argument that explores affinities between studio architecture and Marc Augé's notion of the 'non-place': '[architecture] in film is never just itself', Wollen writes, but 'always a simulacrum of somewhere else, a symbolic representation of some other place' (2002, 199). In this sense, Korda's biopic can be said to displace the Amsterdam it overwrites, asserting an idea of the city which is more 'real' – more effective in 'fixing' the image – than any prior or outside reality.



8.3. Charles Laughton as Rembrandt in Alexander Korda's *Rembrandt* (1936).



8.4. Amsterdam street scene with burghers in Alexander Korda's *Rembrandt* (1936).

However, if studio films relate to the city through a logic of displacement, it is also important to acknowledge that this logic is shot through with political implications – as the close liaison between studio art and the Nazi ideology, so impactful in the 1930s and 1940s, underlines. In 2006, the Dutch television programme ‘Andere Tijden’ produced a documentary film on the topic of Rembrandt and Amsterdam during the Second World War, focusing on German director Hans Steinhoff’s production of a Rembrandt biopic in UFA Filmstadt Amsterdam (previously Cinetone Studios) in Duivendrecht in 1941-2. Possibly under the influence of A. J. Langbehn’s curious, but widely read study *Rembrandt als Erzieher* (1890), and perhaps also prompted by the association of Rembrandt’s name with the existing, pre-war film culture of the Netherlands – e.g., one prominent cinema in Amsterdam from 1919 onwards had been the Rembrandt Theatre on Rembrandt Square – both the Nazi occupier and the Dutch National Socialist Movement (NSB) took a pronounced interest in the painter, in whom they saw the embodiment of the ‘pan-Germanic spirit’ and an icon that might unite rather than divide the Germans and the Dutch.<sup>22</sup> Among the interviewees in the documentary is the German actress Gisela Uhlen, who played Hendrickje Stoffels in Steinhoff’s film. Uhlen’s narrative brings into focus two distinctly different spatialities, both of which could be traced through the idea and memory of Rembrandt. On the one hand, there was the spatial order revolving around the studios of UFA Filmstadt Amsterdam, where most of Steinhoff’s biopic was shot and where a large group of Dutch and German staff worked painstakingly on the set design, constructing a magnificent copy of the Rembrandt House in Jodenbreestraat. This spatial order also included the Amstel Hotel, from which the actors were taxied to Duivendrecht each morning, and Rembrandt Theatre itself, where the film premiered on 3 October 1942 as the costliest film production to be made on Dutch soil during the entire war period. On the other hand, there was the spatio-geographic order of occupation and oppression of which Uhlen and fellow actors, it seems, were only marginally aware. Asked if she knew of the existence of Amsterdam’s Jewish ghetto, she responds that she had heard speak of it, but that she was unable to form a conception of it at the time – a troubling answer if one considers that the original Rembrandt House stood at the heart of the city’s historic Jewish quarter, where it had opened for the public in 1911. It appears that Steinhoff’s film crew moved – quite literally – around a glaring hiatus. Its only engagement with the locality was by way of car drives through the countryside, undertaken to look for landscapes or windmills that could be quoted in the film as visual motifs (*‘motiv suchen’*). Indeed, the whole rationale behind Steinhoff’s decision to shoot the biopic in Holland appears to have been the shortage of film studios in Nazi Germany – not any interest in ‘Rembrandt’s Amsterdam’ he may have had – plus the fact that German actors and film technicians were quite eager to go there, encouraged as they were by Goebbels’s policy that travel should be permitted for *‘kriegswichtiges Unternehmen’*, business critical to the war effort.

Uhlen’s narrative is dramatic testimony that in war-time Amsterdam, Rembrandt was political and symbolic capital, used both to mark *and* hide the axis of difference separating (1) the geography of cultural production, particularly film production, in which the Nazi regime was so heavily invested, and (2) the

social geography of segregation and racial cleansing that determined the lives and fates of many city dwellers in these dark years. Yet, if Steinhoff's studio film negated the Rembrandtesque geography which included the Jewish quarter, Rembrandt did not refuse mobilization as an anti-German icon – certainly not as easily as the occupying powers had hoped or believed he would. In fact, there is an interesting story to be told about acts of symbolic resistance that used 'Rembrandt' as a focus – a story one could choose to climax with the destruction of the old Rembrandt Theatre in an arson attack (it is assumed) by the Amsterdam resistance in January 1943 (cf. Barten 2012). Before Steinhoff started to work on his film, the Nazis expressed an interest in Dutch director Gerard Rutten's *Rembrandt* (a.k.a. *The Magician of Amsterdam*), which was still in progress in 1941. In his autobiography, Rutten recounts how the German occupier considered his shooting script 'historically inaccurate' as it did not sustain the fiction of a Jewish conspiracy against Rembrandt. He says he was pressurized to weave an anti-semitic strand into the plot, after which he fled to Britain (Rutten 1976, 128-34). While Rutten's film remained unfinished, Steinhoff's did cater to Nazi wishes. In its most propagandistic moment, his *Rembrandt* shows three Jewish usurers in conclave with Hendrick Uylenburgh, concocting a scheme that leads to Rembrandt's bankruptcy. However, if Steinhoff's biopic came to displace Rutten's (as well as, one may add, Alexander Korda's, where Rembrandt is close, even intimate with Menasseh), after the war Rutten produced a documentary film that savvily overturned the symbolic geography through which the Nazis had so carefully set Rembrandt up as a pan-Germanic 'master'. Rutten's *Rembrandt in de schuilkamer* (*Rembrandt in the Air-Raid Shelter*, 1946), made under the auspices of Willem Sandberg, a well-known museum director and former resistance member, tells a story of how all through the war the *Night Watch* was kept stored in a bunker near Castricum off the Dutch coast, to protect it against air-raid damage. In focusing attention on how the painting survived *outside* the centre of Nazi-occupied Amsterdam, the film delineated a counter-geography that was offered as a corrective to the political/symbolic appropriations of Rembrandt in previous years. Indeed, making strategic reference to the Dutch coastal landscape – the film contains extensive footage of the construction of bunkers in the Heemskerck area just before the war – it proposed a spatialized re-contextualization of Rembrandt's mid-twentieth century afterlife, one that reduced the German interest in the painter to a minimum and hailed the return of the *Night Watch* to public view as a 'return from exile'.<sup>23</sup>

For clarity's sake: my aim in making this excursion through the 'spatial history of the Rembrandt biopic' is *not* to insinuate in some a-historical manner that the film studio is forever compromised as a political space, or as a space for channelling collective political affect. Nor is it to criticize Greenaway for ignoring the various myths about Rembrandt's Jewish connections – myths which, in their philo-semitic inflections, too, must be said to have produced their own forms of historical flatness and pastiche.<sup>24</sup> Rather, I have sought to retrace this chapter in Rembrandt's cultural and political afterlife as it affords a context for asking critical questions about Greenaway's apo-deictic 'j'accuse' – more precisely, about the quality of his investment in *apo-deixis* and its characteristic constative tropes.



These questions are the following. When is apo-deictic discourse truly political or agoric? What is the relationship between apo-deictic discourse and institutional power, including the institutional power of art? Finally, how much political or agoric energy can be extrapolated from the staging of ‘Golden Age’ citizenship in the contemporary art and heritage film, specifically in the European or transnational context in which Greenaway must be understood?

The title of Greenaway’s mockumentary, *Rembrandt’s J’Accuse*, refers unmistakably to the Dreyfus affair that shook France in the 1890s – as Greenaway acknowledges with a visual quote from *L’Aurore*, the left-wing French newspaper that printed Zola’s words as a headline across the front page in 1898. This reference, so prominently foregrounded in the film, is given additional weight by follow-up references that place Piers Hasselberg’s murder in a continuum with the murders of Pim Fortuyn in 2002 and of Theo van Gogh in Amsterdam in 2004 – as if Greenaway wants to suggest the possibility of inscribing the *Night Watch* in a long-term narrative about Dutch political culture. However, it is difficult not to find this web of allusions facile. In stark contrast to Zola’s, the ‘j’accuse’ that Greenaway attributes to Rembrandt has only a substitute referent: the latter’s accusation concerns a murder committed among rivalling civic guardsmen, and not the abuse of young girls in an orphanage which, in a complication of *Night-watching*’s plot, is what really sparks his sense of social justice. In addition, we have seen that Greenaway’s Rembrandt’s ‘j’accuse’ has a very different type of addressee, i.e., the museum visitor to whom his canvas opens a complex narrative that is replete with double meanings and strangely coded signs. In view of these differences, it appears that one underlying – and in my view defining – difference between Zola’s performance of *apo-deixis* and Greenaway’s is that the former expressed his political and socio-cultural concerns – about French anti-semitism, as is well-known – in the name of a true ideal of the collective life, while the latter places the *Night Watch* at a great temporal distance from any collective life in Rembrandt’s day (cf. Rose 2010). Indeed, Greenaway’s suggestion is very strongly that the ‘j’accuse’ he finds encoded in the *Night Watch* only reaches its addressee in our present museumized context, through the kind of deciphering in which he himself engages in the film.

I would argue that this is where Greenaway’s structuring metonymy (the notion of the gallery room as an agoric space) breaks down: the *Night Watch* remains a museum exhibit, not a court exhibit in *Rembrandt’s J’Accuse*. In terms of Greenaway’s use of apo-deictic discourse, what this yields is that his studio can only be political or agoric – a space for the production of a new politics of space – in an abstract and meta-ized way, and that the complex tension between politicization and museumization is ultimately resolved in his work in favour of the latter. But then, as Mieke Bal suggests, perhaps apo-deictic discourse typically always depends on the context from which it borrows its authority (1996, 1-12). This would certainly explain why Greenaway only obtains limited reflective distance from the hegemonic, commercialized discourses through which he interrogates the heritage city – as if the museumization of urban space is a process that enters his films from the outside, as a trend in which they may participate but to which they finally stand in a relationship of second-order imitation. It might

also go some way towards explaining why Greenaway's interest in early-modern art and culture has tended to be more productive (in terms of how it sparks his imagination) than his attempts to interrogate fascist architecture, aesthetics, and politics in some of his films – as subjects which he has sought to include in his general encyclopaedic ambition to make many chapters from European history resonate within his oeuvre, but which ultimately resist his grip because they are too complex politically, while less open to the reductions of his forms of allegory and pastiche.<sup>25</sup>

## Conclusion: Places into Non-Places

All things considered, the question that Greenaway's Rembrandt diptych throws up is whether a metapolitical inquiry into the possibilities for 'publicness' which today's spatialities hold out – specifically in the context of the European cultural heritage industry and what has been discussed here as the museumization of urban space – can be political enough to accommodate the desire of audiences, film critics, and indeed the director himself for critical/oppositional art. Notwithstanding Greenaway's insistent political claims for his work and, significantly, for his interest in Dutch art history and culture,<sup>26</sup> his Rembrandt films may just as well be said to signal an evasion of politics, or an emptying of political content, as the articulation of critique – metapolitics being the sort of politics that one may turn to when one has stopped being truly political. If this sounds ungenerous, a consideration of Greenaway's Rembrandt films within the larger sweep of his oeuvre would seem to support the thesis that they register a process of de-politicization at work in it, at least on the level of his thematic and narrative concerns: placed alongside the 'national allegories' of such 1980s feature films as *The Draughtsman's Contract* and *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*, so often discussed as 'oppositional' (Johnston 2002; Walsh 2006), they testify to an ever closer alignment of Greenaway's art with the culture and heritage industry and to an increasing reliance on its narrative templates and codes. This is not to say that Greenaway's inscription into contemporary heritage discourse is seamless or unreflective; yet it is to suggest that the revitalization of politically charged memories and heritage which his recent films attempt hovers uneasily between culture as politics and culture as spectacle, between an aesthetic of commitment and (self-)commodification. As we have seen, *Rembrandt's J'Accuse* leaves this double bind palpably unresolved: precisely in its most self-consciously 'political' moments, the film halts at political gesturing.

Yet, paradoxically, if Greenaway's revisitation of citizenship and public culture in the 'Golden Age' does not produce a viable paradigm for rethinking the political in the context of today's European public sphere, his Rembrandt films do throw the problem of a de-politicizing culture into historical relief, thereby helping us to see it whole. Both films propose to see urban and exhibition spaces as privileged battleground in an age of waning historical awareness and diminishing collective life: squares and theatres, museums and galleries, and other places for publicness tend to look tame after a Greenaway film, as if he aims to make

viewers alive to a store of dormant political potential that may be resuscitated through dialogue with the past. In this sense, Greenaway's work can still be understood as a counterblast against the encroaching regime of the 'non-place' in contemporary urban imaginaries. Let me quote once more from Peter Wollen's essay on 'Architecture and Film' to elucidate my point here. Towards the end of his essay, Wollen observes 'that films more and more resemble the rides in theme parks and that there is a growing symbiosis between the two entertainment forms. If this is indeed the case, then cinema is destined to become an art devoted to creating non-places for touristic consumption, rather than places for dramatic consumption' (213). Greenaway's Rembrandt films, notwithstanding the director's overt commercialism, indicate an alternative direction for art cinema. Even if he does not fill the spaces he imagines with new, political and social meaning, his vision for them does resonate with possibility and promise. Or is the 'Golden Age' Amsterdam onto which he projects his ideas, his fantasies and desires just the kind of place that one is likely to dream up from inside a non-place, the place to which one hopes to return when non-placeness no longer prevails as a defining condition for the cinematic and/or the museumized city?

## Notes

- 1 For my understanding of how Rembrandt Year 2006 inscribed itself in larger discourses of historical 'experience' and 'authenticity', I am much indebted to two articles by Broomhall and Spinks (2009 and 2010).
- 2 Many canons accorded Rembrandt and the *Night Watch* a role as icons of the 'Golden Age'. E.g., the *Night Watch* has entries in a collection on Dutch *lieux de mémoire*, titled *Plaatsen van herinnering* (Knevel 2006), and in *De canon van Amsterdam* (de Rooy and Los 2008, 77-9). For a contextualizing discussion in English of the 'canon debates' of those years, see Lechner (2008).
- 3 In this and the following paragraphs I draw on information provided in various online articles and news items, including Dickey (2006) and Esman (2006), and on the archives of various museum websites, including those hyperlinked on 'Rembrandt 400 at the Rijksmuseum' ([www.rijksmuseum.nl/tentoonstellingen/rembrandt-400](http://www.rijksmuseum.nl/tentoonstellingen/rembrandt-400)). The website of the Rembrandt 400 Foundation is no longer online. The most exhaustive overview of Rembrandt events outside the Netherlands in 2006 appears to be 'A Celebration of Rembrandt on the 400th Anniversary of his Birth' ([www.franklinbowlesgallery.com/SF/Artists/Rembrandt/Pages/sf\\_remb400.html](http://www.franklinbowlesgallery.com/SF/Artists/Rembrandt/Pages/sf_remb400.html)) provided by the Franklin Bowles Galleries in San Francisco.
- 4 The museum still has an annex in what is now called Holland Boulevard Schiphol.
- 5 A more exhaustive list should also include the music and theatre performance 'Rembrandt's Mirror' in the Rotterdamse Schouwburg, directed by Greenaway's wife Saskia Boddeke and using a libretto by Greenaway himself.
- 6 Particularly telling in this regard is that the exhibition 'Rembrandt and the Golden Age: Masterpieces from the Rijksmuseum', put together by the Rijksmuseum itself, was on view in three American museums in 2006 (the Dayton Art Institute in Ohio, the Phoenix Art Museum in Arizona, and the Portland Art Museum in Oregon). The exhibition comprised more than one hundred paintings and artefacts by Rembrandt and his contemporaries.
- 7 The press release was published by CODART, among others: 'Rembrandt Year a Resounding Success for Dutch Tourism', 31 July 2007 ([www.codart.nl/news/215/](http://www.codart.nl/news/215/)).
- 8 Alison McQueen has demonstrated the important role of French culture in shaping the Rembrandt myth in the nineteenth century: between the 'Napoleonic pillaging of art and collectibles' of the early 1800s, through which many Netherlandic artworks entered French collections, and the great Rembrandt retrospective in the Rijksmuseum of 1898, it was French critics such as Charles Blanc, Théophile Thoré-Bürger, Hippolyte Taine, and Eugène

- Fromentin who developed the idea of Rembrandt as a ‘man of the people’, someone who embodied through his life and art a distinctly modern (i.e., democratic and republican) political spirit as well as a distinctly northern (i.e., Protestant or nonconformist) kind of individuality. At times Rembrandt’s republicanism was made to stand metonymically for that of the Dutch as a whole (McQueen 2003, 20 and 31-54). Alongside this French tradition, one may place a German one, dating from around the turn of the twentieth century, that cast Rembrandt as a model of deep spirituality and interiority and of a superior, jealously guarded autonomy which, far from being purely or narrowly artistic, was associated with the pan-Germanic *Geist*. This reading was articulated with racialized overtones in A. J. Langbehn’s influential *Rembrandt als Erzieher: Von einem Deutschen* (1890), and it received more subtle treatment in two philosophical meditations on Rembrandt’s place in cultural history by Georg Simmel (1916) and Rudolf Steiner (1916). Langbehn also created the paradigm for the Nazi reappraisal of Rembrandt (Bruin 1995, 65; Perlove 2001, 256-8 and 268-77). If I am sketching the contours of these traditions rather broadly here, it is because my primary interest is in how they helped construct a matrix for the representation and remembrance of Rembrandt in the twentieth century, particularly in the Rembrandt biopic – a highly international tradition in its own right, just as, one may add, the literary tradition of biofiction about Rembrandt (cf. Golahny 2001).
- 9 For photographs of the ‘Jonge Rembrandt Groot’ outside exhibition, visit its website ([www.tjan.nl/rembrandt/](http://www.tjan.nl/rembrandt/)). There were twenty-eight banners in total. For a picture of the controversial ‘bookshelf billboard’, see the news archive of Leiden’s Sleutelstad website ([www.sleutelstad.nl/](http://www.sleutelstad.nl/)).
  - 10 The artists’ ‘bottom-up’ narrative about *Nightwatch 3D* did not prevent its assimilation into the commercial system: following the success of their work as a photo opportunity for tourists and visitors, Russian artists Mikhail Dronov and Alexander Taratynov sought to sell it at 1.5 million euros to local parties, esp. retailers based in the vicinity of Rembrandt Square. The project’s website is [www.nightwatch3d.com/home.htm](http://www.nightwatch3d.com/home.htm).
  - 11 The Dutch-language website ‘Rembrandt in Amsterdam’ is [www.rembrandt-amsterdam.nl](http://www.rembrandt-amsterdam.nl).
  - 12 One example would be the DVD *Rembrandt 400 Years* (2005). See also Beliën and Knevel (2006).
  - 13 On the ‘Rembrandtfeesten’ of 1906, see Bruin (1995, 25-44), van Melle (2006), and de Rooy (2007, 26-30).
  - 14 P. Greenaway interviewed in ‘Peter Greenaway: *Peopling the Palaces* at Venaria Reale’ (Archeworld Channel 2007, released via YouTube ([www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com))). In the same interview, the filmmaker goes on to emphasize his sense of responsibility as a custodian of history: ‘We cannot possibly exist without memory. Memory makes us. Memory gives us context. Memory gives us ... a notion of course of the past, but also of the present, and certainly of the future. History is no more than collective memory. So we have to put all our memories together in order to create a phenomenon of continuity. Having said that, in a way there’s no such thing as history. You can’t visit history, you can’t recreate history. So in a sense I suppose I have been working for some years now on the premise that there’s no such thing as history but there is only historians. And if you take it even further, most people learn their history not from history books but from the cinema’.
  - 15 In a lecture at the European Graduate School, he quipped that the *Nightwatching* installation was supposed not to alienate ‘ladies from Arkansas’ (EGS lecture on the *Nightwatching* project, available in eight installments on YouTube; on *Nightwatching*, see especially installments 5, 6, and 7).
  - 16 Indeed, if over the past fifteen years or so Greenaway seems to have moved closer to the fractured, audience-centred temporalities of occasional art and web art, it is important to acknowledge that this makes ‘art cinema’ and ‘auteurship’ problematic categories for discussing his recent work and for assessing what kind of cultural agency it may claim to have (cf. Luksch 1997; Dragan 2011). If the term ‘art cinema’ has been maintained in the title of this chapter, it is because it has been placed in deliberate tension with the market-oriented, commodified notion of ‘cultural heritage’ with which the director’s work has become so inextricably tied up.
  - 17 Cf. Elsaesser (2005, 180).
  - 18 See Schama (1999). Schama’s influence on Greenaway has been noted before; e.g., Gary Schwartz suggests that Schama’s ‘Trials by Water’ chapter in *The Embarrassment of Riches* shaped Greenaway’s understanding of the Dutch landscape (its ‘moral geography’) in one of his Vermeer-themed projects (Pascoe 2008, 352).

- 19 E.g., see the interview with Shoard (2010).
- 20 E.g., Greenaway's *Peopling the Palaces* project near Turin has been argued, without a trace of irony, to '[offer] exciting potential for augmenting the visitor experience of heritage sites' (Chittenden 2010, 173). While such a reading misses out on the political and auteurist dimensions of Greenaway's art, it must be granted that he has a share in the responsibility for it.
- 21 There is at least one earlier Rembrandt bio for the screen: *Die Tragödie eines Großen*, directed by Arthur Günsburg (1920).
- 22 Cf. Bruin (1995, 65-86) and Perlove (2001, 256-8 and 268-77).
- 23 In constructing this counter-narrative, Rutten ignored that many national art treasures, including *Night Watch*, had in fact been kept in bunkers on German instruction (cf. Bruin 1995, 67-70).
- 24 I am thinking here of Klaus Maria Brandauer in Charles Matton's direction, who gives us a Rembrandt whose 'j'aime les juifs' resonates in the picturesque Amsterdam streets.
- 25 To develop this reading more fully, the discussion would need to include *The Belly of an Architect* (1987) and also the first film in the *Tulse Luper* trilogy, *The Moab Story* (2003), where fascism is prominently included in the historical background.
- 26 As early as 1985, Greenaway cited 'the fact that the Low Countries were one of the first European republics' among the reasons why Dutch history and culture hold a special appeal for him (Gras and Gras 2000, 32).

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## 9. Imagining a Global Village: Amsterdam in Janwillem van de Wetering's Detective Fiction

*Sabine Vanacker*

Amsterdam is a city, but it is also a country by itself, a small nation inside a larger one.

– Geert Mak, *Amsterdam: A Brief Life of the City* (2001, 1)

### Introduction

From its very origins in the nineteenth century, crime fiction has been unequivocally and fundamentally international in outlook. Indeed, its early beginnings – the works of Edgar Allan Poe, Eugène Vidocq, Eugène Sue, Émile Gaboriau, Wilkie Collins, Arthur Conan Doyle, Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler – were the result of a dialogue between at least three national literatures, while, more recently, Swedish, Icelandic, Italian, Japanese, and Hispanic literatures have become widely influential. Because crime fiction strongly depends on the use of classic formulas, conventional plot lines, and various generic traditions – classical detective fiction, the hard-boiled tradition, and the police procedural, for instance – it is intensely intertextual and dialogic, an early example of a global literary genre. Indeed, when a new author decides to adopt, adapt, or ignore the genre's various formulaic tropes and possibilities – type of detective, kind of location, variety of crime – he or she inevitably engages in a creative negotiation with a worldwide set of traditions. Undoubtedly, detective fiction's close dialogue with the film and television industries has only intensified – and complicated – this creative negotiation, ensuring crime writers and their detectives massive interest from global audiences.

The international outlook of Dutch crime fiction is a case in point. When in 1949 the Dutch diplomat, sinologist, and crime fiction aficionado Robert van Gulik (1910-67) published an English translation of an anonymous eighteenth-century Chinese collection of crime stories, *Dee Goong An (Celebrated Cases of Judge Dee)*, he did this with the explicit aim of introducing Western audiences to an older, Chinese crime fiction tradition. Focusing on a legendary magistrate and politician from the T'ang Dynasty (618-907), the original Judge Dee stories were a great success; this inspired van Gulik to create an internationally acclaimed series of his own around the unusual Chinese detective. Publishing his stories both in Dutch and in English, van Gulik was in fact a gifted cultural mediator, both between Eastern and Western crime fiction traditions and between the Netherlands

and the English-speaking world. The younger Dutch-American crime writer Janwillem van de Wetering (1931-2008) was directly inspired by van Gulik.<sup>1</sup> As he describes in an early memoir, *The Empty Mirror* (1971), he encountered van Gulik's detective novels – surprisingly – during his own stay in Japan. Like van Gulik, van de Wetering would address two audiences, writing both in Dutch and in English, and publishing his series about Amsterdam policemen Grijpstra and de Gier both in the Netherlands and the United States. And like van Gulik, van de Wetering too introduced Eastern religion into his crime stories – with the important difference that where the former connected his historical detective stories to Confucianism, the latter's work is infused by Zen Buddhism. Van de Wetering signalled his awareness of the link with the older author throughout his career: he published an appreciation of the life and work of van Gulik in 1989, and many editions of van Gulik's novels carry his introductions. Both authors' works have consistently been in print, in the Netherlands as well as the United States, and both saw their work adapted for the international screen (although in van Gulik's case, not until after his lifetime).<sup>2</sup>

In their 2000 collection on the European detective novel, *Crime Scenes*, Anne Mullen and Emer O'Beirne emphasize the central importance for crime and detective fiction of creating a strong and 'authentic' sense of place. Van de Wetering's choice for Amsterdam as the location of his first Grijpstra and de Gier novel was consequently no coincidence, but a determined, meaningful, and resonant decision. Compared to the imperial London of the Doyle stories, or the seedy, gritty American cities of the noir tradition, how would Amsterdam fare as a location for detection? Would its seventeenth-century canals and historical buildings, its 1930s housing estates and mid-century suburbs, function as a credible backdrop for crime? Should its detectives be policemen or private eyes? Might they drive in unmarked cars, race over canals in speed boats, or – like Gerben Hellinga's early hard-boiled detective – travel by bicycle?<sup>3</sup> Almost inevitably, the Amsterdam location of his series of police procedurals would involve van de Wetering in decisions about the representation and expression of 'Dutchness', keeping in mind the different audiences to which his fiction catered.

When he died on 4 July 2008, Janwillem van de Wetering had come to the end of a notably varied and diverse life. He appears to have been a natural migrant, a nomadic subject, who at one time or another lived in Delft, London, South Africa, Kyoto, Barranquilla and Bogotá in Colombia, Lima, Australia, and Amsterdam. Born in Rotterdam on 12 February 1931, he witnessed the German bombardment of that city and was much influenced by the rounding up and deportation of his Jewish school friends during World War II. His father's import-export business initially led him to study business at Nyenrode University until, via his father's contacts, he moved to South Africa for his work. When his father died, van de Wetering returned to Europe, studying philosophy as an independent reader at University College London (1958-9). An interest in Zen Buddhism, developed in London, led to a highly formative period in his life; he trained as a monk at the Zen monastery Daitoku-ji in Kyoto, an experience described in *The Empty Mirror*. As recently as 2004, van de Wetering discussed his lifelong engagement with the practice and philosophy of Zen Buddhism in a television

programme directed by Jurgen Gude for the Buddhist Broadcasting Foundation. After a period selling real estate in Australia, he moved back to Amsterdam to take over his uncle's textile business. In 1975 he emigrated to the United States and settled in Surry, Maine, but maintained regular visits to Amsterdam. Van de Wetering's crime fiction draws very strongly on these different international experiences, most notably in the inclusion of a set of Zen Buddhist themes and motifs. The Buddhist idea of *karma*, for instance, features in a number of his novels, as do the belief in fate and chance, the pursuit of a detached attitude to the preoccupations of everyday life, of 'loosening one's ties' to the here and now, and the goal of enlightenment.

Equally important, however, were van de Wetering's experiences, upon his return to Amsterdam, as a part-time member of the Amsterdam police force (1968-75). Because of his early, extensive travels, van de Wetering had failed to do his military service, then still compulsory in the Netherlands. As an alternative he was offered a part-time police job during what would turn out to be a pivotal, transitional period for the city: Amsterdam was just then in the vanguard of the sexual revolution, seething with student protests, a true mecca for the new European hippie culture. Written in this context, his series of detective novels, centred around the Amsterdam policemen Grijpstra and de Gier, combined humorous police procedural stories with a streak of Buddhist philosophy and logic, understated and unobtrusive, yet significant and substantive. Their great success in the Netherlands, in the mid-1970s and 1980s, was vital for the revival of Dutch crime fiction, as indicated by the Dutch critic and thriller writer Tomas Ross (1986, 20). Van de Wetering's work also quickly caught on abroad. For a long time, he was one of the few Dutch crime writers with name recognition in the United States and a striking, pronounced presence in the crowded American world of crime fiction.<sup>4</sup> He was regularly reviewed in the American national press, as the Soho Press book covers show; his death was widely commented on in American blogs and crime fiction sites and resulted in obituaries and notices in *The Times*, *The Guardian*, and *The New York Times*. His popularity also made him influential in shaping the international image of Amsterdam for American and other English-speaking audiences.

Van de Wetering was early in presenting an Amsterdam with a strong and fast-growing multicultural presence, and in using the city to reflect on a globalizing world. From the very start of his series in the 1970s, the presence of so many Dutch-Indonesian, Papuan, and Caribbean characters suggested a Dutch identity that was being redefined as the Netherlands opened up to the 'global' through immigration and increasing opportunities for travel. A visit to the Dutch Antilles in *Een ventje van veertig* (*The Perfidious Parrot*) leads an older Grijpstra to reflections on the absurdity of racism and the idea of national identity: 'Quite weird, really, Grijpstra thought. Travelling around blows apart your racism. If you were racist at all. Which he wasn't' (*Een ventje van veertig*, 1996, 9).<sup>5</sup> Moreover, almost from the start van de Wetering's Grijpstra and de Gier series was successful in addressing its two different audiences simultaneously. The story of how he brought his first novel, *Het lijk in de Haarlemmer Houttuinen* (1975), to the market is telling. Initially, van de Wetering could not find a Dutch publisher

for it. When he moved to Maine and translated it for an American audience, he highlighted the exotic appeal of his Dutch location with its English title, *Outsider in Amsterdam*. The Dutch publication followed in the same year, its Dutch title clearly signalling to its Dutch audience that this was a home-grown detective story. Throughout his career he would continue to publish almost simultaneously in both countries. In fact, rather than translating his novels he rewrote them, tweaking and amending them with his diverse target audiences in mind. In a Dutch interview he reflects on this at length:

That's the enjoyment of writing in two languages, you can play all sorts of jokes which are harmless in the other country, also with names of people. In the past I've put the name of a man I didn't like in an English edition because the man doesn't read any English and will never find out; in the Dutch version his name is totally different. I also change whole sections of the books. English is my second language and I don't move around it as comfortably as in Dutch; those first English versions are fairly rigid constructions, more like exercises, because in the Dutch version I act up more, also by using dreams and daydreams. (Mechanicus 1980)

As van de Wetering himself points out, the Dutch versions differ in that they are often more surreal and playful. They engage the reader with in-jokes, such as the rivalry between Amsterdam and Rotterdam that is signalled in the Author's Note for *Een ventje van veertig*: 'This narrative is based on fantasy. Everyone knows that the American "Special Forces" only commit legitimate crimes. ... Rotterdam is a beautiful city full of sweet people. The Amsterdam police force is not corrupt' (5). In the same spirit, there is the extended faux-translation of the invective used by a foul-mouthed American cop, a bilingual joke that could only really be understood by those (many) Dutch readers familiar with English (85). The American versions, in contrast, highlight a more transparently 'exotic' Amsterdam background, 'translating' Dutchness into images and language – canals, gable-fronted houses, happy hookers, and hippies – that are readily comprehensible for non-Dutch audiences.

The present chapter focuses on the representation of Amsterdam, its society and people in van de Wetering's detective fiction. While his detectives do a great deal of travelling – to Japan, the Caribbean, and the U.S. – it is Amsterdam as 'imagined community' that is central to his series of police procedurals. As a result of the international dimensions of his work and writing, the Amsterdam we are presented with is a fundamentally doubled and palimpsestic representation, an auto-image for the Dutch reader dovetailing with the 'exotic' Amsterdam held up for American readers. What is more, van de Wetering wrote his series from a distance, remembering Amsterdam from the vantage point of an emigrant in Maine. Early on in the series, his Amsterdam is *already* a creative act of nostalgia, based on the memory of past experience. Despite many return visits, he wrote with the mindset of someone already absent and 'ec-centric' to the city he describes. In what follows, I will argue that van de Wetering's crime fiction presents a doubled image of his city. His is a very particular, tourist-focused Amsterdam,

limited to the historical city centre ‘with its right-angled gables and tip-up canal bridges’ (obituary in *The Times*, 2008). Surprisingly, however, van de Wetering also presents, right from the start in 1975, an intimation of the post-colonial ‘global village’.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, very early on in the Dutch debates around the multicultural society – before the introduction of the 1984 Ethnic Minorities Policy, which formally established the discourse of ‘multiculturalism’ in the Netherlands – he prefigures Amsterdam as an incipient multicultural location. However, far from giving readers a rosy-coloured utopia that simply re-articulates the vision of Dutch society as exemplarily tolerant and open, van de Wetering combines his image of Amsterdam as ‘global village’ with a mocking, at times uncomfortable argument around race and racism. The current Dutch debate around the multicultural society – with its urgent questions about Dutch identity, the competing demands of freedom of speech and political correctness, and the weight of the colonial past – are all prefigured in van de Wetering’s Amsterdam, shimmering through what appears at first as merely a comic, touristy, and nostalgic imagined community.

### The City as Palimpsest

Focusing on the historical centre of Amsterdam, the inner canal zone or *grachtengordel* with its seventeenth-century houses, there is no doubt that van de Wetering’s fiction offers many instances of iconic Dutchness. This is the exotic, picture-card Amsterdam of tourist guides, dominated by canals and bridges, and undoubtedly appealing to a foreign readership. Addressing his tourist readers and his Dutch audience alike, Dutchness is overdetermined in these novels, with national stereotypes and key features evoked and confirmed again and again. One of van de Wetering’s most intriguing novels, *The Mind-Murders*, tellingly starts with a call to police headquarters from a ‘street seller, dispensing raw herring and onions from his stall’ (13). In another novel, *De Zaak Ijsbreker (Hard Rain)*, Grijpstra and de Gier pause to admire the beauty of the seventeenth-century, canal-fronted patrician house of the murdered man whose case they investigate. With equal regularity, this Amsterdam overwhelms the detectives with its magnificence, providing aesthetic ‘moments of being’ in which they suddenly catch glimpses of beauty and perfection in the midst of the chaos that surrounds them. Such moments frequently occur to Grijpstra, a detective who paints in his spare time. In the opening pages of *The Mind-Murders*, he experiences just such a moment of insight when he ascends a cart, all the better to see de Gier’s attempts to rescue a suspect from a canal. Ignoring the superficial tumult of what is happening in the canal, Grijpstra finds himself appreciating the beauty of the composition in front of him, his vision linking mysteriously and almost magically with the seventeenth-century world of Dutch genre painting:

He climbed the cart, careful not to tip it, and admired the view – a perfect square bordered by bridge, quay-sides, and the tumbled elm tree – the arena where the law fought its formidable opponent. He averted his eyes. The view

might be interesting but he didn't enjoy its irregular motion. He preferred what lay beyond its limits and observed calm water supporting two black geese with fiery red and bulbous beaks, and glittering eyes. Grijpstra thought that he recognized the scene and searched his memory for associations. The requested information appeared promptly. He saw clearly remembered paintings, created by Melchior Hondecoeter, a medieval artist inspired by birds. The adjutant saw pheasants in a snow-covered cemetery, a giant woodcock defending itself with swollen purple throat and half-raised wings against the attack of jealous peacocks, and sooty coots landing on a castle pond surrounded by crumbling moss-green walls. (*The Mind-Murders*, 16)<sup>7</sup>

Grijpstra's Hondecoeter moment displays an Amsterdam that acts as conduit for these moments of perfect aesthetic experience, giving its detectives access to a beauty that supersedes the everyday and to deeper experiences of the real. This too is Amsterdam as palimpsest, a composite texture where the signs and symbols of the modern city are occasionally accompanied by glimpses of a deeper inscriptedness.

Similarly, the realistic, modern-day Amsterdam at times gives way to an uncanny, heightened dream-reality, which has the detectives gaze with amazement at the cityscape. This is occasioned by the intrusion of the surprising, the magical, and the fantastic into the everyday Amsterdam world. On their way to the corpse of a gunned-down pimp in *The Streetbird*, for example, de Gier spots a vulture in flight, his namesake in Dutch, not a native bird in Amsterdam and appearing here as a striking image of doom. Immediately after, he is confronted by an equally surreal image, the sight of four rollerskating businessmen, behatted and besuited, complete with briefcases (*The Streetbird* 4). Thus the detectives are presented with touches of the surreal in the midst of an investigation – van de Wetering's point here being one of heightened, alienated vision, of inviting readers to see the colourful, the bizarre, and the poetic in the everyday. In the same way, the beautiful blue sky observed by the detectives in the story 'Blue, and Dead Too, Yes Indeed' undermines the plot to such an extent that even Grijpstra's mundane police report is overtaken by the surrealist atmosphere; in his statement he repeats the narrator's poetic introduction to the story, resulting in a text which, like a snake, bites its own tale.<sup>8</sup>

The most dominant use of an Amsterdam location as gateway to a higher reality occurs in *The Mind-Murders*, where van de Wetering's Zen Buddhist principles clearly shape both plot and characterization. The novel's plot is infused with the Buddhist concepts of 'fate' and 'karma', the belief that people's actions in this and previous lives affect their fate in a future existence. At the start of this novel, the detectives have been shaken out of their routine (de Gier, for instance, has given up smoking) and as a result they are in a state of fruitful, creative detachment which lasts until the novel's close. The Buddhist vision of the superficial, everyday world as chaotic and meaningless is reflected in the plot, which turns in on itself: ultimately all the running around, all the police questioning and intervening are revealed to have had no effect on what was meant simply *to be*, to run its course. Almost an anti-detective story, *The Mind-Murders* eventually winds

itself down into a very Buddhist sense of stasis and balance. For the two protagonists, Grijpstra and de Gier, it feels as if they are in a dream world, fated always to be drawn back to the same Amsterdam canal, to the same café and the same people. By the side of the Brewers Canal, they are forever encountering the same old man feeding geese; the same cyclist squeaks by; the same shiny Mercedes is always in the process of parking in front of Hotel Oberon, in a story that plays out like a midsummer night's dream and even features a Titania, the barmaid at Café Beelema. The Brewers Canal becomes a microcosmic icon, standing, *pars pro toto*, for the whole of Amsterdam. For van de Wetering the traveller, the émigré, this is a nostalgic love letter to a concentrated, condensed, eternally dream-like Amsterdam that is forever out of reach.

### Heroin Heaven and Anarchy

Showing his Dutch passport to an American police officer in Florida, however, de Gier is forced to deal with a second dominant feature in Amsterdam's (inter)national image: 'She showed him a newspaper cutting. The title read "Amsterdam – Heroin Heaven"' (my translation; *Een ventje van veertig*, 82). As suggested in the introduction, by making Amsterdam the 'scene of the crime' van de Wetering chose a location that could have been suggestive of the hard-boiled noir tradition, had he opted to emphasize the grim reality of drugs, drink, prostitution, and poverty. However, the dominating perspective on the city and its lowlife in the novels is comical and lighthearted. At first sight, the Grijpstra and de Gier novels appear to be a set of airy, ironic, flippant, even superficial stories. The detectives frequently engage in inconsequential chitchat, 'dialogue replete with impotence', as Bert Jansma defined it (1980). They engage in long debates over nothing, quibble endlessly, ponder the state of the country, and contemplate their respective hobbies, sexual partners, and even their pets. All three central detectives, Adjutant Grijpstra, Sergeant de Gier and their superior, the armchair detective mainly referred to as the *commissaris*, respond to the presence of attractive female witnesses and policewomen with (mildly) sexual daydreams and visions, such as the repeated reverie in which the older Grijpstra imagines himself as magnanimously presenting his younger colleague with a beautiful policewoman (*The Mind-Murders*, 129-30). Indeed, these chatty, funny, un-macho, bureaucratic detectives are the exact opposite of the cynical, hard-boiled voice of the average American police novel. Undoubtedly these Dutch policemen are 'soft-boiled' when set against the American noir tradition; the relief they offer from the gritty urban 'realism' of the American police procedural is unquestionably a central aspect of their appeal in the United States. The American audience, consequently, is charmed by the exotic, relaxed Amsterdam of these crime novels, their voluble, eccentric, ironic detectives, and their distinctively aimless dialogue, as van de Wetering suggested in an early interview with *Het Parool* (1978).

For his Dutch audience, on the other hand, van de Wetering's Amsterdam may rather seem an exercise in nostalgia. Van de Wetering's Amsterdam is clearly a town full of prostitutes, pimps, gangsters, drunks, and drug dealers, but it nev-



ertheless exudes the safety and cosiness of the past, when even the Red Light District passed for ‘gezellig’. In this sense, this teeming, cosmopolitan capital recalls the small, closed (and close-knit) communities of a typical Agatha Christie novel. Drug dealers appear, but addicts rarely; prostitutes are always cheerful and generous when they encounter the detectives. Van de Wetering features highly liberal policemen who are aloof, detached, and tremendously cool, and who deal with crime benignly. Importantly, they are doing this with reference to a community: admittedly a community of pimps, whores and drinkers, small-time crooks and eccentrics, but a small and recognizable world nonetheless where everyone has a name – a far cry from the big-city anonymity experienced by modern-day policemen. This is a capital, cosmopolitan city that paradoxically retains the feel of a village, ‘one of the smallest world cities’ indeed (Cohen 2006). To some extent this safe, small-town image defuses the hard and painful realities of organized crime that are known from press coverage about trafficking, pornography, drugs, and prostitution in the Netherlands. In contrast to such press reports, van de Wetering assures his Dutch readers that the liberal, tolerant, de-pillarized society need not lead to an alienated, impersonal, or cold modern city.

Likewise, that other international stereotype, the mellow, relaxed Amsterdam of the 1960s and 1970s is frequently invoked – liberal, anti-authoritarian, and unorthodox, yet another image of Amsterdam that can be claimed, with some adjustments, for both Dutch- and English-speaking audiences. British and American readers may nostalgically remember this mecca of the counterculture, the hip, libertine city of the Vondel Park, the hippies and the squatters, a city of hallucinatory drugs and rock and roll, of joyous sex and happy hookers. While he files an official complaint with a colleague about his policemen’s abuse of power, Grijpstra happily avails himself of the opportunity to grab some free cake, baked by the madam of a nearby brothel in gratitude for the police co-operation (*The Mind-Murders*, 45-6). Elsewhere, de Gier too is easily distracted:

[De Gier] looked at a window where a tall black woman in white lace underwear stared back at him. She smiled; the mauve neon lighting of the small room made her teeth light up. She pulled a hidden string and her bra opened for a moment, displaying a perfect bosom. (*The Mind-Murders*, 183)

Van de Wetering’s novels play to this fantasy Amsterdam promoted in countless tourist brochures, the destination of numerous British stag and hen parties, an imaginary location of leisure and indulgence where, it is believed, anything goes. In this imaginary Amsterdam, the city centre and more particularly its Red Light District function as a site of the carnivalesque. Here, as Bakhtin’s concept suggests, society’s rules and conventions can temporarily be suspended, anything goes, the visitors can indulge, transgress, and live out their fantasies without inhibitions for the limited duration of their stay, until they return to normality (Stallybrass and White 1986).

At the same time, van de Wetering’s Dutch audience is able to read this Amsterdam slightly differently, taking pride in Amsterdam’s rebellious, anti-bourgeois image as a recalcitrant place, so often in opposition – culturally and politi-

cally – to the supposedly more pliable and conformist provinces. This Amsterdam – more frequently articulated in the Dutch versions of the novels – appears to be a city on the brink of anarchy, a fact which does nothing to faze the detectives. In fact, ‘anarchists like their creator’, the detectives revel in its unruliness and wildness (Fortuin 2008):

‘Evil’, the *commissaris* said, ‘is tolerated in Amsterdam, which makes it visible so that you can live with it up to a point. I imagine that the Frisians suppress the evil that is within them too, but a bit too much so. Well, you repress it. It struggles to liberate itself, and then, all of a sudden...’ (*De ratelrat*, 162; cf. *The Rattle-Rat*, 200)

Van de Wetering expressed a similar sentiment in an interview from 1980: ‘Yes, Amsterdam is a city of black sheep, people who don’t fit in with the normal, dumb, stolid, unimaginative way of living. But Amsterdam creates all of our art, and also much of our science’ (Filstrup 1980, 101). Indeed, *The Rattle-Rat* makes a continuous joke out of the opposition of Amsterdam to the virtuous, disciplined and orderly provinces. One of the Frisian policemen sneers at the ‘[f]oreign filth [that is] concentrated in your city’ (142). When six Chinese gangsters steal six bicycles, three in Amsterdam and three in Frisian Bolsward, this is not immediately obvious in Amsterdam. In Bolsward, however, the damaged bicycle locks left behind are described as ‘defiling’ the pavement (104). Leaving a car half-parked on the pavement is, Grijpstra says, typical for Amsterdam (‘geewoon Amsterdams’): ‘When I feel like it. Lazy. Don’t feel like parking the vehicle properly between others. Why bother? Nobody bothers in Amsterdam’ (74). Indeed, because of its compulsive neatness, its tidiness and discipline, Friesland feels uncanny to a visiting de Gier, as he compares its capital city, Leeuwarden, to the Dutch capital:

Leeuwarden, the Frisian capital, was Amsterdam in miniature and perfect in detail, as the architects of the Golden Age, over three hundred years ago, had planned their creation. That I’m allowed to partake of that well-meaning and artistic dream, de Gier thought... No crumpled cigarette packs, no dog droppings, not even in the gutter. Too clean, maybe? De Gier felt uncomfortable. Once contrasts are pushed aside, once everything becomes the way it should be, what do you do? And why was he here? (128)

This is Amsterdam as a site of disruption, where dissent, discontent, and disorder are allowed to erupt – ‘a chaos’, as the detectives observe.

[The police car] stopped again for some drunks who tottered from sidewalk to sidewalk in the narrow street.  
‘Sorry’, Karate said, ‘only civilians can speed in Amsterdam’.  
‘Yes’, Grijpstra said, ‘or no. Never mind. Maybe I see it now, but I don’t see all of it’. ‘Beg pardon, adjutant?’  
‘A chaos’.

‘It sure is, adjutant. See that respectable lady over there? With the hat in her eyes? A schoolmistress or a welfare worker. Drunk as a coot. How the hell did she fall into sin?’. ‘I’ve never accepted the chaos’, Grijpstra said. ‘Perhaps I should. Turn up that siren, constable, we’ve got to get out of here’. (*The Mind-Murders*, 183-4)

Van de Wetering notes the lack of respect for authority with approval, and frequently the detectives and policemen are cowed by assertive, defiant, and bold locals – like the ambulance drivers in van de Wetering’s story ‘Blue, and Dead Too, Yes Indeed’, who enquire whether the detectives have themselves beaten up the suspect they are collecting (*De kat van brigadier De Gier en andere verhalen*, 13). In *The Mind-Murders*, De Gier’s careful undressing, before diving into the canal, is observed with glee and some reverse sexual objectification, by two bystanding girls enquiring how much he charges for his services (*The Mind-Murders*, 14).

### Imagining Multicultural Amsterdam

From the start of van de Wetering’s humorous police procedurals, as early as 1975, his Amsterdam was a decidedly multicultural city, a city of tourists, migrants, incomers, and blow-ins. The central suspect of his first novel, *Outsider in Amsterdam*, is a Papua, exiled because of his past service with the Dutch colonial police; the stylish victim of his second novel, *Buitelkruid (Tumbleweed)*, murdered in her house boat, was born in the Caribbean. In every novel, moreover, the police detectives are faced down by an assertive and witty multicultural population. Here van de Wetering takes pains to emphasize they are ‘at home’, *this*. Indeed, the many Indonesian, Chinese, Japanese, American, Caribbean, and South-American witnesses and suspects often turn the tables on the policemen, interrogating them concerning *their* attitude towards racism, *their* sense of tolerance, and *their* own national and regional identities.

Moreover, van de Wetering’s Amsterdam – often restricted to the central canals of the *grachtengordel* – is also clearly depicted as a town with (neo)colonial roots, as a layered construct with a number of historical periods superimposed. In a number of novels van de Wetering is at pains to point out that the drug pushers and prostitutes of present-day Amsterdam are the modern-day equivalents of the traders and merchant adventurers of a seventeenth century that is not as far away as it may seem. Thus, the house of the ‘Hindist’ sect in *Het lijk in de Haarlemmer Houttuinen (Outsider in Amsterdam)* started its existence as a warehouse, and was built from the same wood as the merchant sailing ships. Modern trade, van de Wetering suggests over and over again, has only adjusted to changing circumstances: the house is now a centre for a new type of merchandize from the East, heroin from Pakistan. Likewise, in *Een ventje van veertig (The Perfidious Parrot)*, a despicable, racist father and his son, Pieter and Karel Ambagt, earned their wealth illegally by breaking international and Dutch boycotts, such as the economic sanctions in place against apartheid South Africa from 1962. Their crime too repeats Dutch colonial history, as they tell the Jewish policeman Cardozo. Remind-

ing him of the many Cardozos in the cemetery of the Dutch Antilles island of Sint Eustatius, they sneeringly point out that these Dutch-Jewish merchants trading during the American Revolutionary War broke an earlier boycott, this time the British boycott of the republican American states (*Een ventje van veertig*, 97). In *De straatvogel* (*The Streetbird*), the presence of the charismatic but vicious pimp Luku Obrian in Amsterdam is connected explicitly to Amsterdam's history as a one-time heart of the slave trade. Obrian's arrival in Amsterdam, his disturbing presence, the fundamental upheaval he causes, is described by the policemen as revenge that is visited on Amsterdam for the sins of its past: 'He wished to avenge the fate of his forefathers', they say (in the Dutch text the sense of agitation that is evoked is even stronger: 'He predicted he would *disconcert* us' [22]). In fact, so regular are the references to the Dutch colonial past, so obvious are the echoes and traces of this history on the surfaces of modern Amsterdam, that van de Wetering appears to be highlighting what Jan Aart Scholte has referred to as the 'proto-global activity' of the Dutch in the early-modern period: if the expansionist enterprises of this period, such as the Dutch East India Company, offered early 'intimations of globality', van de Wetering appears to be highly sensitive to this, locating the roots of the multicultural city in a dark colonial past which it is unable to repress (Scholte 2005, 89-90).

But recent history has left its traces and ironic echoes, too. Jelle Troelstra, the Frisian café owner who is involved in the intrigue of *The Rattle-Rat*, served in the Dutch colonial forces in New Guinea, his period there a punishment for his Nazi sympathies during the Second World War and his presence at the Russian front. Even one of the heroes, Adjutant Grijpstra himself, turns out to have a colonial past serving as a member of the Royal Netherlands Indies Army (the KNIL) in the former Dutch colony. The *commissaris*, on the other hand, is still marked by his sufferings as a member of the Dutch Resistance. German tourists, in van de Wetering's universe, frequently call up references to the war, as when two colleagues from Hamburg come over to investigate their link with a case: 'The *commissaris* watched the three men walk away, Grijpstra leisurely ahead, the German policemen marching slowly in step. He shuddered and his hand missed the door handle of his room' (*The Mind-Murders*, 198).

It appears, then, that van de Wetering's novels persistently signal an Amsterdam that has carried the traces of its past into the present, whether it reminds the *commissaris* of his traumatic war memories, confronts the detectives with the city's dark links with slavery and colonialism, or provides Grijpstra with a more benign palimpsest as he 'sees through' the present to an early-modern Hondecoeter painting. Bearing in mind the Buddhist framework for van de Wetering's fiction, I would suggest that van de Wetering presents a modern Amsterdam that is in effect living out the city's karma. Its gangsters, pimps, and prostitutes ensconced in seventeenth-century merchant houses are but the reincarnations of the greedy sailors, slave traders, and colonizers of the past. In *The Japanese Corpse* the *commissaris* makes a similar ethical point with regard to the personality of the dangerous and unscrupulous head of the yakuza gangsters, the daimyo:

In any case he is no ordinary man, but I don't know if he is the maniac that you describe. The fact that he exists means that the society in which he lives has left this space for him, that perhaps this society wants him to exist. In a different society he would play a different part... (*Een dode uit het Oosten*, 247)

The idea is that a society gets the criminals it deserves, and that it has created them out of its past actions. In Janwillem van de Wetering's novels Amsterdam functions as a palimpsestic city, allowing its detectives to catch glimpses, through the commonplace reality, of a higher or denser reality, a world of beauty and aesthetic delight where the surreal and the magical can intrude – but also, at the same time, a world still bearing the uncanny traces of an unhappy and disturbing past.

In a similar way, van de Wetering's discourse around multiculturalism and colonialism, around race and racism is palimpsestic, an incongruous mixture of statements that can at times become a source of discomfort and unease for the reader. Consistently and persistently, van de Wetering develops gags, quips, stories, and anecdotes revolving around nationality, Dutchness and otherness, ethnicity, race and racism. In *Een dode uit het Oosten* (*The Japanese Corpse*), for instance, van de Wetering plays an extensive game with racist stereotypes. While the Dutch police are on the lookout for two Japanese gangsters, de Gier flip-pantly appears to repeat an old racist cliché: 'Japanese and Chinese suspects all look alike in the eyes of the detectives, I've had trouble with that before. I do not understand it, I can see differences!' (*Een dode uit het Oosten*, 11). But when the detective himself is on the run in Japan, the Japanese police cannot find him, as to the Japanese all Westerners look alike (86). In the same novel, Grijpstra reiterates further disturbing orientalist clichés, describing Japanese tourists in Amsterdam as the ultimate example of discipline and lack of individualism, 'little men in grey trousers and blue blazers and those cross belts for their camera gear' (11). The discovery of a Japanese corpse leads de Gier to proclaim: 'Perhaps this will be a subtle case' (16). More cultural shorthand follows in Grijpstra's thoughts, about Japanese cruelty during the war, kamikaze pilots, but also Japanese temple music and the 'pillars' of Buddhism: pity and the practice of detachment. A final element of Grijpstra's racist cultural baggage is a 'pre-war film in sepia' with the old cliché of the Eastern villain (19, 20, 38). But when de Gier and the *commissaris* travel to Japan, *The Japanese Corpse* suddenly turns out to be a travel narrative as much as a detective story, the account of a fascinating, alienating, and enriching encounter with a foreign culture. Their Japanese opponents, the yakuza gangsters, turn out to understand them better than they know themselves. They unerringly diagnose the *commissaris*' fear of death, frightening and mocking him by bringing him face to face with a staged image of his own death. They sense de Gier's fundamental detachment – the recent deaths of his girlfriend and cat have jolted him out of his everyday life, resulting in a Zen-like 'freedom' – and even though the Dutch policemen and their Japanese colleagues win the day, van de Wetering ends his novel with an image of equilibrium, the *commissaris* and the head of the yakuza balancing each other out. In many novels, van de Wetering

repeats this strategy, raising the spectre of racism only to diffuse it and disarm it. Frequently this occurs at micro-level, in seemingly simplistic racist jokes that worry the reader but are then neutralized. Interestingly, van de Wetering is more daring in the Dutch editions.

The most 'uncomfortable novel' in this respect is *De straatvogel* (*The Street-bird*), where van de Wetering persistently threatens to entrap the reader into a racist complicity, as in this faux-naïf dialogue between the elderly *commissaris* and his wife, translated from the Dutch version:

'And the inspector?'

'He's doing the Turks. Now that the Chinese have been sent away the heroin comes from Turkey. The inspector does a good job'.

'And Grijpstra? He can do the negroes?'. She put her hand to her mouth. 'Oh, you're no longer allowed to say that, aren't you? So what do you say? Surinamese?'

'Blacks, dearest. You also have brown Surinamese; Indians and Javanese and the native Indians. And there are Chinese and lots of Jews and Arabs I think, and us, the ordinary whites'.

'So why can't Grijpstra deal with these nasty blacks? Oh, shit, now I'm discriminating again'. (*De straatvogel*, 17)

Significantly, this double-edged dialogue, flitting dubiously and ambiguously between jokes about racism and about political correctness, is not included in the American edition. For the Dutch audience, these comments function as so many textual snares and ambushes. If readers have 'read over' the racism, they now stand corrected and are confronted with their own prejudices writ large. If they did read the dialogue, squirming uncomfortably over the author's apparent racism, they now discover themselves the victims of a nasty authorial trick: van de Wetering was only teasing and the joke is on them. A similar game with racism is played in *The Mind-Murders*, where de Gier again appears to make a racist comment:

'A nice little boy, even if he happens to be pitch black'. 'You discriminate', Grijpstra said, 'So did your colleague inside, but he was referring to people from The Hague'. 'It's impossible to discriminate against people from The Hague', de Gier said. (*The Mind-Murders*, 44)

Here the same narratorial duplicity is encountered, the racism both uncomfortably highlighted and immediately defused, as these comments are undermined by a ridiculous comparison, the discrimination against the posh inhabitants of the Dutch state capital. Conversely, *The Rattle-Rat* offers the most 'comfortable' of van de Wetering's extended jokes and games with race and racism, an obviously absurd example where the same rhetorical strategy is repeated. In a novel that moves between Amsterdam and Bolsward, a sleepy city in the province of Friesland, the topic of racism is raised several times, in relation to the Chinese gangsters the policemen are investigating and concerning the Jewish policeman

Cardozo. Again, in an extended joke the most extensive and blatantly simplistic comments around racism are raised, *ex absurdo*, about the basic ‘otherness’ of Frisians. In this novel, too, van de Wetering seeks to entrap a naïve reader by building up an uneasy discourse that shifts persistently, simultaneously, and awkwardly, mocking both old-fashioned racism and liberal political correctness. His jokes and quips barely cover the discomfort, as he evokes the spectre of racism and anti-semitism, only to defuse it for a nervous, complicit liberal reader. This is van de Wetering’s most fundamental joke, the author as trickster, a court jester employed to make jokes out of our ideological weaknesses, to prod and poke the soft spots of a multiculturalism that was, until the insecurities of the past decade, a confident bulwark of Amsterdam’s open and tolerant identity.

We do well, consequently, in the midst of van de Wetering’s loving depiction of anarchic, irreverent, beautiful, and multicultural Amsterdam, to pay heed to the presence of so many jokes and quips around Dutchness and foreignness, self and otherness, race and ethnicity. So many of van de Wetering’s jokes repeatedly force his readers to decide on shades of racism and difference: is this almost racist, not quite racist, racist, post-racist, or possibly not racist at all? The readers’ moments of discomfort in van de Wetering’s Amsterdam novels – however brief and ludic – make us recognize an author who is worrying a bone. As early as the 1970s, from the perspective of an author who is himself already a migrant, van de Wetering’s novels repeat and rehearse a new Dutch identity; they consistently define and evoke Amsterdam as a multicultural, global village. While van de Wetering regularly reminds us that people are very much the same everywhere, he also persistently stages jokes around difference and otherness. The detective novels around his Amsterdam policemen are an early uncomfortable reflection on a city left behind, on a multicultural society and a wider Dutch identity. This new Amsterdam, half utopia and half memory, an intimate village with global connections, confirms van de Wetering’s work as an early voice in the Dutch debates around immigration and multiculturalism: while he clearly positions himself as a progressive, anti-racist author he consistently rejects an overly naïve, uncritical view of Amsterdam’s status as a global village. Even as a comic representation, van de Wetering’s Amsterdam is a remarkably composite picture. His Amsterdam is indeed a palimpsest: the ‘smallest of world villages’, yet one that sits uneasily on the remnants of colonialism; a picture of confident tolerance, but one where the traces of an earlier racist and colonial inscription are still clearly legible. While he celebrates his Amsterdam, van de Wetering’s jokes are there to remind us of the ideological and historical layers underneath, to caution us against a reading of reality that neglects the city’s historical karma.

## Notes

- 1 Other influences which van de Wetering acknowledged include the Belgian crime writer Georges Simenon (Fortuin 2008) as well as Edgar Allan Poe, Arthur Upfield, and Raymond Chandler (Filstrup 1980, 106-7).
- 2 In the 1990s, Janwillem van de Wetering’s crime fiction was published by Soho Press; more recently his work has been re-issued by the London-based Bitter Lemon Press. In France,

he was published by Gallimard. Two Dutch-language films are based on van de Wetering's Grijpstra and de Gier novels: *Grijpstra en de Gier* (also known as *Fatal Error*, dir. Wim Verstappen, 1979, produced by Rob Houwer with Rijk de Gooyer and Rutger Hauer in the main roles) and *De ratelrat*, a film for which van de Wetering co-authored the script (dir. Wim Verstappen, 1987, starring Rijk de Gooyer and Peter Faber as Grijpstra and de Gier). Van de Wetering's work has also been adapted for the screen in Germany and France. An example of a Robert van Gulik screen adaptation is the television film *Judge Dee and the Monastery Murders* (dir. Jeremy Kagan, 1974).

- 3 In the 1950s, Gerben Hellinga published three early Dutch hard-boiled novels, *Dollars* (1966), *Messen* (1966), and *Vlammen* (1967), featuring the Amsterdam detective Sid Stefan.
- 4 In an interview with Christopher Smith, van de Wetering also refers to the long-standing popularity of his German translations (Smith 2000, 165), while his work is reported to have sold two million copies in fifteen countries. In 1984 he received the French *Grand prix de littérature policière*.
- 5 All translations from the Dutch in this essay are my own, unless stated otherwise.
- 6 Jan Aart Scholte reminds us that '[t]he popular "global village" metaphor was coined in the 1960s' by Marshall McLuhan (Scholte 2005, 116).
- 7 Grijpstra mistakenly refers to Melchior de Hondecoeter as medieval; in fact, the painter lived and worked in the seventeenth century (1636-95).
- 8 'Blauw, en dood ook, jazeker' is a story from van de Wetering's 1983 collection *De kat van brigadier De Gier en andere verhalen*.

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## 10. Amsterdam, City of Sirens: On Hafid Bouazza's Short Story 'Apolline'

*Henriette Louwse*

When in 1996 Hafid Bouazza published his debut collection of short stories *De voeten van Abdullah* (*Abdullah's Feet*), it caused quite a stir.<sup>1</sup> Besides the obvious literary qualities of the collection, it was the author's background that so excited its readers. Hafid Bouazza, born in Morocco, the son of one of the many 'guest labourers' who came to the Netherlands in the 1970s, had arrived there at the age of seven, young enough to be regarded a second-generation migrant. It is worth remembering what the literary landscape was like in the mid-1990s. The first writers born outside of the Netherlands and its former colonial structures were breaking onto the stage: in 1994 Mustafa Stitou had established his reputation as a poet with *Mijn vormen*; on the prose front, Kader Abdolah had published his first collections of short stories in 1993 and 1995; Naima El Bezaz and Hans Sahar had written their first full novels in 1995; and Abdelkader Benali published his debut novel in the same year that saw the appearance of *Abdullah's Feet*.

It is true that the predominantly monocultural Dutch literary landscape had already encountered a number of 'outsiders' before the emergence of young migration writers in the 1990s. Authors from the one-time colonies of Surinam and the Dutch Antilles – such as Albert Helman, Frank Martinus Arion, Tip Marugg, and Astrid Roemer – had, by then, made a name for themselves in literary circles. However, the tremendous interest among the general reading public in second-generation migrant authors like Bouazza was an as yet unknown phenomenon, one that cannot be disconnected from the zeitgeist of the late 1980s and 1990s, when the multicultural society started to dominate political and social agendas. In this period, public debate and government measures were shifting from the 1980s policy of '*integratie met behoud van eigen taal en cultuur*' – that is, promoting the integration of (non-Western) immigrants by encouraging them to preserve as much as possible their cultural identity and original language – to a policy of mandatory Dutch language courses and required civic integration training, institutionalized in the 1998 Integration of Newcomers Act (*Wet Inburgering Nieuwkomers* or WIN). In short, the nation's mood was turning from a celebratory multiculturalism, predicated on belief in the value of immigrants' own culture and language, to an anxious insistence that 'newcomers' must acquire knowledge of the Dutch language and Dutch cultural practice as a precondition for their successful socio-economic integration.

With the multicultural society emerging as the dominant political and social concern, the new multicultural writers quickly caught the public and media limelight, often for reasons secondary to their literary work. Firstly, they were hailed as the embodiment of a successful integration process; indeed, their ability to take the literary bastion was taken as the ultimate proof of their ‘Dutchification’. Secondly (and in obvious tension with the previous point), the bi-cultural authors were often regarded as spokespersons for their home cultures; thus their emergence was seen as an opportunity to ‘unlock’ the immigrant communities for a predominantly ‘*autochtoon*’ Dutch reading public. In this context, what made Bouazza stand out, apart from the literary quality of his debut, was his explicitly advertized resistance to the ways in which his work was received and to the labels that were attached to his writing. He strongly objected to being considered a ‘migrant’ author, an ‘ethnic’ author, or even a ‘Moroccan-Dutch’ author, arguing that since he wrote in Dutch, he was a Dutch writer, and that no further qualifications were required in regard to his work (e.g., see Hoogervorst 1996; Kieskamp 1997; Kuipers 1998). Also, he insisted that his art had nothing to do with his personal background, not even if most of the stories in *Abdullah’s Feet* were set in an imaginary Moroccan village which carried the same name, Bertollo, as the actual village from which the Bouazzas had emigrated in 1977 (see also Louwse 2007, 79-102). His claim for the autonomy of his art was thus diametrically opposed to the prevailing multiculturalism in the reception.

In its first edition, *Abdullah’s Feet* consisted of eight separate short stories which show a significant degree of coherence and unity: there is overlap in the setting, the same characters recur, and there are various intricate cross-references between the stories. At the heart of the collection are four stories that cover a period of about a decade, all set in Bertollo, a small and dusty Moroccan village. I will need to say a few words about the Bertollo stories before moving on to ‘Apolline’, the main concern of this essay. The protagonist of three of the Bertollo stories (in two cases referred to as Hafid) is a younger version of the narrator who recalls the events of his youth in a retrospective first-person narrative.<sup>2</sup> Although the present location of the narrator remains undisclosed, the reader acutely senses a cultural gap: it is clear that this narrator has moved away, has taken a step back, and is observing the Bertollo community from a distance. This detached narrator constructs the village and its characters from cultural clichés and fairytale-like occurrences: feet can think and talk, trees turn into humans, and vice versa. Yet the stories are far from idyllic: sexual aberrations and religious fanaticism reign supreme, the spiritual leaders are as corrupt and degenerate as the rest of the people, and stealing and cheating are the order of the day. Significantly, there is no intercultural encounter per se: the cultural gap the reader senses is internal to the perspective of the ‘native’ narrator who distances himself from the world of his past and who, in so doing, aligns with the one-dimensional views of the Arab world that are predominant in the West, seeing this world as both exotic and cruel, romantic and perverted, horrifying and fascinating at the same time. One important effect of this narratological construct is that it creates a ‘comfort zone’: a zone shared by the reader and the narrator as they remain at a critical and emotional distance from the world and fortunes of the people of

Bertollo. However, as the Bertollo stories progress, the ‘critical distance gap’ can also be seen to narrow until it has entirely disappeared. By the end, the narrator has been sucked into his own stories: he has turned into a demon who wanders the ruins of oppressive cultural orthodoxy; Bertollo has become a ghost village and literally goes up in flames.

In what follows, my argument will be that although ‘Apolline’ is the only story in the collection that is entirely set in Amsterdam, it is in line with the Bertollo stories in that it joins them in underlining Bouazza’s appeal to not reduce his writing to his personal circumstances or socio-cultural background. My position will be that while the extra-literary deserves attention, it should not distract from, nor should it be seen as standing at odds with, a serious engagement with the text (see also De Graef and Louwerse 2000). In terms of the imagining of Amsterdam in ‘Apolline’, it will be seen that while on the face of it, Bouazza courts a reading of the city in his story as a multicultural meeting point, his penchant for (inter-)textual play also invites readers to move beyond such a reading, to recognize the way in which a much richer array of literary references and associations is superimposed on the image of the city.

### **Cultural Re-Education**

With Bertollo burnt to the ground, up rises the city of Amsterdam as the setting of an intercultural encounter, in which for the first and only time in the collection a woman plays an active role. In the opening lines of the story, Bouazza is careful to link ‘Apolline’ to the previous Bertollo stories: the narrator, called Humayd Humayd – a name that has not occurred before – used to live in Bertollo before he moved to Amsterdam. Why or when this happened we do not know, but presumably a while ago since he has fully become one with his new environment:

I can no longer recall my first impression of Amsterdam, grafted as I am onto the vertebrae of her cobbles, the wooden wombs of her bars and weathered loins of her seedy neighbourhoods. I moved into a bedsit in the Eglantine Street: a cavity in a row of decaying teeth. (96)

The description of the narrator’s fusion with Amsterdam is overwhelmingly physical: vertebrae, womb, loins, teeth. The second reference to the capital follows the same lines – Amsterdam is called ‘a naked, omnivorous, much-loved, overbearing city’ (97) – and this links the city inextricably with Apolline, the story’s heroine and the embodiment of the city’s sensuality, of sexually assertive femininity, and of vocal independence: ‘Taller than I, blonde, high-cheekboned, bushy-lashed, full-hipped, she was the perfect embodiment of my first lonely golden summer in Vondel Park’ (97).

On the face of it, ‘Apolline’ appears to be the recording of a predictable story: the confrontation of a ‘typical’ migrant Muslim male with a ‘typically’ Western European, ‘liberated’ female. Effectively a melancholy monologue, the text opens with the narrator’s retrospective interpretation – given in the present tense – of an

event from his childhood: he had fallen into a ditch and was rescued by a solitary old man, shunned by the rest of the village, who took the boy to his house so that he could dry himself off. Here the narrator finds that the walls of the old man's house are covered with pictures of naked women, and the narrator credits his younger self with the surmise that 'these were bound to be the munificent Sirens of the Occident' (96). Looking back, the narrator is convinced that in this past experience the seeds of his love – or better, obsession – for Apolline were sown. The text then shifts into the past tense, recounting the protagonist's first impressions of Amsterdam and his first encounter with Apolline, the blonde goddess he worships and whose 'personality began to dominate my world' (97).

Intriguingly, Apolline's domination effectively takes shape as a programme in cultural re-education and identity reform. She shows no respect for Humayd's religion (he is not allowed to pray in her presence), and she seeks to strip him of what he refers to as his 'identity' (as he recalls, to her it boiled down to 'the beads and henna tracery of folklore' [97]). She also introduces Humayd to pork, alcohol, and 'sophisticated' sex. The pinnacle of her efforts indeed appears to be his 'sexual re-education' (98). Humayd feels humiliated by this but must comply, because, as he explains: 'She wouldn't take no for an answer: she was so domineering, so uncontradictable, so vibrant, so womanly. So I gave myself up – reluctant, dragging my feet, with dark circles under my eyes' (99). Humayd is clearly so overwhelmed that he does not speak: his words are not recorded in direct speech at any moment in the story. Humayd's speechless state stands in stark contrast with Apolline's powerful verbal presence. Indeed, it is as if her words deprive her lover (albeit in *his* version of the affair) not only of his identity but also of his capacity to speak: 'At strange moments she would sprawl on my chest, trace my lashes with a fingernail and say: "I can see myself in your eyes". I could see myself in her eyes, too – foreshortened, deformed, no less puny than I always felt when I was with her' (101-2). When Apolline, 'at strange moments', says that she sees herself in Humayd's eyes, Humayd interprets this in a quite literal sense. Her seeing is determined by her aggressive European identity and her lover's 'oriental' identity – at least, that is how Humayd interprets her words. The dissymmetry in cultural power structuring their relationship has rendered him weak and defenceless, again, in *his* eyes, the only eyes we as readers have. Apolline seeks to strip Humayd of his 'Moroccan' customs and preferences. She calls him, with a degree of derision, 'son of the dead desert' (98); it is also Apolline who decides that he has 'primitive principles', and that he comes from a country 'where sex served for procreation and where aphrodisiac contortions prior to penetration were not on the cards' (98). Humayd adds meaningfully that '[these] are her words' (98).

It appears, then, that Apolline's re-education programme for her lover amounts to an attempt to eradicate the orientalist identity that she had projected onto Humayd in the first place. In other words, Humayd is caught in a cultural conflict between the 'oriental' identity Apolline has attached to him and wants to strip him of, and the 'European' identity she holds up to him as a positive model. By the same token, Humayd refuses to take Apolline and her attempts at communication seriously. When she goes and visits Morocco, he assumes it is one of her jokes, and at no point does he interpret her move as an attempt to genuinely 'see'

or understand him, as an attempt to rise above orientalist prejudice. He records her best moments as moments of silence: typically when she is asleep, lying in a position that is pleasing to his eye: 'At such times she was my Apolline, more than during the livelong day' (101). He expresses a wish for a mute Apolline, so passive that she almost appears dead. In this context, it is significant that we are not told what precisely led to the end of the affair between the two (just as we were never told how Humayd ended up in Amsterdam). Instead, Apolline is painfully returned to the two-dimensional state of her 'origin' in the narrator's memory: he has stuck her pictures all over the walls of his house. Ironically, in so doing, he has become the Amsterdam counterpoint of the village outcast who saved his life at the beginning of the story.

It is clear, then, that 'Apolline' does not paint a picture of successful migration. Rather than showing the transition from 'native' culture, through migrant limbo, to multicultural utopia, the story shows us mutual fantasizing about the orientalist and occidentalist other – and silence. As such it challenges both the clichés of cultural essentialism and the facile, utopian fantasies of multiculturalism. What Bouazza presents instead is the genuine multicultural condition: convoluted, uncomfortable, full of misunderstanding, but with the potential for 'shared difference'. This is confirmed in the final two sentences of the story when the text circles back to the opening scene, superimposing the image of Amsterdam onto Humayd's childhood village in two long and touchingly poised final sentences:

Dark-bricked, grimy Amsterdam swaggers and staggers alongside my youthful mirror image in the murky ditch under the carob trees, where, reversed in watery reflections, the trees take on the shapes of tall, step-gabled canal houses jostling with the ruins of lives – plastic rubbish bags, bicycle carcasses – and where the sun cannot reach the naiads languishing under the rippled surface. The blistering, deathly quiet of the afternoon siesta, the dusty footpaths and the olive trees, the clamour of my disorderly childhood, these provide the background to a life in Amsterdam with rare golden summers in Vondel Park, rainy Sundays, carefree boredom, quenched evening hours – they constitute the difference I shared and will forever share with Apolline. (103-4)

By the end of the story, then, Bertollo and Amsterdam have become inextricably intertwined, bicycles and naiads hiding side by side in a canal-cum-ditch, just as one's past will always also be part of one's present in the texture of memory. The superimposition of Amsterdam onto Bertollo also suggests recognition on the narrator's part of the possibility of 'shared difference', a possibility in which differences are not eradicated but respected for what they are, without foreclosing communality.

## Two Melancholy Monologues

In the context of *De voeten van Abdullah*, as the debut collection of a young Moroccan-Dutch author in which most of the stories are set in Morocco, this ap-



pears to be the type of multicultural reading that Bouazza invites. It is a reading that satisfies readers' desire to see clear cultural opposites represented – 'Western' versus 'oriental' sexualities, and so on – and to see them brought into dialogue or played out against each other. However, this is unlikely to be the full story. Bouazza, with his unrelenting attack on sociological or anthropological approaches to literature in general and to his own writing in particular, is unlikely to leave unchallenged the assumption that concerns of cultural identity and heritage would dominate – or at least have a shaping impact on – an author's literary choices and aspirations. Sneja Gunew, in *Haunted Nations*, describes the expectations levied on multicultural authors as follows: 'Minority writers ... are invariably confined to the issue of their "identity" [and] even in a poststructuralist world of decentred subjectivity ... their ability to produce "textuality" or to play textual games is rarely countenanced' (72-3). Taking my cue from Gunew's insight, I want to propose that the key to an alternative reading of Bouazza's short story lies exactly in his 'textual games': to be precise, in the dialogue that 'Apolline' stages with arguably the quintessential re-coding of male obsession in the twentieth-century novel, Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955). An intertextual reading, focused on questions of composition and style, will both support and extend the multicultural reading of 'Apolline' I have developed so far, revealing the story to be a rewriting of the figure of the obsessive male for a time that is dominated by multicultural worries. At the same time, lifting the text above the immediate context of Dutch multiculturalism will defy the persistent tendency to lock up Bouazza's writing in assumptions based on what is known about his personal circumstances and background.

Bouazza has frequently expressed his admiration for Nabokov, whose style and craftsmanship he admires and whose strictly aesthetic approach to literature he shares (e.g., Bouazza 2004, 92-3). In his informal poetic manifesto *Een beer in bontjas* (2004), Bouazza links his artistic drive directly to Nabokov's example when he argues that the creative force necessary to produce art can only be inspired by art itself and not by personal circumstances. It is the inspiration provided by the confrontation with great literature that will mould a writer and awaken the need or the will to write, not his or her personal or social background:

Authorship does not spring from the first trauma, but from the first discovery of literature. A migration from, let's say, Morocco to the Netherlands could give rise to a degree of homesickness and a sense of alienation and the journey could render interesting material for a story, but the need to write, the will to write only arises when the mind is transported for example to a nacreous, trickling Berlin in the 1930s as described in *King, Queen, Knave* by Vladimir Nabokov. (16)

In 'Apolline', Bouazza gives literary expression to this admiration when Humbert Humbert's musing on the various forms of *Lolita's* name in the opening lines of *Lolita* reverberate in the words of the other H. H., Humayd Humayd:

Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul. Lo-lee-ta: the tip of the tongue taking a trip of three steps down the palate to tap, at three, on the teeth. Lo. Lee. Ta.

She was Lo, plain Lo, in the morning, standing four feet ten in one sock. She was Lola in slacks. She was Dolly at school. She was Dolores on the dotted line. But in my arms she was always Lolita. (Nabokov 2006, 7)

Apolline, my will o' the wisp, my heart's fancy. How odd that a name can acquire a taste on the tongue. This taste – I know it – is physically determined, the taste of Apolline's womanhood: the taste and pungency of oyster sauce.

At first she was Abouline in my mouth; during the halting ascent of sexual peaks (which she would not allow to be wordless) she was Appelin. But now she is Apolline she will always be Apolline, a whisper above the widening eddies of a moist death. (Bouazza 2000, 96)

Not only does Bouazza allude on a stylistic level to *Lolita*, in terms of structure, too, there are parallels with Nabokov's novel. In *Lolita*, Humbert suggests an explanation for his obsessive interest in young girls when he offers the reader an incident from his early youth: as a twelve-year old, he was thwarted during his first sexual encounter with Annabel, which, he speculates, created a rift in his life: 'I am convinced ... that in a certain magic and fateful way Lolita began with Annabel' (12) (see also Bouazza 2011, 31-3). For Humayd, it was the encounter with the pin-up images in the house of the old man after his fall in the local ditch that prepared the way for his obsession with Apolline:

These were bound to be the munificent Sirens of the Occident, and in my heart at that very moment the seeds were sown of my love for Apolline, in whom I was to find tangible evidence of that two-dimensional voluptuousness. I loved her before I saw her. (96)

However, it is the narratorial frame that evokes the intertextual link most relevant for our discussion. Both texts are melancholy monologues, confessions of a lost love, recorded solely through the eyes of the male narrator. Moreover, in both cases the narrator's verbal *souplesse* and stylistic exuberance manipulate the reader into accepting a coloured view of the love object that is depicted. Humbert, in his eloquent and self-deceptive defence, would like the 'Jury' and his readers to believe that Lolita is a devious, perverted little girl, a budding prostitute, 'hopelessly depraved', 'a little deadly demon' (Nabokov 2006, 16). This evocation of the sexually avaricious nymphet is employed to distract from the deviant sexual preferences of a middle-aged man who takes advantage of his twelve-year old stepdaughter (see also Goldman 2004; Shelton 1999). Humayd's portrayal of the all-powerful Apolline as a sexually liberated and insatiable creature, who is not only disrespectful of Humayd's cultural heritage but also out to corrupt, humiliate, and feast on the protagonist, is equally carefully and skilfully constructed. Not only in his description of forced sexual activities, but also from the metaphors Bouazza employs, Apolline emerges as the adult version of

Nabokov's perilous nymphet. Nabokov's required age gap between the nymphet and her victim – 'never less than ten I should say, generally thirty or forty' (16-17) – is replaced by a cultural distance between the occidental siren and her defenceless oriental prey.

Famously, Nabokov's nymphets possess a 'perilous magic' that brings older men under their spell; they differ from normal little girls in that they are 'not human, but nymphic (that is, demoniac)' (150). In Bouazza's version, the nymphet is changed into a nymph, a naiad, or a siren: mythical creatures associated with water and rivers, and all to a greater or lesser extent dangerous and out to tempt and destroy men. Recognizing Apolline's mythical qualities explains a number of Humayd's mysterious descriptions and comments. Indeed, bearing in mind that naiads live in fountains, the following words recorded by Humayd fall into place: 'She paused by a fountain and said pensively: "Funny how water always sounds so inviting. But you'd know all about that wouldn't you, son of the dead desert?"' (98). Similarly, Humayd notices that 'sometimes she would raise her shoulders and fold her back feathers' or that she would lie 'naked on the bed ... twirling her socked feet in the air' (101). Sirens are birdlike women with wings, and one wonders if Apolline insists on wearing socks to hide her bird feet. What is more, not only does Bouazza commingle the human with the animal, he also fuses the animate with the inanimate when Apolline is at times indistinguishable from her environment, the city of Amsterdam. As mentioned earlier, Amsterdam, like Apolline, is depicted in very physical language, using images that are not only full of sexual resonance ('naked, omnivorous') but also of decay ('weathered loins', 'decaying teeth'). Amsterdam as a deliciously dangerous and depraved city is the perfect match for an equally dangerous transgressive life form such as Apolline: 'she was the perfect embodiment of my first, lonely summer in Vondel Park' (97). To complete the picture, the threat constituted by Apolline is also implied in her name. Humayd remembers how she herself revealed the meaning: "'It's amusing to think my name derives from Apollo, but it doesn't, my sweet. My name comes from Apollyon, also known as the Destroyer, another name for the devil'" (102).

## Alternative Vision

As in *Lolita*, where the reader is only offered Humbert's version of events – a version shaped by its purpose, to defend his case in front of a jury – in 'Apolline' we are only ever offered Humayd's account of the merciless temptress. It is through his language that the opposition between the sexually insatiable, liberated female versus the defenceless male is constructed. Yet – again following Nabokov's narrator-persona – Humayd cannot keep an alternative vision from sporadically breaking through his dominant interpretive frame. The most striking example of this is when the text quite abruptly shifts to a letter Apolline wrote to Humayd when she was on holiday in Morocco, his 'fatherland'. Apolline relates how she experienced a culture shock: when she asked an old man squatting under a palm tree what he was doing, he replied 'Just squatting', and Apolline offers an in-

terpretation: 'I think I understand you better now. This must also be how you undergo my love: when you squat, why not under a palm tree? I have always refused to believe there was nothing hidden behind your introversion. What does it matter? I love you' (121). Her reading of Humayd's 'submission' to her love as somehow indifferent to her ('when you squat, why not under a palm tree?'; when you undergo love, why not mine?) are an indication of Humayd's refusal to look beyond his depersonalized obsession with the *Playboy* Playmate-like woman and of his unwillingness to actually communicate with her as an individual. It is telling that the narrator does not pursue the point of Apolline's letter but instead retraces his feelings of jealousy over the numerous 'pregnant men' which he imagines she has left behind in Morocco (121). Instead of responding to an invitation to genuinely communicate, the narrator prefers to re-experience the tormenting thought of 'her golden and pink beauty in the dust and the sun of that noisy, sullen country' (122). Humayd will not allow his Apolline to be anything other than what he wants her to be: a 'Siren of the Occident', a projection of his hysterical fantasies.

The presentation of a passive, victimized Humayd is further undermined when he records, in an obvious reference to the Red Light District, how 'Red-framed sirens beckon behind deaf glass to me, wearing the same lingerie I liked to see Apolline wear, but which she hated'. The use of the word 'siren' aligns Apolline with the Amsterdam prostitutes, and Humayd's wish for her to wear presumably provocative underwear encapsulates how he would like to see her: as sexually available. He seemingly fleetingly records Apolline's resistance to this role when she rejects her lover's preferred lingerie, but just as the prostitutes are placed 'behind deaf glass', Apolline is imprisoned in silence. It must be noted here that at no point in the text does Humayd actually speak to Apolline, or to anyone else for that matter – apart from us, listeners, readers. He tells us repeatedly that Apolline 'did not tolerate contradiction' (119), and the text of his memory faithfully obeys this command. In the memory of her presence, the narrator is quite literally speechless: there are only some seven instances of direct quotation in the text, and, with the one exception of the old man in Apolline's letter, they are all Apolline's. Yet it is the extreme sophistication with which he recalls this speechless state that makes his monologue such a haunting experience. The text alternates between a past in which the protagonist is absolutely silent and a present in which he displays extreme textual articulacy. The question arises why he did not 'speak' in the past, why he persisted in silence in the face of Apolline's determination to discard the 'beads and henna painting of folklore' she associated with his 'identity' (117), or again, when he was hurt by her 'frivolous intelligence and untroubled cynicism' (119). It is difficult to read in his curiously controlled 'remembered' silence anything other than a persistent refusal to communicate, to move beyond his carefully drawn construct of Apolline as the dominant, irrefutable female who is out to strip him of his 'ethnic pride and primitive principles' (119). Clearly the narrator has an ulterior motive when he persistently rejects communication, thereby keeping the clichéd representation intact.

In an interview in *De Groene Amsterdammer*, shortly after the publication of *De voeten van Abdullah* in 1996, Bouazza briefly refers to his narrator's wish for a passive, silent Apolline:

Apolline was a kind of dream image for the boy, as he knew it from pictures in *Playboy*. But when he is in Amsterdam, that blonde woman with breasts and buttocks turns out to have a soul as well, and a character that proves to be a lot stronger than his own. He cannot deal with that. He discovers that in his native village he never received any education in love, only in sex. He even says on one occasion: ‘She had her good, tender moments. This was when she didn’t say anything and lay in a position he liked seeing her in. It would be better if she were not alive, that would be best’. (Pleij and Vosmeer 1996)

The narrator’s wish for the death of his beloved is represented more subtly in the text than in its author’s interpretive paraphrase (‘At such times she was my Apolline, more than during the livelong day’ [101]), but the gynocidal fantasy remains. Apolline, associated with life throughout the text, abruptly disappears, and Humayd, musing on his Apolline-less state, chillingly reflects: ‘I am a Bluebeard’s castle for the daughters of my memory’ (100). Circling back to the beginning of the story, Humayd’s description of Apolline takes on a different meaning: ‘But now she is Apolline she will always be Apolline, a whisper above the widening eddies of a moist death’ (96). The multiple meanings of ‘moist death’ only strike the reader in retrospect. From what at first appears a shrouded reference to the sexual climax in Humayd’s typically lyrical style, the possibility of a literal moist death emerges: perhaps ‘she will always be Apolline’ because the protagonist has drowned his ‘naiad’ in an Amsterdam canal? It is worth noting that in the Dutch text, Bouazza coins the rather archaic expression ‘*vochte dood*’ for ‘moist death’, rather than the more common ‘*vochtige dood*’. The word ‘*vochte*’, however, has a strong connotation of struggle, ‘*vocht*’ being the past imperfect tense of the verb to ‘fight’ – a possible reference to the resistance Apolline put up to avert her death. In this context, the closing lines – which echo the final words of *Lolita* – take on quite a different meaning: ‘the difference I shared and will forever share with Apolline’ implies that there will be no new memories for Apolline. Her death consigns her eternally to the obsessive fantasies of her jealous lover.

## Textual Play

In ‘Apolline’, Bouazza offers a self-conscious textual manipulation of the orientalist bias which he attributes to his readership. I have already discussed how in the Bertollo stories, the author playfully exploits cultural expectations by painting an Arabic setting which, at least initially, responds to one-dimensional Western views of the Arab world. Interestingly, Bouazza appears to play a similar card in ‘Apolline’, but this time in a setting that is itself Western. Bertollo, the village erected out of cultural clichés (heat, dust, oppressive religion, active djinns, forbidden sexual encounters, and large incestuous families), is replaced by an Amsterdam equally captured in stock images (smoky bars, prostitution, alcohol, sexually assertive women). It is amidst this setting of clichés that Bouazza launches his appeal to move beyond predictable oppositions, to reject the temptation to

classify and generalize, and to respond to the individual and the unique lurking behind the surface of cultural prejudices and preconceptions.<sup>3</sup>

It is significant that the predictable is challenged through the recognition of Bouazza's textual play. Exploring the intertextual engagement of Nabokov's *Lolita*, the protagonist emerges as an unreliable narrator who confidently manipulates his audience by exploiting predictable expectations of a multicultural encounter. By establishing a textual connection with arguably the most well-known unreliable narrator in Western literature, we are also reminded that, although the socio-political, historical, and cultural circumstances of migration authors should not be ignored, it should not distract from attention for the way in which the writing itself confronts its prescribed position within the cultural field. 'Apolline' must therefore also be read as an appeal to not lock up the work of a migration author in the 'Bluebeard's castle' of perceived expectations. Only by allowing Bouazza's text to be more than a socio-cultural statement, by respecting it for what it ostentatiously is, a literary text, can its full potential be released.

Since 1956, editions of *Lolita* have always included Nabokov's short afterword 'On a Book Entitled *Lolita*', in which Nabokov refutes any moralistic or referential reading of his text. Responding to charges of anti-Americanism in his novel, he declares: 'I chose American motels instead of Swiss hotels or English inns only because I am trying to be an American writer and claim only the same rights that other American writers enjoy' (2006, 358-9). Nabokov was acutely aware that his readers and critics, in accusing him of having written an anti-American work, were responding partly to his status as 'an outsider author', and that they exhibited different sensitivities in regard to texts by 'ordinary' home-grown authors. Bouazza's work in general, and perhaps 'Apolline' in particular, shares Nabokov's awareness of the bi-cultural predicament and stakes a similar claim as *Lolita*: the claim to the same rights as Dutch authors have, that is to say, the freedom to enjoy, or better perhaps, *revel*, in textual play.

## Notes

- 1 Hafid Bouazza, *De voeten van Abdullah* (Amsterdam: Arena, 1996). I will base my discussion on the second, revised edition (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 2002). All English translations from 'Apolline' are based on Ina Rilke's translation of the story in *Abdullah's Feet* (2000), with some minor adjustments. All other quotations from the original Dutch given here are my own translations.
- 2 The one exception is in the story 'Satanic Eggs', where the narrative perspective moves to Abdullah, son of one of the village greengrocers.
- 3 In his 2003 novel *Paravion*, Bouazza revisits the affair between Apolline and Humayd in the failed encounter of a migrant teacher and his Paravion (read: Amsterdam) mistress. There is, however, an important difference. In *Paravion* Bouazza makes starkly explicit what remains unsaid in 'Apolline': 'Real love was never part of the plan. If there was anything that could erode his being then it would have to be love. Or maybe not his being, but his... well... what would you call it... his *identity*: a carefully cultivated identity would quite definitely crumble if he could not be the man he had always been and who he wanted to be and that for the very simple reason that she was not the kind of woman he thought a woman should be' (164).

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## **Part III: Global Amsterdam's Cultural Geography**





## 11. **Amsterdam and/as New Babylon: Urban Modernity's Contested Trajectories**

*Mark E. Denaci*

The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed.  
– Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces' (1986, 22)

New Babylon ends nowhere (since the earth is round); it knows no frontiers (since there are no more national economies) or collectivities (since humanity is fluctuating). Every place is accessible to one and all. The whole earth becomes home to its owners. Life is an endless journey across a world that is changing so rapidly that it seems forever other.

– Constant Nieuwenhuys, 'New Babylon: Outline of a Culture' (1974, 161)

As so many of the contributions to this volume attest, the meaning of Amsterdam's mythologized status as a bulwark of freedom, tolerance, and permissiveness is currently subject to much critical debate: who has access to which freedoms, and what kinds of risks might these freedoms involve? Is Amsterdam's celebrated permissiveness too limited, and therefore reserved for only certain segments of its population and city users, or does it extend too far, leaving society vulnerable to various forms of predation from within and from without? As the terms 'access', 'population', 'limited', 'extend', 'far', 'within', and 'without' suggest, most of these debates ultimately revolve around questions of space, including issues of access to specific public and private spaces, control of their material functions and symbolic meanings, and the balancing of productive and restrictive dimensions of borders and boundaries. While these questions are inevitably central to discourses of architecture, urban planning and design, and social policy, Amsterdam has emerged as a particularly charged locus of debate over issues of space, as the one-time 'model city' of social democracy is confronted by the challenges of globalization on at least two symbolic fronts: the first involves the tensions of cultural diversity in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States, dramatized most notoriously by the murder of Theo van Gogh in November 2004, and the second involves tensions over the city's role in a globalized economic system, symbolized architecturally by the remarkable contrast between, on the one hand, the newly built and still developing Zuidas (or South Axis) district with its high-rise offices, and, on the other hand, the historic city

centre.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, the cultural and economic discourses through which those challenges are articulated converge on a number of fronts, most dramatically perhaps in the debates over the present and future of Amsterdam's Red Light District.

Yet, as timely as these debates may be, they often resonate uncannily with the ideas, questions, and images put into play by the model civilization of New Babylon, Dutch artist Constant Nieuwenhuys's utopian project first conceived in 1956 and abandoned only in 1974. Constant – the nom de plume by which he is more popularly known – was part of the Situationist International movement of the 1960s; the Situationists were concerned above all with providing, or at least preserving, spaces of spontaneous social interaction which they felt were threatened by the increasingly regimented and instrumentalist model of urban planning that is a hallmark of functionalist modernism in the context of advanced capitalism. Constant's New Babylon began as a kind of Situationist utopian fantasy of a completely modular city (that is, constructed with standardized, easily adjustable units), free of fixed boundaries and constraints as it floated on stilts above the traffic below. As such, it served as a model for how the most far-reaching Situationist ideas might be applied to an actual city begun from scratch. Significantly, while much of the utopian promise of New Babylon is reflected in the mythological discourse surrounding Amsterdam as a global symbol of freedom and tolerance, Constant's project also functions as a kind of warning about what Amsterdam could come to represent in the absence of certain cultural and economic developments upon which he believed the success of his utopia depended. Beginning with a description of New Babylon and what I will argue is its ambivalent status between utopia and dystopia, I will go on to examine the ways in which it can be used as a metaphor for Amsterdam in both positive and negative senses. First, exploring the utopian promise of Amsterdam as the embodiment of a certain type of Western progressivism, I will consider the city in terms of both New Babylon and Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia, and analyze its particular deployment of space, using Samuel Delany's study of urban transformations in New York City as a point of comparison. The focus of this chapter will then shift to the more troubling, dystopian aspects of New Babylon as they relate to the current situation of Amsterdam, specifically the challenges of global capitalism embodied in the Zuidas business district as well as other, related attempts at re-branding the city as a centre of global commerce. The fact that New Babylon offers both promise and warning, I will argue, has to do with Constant's evolving attitudes towards capitalism and technology over the course of the 1960s, and with the continued relevance of his analysis to today's socio-economic context.

### **New Babylon: Ambivalent Utopia?**

As we will see shortly, many of the debates concerning the present and future role of Amsterdam on the global stage involve issues – in fact, the very definition – of freedom, openness, and creativity, and these concepts were absolutely crucial to the conception and design of Constant's project. Indeed, the artist had

been exploring them well before the inauguration of New Babylon, starting with his career as a key member of the short-lived but influential international avant-garde movement known as Cobra (the name of which refers to its main centres of Copenhagen, Brussels, and Amsterdam). Beginning in November 1948, Constant, together with several collaborators including the Dane Asger Jorn and fellow Dutchman Karel Appel, embarked on a series of exhibitions and publications aiming to combine the most radical artistic tendencies of surrealism, expressionism, and nonfigurative abstraction with an overtly Marxist cultural agenda (Stokvis 1988, 7-20). Shortly before the group's official formation, Constant published an essay that became Cobra's *de facto* manifesto. Notably, he defined art not as an end in itself, but as a provocation towards revolutionary modes of understanding, 'creating a new and fantastic way of seeing' (Constant, 'Manifesto' 30). While the group as such lasted only until 1951, Constant's continued association with Jorn led to the formation of the Imaginist Bauhaus in Alba, Italy, which in turn joined forces with Guy Debord's Lettrist International to form the Situationist International in 1957.<sup>2</sup>

Constant had already begun working on the models that would form the basis of the New Babylon project at the time of his first meeting with Debord at the Alba home of painter Giuseppe Gallizio in December 1956 (Wigley 1998, 15). The project itself was presented to the public in stages, the first of which was an exhibition of models and maquettes at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in May-June 1959. This initial exhibition would be followed over the next decade with increasingly elaborate shows involving drawings, maps, photographs, paintings, films, and texts in addition to the constructed models, often forcing the visitor to navigate a distinctly labyrinthine trajectory (51). Many of these exhibitions included lectures by the artist, at least some of which involved film and slides accompanied by special audio effects, and most of which found their way into publication as essays (9-12, 55). The project, therefore, cannot be categorized as architecture, sculpture, or even art exactly, and this was an important aspect of Constant's intention: as in his pre-Cobra manifesto, Constant was concerned with challenging and transcending traditional artistic categorizations.<sup>3</sup> In keeping with the aforementioned manifesto's commitment to a 'new and fantastic way of seeing', Constant purposely kept the representations of his proposed society in different and sometimes conflicting visual registers (naturalistic and detailed in some instances, and simplified or even expressionistic in others); this prevented the audience from being able to visualize the project literally as a plan for a specific set of structures.

Nevertheless, several distinct characteristics of Constant's vision can be identified. In spite of the massive appearance of many of its models and architectural plans, the key characteristic of New Babylon was the utter flexibility of its boundaries: walls could be built and rebuilt at will, creating larger or smaller spaces depending on the needs of the moment, and the city seemed poised to spread out in a kind of potentially infinite sprawl. In fact, the idea of a 'city' is somewhat irrelevant to the organization of New Babylon, in which a vast network of interconnected 'sectors' rise above the ground on stilts, separated from the more utilitarian worlds of agriculture and high-speed transportation situated



11.1. Constant Nieuwenhuys's *Ode à l'Odéon* (*Tribute to Odeon*), oil and aluminum paint on canvas (1969). (Collection Gemeentemuseum Den Haag).

above and below (Figure 11.1). People were not meant to inhabit these sectors so much as to move nomadically through them, creatively altering the spaces as their needs or desires changed (cf. Okoye 2004, 184-9). As Constant explained in a 1964 essay called 'New Babylon: An Urbanism of the Future', '[E]very element would be left undetermined, mobile, and flexible. For the people circulating in this enormous social space are expected to give it its ever-changing shape; to divide it, to vary it, to create its different atmospheres and to play out their lives in a variety of surroundings' (14). The idea that the people of New Babylon would 'give it its ever-changing shape' was particularly crucial, as his main goal was to unleash what he thought was the stifled creativity of the masses.<sup>4</sup> For Constant, full creativity would produce a virtually unrecognizable way of being, which comes at the expense of permanence and even coherence. Referring to New Babylon's radical lack of fixity in his 1999 study of Situationist conceptions of the urban environment, Simon Sadler went so far as to remark that '[for] the first time in history, the spatial boundaries of a utopian community would seem to dissolve' (147).

While Sadler's characterization contains some truth, I will be arguing shortly that spatial boundaries actually play a significant role in both the conception of New Babylon and its metaphoric relationship to contemporary Amsterdam. The

question remains, however, as to whether Constant ever actually intended these structures to be built. In 1964, for example, Constant sounded certain that the conditions of material plenty necessary for such a utopian project were not only realizable, but even inevitable: 'No force on Earth', he claimed, 'can possibly prevent people seizing the affluence, created by automatic production, that will enable them to live creative lives instead of being merely instruments of production'. The only question, he asserted, was 'how the free men and women of the future will use their unlimited energies', a question to which New Babylon was intended as a possible answer (Constant, 'New Babylon: An Urbanism of the Future', 13). By 1966, however, he acknowledged the remoteness of this future in an interview with performance artist Sean Wellesley-Miller: 'I am very much aware of the fact that New Babylon can not be realized now, that the way of life the New Babylon project is based on depends on new conditions in the field of economy. Automation now does not mean freedom from slavery and toiling, but poverty and boredom for the workers' (qtd. in Sadler 1998, 153). According to architectural historian Mark Wigley, Constant's vision was meant primarily as a provocation, 'more a form of resistance to the current social and spatial condition than a specific proposal for a future world' (68).

While Wigley's interpretation is consistent with my own reading of the majority of Constant's published texts, I would nonetheless add the caveat that in practice, Constant does not seem to have presented his project exclusively as a form of resistance to the status quo; at times, it seems to be as much a critical reflection of current conditions as an alternative to them. In particular, Constant expressed an increasingly apparent ambivalence about how his vision might operate in reality through several paintings he made in relation to the project, most notably towards the conclusion of the project in the late 1960s and early 1970s. From the confusion of ladders extending in all conceivable directions like Futurist or Rayonist force vectors, to the representations of oddly vulnerable and pained looking human residents, and even what seem to be overt and often sexualized scenes of violence and degradation reminiscent of Francis Bacon, the paintings raise several questions about the livability – or even basic desirability – of such a 'utopia' (Figure 11.2). For example, if the structures can be built and rebuilt at will, what would prevent anyone from 'unbuilding' someone else's structure? How would the elderly or the disabled cope with the ubiquitous ladders? Would they be confined to certain levels? And how would the system deal with violent behaviour?

In his paintings, at least, Constant seems cognizant of the potentially serious challenges to human dignity posed by a society free from fixed physical boundaries and rootedness to specific locations. From this perspective, New Babylon would be less a utopia than an ambivalent combination of utopia and dystopia. Despite his earlier characterization of Constant's revolutionary intentions, Wigley eventually acknowledges the evidence of this deep ambivalence, the darker side of which progressively increases in nightmarish explicitness over time:

Discrete figures finally come into focus against a few diaphanous planes in 1968. But their blotchy form now looks like blood stains. Any doubt is re-



11.2. Constant Nieuwenhuys's *Espace en Destruction (Space Destroyed)*, oil on canvas. (Collection Centraal Museum Utrecht).

moved when they become red. There is a sense of ongoing violence. As we finally get close to the figures, close enough to make out faces, they have been piled up or scattered across every surface as if there has been horrific carnage. Human life becomes just a stain of its extinction. (69)

Summarizing this progression, Wigley argues that '[w]hile contemporary cyber-architecture is delivered with the routine euphoric optimism of the long-institutionalized architectural avant-garde, Constant relentlessly explored the hidden menace of his bright new social space and the technologies that made it possible' (71). Though he acknowledges this exploration of 'hidden menace', I am struck by how little attention Wigley and other commentators pay to this aspect of New Babylon.<sup>5</sup> I suspect that the critical reticence has to do with the fact that this profound ambivalence, although clearly related to Constant's earlier work in Cobra, does not fit easily within the parameters of the revolutionary Situationist theory on which Constant himself as well as most commentators rely in explaining New Babylon.

My own take on Constant's apparent ambivalence has to do with the changing cultural context of the 1960s. At the beginning of the decade, Constant and other visionaries could still be optimistic about the prospects of revolution, espe-

cially in a Dutch context: James Kennedy's *Nieuw Babylon in aanbouw: Nederland in de jaren zestig* (1995) actually uses Constant's project as a metaphor for the progressive social changes occurring in the 1960s, including the liberalization of policies relating to such issues as public housing, welfare, abortion, euthanasia, women's rights, and gay rights. While these changes were occurring in many industrialized Western countries during the same period, Kennedy argues that certain characteristics of Dutch culture, most notably a long-held belief in the inevitability of change, led to a faster and more far-reaching liberalization of government policies and social mores in the Netherlands than elsewhere. The rebellious student movements so emblematic of the decade (including the Provo group in Amsterdam, who saw Constant as an inspiration) were just beginning to take shape, and the forces of reaction and cooptation had yet to demonstrate their full power.<sup>6</sup> As the decade wore on and transitioned into the 1970s (symbolized in an American context by the shift from the 'New Frontier' and 'Great Society' of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations to the Nixonian Watergate era), and prospects of revolution (beyond merely incremental reform) grew more remote, one can almost sense Constant's growing cynicism in the increasing brutality of his representations of future society. Constant's repeatedly stated position was that the world depicted in New Babylon was technically achievable but required revolutionary social change, including the abolition of private property. Although this underlying position or premise remained consistent, his focus nevertheless seemed to shift from representing New Babylon as a future alternative to representing it as a dark mirror of then-present conditions. Later in this essay I will return to Constant's stated view of the danger represented by attempts to forge a society like that of New Babylon in the absence of the social and economic changes he thought were its prerequisites. At this point, I want to reiterate my understanding of Constant's project as both an exploration of the possibilities of human freedom and unconstrained creativity and a warning about its potential dangers. This paradoxical aspect of New Babylon, I would argue, is precisely what makes it relevant as a potentially troubling metaphor in the context of key policy debates over the future of Amsterdam today.

### **New Babylon as Metaphor for Amsterdam Today: Heterotopias of Freedom and Containment**

If New Babylon can be understood paradoxically as a visionary utopia, an inhumane dystopia, or both, the city of Amsterdam, both as an actually existing city and as a mental construct, would be better described as a 'heterotopia'. According to Michel Foucault, a heterotopia is, unlike a utopia, a real, existing space, one in which 'the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within a culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted' (1986, 24). It is the space, that is, of otherness, and Foucault further divides these 'other' spaces into two main types: heterotopias of crisis and heterotopias of deviation, both of which serve as refuge for those who find themselves at odds with the rest of mainstream society (24-5). Amsterdam's symbolic status as a space of other-



ness is inextricably linked to its associations with more specifically identifiable heterotopias within its borders. The Anne Frank House is a particularly iconic space of alterity, a museum space ostensibly outside of 'normal' time, marking and memorializing a location where lives were led in a state of crisis caused by racialized conceptions of otherness; the nearby Homomonument, memorializing the gay and lesbian victims of the Holocaust, is an additional example of such a space. The city's famous 'coffee shops' and Red Light District are fairly obvious examples of heterotopias of deviation, where otherwise forbidden or taboo behaviours may occur in carefully regulated spaces. Even the historic canal zone (*grachtengordel*) could be understood as heterotopic in that it is understood as somehow apart from the full modernity of the rest of the city, as could the geographically and architecturally distanced Zuidas high-rise district for the opposite reason. Many of these real, arguably heterotopic spaces, which often compete in representing Amsterdam synecdochally to the rest of the world, are current participants in high-stakes struggles of and for representation: powerful commercial forces are working to commodify and/or gentrify them in order to re-brand the city as a whole as an archetypal hub of global capital, while at the same time the voices of xenophobia and political reaction attempt to close them off to various threatening 'others'.

Is Amsterdam therefore (as the first of those two narratives suggests) in need of modernization, particularly in the sense of creating greater possibilities for innovation and especially mobility of people and capital? Or is the city (as the second narrative suggests) on its way to becoming a more down-to-earth version of Constant's floating utopia/dystopia, revelling in its progressive freedom from constraint while leaving its citizens vulnerable to any and all sorts of degradation and violence by those who refuse to play by its modest rules? These questions and their possible answers hinge on the discourse of spatial boundaries: where and how are boundaries erected, and how porous are they, in either New Babylon or Amsterdam? New Babylon was explicitly designed to challenge the notion of fixed boundaries wherever possible. Paradoxically, it does not do away with boundaries at all – on the contrary, it is entirely dependent upon them. In fact, the only references to open spaces that Constant makes in his essays are in his description of the spaces between his sector constructions, 'extensive open green spaces where nobody lives and where no buildings are to be found' ('New Babylon: An Urbanism of the Future', 14). He specifies, moreover, that this separation from the open space of nature involves *control*: 'Far from a return to nature, to the idea of living in a park as individual aristocrats once did, we see in such immense constructions the possibility of overcoming nature and of submitting the climate, lighting and sounds to our control' ('Another City for Another Life', 115). The spaces of New Babylon, then, are by definition bounded, although the boundaries are designed to be temporary and easily moveable, allowing for the maximization of opportunities for the creation of 'situations', to use Debord's terminology. One could understand the structure as a kind of living being, constantly adapting to the needs or even whims of the moment. Though people set up its walls, only through the 'situations' then created by the enclosed spaces do people fully live.

By contrast, several of the most popular conceptions of Amsterdam involve the loosening or lack of boundaries, at least in certain key areas, such as around recreational drug use and sexuality. Yet, the actual situation in Amsterdam is much more complex: as with New Babylon, the Dutch policies around these issues represent anything but a lack of boundaries. Like those of New Babylon, moreover, the main structures supporting Amsterdam's apparent tolerance also involve containment and control. On the subject of drugs, for example, the creation of designated spaces for the use of certain 'softer' drugs is meant to reduce criminal activity surrounding their distribution, and also to free law enforcement to concentrate on stopping the trade of 'harder' drugs. Everything about the policy, then, relates to notions of 'containment': brought 'inside' the coffee shop and therefore the law, soft drug use can more easily be regulated, monitored, controlled, and separated from other illegal activity.<sup>7</sup> This pragmatic approach to the drug problem may be a perfect example of what Edward Soja, in his comparison of the urban character of Amsterdam to that of Los Angeles, described as the 'cosmopolitan Dutch world of ever-so-slightly repressive tolerance' (1996, 282). The policy of legalized prostitution, likewise, follows the same logic, which is less one of freedom from constraint than one of containment and regulation within specifically designated spaces.<sup>8</sup> As the contributions of Markha Valenta as well as Michaël Deinema and Manuel B. Aalbers to this volume demonstrate, the shift from unofficially 'tolerated' to fully legalized prostitution has resulted in increased surveillance and control over some forms of prostitution along with a concomitant and somewhat dangerous marginalization of other forms outside of the newly official boundaries.

In this way, Dutch 'openness' and progressivism can be seen as a particularly advanced version of Michel Foucault's concept of disciplinary power, which is not exercised through prohibition as much as through systematic surveillance and regulation, and which might be understood as the very antithesis of Constant's Situationist (post-)urbanism. In fact, Sadler describes New Babylon as resisting this type of Foucauldian scenario, understanding its flexible boundaries not as threatening security and privacy, but as guaranteeing them: 'The labyrinthian plan itself offered some reassurance, making the effective governance of New Babylon something of an impossibility. ... The mobile internal guts of New Babylon offered the citizen infinite possibilities for cover, something withheld by the open spaces and transparency of mainstream modernism' (1998, 146). Although Sadler's point is valid, he does not acknowledge the possibility that the 'infinite possibilities for cover' would also be available to predators, or that Constant's own renderings suggest a considerable vulnerability on the part of the inhabitants.

In spite of the apparent contradiction between the Dutch model of spatial control and Constant's vision of spatial anarchy, the Dutch model (especially in its somewhat earlier and less regulated approach of *gedogen*, or tolerance) appears to be far more humane, and far more in keeping with Situationist ideals, than the urban models such as those being enacted by New York City in its transformation of the Times Square neighbourhood, for example. According to Samuel Delany in *Times Square Red*, *Times Square Blue*, during the last twenty

years New York City has been systematically eliminating the kind of heterotopic spaces for which Amsterdam is (in)famous. While New York has never had spaces of legalized (or officially ‘tolerated’) prostitution or drug use, according to Delany, the web of porn theatres and other ‘seedy’ businesses occupying the Times Square neighbourhood from the 1960s through much of the 1980s served a similar function, allowing a relatively safe space for the enjoyment of a range of socially marginal activities by various socially marginal populations, including the poor, the homeless, and the mentally ill, as well as those with unusual sexual tastes and proclivities. One of Delany’s main arguments is that while these businesses were often forced to close in the name of public safety, by eliminating the spaces in which these activities might safely be enjoyed, the affected populations were forced out into the street, into situations far more dangerous for themselves and for others. Drawing on the pioneering work of American-Canadian activist and writer Jane Jacobs, Delany argues that a certain community policing prevalent in the formerly seedy neighbourhoods and businesses is made far more difficult in the less crowded areas to which many of these activities have been relocated. In general, he sees New York City as a place where unexpected moments of interclass contact, which he considers essential for a fulfilling urban life, are made increasingly rare (1999, 153-61 and *passim*). To what extent, we may wonder, might the current ‘Plan 1012’ project to ‘clean up’ and ‘revitalize’ Amsterdam’s Red Light District have similar consequences? As central neighbourhoods become increasingly homogenized for the pleasure of middle-class residents and (especially) tourists, the displacement of already marginalized populations may lead to far greater problems of isolation, violence, and vulnerability.<sup>9</sup>

Amsterdam, arguably, has managed thus far to avoid the opposed pitfalls of a Situationist anarchy on the one hand and the overly regimented, corporate social control instituted in the New York City model on the other, although in many ways it appears determined to head in the latter direction. Certainly, in their comparative study of Dutch and American social policies, John I. Gilderbloom, Matthew J. Hanka, and Carrie Beth Lasley describe Amsterdam’s social achievements in terms not entirely unrelated to Constant’s desires for New Babylon: ‘Amsterdam, at this moment in history, might be the world’s greatest city because of its ability to ensure basic necessities, freedom, and creativity’ (2009, 473). They do not, on the other hand, address any of the current debates within the Netherlands over the continued status of the very policies they praise. The counter-argument – that Amsterdam has drifted too far in the direction of New Babylon by becoming too tolerant and leaving its boundaries too flexible – is hinted at in the subtitle to the paperback edition of Ian Buruma’s journalistic study *Murder in Amsterdam: Liberal Europe, Islam, and the Limits of Tolerance* (2006).<sup>10</sup> In this case, Amsterdam is made to stand synecdochally for not only Dutch liberal progressivism, but for that of Europe as a whole. Buruma includes among his multiple interview subjects several individuals on both sides of the Islamic/secular European divide who condemn the apparent weakness of Dutch society, both in its tradition of tolerance itself and in its failure to guard that tradition more carefully. But Buruma’s text also at least implicitly deals with the potentially productive character of borders, and the necessity to create spaces *for* people and activities as opposed

to merely keeping them out. Quoting a Dutch law student of Moroccan descent's description of feeling 'mentally disappeared' due to discrimination against those wearing headscarves, Buruma writes, 'The sense of being "disappeared" can lead to aggression, as well as self-hatred; dreams of omnipotence blend with the desire for self-destruction' (140). In the end, Buruma blames this aggression neither on stereotypical representations of the nature of Islam nor on similarly caricatured notions of an overly flexible and tolerant Dutch society, but rather on Dutch (and European) society's failure to create spaces of full inclusion for Muslim immigrants and their descendants.<sup>11</sup> In this sense, the arguments of Delany and Buruma overlap: both warn of the dangers of social exclusion, although Delany is more focused on the ways in which urban infrastructure as influenced by zoning and development projects can foster a literal, spatial marginalization as opposed to the more general economic and cultural dynamics of exclusion that Buruma discusses. Thus both Delany (indirectly) and Buruma suggest broad strategies through which Amsterdam could move towards a more functional and humane version of New Babylon: by creating relatively flexible – indeed, in a sense, heterotopic – spaces of broad social inclusion.

### **New Babylon as Dystopia: Zuidas and the Globalization of Amsterdam**

On the other hand, recent developments in the 'imagining' of Amsterdam have not been promising, and the city seems poised to turn into a dystopic mirror of the most troubling aspects of New Babylon. The Zuidas district is a particularly visible case in point. Geographically separated from the city, with few exceptions the development's high-rise buildings look as if they could have been built just about anywhere in the world, providing a somewhat New Babylonian sense of geographic and spatial disorientation (Figure 11.3). In fact, from its inception, the project has been couched in terms of freedom from the constraints on various forms of mobility (economic, structural, and spatial) imposed by the central city. Indeed, the project initially picked up momentum through the influence of private investors like ABN/AMRO and ING, who, in deciding to build in the Zuidas area, disregarded what until the mid-1990s was the municipality's prevailing view that the 'main priority' in terms of urban renewal 'should be to strengthen the old centre of the city by developing the eastern harbour area in close vicinity of the inner town' (Jantzen and Vetner 2008, 150; cf. Salet and Majoor 2005, 35 and *passim*). The private sector continues to play a decisive role in the development of the district, even though the presence of VU University also permits the branding of it as a 'brainport' – not exclusively a business hub – that can be packaged together with the Schiphol Airport and the Rotterdam 'seaport'.

In this context, it seems worth reading the Zuidas project through the lens of Constant's (post-)urban vision, keeping in mind its dystopian as well as utopian dimension. Ironically, given Constant's ideological commitments, Ginette Verstraete identifies the more recent discourse of freedom and mobility to which I have referred as part of a neoliberal socio-economic agenda, claiming that its 'ideal European is someone with a thin connection to any single place – a rootless,



11.3. Zuidas district, Amsterdam. (Photo: M. Meissner).

flexible, highly educated and well-travelled cosmopolitan, capable of maintaining long-distance and virtual relations without looking to the nation-state for protection' (2010, 8). Superficially, this 'ideal European' sounds remarkably similar to Constant's notion of the rootless New Babylonian, although the lack of emphasis on creativity and especially play in Verstraete's description is symptomatic of other, more fundamental differences, which I will address shortly. The Zuidas district would appear to be a textbook setting for this neoliberal 'European' discourse. For example, in the preface to their tellingly titled anthology, *Amsterdam Zuidas: European Space*, Willem Salet and Stan Majoor locate the development of Zuidas within a broad conceptualization of urban space: 'Until the beginning of the nineties, the centre of Amsterdam was regarded as the obvious nucleus of urban and regional economic activity but, since then, issues of accessibility and scale have induced the development of multinodal spatial networks on a regional scale' (2005, 6). This notion of 'multinodal spatial networks' replacing (or at least augmenting) the centralized, hierarchical city plan would seem initially to follow the logic of New Babylon and its network of 'zones' rising above and apart from traditional urban cores. Constant's ideas of unhindered mobility also seem to be echoed in the justification for the existence of the Zuidas development.

Yet, it is precisely through this apparent analogy with Constant's vision that the Zuidas project and the urban and spatial discourses surrounding it may be submitted to critique. In describing the conceptions of urban space at the basis of the Zuidas development, Salet and Majoor put particular emphasis on what they call 'non-territorial bounded networks of communication', claiming that, '[t]he quality of a place lies in its *grade of interconnectedness*' (23, italics in original). In light of this 'network quality' so crucial to the 'new urbanism' of which the Amsterdam Zuidas is emblematic, Wigley's description of Constant's 1960 presentation of New Babylon at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam is remarkable, sounding for all intents and purposes like an idealized description of the Zuidas district:

The network [of structures] sits on top of an even more intricate web of black lines that rush in every direction with what seem to be high-speed streamlined curves. Railway tracks pass more soberly across. Intersections multiply. Everything is interconnected. The overlapping edges disappear off the edges of the plan and the ends of other webs enter from the sides. The already huge megastructure is apparently just part of a vast system. (Wigley 1998, 10)

However, although the new district somewhat mimics the look of New Babylon, and seems geared, in its anonymity and access to multiple forms of transportation and communication, to a more transient, nomadic lifestyle, its capitalist ethos is nevertheless entirely foreign to Constant's vision. While the notion of 'network quality' resonates initially with some of Constant's ideas, it ultimately betrays a far more instrumentalist conception of social interaction, suggesting organization as opposed to spontaneity as its basis. In this regard, Delany's distinction between 'contact' and 'networking' is useful: he sees the former as spontaneous, even random modes of interaction among diverse groups and individuals, and the latter as self-interested, contrived, and ultimately less rewarding forms (such as those encountered in a business mixer or professional conference) (1999, 123-42 and *passim*). The very existence of Zuidas as a specifically business-oriented zone would tend to marginalize spaces of spontaneous 'contact' (in Delany's terms) or creativity and play (in those of Constant). Even when creativity is addressed in a neoliberal context, it tends to take on a radically different character from what Constant and the Situationists had in mind.

In a 2007 analysis of the ideology behind the Zuidas project and Amsterdam's recent urban development in general, Merijn Oudenampsen specifically contrasted Amsterdam's 'creative city' marketing campaign to Constant's radical vision: far from bringing people the freedom to engage in collective forms of creativity, he argued, global capital has turned creativity itself into a branded commodity. Oudenampsen's position is convincing, and I cannot help but to interpret it in light of my earlier reading of the later stages of Constant's project: in an appalling perversion of the Situationist project of making boundaries more flexible and populations more mobile, the neoliberal system turns people into the kind of powerless animals, desperately lost in the labyrinth, that we saw in Constant's darkest, most dystopian paintings. After describing the erosion of traditional social safety nets, Oudenampsen argues that 'while the city looks outside for investments and talent, the local population that isn't productive or cannot market its creativity sufficiently becomes redundant', and '[t]he environment of the Creative City becomes a highly segregated one' (2007, n.p.). Outlining a transformation eerily reminiscent of that of Delany's New York City, Oudenampsen describes a frightening outcome of a process in which formerly fixed boundaries become unstable as in New Babylon, but without the requisite social and economic conditions necessary for its proper functioning. Rather than enriching people's lives, creativity becomes little more than yet another tool of social stratification.

Such a scenario, of course, was exactly what ultimately caused Constant to abandon his project by the early 1970s. As the prospects for revolutionary social and economic change appeared increasingly remote, the artist emphasized that

his proposed society could not possibly function in the current reality. As he wrote in 'New Babylon: Outline of a Culture',

[I]t is unthinkable that a life like that in New Babylon could be imposed on contemporary society, even for the briefest length of time. ... Every reason for aggressivity has been eliminated in New Babylon. The conditions of life favour sublimation, and activity becomes creation. This superior form of existence is only possible in a world of total freedom where the human being no longer struggles to maintain a certain level, but concentrates his activity on the permanent creation of his life, which he directs toward an even higher level. (163)

I concur with Oudenampsen that the Amsterdam of Zuidas, of the campaign to become the 'creative city' of the future, may be attempting exactly what Constant warns against here: the project seems to emulate New Babylon's impermanent and destructured way of life without first attending to its necessary precondition, which he understood to be the elimination of material necessity due to the socialization of automation. As Constant's paintings of the 1970s dramatized, freedom from structural constraint, in the absence of freedom from material need, does not necessarily lead to increased creativity, and may even lead to increased suffering and inhumane behaviour. However, just as Gilderbloom et al. do not pay sufficient attention to the possible erosion of traditionally progressive Dutch social policies, Oudenampsen's analysis likewise fails to acknowledge the possibility that the Dutch tradition of pragmatism and consensus building celebrated by Gilderbloom et al., Kennedy, and Soja, among others, may yet prevent or at least ameliorate the worst-case scenario against which he warns. Amsterdam – and the Netherlands generally – stand at a crossroads, where the utopian impulse that Constant sought to preserve for the future may yet be able to direct city planners and city dwellers to alternatives to the current, neoliberal order.

In conclusion, it seems apposite to emphasize that discourses of architecture and urban planning always take recourse, on some level, to broader discourses on freedom versus containment: that is, on the multiple ways in which urban structures restrict or encourage freedom, with freedom understood as both freedom *from* (restriction, tyranny, want...) and freedom *to* (act, move, change, experience pleasure...). Architectural and other social boundaries provide us with both protection and restriction, and can be understood to limit our freedom as well as to make it possible. Amsterdam has long served as a global symbol of an astonishing balance of freedom and containment, opportunity and protection. According to Edward Soja, even the city's distinctive canal houses represent this careful balancing: 'The lived spaces of the Centrum are popularly designed to make density beautiful as well as accommodating, to flexibly enculturate and socialize without imprisoning, to make the strange familiar, and to add somehow to one's regular habits of thought that entertaining stimulus of a little confusion' (1996, 283). Even Soja, however, writing some years before the beginnings of Zuidas, warns that 'the continued expansion of the city as a global financial management center is likely to pose a major threat in the very near future to many

of the “magical” qualities of the Centrum’ (304). The image of Amsterdam is certainly changing, although the ultimate context of its new image is yet to be determined. One way or another, our images of Amsterdam seem haunted by New Babylon; the crucial question for Amsterdam seems to be one of what version of New Babylon it wishes to become.

## Notes

- 1 Begun in 1997, the Zuidas (South Axis) is a financial district currently dominated by post-modern high-rise structures, strategically located between Amsterdam and the nearby Schiphol Airport. See Salet and Majoor (2005).
- 2 For more on the historical and ideological continuity between the Cobra movement and the Situationist International, see Aubert (2006).
- 3 To this end, he described his project with the Wagnerian term *Gesamtkunstwerk* (‘total work of art’) (Constant, ‘Unitary Urbanism’ 135).
- 4 Like other Situationists, Constant was heavily influenced in his thinking by *Homo Ludens*, Johan Huizinga’s 1938 analysis of the role of play in human culture; however, Constant was careful to point out that the state of play only retained coherence in opposition to the state of work, and his goal was to transcend the very distinction. Constant makes too many references to ‘play’ throughout his essays to list here, but specific discussions of Huizinga include ‘Unitary Urbanism’ (132), ‘New Babylon: An Urbanism of the Future’ (13-14), ‘New Babylon – Ten Years On’ (233), and Buchloh (2001). For more on Huizinga’s influence on Situationism in general, see Andreotti (2000).
- 5 Wigley is the only commentator I have come across who fully acknowledges this aspect of Constant’s work, and even he relegates its discussion to the final four pages of his sixty-two page essay.
- 6 On the specific relationship between Provo and Constant, see Wigley (1998, 70); for a more general discussion of Provo and its significance to Amsterdam’s culture and politics, see Soja (1996, 293-4).
- 7 For more on the Dutch drug policy, including detailed histories of its historical development, see Leuw and Haen Marshall (1994), Dolin (2001), and the official government document *Drugs Policy in the Netherlands* (1995).
- 8 See *Dutch Policy on Prostitution: Questions and Answers 2004*, published by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- 9 See this volume’s contribution by Deinema and Aalbers for a detailed analysis of Plan 1012 and its consequences.
- 10 The hardcover had the somewhat different subtitle: *The Death of Theo van Gogh and the Limits of Tolerance*.
- 11 For an in-depth academic examination of policies involving Muslim immigrant populations in Europe more generally, see Fekete (2009).

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## 12. Amsterdam's Architectural Image from Early-Modern Print Series to Global Heritage Discourse

*Freek Schmidt*

### Introduction

Amsterdam offers different groups of enthusiasts many distinct itineraries. Certainly, the average tourist trajectory along the canals differs from the pilgrimage made by architecture aficionados to Berlage's Plan Zuid. What is more, the visitor's gaze has changed over the course of time, converging with and responding to other viewing practices. This chapter will investigate the multifaceted, ever-changing image of Amsterdam architecture and its reception by disparate audiences, and it will re-examine the relationship between architectural images – i.e., two-dimensional visual representations of parts of the city and its buildings – and the actual sites. In doing so, the focus will be on eighteenth-century representations of the city, and more specifically on how certain types of printed sources have shaped our reading of the city and its forms and continue to do so into the present, influencing how we imagine and experience Amsterdam today under conditions which on the face of it may seem so different. As I will argue, the way in which Amsterdam appears in present-day 'global heritage' discourse is not without precedent and can be related to a long history of conceptualizations of the seventeenth-century inner-city canal ring, the *grachtengordel*. Reconsidering earlier expressions of interest in – and appreciation for – specific features of Amsterdam architecture and urban design will clarify their meaning and appeal in the present; among others, it will allow us to place the recent elevation of the *grachtengordel* to 'UNESCO world heritage' status (in 2010) in a long-term perspective, emphasizing how its presentation of the canal belt as a unified whole was anticipated in eighteenth-century visual discourse.

The international architectural tourist comes to Amsterdam, not for the historical inner city, but to see the extraordinary work of the architects of the early twentieth century. In the chronology of international surveys of urban architecture and its history, references to the Netherlands often do not crop up until the early twentieth century. H. P. Berlage is mentioned as an architect or urban designer, followed by the Amsterdam School architects of a later generation such as Michel de Klerk and modernists such as J. J. P. Oud and Gerrit Rietveld. In part, this emphasis goes back to an early stage in the historiography, when direct relationships between influential architects and the first historians of the modern movement stimulated the inclusion of several Dutch figures in the nar-

rative of modern architecture since 1900. They have held a central place in it ever since. The work of Michel de Klerk and P. L. Kramer for example is said to '[represent] internationally the greatest Dutch contribution to modern architecture' (Hitchcock 1977, 479), and their Amsterdam buildings are still among the most frequented places of architectural worship. Another architectural attraction, however, is formed by Amsterdam's historical core, particularly the seventeenth-century extensions that were laid out in two phases that started in 1610 and 1660. Remarkably, this aspect is often considered singular and idiosyncratic, certainly when compared to the monumentality and grandeur of other European capitals. In this sense, Amsterdam seems to many visitors and historians to lack the formal urbanism, the great monuments of architecture, and the curtain-like uniformity of housing projects of other great European cities. Although attempts to turn this 'disqualification' to advantage for the city go a long way back – at least to the 1760s and 1770s, as the following discussion will show – alternative narratives about Amsterdam's architectural uniqueness have rarely caught on. In what follows, then, I propose to examine some older visual representations of Amsterdam inner-city architecture in order to reflect on – and reconsider – Amsterdam's architectural image today, emphasizing especially the international or indeed the global dimension involved in its construction. In doing so, my case studies will be the late eighteenth-century *Atlas Fouquet* and its near contemporary, the *Grachtenboek*, and the rediscovery of the latter publication in the early twentieth century.

## Images of the City and Their Uses

Amsterdam can be imagined in many different ways, thus becoming a 'city of the mind', an immaterial city, one 'not of roads, houses and walls, but of thoughts, images and representations' (Taverne and Visser 1993, 330; Stieber 2006, 249). According to architectural historian Nancy Stieber, the city exists as a mental construction which can take three basic forms: experience, imagination, and fantasy. First, the image of the *experienced* city is one that arises from physical contact with the actual urban tissue. As Kevin Lynch has pointed out, local city dwellers construct their perceptual form or 'mental map' of the city to orientate themselves in their surroundings, while tourists construct a map in which the singular, the extraordinary, and the spectacular predominate (Lynch 1960). In this sense, we can see the Amsterdam self-image that exists today as a combination of the local or geographic image of the city and the tourist image, a composite construct 'in which the special characteristics of the city's pride, propaganda and self-promotion are combined with the features of the familiar, the sentimental and the trivial' (Stieber 250). This image of the city is closely linked to the second category, that of the city as *imagined* and represented by artists, architects, planners, designers, writers, filmmakers, and musicians – or in short, of what Henri Lefebvre called conceived or conceptualized space (Lefebvre 1991, 33, 38-9). Crucial to understanding this dimension of the 'city of the mind' is not only what has been selected for inclusion in the representation, but also how and why

this process of selection took place, and what it tells us about the maker and the intended audience(s). If we look closer at the depiction of the city in a specific age and in historically specific media, we can try and understand the choices made and the context in which the images were produced and received. Finally, the third form of the city of the mind, the *imaginary* city, refers to images that are completely detached from any attempt at accurate or truthful representation – such as Constant's New Babylon, discussed by Mark E. Denaci elsewhere in this book – but which present us with alternatives to the actually experienced urban environment, as fantasies that provide utopias or which expressly oppose or criticize the existing city and the way it is generally perceived (Stieber 253).

For the purposes of this essay, the first two categories in particular are useful to distinguish between the ways in which Amsterdam has been experienced, represented, and imagined over time. In the eighteenth century, the urban configuration and architecture of Amsterdam became the subject of various commercial print series. In contrast to the well-known seventeenth-century cityscapes painted by, for instance, G. A. Berckheyde and Jan van der Heyden, these eighteenth-century print series have received only limited attention. Their popularity, purpose, and meaning at the time of production have gone largely unexamined. This is all the more remarkable if one considers that they form indispensable visual resources which not only document Amsterdam's past, but have also influenced urban planning at various later junctures; as well, they have been used for purposes of historical reconstruction at various points in time. Examining how Amsterdam architecture was represented in print in the eighteenth century, then, can not only help us to understand what Amsterdam may have looked like at the time those prints were made, but also what the (commercial) printmakers were seeking to communicate and what kind of agency these images had over time. Finally, considering the 'imagining' of eighteenth-century Amsterdam in print one may be able to understand how the city was perceived at home and abroad. This enables us to investigate and challenge the assumption that Amsterdam was always a clearly identifiable and coherent architectural unity, as is often supposed.

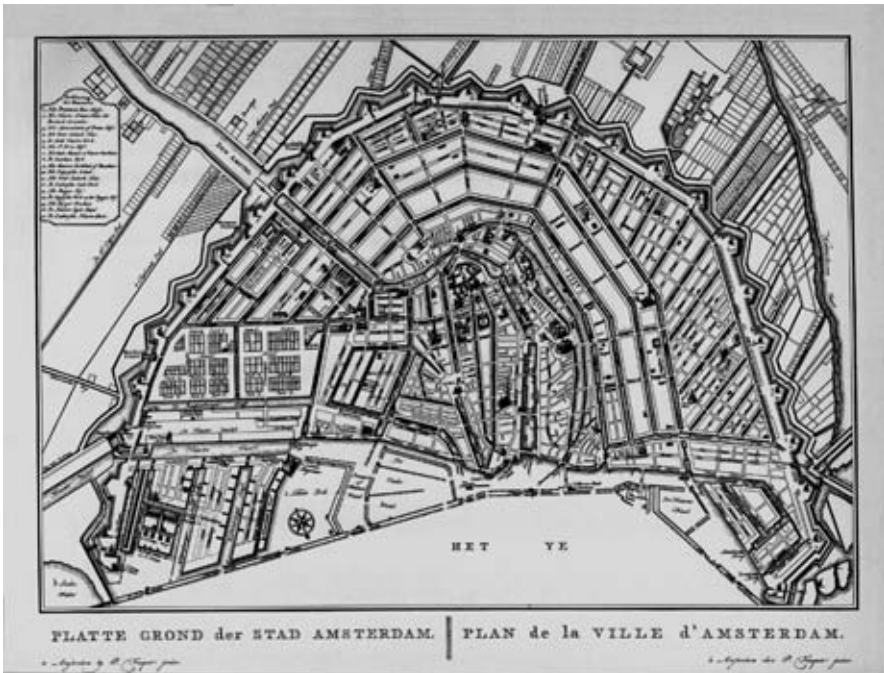
One more methodological point is in order. Our understanding of the historical qualities of the inner city of Amsterdam is based on its pictorial, two-dimensional representation in maps, drawings, paintings, prints, and, finally, photographs. Although physical remnants in the city itself also give some insight into the Amsterdam of Rembrandt and the 'Golden Age', it is first and foremost through images that knowledge about this and other periods has been transmitted. Images, however, form ambiguous historical evidence (Haskell 1993, 6; Burke 2001, 84-7). We use them to activate our historical imagination, as 'sources' that we like to think of as 'documenting' the past, but in doing so we use them in ways for which they were not always intended. Many images and representations of the city were first and foremost made for aesthetic or sentimental purposes, as decoration or as souvenirs. With this proviso in mind, let us turn to three types of two-dimensional representations of the city that have been particularly influential in shaping ideas about Amsterdam's inner city and its architecture since the seventeenth-century: the map, the cityscape, and the streetscape.

## Mapping Amsterdam

At some point, it became not unusual for Amsterdammers to hang their city on the wall in their homes: not in the form of cityscapes, but as abstract renderings of its layout with its streets and canals represented in the form of a map. Part of the pleasure afforded by such sights was that they permitted viewers to merge separate elements into a composite image; indeed, the beholder of a map is able to recognize a kind of logic in its abstract interplay of lines, discovering in it a reflection of the structure of the environment – even when this structure is not perceptible in daily life (Schmidt 2008). According to Svetlana Alpers, to indulge this ‘mapping impulse’ was a common pastime in seventeenth-century Holland (Alpers 1983, 119-68).

Alpers’s suggestion that the popularity of Dutch seventeenth-century picture making should to a large extent be ascribed to its ability to describe the urban world – more successfully so than the written word – seems highly relevant (Woodward 1987, 51-97; Bakker 2004, 286-90; Westermann 2004, 77, 186). A map shows us how the city is constructed, something we will never be able to experience in the street, and which does not correspond to how a city presents itself at the first, physical encounter. The map teaches us to see the city as an organic whole, permitting us to locate ourselves and trace our movements, and thus to enhance our understanding of the piece of the world in which we live. It does so by transposing the chorography, the textual description of the geography of the city, onto a wordless ichnography or ground plan that represents the city ‘as if viewed from an infinite number of viewpoints, all perpendicular to each topographical feature’ (Pinto 1976, 35). This is clearly not the way the city would ever appear to the beholder in reality; it is an abstraction that is made possible by advanced measuring, recording, and representational skills.

In addition, early-modern prints must have appealed to consumers not just as practical aids but also because they allowed them to identify with the city. This aspect of the historical significance of the printed city image should not be underestimated (Harley 2001). Among the reasons to collect city maps, and perhaps to decorate the home with them, must have been an aspect of civic pride, stimulated by the ‘photogenic’ quality of Amsterdam’s seventeenth-century map: showing the city as a plain surface, with clear and elegant contours, it presented an Amsterdam that could hold its own against other cities. Following the seventeenth-century extensions, the motif of the *grachtengordel* gave the city map a special aesthetic appeal (Figure 12.1). Maps showed the city at its best, as samples of seventeenth-century ‘city promotion’ of ‘urban patriotism’ (Bakker 2007). The motif of the *grachtengordel* is still instantly recognizable today, even though the general shape of the city has changed dramatically since the late nineteenth century, into a kind of amorphous coagulation with less characteristic contours and features that do not look as good on paper. Because of the persistence of the *grachtengordel* motif into the present, it is to its history after the seventeenth century that we now turn.



12.1. Map of Amsterdam, included in the *Atlas Fouquet* (ca. 1780).

The northern waterfront at the IJ is at the bottom, emphasizing the marine and harbour activity. The half circle of the fortifications with the bulwarks encloses the seventeenth-century wreath-like canal district, which in turn rings the earlier, irregular pattern of the inner city. (Photo: F. Schmidt).

## The *Atlas Fouquet*

The most popular and well-known of several eighteenth-century collections of engraved vistas of Amsterdam is the so-called *Atlas Fouquet*. Pieter or Pierre Fouquet was an Amsterdam-based Dutch art dealer who, between 1760 and 1783, commissioned several Amsterdam draughtsmen – including H. P. Schouten, Reinier Vinkeles, Hendrik Keun, and Caspar Philips Jacobsz. – to produce images of the city. The drawings were then engraved by himself and others, with captions in French and Dutch, and sold both separately and in series. We know that the first series of ten to twelve prints was also sold in Paris by the engraver Basan, who added his own name and address to the prints (Figure 12.2). The prints were very successful: Fouquet continued to produce them until 1778, when he published a bilingual table of contents for a series of one hundred prints, to which he added an engraved map of Amsterdam. Because the prints were sold separately, to be bound by the buyer, they can still be found in many different compilations (van Eeghen 1960 and 1975; van den Hoek Ostende 1960). As an art dealer, Fouquet was not allowed to add more detailed explanations to the engravings, but in 1783 he commissioned two booksellers to produce an edition of the complete



(folded) engravings together with descriptions. This edition came to be known as the *Atlas Fouquet*. One of the last two additions to this two-volume book was an engraving of the new workhouse – the largest structure built in Amsterdam in the eighteenth century, completed in 1781 – after a drawing by H. P. Schouten, the draughtsman responsible for fifty-nine of the one hundred plates. The descriptions for this *Nieuwe atlas van de voornaamste gebouwen en gezigten der stad Amsterdam, met derzelver beknopte beschrijvingen* were probably taken from the recent three-volume folio edition of the history of Amsterdam by the city's official historian, Jan Wagenaar. Ten plates were updated and included in the so-called *Vervolg op Wagenaar* of 1788, a sequel to Wagenaar's history that described the most important buildings of the city. In fact, it makes sense to think of Fouquet's project as forming a kind of companion to Wagenaar's history right from the start. The two projects certainly enjoyed a conjoined momentum: the city council commissioned the first official history of the city from Wagenaar in 1758, Fouquet's project commencing just two years later. Both would be popular for decades to come.



12.2. The Westerkerk and Meathall, seen from the Keizersgracht.

Engraving by Paul van Liender (1760) after a drawing by Jan de Beyer, published by Pierre Fouquet as part of his *Atlas*. This particular engraving belonged to the first series of 10-12 engravings of a total of 100 that would be produced up to 1783, and were simultaneously sold in Paris by the engraver Basan. (Photo: F. Schmidt).

What do we see in these eighteenth-century representations of Amsterdam on paper? A comparison with the seventeenth century may be instructive. According to some historians, Amsterdam's cityscape reached its quintessential form around the middle of the seventeenth century, to remain unchanged until ca. 1900. Considered from an art-historical viewpoint, however, this fails to acknowledge that perceptions of the city continued to evolve – among others because the larger cultural context in which the city was portrayed changed substantially in the course of the eighteenth century. The city that took shape in the 'Golden Age' of the Republic – a global city rising to sudden eminence in a very unlikely spot, a boom

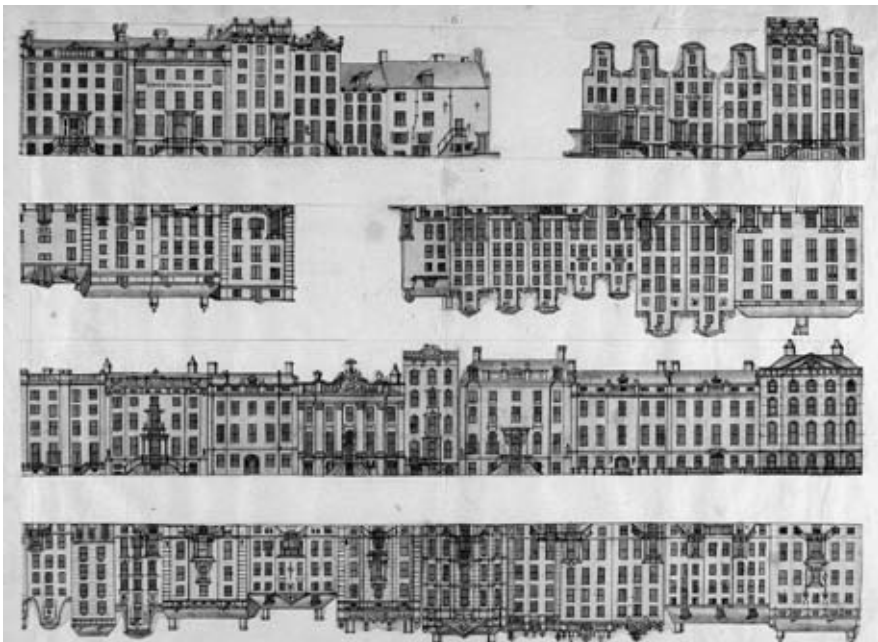
town with a new feel to it, with freshly planted trees and shiny façades standing next to empty lots which promised further development – had, one century on, turned into a city that displayed signs of heavy use. We know that incredible sums were spent to maintain the city, its public spaces, roads, and waterways (which, incidentally, spread an awful stench). By the time Wagenaar started on his commission it had become an accepted view that Amsterdam was no longer a global city of influence, but rather a minor capital: a city no longer ahead in the march of progress, but one struggling to maintain its standard of urban life and prevent it from decline. In Fouquet's *Atlas* this is to some extent reflected: compared to seventeenth-century prints we can see that it did not primarily aim to express civic pride in a spotless city, or to showcase the latest urban achievements. The eighteenth-century prints map the city in numerous ways, showing it as calm and peaceful, and yet as full of human activity, as colourful and attractive in spite of its age. This city is not ideal or brand new, but rather a place 'in progress': we see a constantly changing, somewhat weathered, irregular and picturesque whole, a condensed version of the city that lives and which bears all the scars and markings of it. In these eighteenth-century images of the city, for the first time, history creeps in.

At the same time, we should not forget that those printed cityscapes continued to enjoy a certain popularity, as their abundance indicates. Fouquet's project was a commercial enterprise in a city that was still an important centre of the European book trade; prints were a popular by-product that could boast its own admirers and collectors. Fouquet's prints were sought after by locals, but they also sold as souvenirs to visitors (hence the bilingual captions). Some visitors would acquire prints of Amsterdam prior to travelling; on arrival they would find a city they already knew – just as many tourists today, with the help of various media, find the greatest pleasure not in the discovery of the new, but in the recognition of the already familiar 'city of the mind'. The increase of topographical views of cities in the eighteenth century was a European-wide phenomenon, not in the last place because the rising numbers of 'grand tourists' increased the demand for views of popular visiting sites (San Juan 2001; Wittman 2007; Monteyne 2007). In this context, the topographical genre of the cityscape emerged as a specific art form in which the city would be reduced to a small set of harmonious and memorable motifs; the engraver or draughtsman needed to compress the features of a city, adjusting reality, to make everything fit within the frame (Cooper 1999). Specific views became popular and helped to establish a collective pictorial memory that concentrated on a few powerful images. Thus, one print or series of prints could establish the collective memory of a city abroad. Views of the main city buildings and their surroundings, like Dam Square with the town hall, the Binnen Amstel with the Mint, or one of the many typical canal views showing the canal and scenes on the quays against the background of a row of houses could all serve this purpose. This certainly also applies to the *Atlas Fouquet*. For a more radically innovative kind of urban representation – one that is unique in its kind before the nineteenth century – we need to turn to another publication that also started in the 1760s.



This beautiful and multipurpose work is not only very pleasing for the dwellers of these magnificent buildings, but also for amateurs who enrich their art cabinets with everything that pleases their taste. It is no less useful for carpenters, bricklayers, stonemasons, painters, smiths, and others who belong to the building trades, because many of these buildings were built according to the designs and drawings of famous Italian and French architects and [because they] show thousands of models that art lovers can add to their descriptions of Amsterdam.

In actual practice, however, van Mourik's publication was primarily used by practitioners: only thirty-five home-owners subscribed to the series, while the largest group of subscribers (two hundred and forty-two) consisted of carpenters and masons. No architects appear on the list (van Houten 1962). This is not surprising if one considers that the eighteenth century forms the age of a great makeover of private property within an urban pattern that remained largely unchanged (Levie 1980; Zantkuijl 1993; Schmidt 2006 and 2009). In the course of the century, many Amsterdam buildings were raised one floor level. The Herengracht and the Keizersgracht were a playground where home-owners busied themselves with renewal or maintenance projects, rebuilding or renovating their domicile with the assistance of an army of skilled craftsmen, but often without the help of professional architects. Most of the houses kept their original, seventeenth-century structure – either a wooden frame or, more frequently, a structure with load-



12.4. Original drawing (no. 6) for the *Grachtenboek* (ca. 1767). Royal Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW). (Photo: F. Schmidt). The two upper rows represent both sides of the Keizersgracht, the two bottom rows the Herengracht, close to the Vijzelstraat.

bearing side walls – while the façades and interiors were either redecorated or pulled down and replaced. The *Grachtenboek* neatly illustrates this: its engravings show simple, early-seventeenth century houses with wooden substructures, cross-bar frames, one storey, and a roof with a stepped gable at the front, standing next to completely renovated, raised vertical stone cornice fronts with sash windows and sculpted crownings (Figure 12.4). The fact that the engravings were not very accurate in matters of detail will not have disturbed most subscribers (Mieras 1958; van Houten 1962). The images of the individual façades still offered a sample sheet of possibilities that contractors could present to their clients.

### **The *Grachtenboek* Rediscovered**

In the twentieth century, the *Grachtenboek* was the subject of renewed attention and it was constantly reprinted. Its ‘rediscovery’ and subsequent success should be understood against the background of contemporary initiatives to preserve the historic inner city. A central figure in this story is the city surveyor, Eelke van Houten (1872-1970), who is also known for his so-called ‘Van Houten façades’: the result of a process of restoration or completion of deteriorated or damaged street façades in their traditional form, with the use of old building materials and other remnants rescued from demolished houses (Brinkgreve 1983; van Rossem 2004, 25-6; van Rossem 2008, 140-3). In 1922, van Houten published a reproduction of the original *Grachtenboek*, which he had rediscovered in an architectural library. Several reprints of the engravings followed, often with the aim of directing attention to the ‘beauty’ of the *grachtengordel* and to shore up preservationist claims. In 1962 a new edition appeared, containing reproductions of the engravings, as well as the original drawings, rediscovered in the early 1960s, together with architectural descriptions of each individual house.

The timely ‘rediscovery’ of the *Grachtenboek* seems to have been an important, perhaps even crucial instrument for the promotion of the idea of the *grachtengordel*. Combining two different methods of two-dimensional representation – cartography to map the city and reveal the crescent-like shape of the seventeenth-century extension, and detailed frontal street views to show the elevations of the houses built on the three main canals – it offered a clear, comprehensible image that was easy to ‘read’ and understand. Importantly, the unity bestowed in retrospect on the Amsterdam urban scheme served urban planners and preservationists alike. Designers who were planning new extensions could legitimize their approach by showing that what they did stood in a long tradition: apparently, already in the seventeenth century, city officials and the city architect had joined forces to secure a controlled and rational process of urban growth. Moreover, imagining Amsterdam in terms of a rational urban design scheme was strategic in the context of the professionalization of urban design in the early twentieth century: re-inventing the *grachtengordel* as a pioneering feat of urban design would support future claims on the part of city planners for the need to ‘think big’. This reductive historical narrative about the city, which was soon to enter the international historiography, turned Amsterdam’s seventeenth-century

layout into a prime achievement of modern urban design, thus creating a clear precedent for the next great triumph of city planning, Berlage's Plan Zuid (1917).

Meanwhile preservationists could point to the fact that the overall design or scheme as well as the streetscapes as depicted in the *Grachtenboek* were still largely intact. The painterly qualities of the cityscape, a place where time appeared to have stood still, were recognized by foreigners such as Henry Havard in his *La Hollande pittoresque: voyage aux villes mortes du Zuiderzée* (1874), soon to be followed by similar reappraisals in Amsterdam itself. The fact that the city seemed to have missed so many major innovative infrastructural developments which other European capitals had already embraced no doubt added to its picturesque qualities. In short, what had hitherto seemed a sign of backwardness, or of reluctance to embrace the urban modernity of a city like Paris or London, now began to appear as a sign of distinction. In this sense, the rediscovery of the *Grachtenboek* may have been instrumental in directing urban planners to the urban periphery, and away from the historic inner-city centre, to realize their ambitions and vision for the city.

### **The Concept of the *Grachtengordel***

Exactly where and when the term *grachtengordel* was first used is not entirely clear. During the second half of the nineteenth century the emphasis in the historiography shifted from factual, rather antiquarian historical studies towards attempts to explain the system of extensions. In 1871 the city archivist Piet Scheltema proposed a 'fifth extension' that would save the existing city; in doing so he emphasized the extent to which the earlier extensions had all followed 'a fixed plan and specific system' (Abrahamse 2004, 150; Abrahamse 2010, 20-33). At the same time, critics of new extension projects liked to contrast them negatively with seventeenth-century precedents, which they praised lavishly to set up a clear-cut contrast: 'If one investigates how intelligently and consistently our forefathers, under the guidance of the city government, expanded the city with this beautiful ring of canals, the layout of the new part of the city stands out like a sore thumb', wrote the architect Isaac Gosschalk in 1877 (qtd. in Jager 2002, 383, 517, note 27). It lacked the harmonious and spacious pattern of the three main canals that were stamped on everyone's memory and celebrated in many maps, and which provided a logical network of waterways and streets that spanned the whole city. Likewise, in 1888 one of the founders of the *Genootschap Amstelodamum*, D. C. Meijer, praised the seventeenth-century extensions for their rationality, unity, and display of symmetry (Abrahamse 2010, 23). Such appraisals took their stimulus from the abhorred extension of 1875-6 according to the pragmatic plans of Director of Public Works J. Kalf, which respected the existing property rights and parcellation of land in the new city layout (as had been done in the case of the Jordaan during the so-called third extension). Kalf's plan could be seen as the pragmatic answer to an earlier extension plan by city engineer J. G. van Niftrik (1866), which seemed to follow interpretations of Amsterdam's earlier extensions in terms of a tradition of city planning quite closely

(Hameleers 2002, 21; Jager 2002, ch. 5; van der Valk 1989, ch. 6). Uneasiness with a grand master plan that would have doubled the area of the city, combined with the problems that could be expected from the large-scale expropriation and reallocation of land, led to the disqualification of van Niftrik's plan in the late 1860s. It would often be remembered with regret as a plan that had at least attempted – in its attention for the monumental and the picturesque – to connect to the seventeenth-century extensions, and which would have made the extension of Berlage's 1917 Plan Zuid, in his own words, superfluous (Jager 2002, 403-4).

All subsequent histories of Amsterdam's extensions follow similar chronological lines and even have a comparable plot: they all describe the extensions as the result of necessity, while combining criticism of Kalff's extension plan with an analysis of the shortcomings of the pre-existing urban fabric (cf. van der Cammen and de Klerk 2003, 62). It may not be surprising, in the light of the pragmatism and compromises of the nineteenth century, that the idea of a seventeenth-century 'master plan' for the inner city gradually became domesticated. As early as 1920, the term *grachtengordel* was used in reference to the canal belt (both in the singular and in the plural), and in 1924 the term appeared in the minutes of the city council with each of the three canals, Herengracht, Keizersgracht, and Prinsengracht, forming its own 'gordel' or belt (*Maandblad Amstelodamum* 1920, 60, 84-5; 1924, 27). At this point, the seventeenth-century layout for the city was interpreted retrospectively as an early example of aesthetic 'Stadtbaukunst', or city planning according to artistic principles, in the way defined by Camillo Sitte in his immensely popular 1889 book (Collins and Collins 1986). In contrast, Kalff's extension plan was considered to be so hideous – it was nicknamed the 'funeral wreath' – that preserving the old inner city became an ever more important goal (Wagenaar 2000). The heroic idea of a mythical master plan for the *grachtengordel* also benefited from the emancipation of the young discipline of city planning in the early twentieth century. The (at that point) close relationship between designers and historians stimulated its invention; it soon made its way into many popular twentieth-century international surveys of architectural history and urban planning (Mumford 1961; Benevolo 1967; Kostof 1995), which discussed the Amsterdam *grachtengordel* as an impressive baroque composition. Finally, the idea of a great plan prompted the question of its authorship. Meijer mentioned the city architect Daniel Stalpaert as the presiding genius behind the plans, while other names also surfaced, especially that of the sculptor and architect Hendrick de Keyser (Abrahamse 2010, 25-6). The early-twentieth century architect Abel Antoon Kok, for example – a prolific writer on Amsterdam's architectural history, responsible for many restorations of old Amsterdam houses during the interbellum – explained to his radio listeners in 1937 that:

[around] the year 1600 the need arose for substantial urban extension. Not much later a stonemason, Hendrick de Keyser, who was also a talented sculptor and designer, became what would today be called a city architect. In this position he produced a plan for the extension of the city, a giant ring of canals [*grachtengordel*], half circle-shaped and with radiating streets, a masterly move. Great minds see ahead of their times. The Prinsengracht is a good wa-

terway, the quays of the Keizersgracht are now spacious motorways. In this plan we find all that our age considers to be modern. (Kok 1937, 61)

Kok was probably the most influential ambassador of the idea of the historical inner city of Amsterdam. Not only was he responsible for a large number of restorations in the inner city, he also wrote and lectured regularly about Amsterdam architecture and ‘*beemkunde*’ (local history) for large and non-specialist audiences (‘A. A. Kok †’ 1951; Beek 1984). It is with his public and promotional activities that the concept of the *grachtengordel* as a unified, planned achievement reached the general public.

Meanwhile, divergent interpretations, presenting the *grachtengordel* as a utilitarian response to the city’s geography and as the result of pragmatic financial investments, took almost a century to develop and to get accepted – at least in Dutch scholarship on the subject (Abrahamse 2010, 26-33). In the light of a post-structuralist historiography, the interrelated motives that have recently been identified as crucial to the making of the *grachtengordel* are hardly surprising: functionality, aesthetics, and a handsome financial return on investment (Abrahamse 2004 and 2010, 354). It remains to be seen, however, if this less exalted history can successfully replace the idea of the mythical master plan. In August 2010, the ‘Amsterdam Canal District’ was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List as ‘a masterpiece of hydraulic engineering, town planning, and a rational programme of construction and bourgeois architecture’ (UNESCO, *Report*; Bakker 2007, 19). Stressing the ‘concept’ of the city of canals seems to reinforce the image of the city as established in the historical imagination and in a multitude of narratives since the nineteenth century, perforce underrating the multilayered physical substance that defines Amsterdam today.

Among the first outsiders to appreciate Amsterdam in the way contemporary tourists want to recognize the city were nineteenth-century artists, who were looking for picturesque qualities and for the ghosts of Rembrandt and other seventeenth-century painters (Wagenaar 2000, 25-30; van Rossem 2000 and 2004; Jager 30-4). The search for the picturesque motivated one of the first preservation activists, the painter Jan Veth, to seek to prevent the city from filling the Reguliersgracht (in his pamphlet *Stedenschennis* [1901]). Protests against ‘*wandalisme*’ to save individual defunct Amsterdam buildings from demolition – inspired by Victor Hugo’s battle against the destruction of historical buildings in France – were also not free from appeals to the ‘picturesque’ as a preservationist norm (Krabbe 159-65; Jager 49). Current ideas about the protection of a cityscape have their origin in this picturesque discourse about the built environment (Meijer and Veth 1901; van Rossem 2004, 21-3). Meanwhile, drastic interventions like the creation of the Raadhuisstraat (1896), the widening of the Vijzelstraat (1920s) and, less successfully, of the Weesperstraat (1950s), as well as the filling of numerous canals, have affected the authentic context of the inner city; yet these structural interventions have been essential to the city’s survival and modernization (Deben et al. 2004, 5; Meurs 2000, 160-78, 361-76; Meurs 2004). This evolving character of the modern historical city is perhaps part of its continuing attraction: it is a place that invites new activity, one where people want to stay and live together as long as the urban fabric can be adjusted so as not to alienate them.



## Architecture and Image

The twentieth-century republication of the *Grachtenboek* has been highly influential: representing Amsterdam's ring of canals as one large, unified piece of urban architecture and design, to be seen as an unbroken and coordinated composition, it provided a readily comprehensible image for what is in fact a very fragmented assemblage of architectural achievements. The architect and historian J. P. Mieras, writing in 1958, has left an astute comment on the impact of this image on the historical imagination. The façades in the book, he writes, grasped the public's attention when it became available on republication, and it opened the eyes of many to the beauty of the architecture along the canals, notwithstanding the fact that the images and the actual situation often hardly correlate:

To be struck by such a complex phenomenon as urbanistic beauty is often the sudden outcome of a gradual process, the pace of which is determined by all sorts of (often remote) circumstances and factors. Suddenly, just as an image in a stereoscope can appear before our eyes, the beautiful sight that we passed by so many times stands before us, and we are captivated by it. An external impulse can help to awaken our mind from this slumber in regard to aesthetic signs. The *Grachtenboek* was, to many, just such an impulse, suggesting by means of one highly effective image the grandeur of our canal architecture and its beauty. (Mieras 1958, 189)

It is important to emphasize that it is not only our aesthetic response, but also our historical imagination that is activated to make the built environment fit with our perception and understanding of the past, and finally to blend with it. The *Grachtenboek* has given historians an appealing image of the cityscape of the past, one that allows them to reconstruct the façades of houses as they appeared in 1768 (Figure 12.5). Ever since 1922, it has been used as a model for planning and new building activities. Indeed, in the interbellum it was the main source for interventions that aimed to reinforce the historical cityscape – often to the regret of modern architects, but to the satisfaction of the city council and the public (Meurs 2004, 454; Meischke 1995; van Rossem 2008). To this day, Eelke van Houten is considered one of Amsterdam's pioneer devotees to the preservation and advancement of the 'city beautiful' (van Rossem 2008, 142). It is since van Houten that the appreciation for the picturesque and monumental qualities of the *grachtengordel* has been cast in historical terms, in the language of preservationism. The picturesque image that he has helped construct has also eagerly been seized on by the tourist industry (e.g., in 1925 the canal boat was introduced for purposes of tourism, remaining one of the top three attractions for outside visitors in the city today).

By way of conclusion, it is interesting to consider that the *Grachtenboek* – having functioned so powerfully as a guide for how to use and interpret the 'canal district' in the past, for how to experience and represent it – also points to some directions for the future. It has taken some time, until the twentieth century, before the *grachtengordel* was hailed as a masterpiece of urban planning.



12.5. Amsterdam, Keizersgracht at the corner of the Herenstraat. The house was rebuilt in 1967 incorporating its ruinous bottom half. With the aid of the *Grachtenboek* the upper half was reconstructed, adding an extra row of windows on the Herenstraat side. (Photo: F. Schmidt).

The recent inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List marks that this image is now there to stay, promising to influence how the municipality and commercial parties will approach the inner city for many years to come (Slooff 2011). Indeed, to point out the UNESCO listing provides one answer to the central question of an academic conference in 2002: ‘how a monumentally structured city adapts to new developments in the market and society’ (Deben et al. 2004, 6). Local historical groups and conservationists who supported the UNESCO nomination, not immune perhaps to the modern condition of nostalgia (Lowenthal 1985; Boym 2001), may not have considered that with the desired UNESCO status Amsterdam would boost its position in the globalizing tourist market of competing heritage industries. In fact, the UNESCO listing has helped inscribe the *grachtengordel* in city-marketing discourses as a Unique Selling Point or an extra ‘Michelin star’, strengthening the links between the tourist industry, the heritage industry, and other cultural industries. Paradoxically, then, while the UNESCO list is primarily meant as an instrument to safeguard historical survivals in the built environment, and to encourage their preservation, it may well lead to further adaptations in Amsterdam’s cityscape to satisfy the expectations of the ‘tourist gaze’ (Urry 2002). The anticipated growth of tourist numbers and their presence in the heritage city will undeniably affect its monuments and the way they are presented and experienced, and create new problems that will need to be contained. Every new development, every new building activity or reconstruction that is undertaken in the demarcated area will be met with claims about the ‘historical’ and ‘authentic’ character of the past that has been chosen to be preserved or promoted, in ways that could blend preservationist and commercial or economic interests to the point of conflation. Branding the city to comply with the expectations of the global visitor may even result in a loss of local identity as experienced by residents, as has been observed in different European cities (Ash-

worth and Tunbridge 2000, 65-9). In this regard, it is worth reflecting on David Lowenthal's observation that '[foreign] acclaim' can actually '[demean] domestic heritage even when echoing national sentiment' (1998, 231).

No matter where one stands on these issues, the characterizations of the canal ring area that figured in the nomination and surface in the decision document are bound to become the headings under which Amsterdam will be globally classified and promoted: as 'a masterpiece of town planning', or even 'the realization of the ideal city' in the history of the modern world. With appeals to the important UNESCO categories of 'integrity' and 'authenticity', these documents tend to foreground the original planning intentions (design) and the state of the *grachtengordel* at the time of its 'completion' in the seventeenth century, while underplaying its subsequent developments and urban evolution. It is likely that the conception of the *grachtengordel* as a planned work of art will continue to fashion the image of the heritage city in the future. From an historical point of view, the canal district's new status can be considered as the culmination of an almost century-long process of sanctifying the *grachtengordel* as it was invented in the early twentieth century, made possible by those forceful images of the city in print that were produced as early as the late eighteenth century.

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### 13. Amsterdam Memorials, Multiculturalism, and the Debate on Dutch Identity

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Imagining Amsterdam at the beginning of the twenty-first century naturally implies a focus on the new population groups that have profoundly changed the city's identity since the 1960s. In an increasingly globalized world, it might be tempting to discuss the social impact of immigration exclusively from a deterritorialized, transnational perspective. Approaching Amsterdam as just another 'station in a worldwide circuit' (de Swaan 1991, 137), however, runs the risk of overlooking how the city's history shapes a locally specific reaction to the global flows of people, commodities, and goods that can be seen to course through its body. In a globalizing society, the local does not simply become submerged in the global; rather, both dimensions co-exist and create political, social, and cultural tensions that cannot be grasped without acknowledging the interconnections and dynamic interplay between them. In this sense, it seems useful to speak with Roland Robertson of the need for a 'glocal' approach to questions of cultural identity and difference in the city (Robertson 1992).

The necessity of a 'glocal' approach to contemporary identity questions is reinforced by the demand by new population groups for equal treatment and equal opportunities on the local level. While theories about a 'nomadic' (Deleuze and Guattari 1976), 'in-between' (Bhabha 1994), or 'transnational' (Al-Ali and Koser 2002) existence might seem methodologically appealing for the study of identity in a globalizing world, it may be questioned whether the assumption of perennial deterritorialization that underpins such approaches does sufficient justice to the goals, ambitions, and experiences of immigrant families and their descendants. As Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan (2003) has argued, 'rather than glorify the immigrant moment as a mode of perennial liminality, the diasporic self seeks to reterritorialize itself' (324). A similar stance is sometimes taken within the Netherlands: although some authors hold that to believe in a stable Dutch identity in times of globalization is wholly illusory (van der Veer 2000; Etyy 2005), certain Dutch authors with a foreign background are demonstrating a new – and often positive – concern with national identity in their work (Dewulf 2008, 19-24). One of them, Kader Abdolah, has even prophesied that globalization, far from leading to a weakening of Dutch identity, will rather lead to its reinvigoration due to the efforts of newcomers to fashion themselves into equal citizens of the nation. 'Dutch society is no longer yours', warns Abdolah, 'the Netherlands is also ours' (125). As both Radhakrishnan and Abdolah indicate, then, globalization



does not necessarily make local specificities disappear, it also leads to renewed territorialization, which requires the reinvention or rearticulation of local identities and local cultural models. In current scholarship on Dutch society, too, this position is gaining ground. Sociologist Frank Lechner for example, in *The Netherlands: Globalization and National Identity*, contends that ‘if building nations was a matter of imagining communities, then this is a period that calls for [national] reimagining’ (2008, 28).

This article intends to complement a previous study on the reterritorialization process in the Dutch context, which focused on the reinvention of national identity through literary writing around the turn of the century (Dewulf 2008). The main focus here will be on the connection between the commemoration of the Second World War, the many memorials that have been placed in the urban spaces of Amsterdam since 1945, and the current discussion on immigration and multiculturalism in Dutch society. Unlike other critics and scholars who have sought to throw contemporary discussions into historical relief by connecting them to the war and the occupation of 1940-5 – and who, in so doing, have emphasized the deep anxiety that is often expressed in Dutch public discourse about the possible resurgence of some form of fascism or extreme-right populism (Buruma 2006; Sniderman and Hagedoorn 2007) – I will seek to trace positive parallels between the reinvention of Dutch identity in the aftermath of the German occupation and the current reterritorialization process. The underlying aim will be to shift the focus of the debate from the negative and indeed the dangerous implications of national thinking to the possibilities for imagining togetherness and community which discourses of the nation hold out, and which I argue are relevant, useful, and even urgent in the context of today’s social and cultural transitions.

In what follows, I will take my cue from the fact that contemporary Dutch intellectuals, in their reflections on the consequences of globalization and immigration for Dutch society and culture, often (unwittingly) seem to echo the words used by members of the Dutch resistance during the German occupation about the importance of grounding national culture firmly in history and collective memory. The essayist Bas Heijne, for instance, identified the disappearance of a ‘vision’ of national identity and culture, of ‘what it means to be Dutch in times of migration and globalization’, as one of the main reasons for the integration problems experienced with immigrants (Heijne 2003, 13). Likewise, in his polemical article ‘Het multiculturele drama’ (‘The Multicultural Drama’), publicist and prominent social-democratic intellectual Paul Scheffer argued that ‘[w]e need to speak more about our borders, have lost the connection with our own history, and have been careless about our own language’ (2000, 6). In comparison, in 1942 resistance fighter Henk van Randwijk identified the weakness of Dutch society with the words ‘We, the citizens, were asleep and did not know anymore what treasures we had to defend’ (1), while Johan van der Woude, using the pseudonym Martijn Cort, argued in one of the letters to his son collected in *Zeven brieven* (*Seven Letters*) that ‘only now do we realize how careless we have been and how we have neglected the important privileges and values of our country’ (1944, 16-17). Here, too, the rediscovery of the past as a storehouse

of values and guiding principles – expressed through the trope of an historical awakening – attends a moment of crisis or far-reaching transition. In short, the deep concern about Dutch identity that was so intense during the German occupation, but which faded in the years following the liberation, seems to have made a remarkable comeback in the twenty-first century. In the following sections I propose to explore this parallel further through a discussion of some iconic post-war monuments in Amsterdam – monuments which, following the approach outlined by Pierre Nora in *Les lieux de mémoire* (1984–92), will be used here as a focus for reflecting on the current process of reterritorialization. As will be seen, these monuments guide us from Amsterdam’s symbolic centre to the periphery of the city, raising questions about how the nation can be imagined in ways that are truly inclusive and affirmative of diversity.

## The Liberation of Amsterdam

‘Amsterdammers: wij zijn vrij!’ (‘Amsterdammers: we are free!’). With this reference to freedom, Dutch journalist and iconic resistance leader Henk van Randwijk proclaimed the liberation of his city in the name of the Amsterdam resistance movement on 8 May 1945. ‘Freedom’ was a keyword in van Randwijk’s life and thought; not coincidentally, the underground newspaper which he edited for most of the war was called *Vrij Nederland* (*Free Netherlands*). Freedom, however, meant more to him than the restoration of peace and national autonomy: he insisted that with the defeat of Nazism, a process of national renewal had only begun and was still far from complete. Hence the conclusion of his speech that ‘[we] have lost years, but we can gain a century!’ (Mulder and Koedijk 1988, 106). Barely two years later, van Randwijk addressed the Dutch people again, but this time his message was different. Outraged by the broad support that existed in Dutch society for the military crackdown on the Indonesian Republic – a republic already proclaimed in 1945, but not recognized by the Dutch government until late in 1949 – he published ‘Omdat ik Nederlander ben’ (‘Because I Am Dutch’) in *Vrij Nederland* on 22 July 1947. He bitterly observed that some of those who had glorified the idea of freedom during the German occupation had now emerged as the strongest critics of Indonesian freedom. This time, then, his charge was not directed against a foreign enemy but against his compatriots:

I speak up because I am Dutch. Because I am Dutch, I say no! against the violence that is taking place in Indonesia. I say this, being mindful of the accusations made by myself and others against the German people, who out of patriotism and misinterpreted national interest decided to keep quiet when Hitler committed crimes in their name. (Mulder and Koedijk 1988, 591)

On both occasions, van Randwijk used the keyword ‘freedom’ – once to apply it to the centre of the Netherlands, and once to the colonial periphery. As he was no doubt aware, while there seemed to be consensus about the meaning of freedom in reference to the centre, this changed dramatically when the ideal was applied

to the colonies overseas; indeed, what in regard to the centre had been a unifying force turned out to be divisive in regard to the periphery. Precisely by placing the periphery in the centre, van Randwijk was able to expose a glaring inconsistency at the heart of Dutch political discourse in the late 1940s. Crucially, his post-colonial turn meant more than a change in perspective and ideas; rather, he was globalizing the consequences of the ideals he had formed during the war, trying to stay true to them in new contexts.



13.1. Rear view of the National Monument, Dam Square (1956). (Photo: M. Meissner).

The problem of how to position Dutch society in relation to Indonesia was there to stay. In 1956, eleven years after van Randwijk's liberation speech, a war memorial was erected on Dam Square, replacing the colonnade that had functioned as a temporary monument since December 1947. Twelve urns containing soil from the eleven Dutch provinces and from Indonesia were sealed into the rear wall of the monument in remembrance of the martyrs who had fallen in the Second World War (Figure 13.1). The urn with Indonesian soil, however, provoked discussion: members of the resistance were divided on the question of the government's handling of the Indonesian crisis, and there were fears that the symbolic inclusion of Indonesia in the form of a 'twelfth urn' might be interpreted as a colonialist gesture. Eventually, a compromise was reached by renaming the twelfth urn 'a symbol of self-sacrifice for peace and justice' instead of 'a symbol of solidarity between all territories united in freedom under the protection of the Queen' (Locher-Scholten 1995, 273). Thanks to this compromise, the possibility of a separate, potentially divisive Indonesian monument was forestalled, and a sense of national unity prevailed – at least in the official commemorations. To avoid further discussion, the niche that had originally been prepared for a thirteenth urn with soil from the Dutch territories in the Caribbean remained empty. The difficulty in including Indonesia and overseas territories in the war memorial underlines the challenges involved in defining 'Dutchness' in post-colonial times.

In its austerity, the National Monument on Dam Square chimed with the pre-

vailing tendency of those years to commemorate the war as a tragedy in which the whole nation was united. It is important to stress that this emphasis on unity was new. As Hermann von der Dunk has argued, in the ‘pillarized’ society of the 1930s one used to be consciously Dutch primarily because one realized that by doing so, one could continue to live one’s life as a Protestant, Catholic, or socialist, enjoying the state’s protection and its support for one’s political-denominational ‘pillar’ (1982, 27). During the occupation, however, this had changed. Despite the significant ideological differences that existed between resistance groups, they had shared a common goal, a common enemy, and a common suffering. The cooperation between them had been unconditional: it was, for instance, not strange for the same printer to work both for the communist underground newspaper *De Waarheid* and for the conservative-Christian newspaper *Trouw* (Winkel and de Vries 1989, 37). Before the war, such collaboration would have been unthinkable. The spirit of national unity also informed the production of ‘clandestine literature’, including resistance poetry, which positioned the Dutch directly in relation to the nation, over and above the identity of the separate social ‘pillars’.<sup>1</sup> While most resistance poems were new, some original poems dating back to the sixteenth century – so-called *Geuzenliederen* – were also reprinted. Yet an exception was made for a certain type of *Geuzen* songs: those with an anti-Catholic message. For obvious reasons, Dutch Catholics traditionally had difficulties with the glorification of the Eighty Years’ War (1568-1648) in terms of a struggle for freedom. As late as 1872, during the tercentenary of the capture of Den Briel – an important turning point in the Dutch uprising against Spain – Catholics decided to celebrate in a different way: instead of remembering 1572 as the first major victory obtained by the *Geuzen*, they chose to commemorate nineteen priests who had been executed by these Protestant ‘rebels’. During the Second World War, however, the active participation of Catholics in the resistance cemented their identification with the nation. One could argue that while the Eighty Years’ War formed the basis of the traditional idea of Dutch identity as Calvinist, it was World War II that unified the nation across religious divides. Resistance poet Klaas Heeroma’s words testify to this new self-awareness: ‘This great suffering / made us into one people: / nobody can separate / those who stand united at the same grave’ (in Schenk and Mos 2005, 47).

## **New Monuments for Amsterdam**

The new emphasis on national unity did not permit special reference to specific groups, nor did it allow acknowledgment that some groups had suffered more under the occupation than others. Indeed, despite the fact that almost half of the 210,000 Dutch victims of the war had been Jewish, by 1960 only a single monument had been erected that referred specifically to the Jewish Holocaust. This Monument of Jewish Gratitude on Weesperstraat, unveiled in 1950, carried the message ‘Protected by Your Love’ to express the appreciation of the Jewish people for the Dutch nation. A discomfitingly naïve message from today’s perspective, it does reflect the tendency to commemorate the war as a unifying

tragedy. Indeed, by 1960, the National War Memorial on Dam Square was still considered to be the only proper location for remembering and honouring its victims. How viable was this carefully guarded sense of unity, and for how long would it last?

In the summer of 1960, complaints could be heard about the lack of respect young people were showing for the National War Memorial. On sunny days, teenagers would sit on it, some of them cuddling, others picnicking or smoking. By 1969, they had taken complete control of the memorial, turning it into a gathering place for hippies. Their attitude reflected a profound transformation then taking place in Dutch society. From a colonial empire with a predominantly religious and provincial mentality, the Netherlands was transforming at a remarkably quick pace into a small nation with an increasingly secular and internationally orientated outlook. This new generation reflected critically upon Dutch responsibilities for what had happened during the German occupation. In light of the fact that some 75 per cent of the Jewish population in the Netherlands had been transported to Nazi death camps – a larger percentage than in any other country in Western Europe (Barnouw 2005, 61) – the patriotic overtones of the commemorations rang rather hollow and even smacked of hypocrisy to them. Rather than a ‘nation of heroes’, they perceived the Netherlands to be a ‘nation of culprits’. They also recognized that some groups in Dutch society had been more affected by the war than others and therefore deserved special attention and recognition. While the commemoration of the war had thus far been a unanimous national affair, self-critique and a more diversified and discriminating reassessment of the war years paved the way for new monuments and eventually a new culture of commemoration.

The most famous of these monuments was the Anne Frank House. Inaugurated in May 1960, the former hiding place of the Frank family was now to serve as a museum to recall the plight of the Jewish people during the Second World War. In addition, in 1962 the Hollandsche Schouwburg, the former Dutch Theatre on Plantage Middenlaan, was inaugurated as a memorial to specifically commemorate the Jewish victims of the Holocaust. It was there that, three years later, historian Jacques Presser presented his two-volume work *Ondergang* (published in English as *The Destruction of the Dutch Jews* in 1969), which would trigger a large public discussion about Dutch responsibilities regarding the persecution of Jews during the occupation. Dozens of other monuments commemorating the Holocaust were to follow, most famously the Auschwitz monument that was placed in the Wertheim Park in 1993 after a design by artist and writer Jan Wolkers.

Diversification as a strategy for including specific minorities in the national commemoration of the war was also extended to other groups, such as the Romani people. In the 1970s, Koos Petalo – nicknamed the ‘Dutch Gypsy King’ – successfully campaigned for the inclusion of the Roma community in the commemoration of the Holocaust. This led to the inauguration, on 25 November 1978, of the Zigeunermonument (Gypsy Monument) near the Rijksmuseum (Figure 13.2). By then, the Dutch gay community had also begun to question the traditional commemoration of the war, which did not allow specific attention

for the homosexual victims of the Holocaust. In 1970, members of an Amsterdam Gay Action Group caused a scandal by laying a wreath in memory of the homosexual victims of the Nazi regime at the National Remembrance ceremony on Dam Square. The authorities considered this improper and arrested the activists. Other protests came in the form of poetry. The same literary genre that had once been so powerful in the resistance against the Nazis was now used against former resistance members who refused to allow the gay community to honour its Holocaust victims during the official commemoration ceremony of World War II. In his 'Voetnoot bij de kranslegging op de Dam' ('Footnote to the Laying of Wreaths at Dam Square'), Jaap Harten protested: 'Is it again the time, members of the National Commemoration committee, / have you begun your discrimination rubbing your puffy hands / unanimously nodding about a dignified commemoration? / ... Should the Nazi scum beat you up once more / until you understand what freedom means?' (1970, 45-6). These protests paved the way for the construction of the Homomonument that was unveiled in 1987. It was not intended as a monument only for those homosexuals who had suffered discrimination and persecution under the Nazi regime, but its triangles in pinkish granite are an unmistakable reference to the badge that homosexuals had to wear in German concentration camps, and it is still the site of a special commemoration ceremony on 4 May (National Remembrance Day) each year.



13.2. Gipsy Monument, Museum Square (1978). (Photo: M. Meissner).

### **New Population Groups, Old Strategies**

The erection of monuments to overcome traumas of the past and to restore or preserve public harmony and order became an Amsterdam tradition. It therefore came as no surprise that in the context of the ambitious renovation plans of Amsterdam's city council for the Bijlmer, a neighbourhood with many immigrants from the former colony of Surinam, the idea arose to erect a monument in honour of the anti-colonialist writer Anton de Kom (1898-1945). Because of his

role as a political agitator against the colonial system in Surinam, de Kom had been exiled to the Netherlands in 1933. As an exile, he had no particular reason to participate in the liberation of the Netherlands, but he joined the resistance nonetheless – presumably out of solidarity with his communist comrades. He was arrested in August 1944 and died in a concentration camp near Bremen the following spring. De Kom posthumously received the Resistance Commemorative Cross in 1982, and plans for a monument gathered momentum when residents of the Bijlmer petitioned their *stadsdeel* or city district for it in the late 1990s. In 2006, on the central square of the completely renewed Bijlmer district, de Kom's statue was finally inaugurated (Figure 13.3). It was decorated with a verse from his poem 'Vaarwel, Akoeba, vaarwel!' ('Farewell, Akoeba, Farewell!'): 'I will fight! / Only after the victory will I return' (de Kom 1969, 21). If the organizers had paid more attention to the entire poem, they might have had a sense of foreboding that this new monument would stir controversy. The poem's final verses, which do not show on the monument, speak the uncompromising language of 'us' versus 'them', clearly identifying who the enemies of the Surinamese people are: 'Can you hear the white people coming? / Their army speaks as the countless leaves of the trees. / I won't return until I've defeated them' (de Kom 1969, 21).



13.3. Anton de Kom Monument, Zuidoost (2006). (Photo: M. Meissner).

The problems around the Anton de Kom memorial are of interest here as they may help us to identify some of the limits to Amsterdam's strategy of unity-in-diversity in its official commemorative culture. The fact that the statue was made by a (white) Dutch artist who had been given preference over a Surinamese sculptor – Henry Renfurm – who enjoyed a great deal of popular support among residents in the Bijlmer, resulted in unease among the Surinamese community. On the day of its inauguration, angry Surinamese stormed the monument and covered it with the Surinamese flag, claiming that de Kom's nudity and other aspects of his figure – including, according to some beholders, a mutilated arm – were reminiscent of slavery and therefore undignified. What had been intended as a

gesture of inclusion, then, turned out to provoke a controversy that was emotionally charged. Annet Zondervan, director of the Dutch Centre for Visual Art (CBK) for the Zuidoost district of Amsterdam, tried to see the commotion from a positive angle: she held that the dissenting views were in line with de Kom's own rebellious spirit, since, as a man of culture, he had often sought to provoke discussion through his art (Boots and Woortman 2009, 437-8). Some Surinamese interpreted the project rather differently: not as a sign of inclusion, but rather as an unwelcome annexation of their hero by the Dutch establishment. Their anger had still not subsided on the first anniversary of the statue's inauguration, when another assault on it took place and unidentified individuals covered it in red paint.

The controversy around Anton de Kom's statue was not an isolated case. It reminded many of what had happened elsewhere in Amsterdam only four years earlier, when the inauguration of the Slavery Monument in the Oosterpark had ended in tumult and chaos. Huge fences had been placed around the monument to prevent uninvited guests from intruding on the inauguration. Hundreds of Surinamese and Antilleans who rattled the fences and demanded access to the ceremony were dispersed by the police by means of horses, dogs, and batons. It appears that while the creation of new monuments was a successful strategy for including minority groups such as the Roma or the gay community in the commemoration of World War II, it caused considerable controversy among communities whose historical connection with the war and the German occupation of the Netherlands was not that strong. A possible explanation is that traditionally, the commemoration of the war was anchored in a strong sense of common suffering, of a kind of wound that the Dutch nation shared; this unifying element was so strong that it was perfectly compatible with a degree of diversification in the national commemoration. In the case of slavery, however, the unifying element is absent. As Marion den Uyl (2009) and Markus Balkenhol (2009) have demonstrated, the commemoration of slavery in the Netherlands is primarily perceived as a Surinamese and Antillean affair that does not affect the Dutch population as a whole; for this reason, it is perceived – on both sides – as an undesirable imposition when orchestrated on the national level. Ernest Renan's famous argument in *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* (*What Is a Nation?* [1882]) would lend support to this explanation. Renan insists on the importance of shared, common suffering as a unifying force in national commemorations. In the case of the statue for Anton de Kom and the Slavery Monument in Oosterpark, however, the Amsterdam city authorities seem to have set the cart before the horse and went ahead with memorials that had little national resonance. This made a strategy that was meant to be inclusive and conciliatory appear appropriative and annexational. In the process, it only strengthened the perception of Dutch society as a space divided between those who were here during the war and those who arrived afterwards – in short, between 'us' and 'them', between 'autochtoon' and 'allochtoon', between 'old Dutchmen' and 'new Dutchmen'.



## The Return of Anti-Semitism

In 2007, a new measure was introduced in regard to the commemoration of the Second World War on Dam Square on 4 May each year. According to a new decree, all wreaths that are laid down during the commemoration ceremony have to be taken inside at night and guarded during the day. This measure was taken as a consequence of recurrent incidents with groups of predominantly young Dutch-Moroccans who destroyed the wreaths and even played soccer with them – shouting ‘Let’s kill the Jews’ on one occasion (van Zanten 2007).

These adolescents are mostly descendants of Moroccans who came to the Netherlands in the 1960s and 1970s as ‘guest workers’. At the time, neither the Dutch government nor these workers themselves assumed that they would ever desire or obtain permanent residency in the Netherlands. Yet many of them eventually decided to stay. The government accepted their decision, granting them Dutch citizenship and the right to be joined by family members from their country of origin. The Dutch population generally supported this policy. Indeed, support for the transformation of the Netherlands into a multicultural society was seen by many – consciously or unconsciously – as a way to atone for some of the shameful errors of the past: the country’s history of oppressive governance in the former colonies, its involvement in the slave trade, its military interventions in Indonesia in 1947 and 1949, and most notably its mixture of passivism and complicity regarding the persecution of the Jews in the Second World War (Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007, 15). An unexpected consequence of family reunion in the Muslim community, however, was the reintroduction in Dutch society of traditional values and role models which in many ways were similar to – or at least reminiscent of – the ones the generation of the 1960s had so desperately tried to abolish: a strong respect for the father as head of the family, a more traditional role for women in society, constraints upon sexual liberty and self-determination, especially (again) for women, and above all, a perspective on society and politics that was deeply informed by religion (Lechner 2008, 142). The Muslim communities remained largely isolated in Dutch society. Several neighbourhoods in the largest Dutch cities became predominantly Moroccan or Turkish, where a new generation grew up that had to negotiate its way between the traditionalist values of their parents and the predominantly secular and liberal values of the mainstream of Dutch society. Dutch-Moroccan boys in particular seemed to have difficulties coping with this challenge, which was reflected in poor results at school, high levels of unemployment, and disproportionate involvement in criminal activities.

Data provided by the Center for Information and Documentation on Israel (CIDI) indicated that some of these adolescents vented their frustrations by adopting anti-semitic attitudes.<sup>2</sup> This was confirmed by Gabriel Schoenfeld, whose study *The Return of Anti-Semitism* showed that the increase in anti-semitism in Dutch society in the early 2000s could be traced back to children and grandchildren of Muslim immigrants (2004, 71). Public awareness grew accordingly, as the Dutch media gave anti-semitic incidents extensive coverage – especially those that had taken place in direct relation to the commemoration of

the Second World War. Meanwhile interpretations of the phenomenon differed quite substantially. While some condoned anti-semitism among certain groups of youths as an expression of frustration, or as machismo behaviour that was without deeper significance, others interpreted it as a sign that many children of (non-Western) immigrants did not identify with how Dutch identity had been defined since 1945. In this reading, those children, although they were born in the Netherlands and had Dutch citizenship, did not share Dutch norms and values and would rather continue to associate themselves with their country of 'origin' – which is to say, that of their parents (Scheffer 2007).

Seen in this sense, the controversy over monuments that commemorate slavery on the one hand, and the destruction of wreaths at the Dam on the other, could be taken as two different reflections of the same underlying problem: the failure of Dutch society to include those groups who have no (immediate) historical connection with World War II, and the ineffectiveness of (official) strategies of inclusion that have their origin in the commemoration of the war.

### **Reterritorialization**

Despite the confidence which Dutch society continues to place in commemoration practices, little has been done to renew strategies of remembrance that date back to the liberation. As historian Hans Blom already observed in 1995, the memory of the war as a unifying force in Dutch society is waning; hence his suggestion to reflect on the development of new forms of commemoration that could take over the function of the old (541). His observation is reminiscent of historian Jan Romein, who in 1954 had suggested transforming the commemoration of the liberation of 1945 into an annual occasion for reflection on ways to foster bonds between citizens. Long before his British colleagues Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger in *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), Romein realized that while traditions are necessarily invented, this does not make them less important and effective in preserving a sense of collectivity (92-3).

In conclusion, let me focus on one example of how harking back to the moment of 1945 may be conducive to rethinking Amsterdam's commemorative culture and the question of national identity for the present. In 2007, Job Cohen, then mayor of Amsterdam, tried to recapture the creative energy and the willingness to reform Dutch society that had existed in the immediate aftermath of the liberation. In a public lecture, he acknowledged that national identity is always a construction. However, instead of taking this as a reason for rejecting it as an outdated and potentially dangerous fantasy, he suggested reconstructing or even reinventing Dutch national identity to make it reflect the significant changes in the population of the Netherlands since 1945. More specifically, he presented multiculturalism as the basis of a viable new national identity, compatible with the challenges which the Netherlands as a whole and his city in particular were facing in a globalized world:

What does the choice for an inclusive society mean for the formation of a Dutch identity? ... There are unmistakable elements that can be understood as the collective Dutch identity. These elements are characterized by several matters that have manifested themselves in various ways among our people throughout the ages. These elements include the following: a sense of freedom; openness to new things, people, ideas, places; an orientation to the outside: trade, travel, discovery. (Cohen 2007)

Not coincidentally, Cohen chose to give this lecture on a highly symbolic day: 5 May 2007, Liberation Day. The link to the ideas and hopes of the former resistance movement becomes even stronger if one considers that Cohen's lecture took place in honour of Henk van Randwijk. With his van Randwijk Lecture, Cohen expressly built a bridge between what had once been the ideas and dreams expressed by the Dutch resistance and his own ambitions and hopes for the future of Amsterdam.

The parallel with van Randwijk is full of implications, which are worth teasing out at some length. Interestingly, Cohen's vision of Amsterdam as a city of inclusiveness corresponded to van Randwijk's opposition to the return of 'pillarization' in Dutch post-war society. 'Pillarization' – as the compartmentalization of Dutch public life into distinct (Protestant, Catholic, socialist) niches – contradicted his belief that in order to transcend the limits of one's group or milieu, and to contribute most successfully to the public good, one needs to learn to question one's identity. Van Randwijk's novel *Een zoon begraaft zijn vader* (*A Son Buries His Father* [1938]) neatly illustrates this, as it figures a protagonist who buries his (conservative Christian) past in order to begin a different life.<sup>3</sup> Nor was van Randwijk's cutting across 'pillarized' borders confined to literature: he was one of the first Dutch intellectuals to take concrete measures that opposed the persecution of Dutch Jews. While others remained passive as long as their 'pillar' remained untouched by German interference, van Randwijk became involved in the resistance movement as early as April 1941. In January 1942, he published his pamphlet *Tenzij (Unless...)*, in which he accused his fellow citizens of passivism in regard to the plight of the Jews, and in which he even reached out to communists to invite them to help him with its distribution. After the war, he continued this policy by provocatively hiring prominent Catholics such as Anton van Duinkerken and Klaas Heeroma for his (originally Protestant) newspaper, and by employing repentant ex-members of the former Dutch National Socialist Movement, the NSB. In the same spirit, *Vrij Nederland* under van Randwijk's editorship featured a column titled 'We Give the Floor to...', in which people who opposed the newspaper's usual standpoint and agenda were given a chance to express their opinion.

Importantly, van Randwijk's project with *Vrij Nederland* was not simply about bringing together different people and a diversity of opinions, but about stimulating people to learn from each other and to re-examine the norms and values they had inculcated within their separate 'pillars' in their youth. His appeal to freedom was not the freedom to retreat into one's 'pillar' to maintain the purity or distinct identity of one's own group, but rather to cut across and transcend cul-

tural and religious borders. By doing so, he paved the way for increasing numbers of Dutch Catholics, Jews, and Protestants – very much against the will of their political and religious leaders – to enter into religiously mixed marriages. Significantly, from today’s perspective van Randwijk’s ideal of freedom stands in clear opposition to the way in which the current debate in the Netherlands remains tied up with the division between ‘us’ and ‘them’, *‘autochtoon’* and *‘allochtoon’*, ‘old Dutchmen’ and ‘new Dutchmen’. This distinction reflects a mindset that perceives the Netherlands as a static society, where multiculturalism is not understood as a model that fosters interaction with newcomers and encourages inter-religious and interethnic mixture, but rather one that once again cements borders between different population groups.

Reinventing ‘global Amsterdam’ from the perspective of Henk van Randwijk entails a different perspective on multiculturalism: not as coexistence-in-diversity, but as interaction-in-diversity. It rejects the idea that a static Dutch mainstream identity should simply coexist with and remain essentially untouched by the Other; rather, it represents a vision of Amsterdam as a city where Otherness is an important source of renewal, a motor of perpetual change. It is of symbolic significance that a representation of such a form of reterritorialization, a new beginning on foreign soil, can actually already be found in Amsterdam, on Surinam Square, in the little-known Monument of Awareness by the Surinamese artist Henry Rénfurm (Figure 13.4). In this monument, people of different origins come together in the rhythm of Robin Dobru’s Surinamese poem ‘Wan Bon’ (‘One Tree’), and everyone takes root in one and the same Tree of Life.



13.4. Monument of Awareness, Surinam Square (2003). (Photo: M. Meissner).

It has already been pointed out that the War Memorial on the Dam has never been completed since its Caribbean urn remained empty. Perhaps the Caribbean soil that was originally intended for Dam Square ended up in Surinam Square, where it was no longer used to honour those who died in the Second World War but rather to nourish a new Tree of Life.

## Notes

- 1 During the occupation, over 40,000 copies of collections with resistance poetry were sold. Together with Gerrit Kamphuis and Jan de Groot, Henk van Randwijk co-edited the first of those anthologies, the *Nieuw Geuzenliedboek*, published exactly one year after the invasion on 10 May 1941 (Aarts and van Etten 1995, 7ff.).
- 2 The Center for Information and Documentation on Israel (CIDI) publishes an annual report on anti-semitism in the Netherlands (downloadable at [www.cidi.nl](http://www.cidi.nl)).
- 3 Not without reason, van Randwijk's Christian publisher Kees Callenbach had strong reservations about the novel, because he feared that it might stimulate children to question the values of their parents (Mulder and Koedijk 1988, 106).

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## 14. Graphic Design, Globalization, and Placemaking in the Neighbourhoods of Amsterdam

*Bharain Mac an Bhreithiún*

Our experience of urban life in a city like Amsterdam consists of the interaction of many factors that work together to create a sense of place: the layout of streets and squares, the architectural façades, and the layers of carefully designed lettering and imagery that cling to the fabric of the city. This chapter deals with how graphic design in the urban environment of Amsterdam contributes to the creation and maintenance of this sense of place, or what cultural geographers term the *genius loci* of the city. More specifically, it considers the struggle *within* visual culture to assign a range of meanings to Amsterdam as a collection of individual neighbourhoods, with a particular emphasis on the commodification of the city's sense of place through urban branding strategies and city-marketing campaigns and, as well, on the local tactics that are employed to resist this commodification 'on the ground'. As will be seen, the role of graphic design in this contested area is particularly interesting as it plays an important role in the top-down imposition of certain narratives of place, while it can also be a means of resisting imposed narratives 'from the ground up'.

Anyone walking the streets of 'global' Amsterdam in the twenty-first century is likely to encounter a range of competing visual narratives which either attempt to impose dominant notions of place on the city or to disrupt and challenge imposed, hegemonic perspectives. Let us begin this exploration of Amsterdam's urban semiotics, then, by trying to define this somewhat vague notion of place. Geographers such as John Agnew regard *place* as a 'meaningful location' and *sense of place* as belonging to the realm of subjective, emotional connections or attachments to a particular locale (Cresswell 2004, 7). Likewise, for the Chinese-American geographer Yi-Fu Tuan place is most usefully contrasted with its foil, the physical, matter-of-fact notion of *space*, a geographical entity devoid of cultural meanings and emotional attachments (Cresswell 8). Space becomes place when given meanings, for example, when a particular spatial setting is given a name, such as Amsterdam, De Pijp, or Sloterdijk. In this process, visual culture makes a fundamental contribution, influencing how people connect with the *city as place*. It is in this sense that we can think of graphic design in the urban environment as writing a series of competing narratives of place, defining the city in different ways, some of which could be critiqued as exclusionary or as a means of approving or legitimizing aspects of the city's identity, while others could be seen as more open and inclusive.



Since the onset of the most recent wave of globalization around 1989, the struggle to define place in an open, global city like Amsterdam has become increasingly complex. As a port city with a rich history of openness to the outside world, Amsterdam provides an excellent case study for the examination of the effects of an inward flow of capital and people on the *genius loci* of a world city. One of the most commonly heard charges against globalization is that it leads to a diminution of place, a weakening of the individual identity of different locales as the effects of ‘time-space compression’ and multinational capitalism take hold. The French anthropologist Marc Augé famously explores this tendency in his *Non-Lieux. Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité* (1992), which traces the creation of non-specific, identikit ‘non-places’ through the protuberance of motorways, airports, shopping centres, and chain hotels in modern culture. The present chapter, informed by this tradition of critique, explores how Amsterdam is caught up in these recent trends, looking specifically at how globalization affects the graphic design of the built environment and asking whether the result is indeed a diminution of the city’s sense of place. One aspect that will be given special attention in this respect is that of city branding. Since 2004, the city council has promoted Amsterdam’s identity as a branded commodity through the *I amsterdam* urban branding campaign. This project follows an established pattern in globalizing cities that involves ‘the reimagining of the city, the rewriting of the city for both internal and external audiences’, with city authorities taking an ever more commercial approach to the city as a ‘product’ that should attract international high-flyers and the economic advantage their presence is believed to generate (Short 2006, 74). In the context of this pattern – often analyzed as part of a larger ‘shift from the Keynesian to the neoliberal city’ (Short 73) – external desires and perceptions have become increasingly important in the self-imagining of the aspiring ‘global city’. Has this led to a loss of local colour, as place is now defined in such a way as to highlight a range of attributes shared with a host of other world cities – to the detriment perhaps of Amsterdam’s heritage of idiosyncrasy and eccentricity? Are traditional narratives of place in Amsterdam being displaced by the commodified *genius loci* that is offered up by the city authorities and their graphic designers?

At the same time, while the *I amsterdam* campaign may be viewed as a top-down imposition, supported by the work of professional design studios, other examples of graphic design in Amsterdam are counter-discursive; they resist the dominant visual narratives by proposing alternative ones or by subverting their codes. One example would be the *Ai! Amsterdam* campaign, a kind of playful *détournement* of *I amsterdam* that makes use of Situationist techniques to ridicule the council’s city brand. Other examples could be found in the neighbourhood De Pijp, where the assertion of non-cosmopolitan, traditional Dutch identities from the provinces may be viewed as a means of resisting the multiethnic ‘melting pot’ narrative of an area of high immigration, or, alternatively, as a means of staging local cultural ‘authenticity’ for tourists and visitors. In considering these alternative narratives, the work of Michel de Certeau is particularly useful. According to de Certeau, while authority imposes its *strategy* on the populace, resistance takes the form of *tactics*, counter-hegemonic expressions of opposition that seek

to undermine the dominant narratives. He has found such forms of resistance in practices like walking in the city, pointing out how pedestrians are expected to follow certain paths, but how in practice they behave in innumerable and unquantifiable ways, filling the streets with the ‘forests of their desires and goals’, and performing ‘a tactical art that plays with the structures of place available’ (de Certeau 1984, xxi; Cresswell 2004, 39). As this chapter argues, in the case of graphic design and the definition of place in Amsterdam, these tactics take the form of street art, flyposting, and graffiti as well as signage and lettering that combine to resist processes of modernization and homogenization. All of these challenge the kind of images and visualizations that Henri Lefebvre identified as representing ‘the kind of technocratic planning discourse that focuses on the functional order of urban space’ (Hubbard 2006, 103).

### The *I amsterdam* Campaign, Placemaking, and Graphic Design



14.1. *I amsterdam* in 3D, Museum Square. (Photo: Bharain Mac an Bhreithiún).

The creation of a city brand constructs and imposes a unitary sense of place on the city as a whole. In so doing, it is influenced as much by its target audience as by the identity of the city itself. According to Mihalis Kavaratzis and G. J. Ashworth, who have written extensively on Amsterdam and urban branding campaigns, ‘such branding is often one-dimensional, and seeks to promote one particular facet of urban identity so as to develop a niche in global flows of investment and tourism’ (Hubbard 2006, 87). Competition between cities is reduced to a play of signs. As if anticipating such criticism, the *I amsterdam* campaign that was launched in September 2004 is based on a philosophy of participation and inclusivity (Figure 14.1). The visual identity it constructs in its logo, designed by KesselsKramer for Amsterdam Partners, is focused on the simple motto ‘I amsterdam’, rendered in the typeface Avenir, the work of the Swiss typographer Adrian Frutiger. The ‘I am’ is foregrounded in red letters and the remainder in white. This emphasizes the notion of the individual’s relationship with the collective of the city, making use of the basic English *I am* to drive the point home. According

to the brand's website, *I amsterdam* positions the Amsterdammer at the heart of the identity programme:

*I amsterdam* is the motto that creates the brand for the city and people of Amsterdam. In saying or expressing *I amsterdam*, we demonstrate a clear choice for the city of Amsterdam. *I amsterdam* shows our pride, our confidence and our dedication. *I amsterdam* is our personal endorsement for our city. Using *I amsterdam*, we can show clearly and proudly all the many benefits, opportunities and dimensions of excellence that make Amsterdam our city of choice. (*I amsterdam* 2009)

In the designers' schema, the *genius loci* is not predetermined but left to the multifarious definitions of each and every citizen, as well as every visitor coming into contact with the city. This is given visual emphasis by means of a participative graphic design. This includes the three-dimensional *I amsterdam* logo positioned in a number of key tourist locations in the city as well as the posters at bus shelters and tram stops which, as one critic puts it, 'exhibit slick photographic presentations of Amsterdam and Amsterdammers, printed with the *I amsterdam* logo, to demonstrate to the many passers-by that their own presence and identity on the streets of Amsterdam are an indispensable part of the brand-name Amsterdam' (Oudenampsen 2007, 112). KesselsKramer and Amsterdam Partners are inviting us all to participate in a mosaic of definitions by providing an open sign that we can inscribe with our own meanings.

Yet, a number of observers have pointed out that the brand is not unmotivated by powerful, controlling discourses, and that the openness of the subject position it holds out ('I am') is not as free of bias and manipulation as the official discourse surrounding it suggests. For a start, this purely typographic solution ignores the rich typographic tradition of the Netherlands and opts for a Swiss typeface by Adrian Frutiger, a key figure in the development of the International Typographic Style that would become the visual signifier of choice not only for functionalist modernists but also for the visual identity of powerful capitalist corporations, particularly in the United States. This choice of internationalism over the vernacular is echoed in the use of an English-language phrase, placing Amsterdam within a globalized narrative informed by Anglo-American economic dominance and linguistic hegemony, albeit one that has been accommodated by the Dutch mainstream for many years. The association of the brand with a coalition of business interests that have signed up in partnership with *I amsterdam* connects it to a market-oriented project to redefine the identity of the city. Indeed, 'non-partners may use the *I amsterdam* motto only with written approval by Amsterdam Partners' (*I amsterdam* 2009).

In an article titled 'Amsterdam™, the City as a Business', Merijn Oudenampsen outlines the way in which the *I amsterdam* campaign fits into the city council's strategic vision for Amsterdam in the post-1989 era of globalization. Recognizing that city branding is not new to the Netherlands, Oudenampsen points out that the *I amsterdam* campaign differs from past campaigns such as *Amsterdam heeft 't* in that it casts the city as a laboratory of creativity and entrepreneurial-

ism and not as a provider or regulator of services. To historicize this strategy, Oudenampsen cites David Harvey's recognition of a developing global consensus about urban government since 1989 – a consensus best described in terms of a neoliberal view of city government as a commercial exercise, depending on marketing initiatives to trumpet the city's appeal in an increasingly globalized economic context. In this view, the public sector takes on many of the characteristics of private enterprise and, according to Harvey, is in danger of serving the needs of an economic urban elite at the expense of more vulnerable groups and communities (Oudenampsen 2007, 113). Likewise, one could cite Saskia Sassen's analysis, in which globalization has resulted in a process of competition between world cities in which the clustering of knowledge-rich individuals is considered of paramount importance. The creation of an environment that facilitates face-to-face contact between such individuals is thought to contribute to the creation of a critical mass of knowledge that gives cities an edge over their competitors (Hubbard 2006, 175). In this sense, it is significant that an increased emphasis is placed on the (perceived) need to attract creatives and entrepreneurs in order to remain economically competitive; this clearly also applies to Amsterdam (Bontje and Crok 2006). It is in the context of this new kind of city government that recourse is increasingly taken to city branding, the branch of graphic design that sells the city and its identity as a commodity on the global market. Who, we must ponder, benefits from this branding of the city?

It is clear that Amsterdam already possessed a range of visual signifiers that identify it perfectly well as a unitary entity. The thirteenth-century *Andreaskruizen* or Andrew Crosses that figure in Amsterdam's coat of arms as well as the city's current street signage system both make use of Dutch typographic and graphic design to reinforce Amsterdam's place identity. Both of these visual markers – repeated thousands of times throughout the urban environment on flags and bollards, and attached to street corners and façades – provide the city with an adequate sense of place-based identity. In the case of the street signage, the combination of indexical street names and a uniform graphic identity throughout the city represents a fully functional placemaking system that works in harmony with the city's architecture while referencing Dutch culture and history as well as locale. Even the NEN 3225 font of the city's blue and white street signs, a typeface that emerged from a public lettering commission that was set up during the German occupation and which included Sem Hartz and Jan van Krimpen, references Dutch rather than German or Swiss typographic traditions: a choice that not only reflects the mood of Dutch patriotism after the liberation but which also pays homage to the local, national typographic tradition (Middendorp 2004, 298) (Figure 14.2). The established approach of placing street signs at every junction to evoke place contrasts with the attempts by *I amsterdam* to connect with the physical environment of the city. Whereas the signs represent a coded system that evokes the entire city as well as the particular locale in question, the huge *I amsterdam* letters placed at various touristic hubs such as the Museumplein reference only the city as a brand – like billboards by the highway, the typotecture of *I amsterdam* cannot compete in terms of subtlety and flexibility. The letters' locations are telling: they reveal that this is not primarily an affirmation of Am-

sterdam's identity aimed at its own citizens – although formally speaking, those are targeted as well by the urban marketing campaign (Kavaratzis and Ashworth 2006) – but a blunt and commercialized evocation of place for an audience of international tourists.



14.2. Blue and white street sign.  
(Photo: Bharain Mac an Bhreithiún).

Not surprisingly, many critical voices have been raised in relation to the *I amsterdam* campaign, and graphic design has been enlisted prominently as a form of resistance to the campaign's assumptions. Among others, dissent has resulted in the *détournement* of the brand by a group of cultural activists operating under the name *Ai! Amsterdam*. This collective views the official city brand as presenting a bland version of the city's identity, a watering down of its libertarian and permissive aspects in the interests of big business and a conservative-leaning political class. Its reworking of the logo is the first in a series of examples in which graphic design can be considered a form of counter-discursive resistance to the dominant narratives of place imposed by those in authority (Figure 14.3). In this case, the tactic has involved minimal changes to the original *I amsterdam* logo, but in such a way as to subvert its original signification. Sometimes employing the same Avenir typeface as the city council's campaign, and at other times incorporating a red heart similar to that of Milton Glaser's 'I Love New York' (I ♥ NY) campaign – one of the earliest examples worldwide of city marketing and branding by means of a trade-marked logo – the guerilla designers are sampling, subverting, and playing not only with the *I amsterdam* campaign itself but with the semiotic codes of urban branding in general. It also represents an articulate critique of the council's targeting of the creative class, pointing to its failure to connect with the creatives already resident in the city. To quote one disaffected 'Ai! Amsterdammer': 'According to the city council, Amsterdam should be a trendy business centre, visited by affluent diamond selling cruise customers. No little chaos, no sex and no fun anymore... just serious "creative" business' (de Boer 2009). The presence of the *Ai! Amsterdam* logo in windows all over the city testifies to a lively debate over the city's sense of place, as well as to the hazards involved in imposing any single brand identity on a city that relies on the interaction of a wide range of competing identities and beliefs to sustain its vitality and cosmopolitanism.



14.3. *Ai! Amsterdam* window poster. (Photo: Bharain Mac an Bhreithiún).

### Placemaking and Globalization: The Case of De Pijp

Openness to an inward flow of people as well as capital is one of globalization's defining features, and it is clear from walking the neighbourhoods of Amsterdam that the many shifts in the demographic make-up of the city have had an inevitable effect on its sense of place. The presence of immigrant communities in Amsterdam is nothing new, as the seventeenth-century Portuguese synagogue, among other monuments, attests. While the city council attempts its monolithic rebranding of the city, graphic design at the grassroots level of the *buurt* (neighbourhood) also advances a myriad of place-defining narratives that testify to the city's multiculturalism, in itself a consequence of both decolonization and globalization.

De Pijp is a mixed, nineteenth-century neighbourhood that is located just south of Amsterdam's half-moon shaped canal belt. Constructed to house the growing number of industrial workers from the 1860s onwards, it is now home to a residual Dutch working class and a large population of immigrants, or what in Dutch (official) discourse would be referred to by the Greek-derived terms *autochtonen* and *allochtonen*. Due to its close proximity to central Amsterdam and its connections with the art world, De Pijp has also been experiencing substantial gentrification, with many middle-class and gay residents moving in. Thus its sense of place is far from static. As such it provides us with an ideal case study for the examination of the effects of globalization on the *genius loci* in terms of the visual presence of immigrant communities as well as the graphic aspects of gentrification with its imported blend of hipsterism and mass-market commercialism. With all of these influences on the *genius loci* attempting to make a graphic mark on the built environment, it may be useful to look at some of the models offered up by cultural geographers who have studied globalizing trends in the city and their effects 'on the ground'.

The first issue that merits attention as we wander the streets of De Pijp is what the geographer Edward Relph calls a loss of authenticity and the erosion of place

in the contemporary city. Deeply influenced by Heidegger's thinking on the subject, Relph worried as early as 1976 that 'it was becoming increasingly difficult for people to feel connected to the world through place' (Cresswell 2004, 44). In his book *Place and Placeness*, Relph set out the idea that, as humans, we relate to place either as existential insiders or existential outsiders, either experiencing a strong sense of belonging or experiencing alienation from the places where we dwell. To be an insider is to identify profoundly with the places occupied, while as an existential outsider, one feels a deep sense of alienation that is the antithesis of the 'unreflective sense of belonging' that characterizes the insider's condition (Cresswell 44). Thus, for Relph there exist authentic and inauthentic attitudes to place, the former marked by a genuine sense of responsibility for your existence in connection with a locality, and the latter by a lack of awareness of the deep and symbolic significance of places and inability to appreciate their identities:

An inauthentic attitude to places is transmitted through a number of processes, or perhaps more accurately 'media', which directly or indirectly encourage 'placelessness', that is a weakening of the identity of places to the point where they not only look alike and feel alike but offer the same bland possibilities for existence. (Relph 1976, 82)

Relph points the finger of blame, not only to mass communication, big business, and central authority but also to the rise of new cultures of mobility, particularly through tourism. As David Harvey points out, in a further historicization of this insight, the concern with authenticity in relation to place has become notable only since the industrial revolution: '[only] as modern industrialization separates us from the process of production and we encounter it as a finished commodity does it emerge' (Harvey 1996, 302).



14.4. Window lettering, Café Chris Scholten. (Photo: Bharain Mac an Bhreithiún).

In De Pijp, while the kind of identikit cultural forms that are now being replicated across the globe are certainly identifiable, we are also brought face-to-face with visual examples that represent what Relph might call an authentic attitude to place. The lettering painted on the windows of a number of *bruin cafés*, such as Café Chris Scholten at Van Woustraat 104 (Figure 14.4), could be described as representing a heightened awareness of the deep and symbolic significance of places and their identities and of the way in which they provide a connection with the cultural history and heritage of the city in which they appear. The *bruin café* is a traditional workers' café whose walls have been stained brown by the accumulation of many years of customers' tobacco smoke. At a visual level, this connection with the past, made initially evident through the stained wallpaper, is reinforced by the style of lettering that traditionally adorns the large café windows. In the case of the Chris Scholten and other establishments in De Pijp, the lettering is likely to be the work of local sign painter and lettering artist Leo Beukeboom, who was born in 1943 and lives in the neighbourhood.

From 1967 to 1989, Beukeboom worked for Heineken. Until the late 1980s, large Dutch breweries such as Heineken and Amstel financed and organized the painting of café signs on the condition that the name of the company and its telephone number appear beside that of the café itself. Due to cost cutting in the breweries, this practice was brought to an end and cafés were expected to finance the signage themselves (Collizi 2007). The practice has, however, left a legacy of typographic design at neighbourhood level that, in its referencing of Dutch typographic history, can claim to fulfil Relph's criteria for authenticity in terms of the production of place. Beukeboom's work is personal in its idiosyncracies, in its use of Garamondesque letters, and in the accompanying imagery of billiard cues and frothing glasses of golden beer. The main body of his typographical work, however, with its italic swash cursives, follows the established conventions for *bruin café* signage that takes its inspiration from the work of the Dutch 'Golden Age' mannerist calligrapher Jan van de Velde (1569-1623). Van de Velde, as Mariët Westermann puts it, 'blurred the border between picture-making and writing' with the spectacularly elaborate and self-conscious examples of the written word displayed in his handwriting manual *Spieghel der Schrijffkonste* (1605), produced at a time when the Dutch found themselves at the apex of European literary and print culture (Westermann 1996, 60). In addition to complex calligraphic compositions, the manual contains a series of lettertypes that became a useful sourcebook for twentieth-century lettering artists such as Beukeboom. Throughout De Pijp, Beukeboom's lettering forges a link with a local typographic tradition, celebrating Amsterdam's and the Netherlands' distinct identity, and celebrating a vernacular visual heritage that defines the city and its hinterland as different from other places in the world. While he worked for what have since become multinationals caught up in a globalized economy, Beukeboom's work, like the old Bols and Douwe Egberts signage scattered around the neighbourhood, references both a commercial and a deeper cultural history that define the city. Arguably, in the present context the survival of these signifiers in the urban environment allows them to play the counter-discursive role of resistance to the narrative of place set up by *I amsterdam*. The idiosyncratic flourishes of the local sign painter conform



to Relph's notion of authenticity and trump the city brand in terms of representing the *genius loci* at neighbourhood level. These signs underline De Pijp's difference from other neighbourhoods and highlight Amsterdam's distinctive qualities in relation to other cities, whereas the graphics of city branding tends to rely on a narrow set of visual codes that emphasize or establish similarities between a range of competing world cities (Hubbard 2006, 87).

However, given the high proportion of immigrants resident in De Pijp, the notion that Beukeboom's *bruin café* lettering represents authenticity in terms of place is rather problematic. Does this make the signs painted on Surinamese restaurants and Moroccan or Turkish shops somehow less authentic in terms of place, or is the notion of settlement and identification with a locale central to the authentic attitude which Relph puts forward? As an approach to place, Relph's model could be read as setting up a hierarchy of insiders and outsiders, precisely the kind of thinking that lends itself for exploitation by far-right anti-immigration rhetoric. As an approach to place it sets up a hierarchical model, in which an authentic *autochtoon* population and its cultural identity is preferred over the somehow less authentic experiences of place of more recent arrivals, or even of those who can be seen as having allegiances and roots elsewhere. As ever more citizens are experiencing place as newcomers, especially in an immigrant city like Amsterdam, other models of placemaking are called for that enable a more dynamic and inclusive approach to identity, community, and place.

Doreen Massey's 1993 paper 'A Global Sense of Place' provides a much more optimistic template for the consideration of place and placemaking in the globalized city. She calls for a reconsideration of the meaning of place, seeing it as a process that is produced by fluid and porous interconnections and networks of people. Massey cites the example of Corsica as an island that has undergone several waves of successive settlement, each of which has made a distinct contribution to the *genius loci*; this example shows that the meanings of place are not fixed around a singular identity that can be lost or eroded. In the same way, rather than signifying the end of place, globalization in Massey's reading creates hybrid places with new identities that are open to the outside world:

Instead ... of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself, whether that be a street, or a region or even a continent. And this in turn allows a sense of place which is extroverted, which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world, which integrates in a positive way the global and the local. (Massey 2004, 69)

In the same vein, Massey celebrates the hybridization and layering of identity experienced in multiethnic neighbourhoods such as London's Kilburn, where Irish and Caribbean residents live alongside the longer established community of English Londoners.



14.5. Eerste Van der Helststraat, De Pijp. (Photo: Bharain Mac an Bhreithiún).

As we wander the neighbourhood of De Pijp from Van Woustraat towards the Albert Cuypstraat, the potential of Massey's model in reference to this area becomes evident. On Eerste Van der Helststraat we are likely to notice the visual juxtapositioning of an Islamic grocery store and an outlet of the Dutch bakery chain Brood (Figure 14.5). The grocery store announces its difference in rather subtle ways, mainly through the painted window-lettering in Turkish and Arabic, even as the window shelters under the traditional red-and-white striped canopy of a grocery store. The branch of the Brood chain, on the other hand, trumpets its Dutchness in a manner that is almost camp in its visual exuberance. The interior is decorated with an animated version of Vermeer's *Milkmaid*. Orange garlands are draped in the windows, the stencilled typography of the logo is backgrounded in orange, and the space directly in front of the shop is occupied by a novelty orange elephant emblazoned with a portrait of Queen Beatrix. References to the monarchy and the House of Orange connect the establishment with the core elements of Dutch national identity stretching back to the Dutch Revolt of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the founding of an independent United Provinces of the Netherlands. The presence of these visual signs might suggest a connection with place based on a claim to authenticity and yet, in the case of Brood, this is ambiguous. The outlet is part of a national chain, and therefore of a trend that results in the displacement of local bakeries that have a historical connection to the neighbourhood. Such chains move into neighbourhoods like De Pijp after a first wave of fashionable artist- and gay-led gentrification has prepared the way for the arrival of middle-class residents who follow in the wake of a perceived bohemia but who appreciate the convenience of comfortably familiar shopping and leisure facilities. In this sense, the visual signifiers festooned across the façade of Brood represent an identikit national identity, making no specific reference to De Pijp as a place.

A tour of De Pijp also reveals the presence of other extremely exuberant visual expressions of Dutchness. Across the street from the orange banners of Brood,

and directly opposite the Turkish store, stands a poster advertizing 'Malse Haring, Vers van het Mes' ('Tender Herring, Fresh from the Knife'). The herring is displayed against a background depicting the red, white, and blue of the Dutch tricolour and, as if this were not adequate in suggesting its provenance, another Dutch flag appears, attached to a cocktail stick and delicately poised in the side of the herring fillet. Above the poster, the façade of the shop, Volendammer Vishandel, is swathed in various representations of the Dutch flag. Named after the traditional model fishing village of Volendam, this celebration of Dutchness contributes to a local place narrative that plays up the authenticity of the market to both local and tourist audiences, in contrast to the multicultural identities of street markets in the Oud-West and Dapperbuurt neighbourhoods, among others. Other examples of the self-conscious portrayal of Dutchness include another Volendammer Viswinkel and a Hollandse Gebakkraam kiosk on Albert Cuypstraat, replete with images of nostalgic Amsterdam painted on its façade. Despite the seeming visual apartheid of *autochtoon* and *allochtoon* elements, when we examine the façade of the Islamic butcher's more carefully we might remark the subtle traces of the Dutch flag in its signage as well. What is clear from these examples is that authenticity in terms of the culinary culture is closely associated with notions of locally sourced produce and, as well, that the means of signifying this is a reliance on the symbolic language of nationality which, in the context of a neighbourhood open to immigration, can appear as a sign of insecurity or even hostility. In the cases of the Dutch-owned businesses, there may even be an element of counter-discursive resistance in the use of these emphatically national signifiers. In the multicultural context of the neighbourhood, this celebration of authenticity might be open to readings of a reactionary political stance, given that the visual narrative of Dutchness creates a clear distinction with the identities of surrounding businesses. On the other hand, these visual narratives could also be seen as part of a logic or process of commodification, whereby the Albert Cuyp market is being promoted as traditional and authentic in ways that are only slightly less camp than those employed by the Brood bakery. Evocation of traditional, rural settlements such as Volendam and the nostalgic images of old Amsterdam appear to confirm the notion that authenticity and place identity can be connoted through recourse to a visual narrative of a monocultural Dutch identity, a discourse that contrasts with the open, globalizing narrative promoted by the authorities. Once again, graphic design provides the citizen with a tactical response to the strategies of officialdom, this time fed by the politically ascendant and worrisome trends of populism and resurgent national thinking.

We might equally conclude that the graphic environment replicates the system of religious, cultural, and social compartmentalization that is known as *verzuiling* or 'pillarization'. This model for the organization of society was dominant in the Netherlands from the beginning of the twentieth century to the late 1960s, and allowed the various confessional groups as well as the socialists to organize their own schools, trade unions, newspapers, and radio and television stations, and to live lives that were effectively parallel and even isolated from one another. While the different 'pillars' succumbed to a process of erosion in the course of the 1960s, the result of greater individualism and the rise of a secular society, in-

stitutional traces of the system remain in the twenty-first century, most evidently in the organization of the different broadcasting companies but also in terms of the trend among Muslims to make use of residual legislation to found their own schools separate from the Dutch mainstream. While a tour of De Pijp appears to confirm Massey's notion of a global sense of place, it is perhaps wise to consider the possibility that we are also experiencing a visual landscape influenced to some extent by the rise of a form of neo-pillarization (at least in the form of a neighbourhood aesthetic). While the main confessional pillars disintegrated and the rigid *verzuiling* of the early twentieth century lost its power to segregate the Dutch population and break it into a range of socially and politically distinct niches, 'some have argued that the influx of Muslim immigrants since the 1970s, who initially were not particularly encouraged to integrate but left to their own resources, created a new form of "pillarization"' (de Haan 2010, 122).

Whereas Massey's model emphasizes mixing and hybridity, then, *verzuiling* implies a process of careful separation within a neatly compartmentalized society and public sphere. From the point of view of graphic design in the environment, it is not always easy for the outsider to tell the difference but the population of De Pijp will be able to read the connotations of their visual environment politically and ideologically and graphic design clearly has a role to play in setting the tone and in defining the *genius loci* in which cohabitation takes place. Some signage is hybridized with its mix of Arabic and Dutch typeforms or with its integration of Dutch national colours into an Indonesian or Turkish shop façade. At other times we encounter a kind of spatial and graphic segregation as Saint Nicholas's companion Zwarte Piet pops up in one shop and shoarma-dominated photography embellishes its neighbour. Once again, the construction of neo-pillarization through graphic design might be read as belonging within the sphere of resistance, a tactic that counters the official strategy of togetherness or even assimilation that is part of the discourse of *I amsterdam* – a society of individuals, each one of whom relates directly to the city rather than within the various pillars that traditionally made up Dutch society.

## Conclusion: Place as Process and Event

By way of conclusion, let me draw on two recent art projects around graphic design and placemaking in the urban environment – *Replaced Street Signs* and *Amsterdam in Letters* – for some final reflections on how place can most usefully be conceptualized under today's conditions of globalization. One notable project that dealt with questions of multiculturalism in the *buurt*, *Replaced Street Signs* (2008) by Vincent van Gerven Oei and Jonas Staal, consisted of a temporary graphic intervention in the urban landscape and addressed the issue of how the presence of Muslim immigrants in the Netherlands relates to – and transforms – the *genius loci* of their surroundings. In the Schilderswijk (Painters' district) in The Hague, several Dutch street signs bearing the names of prominent Dutch 'Golden Age' artists were replaced by literal translations into Arabic script. The translation of the signs into Arabic was intended as a 'cultural update' whereby

what had been stigmatized as a *probleemwijk*, or problem neighbourhood, was to be realigned with its current inhabitants through the alteration of its official signage. In itself, the form of this intervention was not altogether new: a project instigated by the municipality had previously resulted in a similar cultural update for The Hague's Chinatown district, in an attempt to draw together the Dutch and Chinese cultural identities at work in the area, while street signage in Amsterdam's Chinatown now incorporates Chinese script into the familiar blue-and-white Amsterdam street signage system. However, the *Replaced Street Signs* project in the Schilderswijk aimed to highlight that the alteration of place by Muslim (Moroccan and Turkish) residents was much more controversial, and was perceived as a much greater threat to the Dutch sense of national and local identity, than that effected by Chinese immigration. Through the intervention of graphic design, then, the fault lines over place, identity, and integration into Dutch cultural heritage were identified and exposed. Again, a graphic signifier of place opened a debate about alterations in the *genius loci* of a Dutch city neighbourhood. What makes this project particularly interesting is its celebration of hybrid forms: the Schilderswijk's fusion of the toponymy of 'Golden Age' painters and Arabic script can be considered a representative rendering of Massey's 'global sense of place' in which cultural hybridity is the norm. The exclusive use of Arabic script in this case points to the exclusion of these residents from the Dutch population in an outlying, so-called problem neighbourhood. In this sense, the uneasy rendering of *genius loci* that the signs represent testifies to the failure of multiculturalism in this neighbourhood, where social mixing has given way to exclusion and a spatial pillarization which separates the immigrant neighbourhood from the rest of the city. Once again, this signage may be interpreted as a counter-discursive tactic – the official strategy of togetherness having broken down around the edges of this and other Dutch cities (Amsterdam's Bijlmermeer representing another good example of such trends).

*Replaced Street Signs* underlines what this article has sought to demonstrate throughout: the capacity of urban graphic design to open up a public forum for the discussion of globalization and its effect upon the *genius loci* of the city and its neighbourhoods. Maarten Helle's photo-essay *Amsterdam in Letters* (2008), accompanied by Willem Ellenbroek's text, also explores this potential for placemaking through the interplay of graphic design and the built environment. Among others, it comments on the 'unlimited confidence in the future' that is expressed by permanent inscriptions in a building's façade. As Ellenbroek reflects on this investment in permanence:

It meant that the enterprise would last forever, passed on from one generation to another... Little is left of those dreams of eternity. There is hardly a single shop any longer that still sells what you can read on the façade. The pork butcher's in the Utrechtsestraat is now a ceramics boutique. The proud 'Piano's, Orgels en Vleugels' in the Heiligeweg is now a branch of Benetton. (Ellenbroek 2008, 12)

In another reference to globalization, Ellenbroek tells the story of the old butcher's shop In 't Vette Varken (In the Fatted Pig) in the Jordaan, which has become an Islamic butcher's. As the façade had been declared a protected monument, the new owner could not change the sign and had to make do with painting 'Het Vette Kalf' ('The Fatted Calf') on the window (Ellenbroek 2008, 13). Between them, what these examples bring into focus is the cultural hybridity brought about by immigration as well as the colonization of the vernacular by multinational homogeneity, reminding us how globalization impacts on place in widely different ways. In addition, Ellenbroek's examples also direct attention to the temporal dimension involved: they register social change and transformation beyond what was imagined at earlier moments in time.

In conclusion, what clearly emerges from this survey of Amsterdam's graphic landscape is what a wide range of responses these processes and transformations invite. Some of the graphic design hosted by Amsterdam's streetscape invites a kneejerk conservative response that views it as an incursion into a familiar and culturally distinctive visual world: a notion of overly rapid change and destruction that is easily exploitable by traditionalist and xenophobic political groups. To some extent, this position is shared by a number of geographers and urban theorists whose frameworks for analysis set up notions of authenticity as somehow under threat, holding globalization responsible for the erosion of the *genius loci* in the city. Edward Relph's position, for example, can be adopted with regard to the fading tradition of handpainted signage on the windows of *bruin cafés*, such as that practiced by Leo Beukeboom in De Pijp. Similarly, Manuel Castells has put forward arguments that could be used to accuse *I amsterdam* and its encouragement of globalized flows of goods and people as posing a threat to place identity within Amsterdam. Drawing obvious parallels with Relph's work on placelessness and Augé's notion of 'non-places', Castells argues that there are now many spaces which are solely associated with the accelerated flow of people and goods around the world and do not act as localized sites for the celebration of 'real' cultures. Thus he identifies a gradual erosion of place identity, occurring as more and more sites are given over to the articulation of global flows (Hubbard 2006, 177).

However, perhaps a distinction should be drawn between rapid flows of goods and people and the kind of flow that leads to putting down roots and working out new narratives of place in the city. Indeed, a temporal framework is useful when approaching the question of place identity in Amsterdam. Place, far from a fixed entity, is an event which develops over time. Doreen Massey's plea to reimagine places 'as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings' (Cresswell 2004, 69) offers us the chance to see *genius loci* as a process within the life of the city. Massey is optimistic in viewing globalization as presenting positive combinations of the global and the local. In this sense, De Pijp's fascinating mix of vernacular, post-colonial, and gentrifying elements makes it a vital laboratory whose identity as a place is far from being emptied out. Its *genius loci* is simply undergoing change, it is fluid and mobile, an event *taking place* in real time rather than a static entity awaiting the corrosive attack of globalized visual forms. This sense of place as an event rather than a fixed

entity is also celebrated by Michel de Certeau who sees place as 'being made and remade on a daily basis' (Cresswell 39). This sense of fluidity at the heart of de Certeau's thinking on the *genius loci* sees place as offering up the potential for social actors to intervene in acts of resistance that work tactically to undermine and undo the strategies of authority. Hence, while Castells makes a good point in accusing globalization's accelerated flows of goods and people as creating sites of relative placelessness, by taking up de Certeau's idea of place as event, there is potential to create alternative narratives and place identities that erupt sporadically in the midst of such bland environments. The playful interventions of independent grassroots designers, small shopkeepers, graffiti artists, and flyposterers make and remake place over time, engaging in a dialogue with the authorities that allows Amsterdam and its *genius loci* to present itself as an ongoing conversation rather than a carefully preserved museum exhibit or a bland commercial brand.

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## 15. A Global Red-Light City? Prostitution in Amsterdam as a Real-and-Imagined Place

*Michaël Deinema and Manuel B. Aalbers*

### Introduction

Only a decade since the Dutch parliament ratified the legalization of prostitution, the sex-oriented Red Light District, prominent symbol of Amsterdam's 'progressive' liberality and permissiveness, has come under heavy fire. The Amsterdam city council has formulated a comprehensive strategy to alter the character of the historic city centre: launched in 2007, Plan 1012 aims to restructure and clean up this inner-city neighbourhood which includes the Wallen, the city's largest red-light district. A strong reduction of window prostitution is one of the spearheads of the restructuring plan. Why have local authorities turned against the red-light district, Amsterdam's great tourist draw, heralded not so long ago as exemplifying a great advancement in the free choice of labour and the long-awaited social acceptance of 'the world's oldest profession'? As Amsterdam is, and traditionally has been, deeply integrated in the global economy, acting as a prime hub for international flows of people, finance, information, and ideas, this question is here considered within the context of the ever-deepening processes of economic and cultural globalization that profoundly affect Amsterdam's political, economic, and cultural life (Nijman 1999; Taylor 2000; Krätke 2006).

Two significant shifts are taking place against the backdrop of Plan 1012. In local political discourse, window prostitution is increasingly portrayed as a problem, signifying a shift in the way in which the character and (in)appropriate place of prostitution in Amsterdam is imagined by local policymakers and international commentators (Skinner 2008). An increased emphasis on human trafficking, sexual slavery, crime, and violence fuels calls for the drastic curtailment of window prostitution in the district, despite the fact that formal legalization was designed to combat such excesses and that window prostitution can be more successfully regulated than alternative, less visible forms of sex work. Second, the imaginary of Amsterdam itself and its central historic district are shifting. It has been a general trend for some time now that city councils are pressured to promote and brand their cities in a globalizing marketplace. Branding strategies and economic considerations are likely to play a key role in any plan to restructure the centre of a globally well-connected capital (Savitch and Kantor 2002). Amsterdam is certainly no exception: a recent white paper states that one aim of Plan 1012 among others is 'to realize a varied and high quality image for the city

approach area' (*Heart of Amsterdam* 2009, 4). This raises questions about the way in which the shifting reality of prostitution practices 'on the ground' relates to – and is shaped by – the increasing role of 'city image' considerations.

It must be clear that the stakes are high for many parties involved. Major changes to the red-light district are bound to affect Amsterdam's economy and the character of its city centre. Furthermore, how the municipality handles the district affects not only the city's reputation and its place in the global imaginary, but also the working conditions of prostitutes on the local level. Will Plan 1012 effectively tackle the negative excesses of prostitution and make the city centre a more attractive place for residents and visitors, as its proponents claim? Or will its unintended consequences leave both prostitutes and the city worse off? Much of this depends on how the views, of locals and others, on prostitution and its place in Amsterdam interact with its actual manifestations. In what follows, our historically grounded analysis will focus on how the red-light district has been shaped by a long history of global flows into Amsterdam as well as by external or 'outside' views on prostitution in the city, partly through their effects on local (self-)perceptions. Through comparing and contrasting past and present interventions in the district, and through analyzing the causes and effects of these interventions with special attention for the role of image considerations, we aim to show what may be in store for Amsterdam, the red-light district and its sex workers *post* Plan 1012.

## **A Genealogy of Amsterdam Prostitution as Global, Real and Imagined**

The social and spatial realities of Amsterdam prostitution are, and have been historically, intimately related to Amsterdam's position as an important node in international economic networks as well as to its openness, with flows of people moving continually in and out of the city. Through their globality, Amsterdam, its historic centre, and prostitution itself in the city exist simultaneously as real social-economic and spatial phenomena and as cultural signifiers that hold meaning for different groups, from local inhabitants to foreign visitors.

It has often been argued that with the intensification of globalization and the proliferation of various global media, symbolic images and markers increasingly influence material and social realities (e.g. Appadurai 1990). Unmediated experience is becoming ever less relevant to social interactions, blurring dichotomies between lived experience and symbolic representations. The post-industrial, globalizing economy produces and depends on images and brands which distinguish different products and consumer identities. Products, lifestyles, and identities are consequently experienced and lived through their (often contested) definitions as unique (Lash and Urry 1994). The same goes for cities. With people increasingly footloose, and able to see and interact with remote places online, cities are no longer the unquestioned social domain of their inhabitants and the occasional visitor. Places are increasingly defined and experienced relationally; thus the experience of being and living there is thoroughly affected by notions held about the place, even by remote observers. These notions are often based largely on some

striking characteristics, social or cultural extremities or oddities, overdefining the distinctness of the place, and putting ‘outside’ pressure on local lived realities.

Cities like Amsterdam, as well-known tourist destinations that are highly integrated into global economic and media networks, are simultaneously ‘real-and-imagined’, to use a phrase by urban planner and political geographer Edward Soja (1996). Stories and images determine many of the experiences in and of the city. This happens in prepackaged ways, as is the case with the tourist attractions Holland Experience, Heineken Experience, Ajax Experience and red-light district tours, or with the *I amsterdam* city branding campaign (Zuckerwise 2012; Goggin 2010; see also Bharain Mac an Bhreithiún’s chapter in the present volume). It also happens in less direct, more flexible ways, through the diffuse impressions of Amsterdam that abound around the world, affecting perceptions of visitors and locals alike. International media representations of Amsterdam, and diffuse notions circulating the world about this city, tend to focus on its ‘coffee shops’ (where cannabis is legally sold) and its red-light district, which non-locals often take as a *pars pro toto* to define the city (Schwammenthal 2007). Not only Amsterdam is real-and-imagined, a place on mental as much as on geographical maps, so is the Red Light District, often considered a sex-and-drugs theme park (Nijman 1999; van Straaten 2000).<sup>1</sup> Prostitution, while ostensibly catering to physical urges, is real-and-imagined as well. Prostitution-related policies in Amsterdam are shaped by a ceaseless interplay between social-economic realities and a discursive arena involving competing visions of the city and the sex work industry. Importantly, the imaginaries surrounding the red-light district influence policymakers’ perceptions and thus their policies, echoing the ‘Thomas theorem’ that says that what is defined as real is real in its consequences. And new policies influence existing imaginaries of the district in turn. As will be argued below, the interplay between the imaginary and the real prostitution spaces of Amsterdam is not straightforward but is complicated by social and cultural trends located at different scales: local, national, and global.

This interplay is not particular to Amsterdam. In Belgium, for example, a historic shift in the dominant conceptualization of prostitutes from ‘vixens’ to ‘victims’ affected (albeit in fragmented ways) national prostitution policies; the recent restructuring of Antwerp’s red-light district (the Schipperskwartier) was sparked and informed by image-affecting processes of globalization (immigration, tourism, and urban resurgence) (Schroyen 2010; Loopmans and van den Broeck 2011). Nor is this interplay particularly new. Amsterdam’s prostitution sector has been globalized to some extent for centuries. During the two centuries after Amsterdam’s rise to global prominence as a maritime trading centre around 1600, its political elites generally adopted a fairly tolerant approach towards prostitution, consistent with a pragmatic view of urban social management. In the two centuries after the temporary annexation of the Netherlands by Napoleonic France in 1810, however, prostitution in Amsterdam was successively regulated, criminalized, tolerated, and then formally legalized. At every stage it took on a different form and occupied a different place in the city, both literally and metaphorically. The interplay between ‘city image’ and socio-spatial reality was central to each of these transitions.

In what follows we will provide a genealogy both of the concrete place of prostitution in the city and of the place held by prostitution in the city's self-representations and international image. This will show how these two dimensions of the social-spatial dynamic of prostitution in Amsterdam – the dimension of its physical, lived existence and that of its imaginary or mental representations – tend to interact, something which should inform policy decisions concerning its tenacious, (in)famous, and shape-shifting prostitution sector.

### **Amsterdam's Imagined Moral Geography: Historical Roots and Shifts**

Attitudes towards prostitution in Amsterdam have changed several times over the last four centuries. What has not changed is the orientation of Amsterdam's sex work sector towards the global flows of people and commerce that have permeated the city since ca. 1600. This is reflected in the geography of prostitution in Amsterdam. The Wallen, where the main red-light district is presently located, was already a magnet for prostitution and its 'ancillary service industries' during the seventeenth century (Schama 1987, 468; van de Pol 2011). These originally flourished so profusely here because the area straddled Amsterdam's busy shipping port. The port itself has long since changed location, losing much of its former importance, but prostitution and a reputation for sexually tinted entertainment had taken root in the Wallen and were there to stay. This history goes some way towards explaining the present geography of window prostitution in Amsterdam.

For large stretches of its history, prostitution in the Wallen has been oriented towards a highly transient population, both of prostitutes and their clients. In the seventeenth century, the clients were often seamen and the prostitutes came from the Dutch Republic's hinterlands, sometimes from as far away as Denmark. Since the late twentieth century, tourists from all over the world engage in commercial sexual transactions in the red-light district, usually with immigrant girls from Central and Eastern Europe or Latin America. In other periods, too, Amsterdam's prostitution sector could be seen to thrive on fleeting male visitors and migrant women. In Napoleonic times, the French empire's soldiers were key purchasers of sexual services in Amsterdam. Later in the nineteenth century, the providers of such services were increasingly girls from Germany, Belgium, or France.

The internationalized character of Amsterdam's prostitution has tended to sensitize local policymakers to external or 'outside' perceptions. While city magistrates usually tolerated prostitution as an inevitable or even useful urban element in a busy port city continually visited by hordes of sex-starved mariners, the occasional crackdowns in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries prevented tales of Amsterdam licentiousness from gaining too much currency abroad. In early-modern times, then, the city's social and moral policies were already partly predicated on image-management considerations (Schama 1987, 470-80; Zuckerwise 2012). In the nineteenth century, the impact of externally generated views on Amsterdam's prostitution policies became very apparent. Regulation of brothels and mandatory medical visitations of prostitutes were first instituted in

1811 at Napoleon's behest to control the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. An abolitionist movement strongly opposing this regulatory system and brothels developed during the 1870s, following the lead of British anti-prostitution activist Josephine Butler. Indeed, Dutch abolitionism was integrated in a formidable Europe-wide activist network, and the victory it obtained with the 1911 Morality Laws, which banned brothels throughout the Netherlands (Amsterdam had banned them already in 1897), was partly a response to international vigilance on the issue.

Such policy changes were invariably related to larger shifts in the dominant discursive constructions of prostitutes and their place in the city, reflecting an internalization of external perspectives. Before Napoleon's interventions, Amsterdam officials cloaked their recognition of the social utility of prostitution – its contribution to social order – in mild, rather symbolic expressions of moral condemnation. Regulation was similarly based on a view of prostitution as a 'necessary evil'. But the image of prostitutes became more negative than before. As depraved seductresses and potential carriers of disease, they were now thought to carry full responsibility for any evils resulting from their sexual transactions (de Vries 1997; Mooij 1998). Abolitionists, in contrast, portrayed prostitutes as exploited victims and 'white slaves'. During the last decades of the nineteenth century this view gained traction throughout Europe and North America (Keire 2010). Another shift occurred after the Second World War, with prostitution increasingly pathologized through a psycho-social lens, encouraging soft-handed care-based approaches (Boutellier 1991). Almost simultaneously, the sexual revolution, for some, re-signified prostitution as sexual liberation. These new notions and perceptions encouraged more liberal policies of decriminalization in the postwar period.

Both policies and discourses on prostitution in Amsterdam are, historically, intimately tied to the spaces of prostitution in an intricate triangular dynamic. Nineteenth-century regulationists considered the secluded and discrete brothel the appropriate place for controlled prostitution. Formal control and humiliating visitations, however, produced evasions on the part of sex workers, many of whom illegally practiced so-called 'free prostitution' outside of brothels, in central areas with many public entertainment facilities. Under pressure of this competition, brothel owners ran stricter regimes and illegal brothel-based coercion ('white slavery') increased (Bossenbroek and Kompagnie 1998; Deinema 2006). Consequently, brothels were increasingly branded as spaces of wicked exploitation. The resulting prohibition of brothels led to a spatial dispersal of prostitution in Amsterdam, with prostitutes operating rather inconspicuously from hotels, massage salons, or even tobacco shops, blending into new neighbourhoods and everyday urban life (de Wildt and Arnoldussen 2002; Middelburg 2010). Its existence subtly veiled, attitudes towards prostitution softened. This set the stage for decriminalization and the emergence of window prostitution, in particular in the age-old hub of sexual transactions, the Wallen. Coupled with the social-economic marginalization and depopulation of this historic inner-city district during the 1960s and 1970s – itself the effect of large-scale suburbanization and worsening perceptions of inner-city life – this historic legacy made the Wallen a convenient place for experiments with openly practiced sex work.

Policy changes and interventions tend to affect the spatiality of prostitution in Amsterdam, often in unintended ways. In turn, shifting spatialities affect policies, but usually through the mediation of local imaginaries of the prostitute as well as of her spaces of operation. Local imaginaries, however, are not exclusively generated locally. The social experiment of tolerating window prostitution *de facto* during the last decades of the twentieth century, a policy known in Dutch as *gedogen*, created a red-light district of international fame, earning Amsterdam the dual reputation (in the Western world at least) of being Europe's Sin City and its progressive utopia/heterotopia. Cultural liberals across the world portray Amsterdam in a positive light and attribute a liberating and harmonious live-and-let-live attitude to the city, generally believing this to be linked to exemplary – if perhaps rather quirky – social policy experimentation. This view was recently endorsed by a number of Hollywood celebrities whose enthusiastic comments about Amsterdam were compiled on video and posted on the city promotion *I amsterdam* website.<sup>2</sup> Cultural conservatives, by contrast, take a negative view, scolding Amsterdam for what they see as its crime-ridden immorality or hopeless naïveté. In 2009 American Fox News talk show host Bill O'Reilly, for example, claimed criminal organizations basically ruled Amsterdam due to the city's liberal policies (and parroted city authority rhetoric on how Amsterdam draws the wrong types of tourists, claiming it cannot attract 'family tourists' anymore). These images have played a major role in the more recent shifts in Amsterdam's prostitution policies with which we are principally concerned in this chapter: the formal legalization of brothels in 1999 and the restrictive backlash embodied by Plan 1012 since 2007.

### **Trying to Control the Uncontrollable: Legalizing Prostitution and Plan 1012**

In 1999, the Dutch government decided to repeal the brothel ban of 1911. In effect, prostitution was legalized as of 1 October 2000. Just like the introduction of the brothel ban, its repeal was the result of changing social views, and not just in the Netherlands (e.g., Denmark legalized prostitution in 1998). Around this time, the Dutch government – a so-called 'purple coalition' comprised of the leading social-democratic party, the PvdA, and two liberal-democratic parties, the VVD and D66 – extended the civil liberties of Dutch citizens not only by legalizing prostitution but also by passing legislation regulating euthanasia and gay marriage. Legalization itself was largely supported across the political spectrum. For economic liberals on the right, the decisive argument was that the old Morality Laws of 1911 constituted an infringement on the right to free choice of labour. For the left, the idea that legalization would facilitate the regulation of prostitution was at least as important. Some conservatives similarly supported the repeal of the brothel ban on the premise that legalization would make it easier to fight persistent problems in the sex industry such as forced prostitution and the prostitution of minors. It was argued that the 'toleration' of prostitution, the creation of a grey zone between criminalization and legalization, had made it impossible to criminalize some forms of prostitution while allowing others. For-

mal legalization would enable the state to define what types should be allowed and which not. This supposed normalization of prostitution was said to make it easier to protect prostitutes. A majority of the Dutch public supported legalization, believing it would counter exploitation of prostitutes, who were generally regarded fairly positively but were thought to be routinely victimized by pimps (WODC 2002).

Legalization, however, also had its critics, both at home and abroad. Some charged that, by the time of legalization, the red-light district had already lost its emancipatory charm and had become harshly commercial (Nijman 1999). Abroad, Amsterdam came to be seen by some as a hub of international human trafficking rings, criticism reminiscent of the ‘white slavery’ rhetoric of the *fin-de-siècle* (Skinner 2008). The Amsterdam council itself came to suspect that legalization did not have the desired effect in terms of increasing the controllability of the sector. In 2005 Amma Asante and Karina Schaapman – two city councillors for the local social-democrats, the latter a former prostitute herself – published a report titled *Het onzichtbare zichtbaar gemaakt* (*Making the Invisible Visible*). They argued that the withdrawal of the brothel ban had in fact made it harder rather than easier to regulate prostitution. With a population of 730,000, Amsterdam accommodated 8,000 to 10,000 prostitutes in 2000, 30 per cent of whom worked behind the famous windows of the city’s red-light districts. Another 30 per cent worked in other sex houses (brothels), 10 per cent on the street, and 30 per cent in the sector designated ‘other’, mostly as escorts and from home. In five years the share of window prostitution had halved, while the category ‘other’ had grown rapidly. Most problems seemed to be concentrated in this ‘other’ sector and in street prostitution. Thus, the most troubling branch of prostitution was not only the least regulated sector, but also the fastest growing one. Legalization had not improved the conditions of prostitutes at large, but had resulted in illegal prostitution going underground.

Recently, the city council has been active in minimizing prostitution, but in doing so it has focused its efforts on fighting the most visible and least problematic part of the industry: well-regulated, highly visible, and spatially concentrated window prostitution. The main result of these shifting perceptions and of the renewed problematization of window prostitution is Plan 1012, launched in 2007 (*Heart of Amsterdam* 2009).<sup>3</sup> This plan calls not only for the strong reduction (up to 75 per cent) of window prostitution in the red-light district, but for the removal of all ‘criminogenic’ businesses from zip code area 1012, the heart of the historic centre which includes, besides the red-light district itself, the central train station and some of the city’s main shopping streets. The novel term ‘criminogenic’ refers to companies that may not be directly involved in any illegal business, but are deemed likely to be, at least in part, built on ‘black money’. The city claims that this applies to many souvenir shops, non-global fast-food places (thus excluding McDonald’s, Burger King, and the like), grocery stores, coffee shops, and sex-related businesses in and around the Wallen. As such, the policy visions underlying Plan 1012 lump together window prostitution with other manifestations of Amsterdam’s liberal policies which, like the famous coffee shops, constitute the core of Amsterdam’s popular image in the United States and the rest of



Europe. Closing down the windows remains one of the spearheads, however, and since 2007, the city of Amsterdam, in cooperation with a few non-profit housing associations and the non-profit restoration company Stadsherstel, has been buying out owners of buildings with window prostitution (Aalbers and Deinema 2012). In all cases, prostitution activities were halted. In addition, many prostitution licenses have been discontinued.

Proponents of Plan 1012 stress that many women in the red-light district are in a dangerous and precarious position, and that restructuring the area will help fight unacceptable excesses of the sexual services industry, such as human trafficking and coerced prostitution. However, as we have seen, previous policies – nineteenth-century regulation, the 1911 ban on brothels, and legalization under the 1999 repeal act – all shared this same aim. Undesired practices have evaded all previous attempts to eliminate or control them, with prostitution becoming more dispersed throughout the city and often growing harsher and more opaque in the immediate wake of such interventions. Past experiences with prostitution seem to teach us a paradox: more (formal) control results in less controllability. While in many ways representing contradictory approaches, regulation, prohibition, and legalization all entailed a form of official recognition. In all three cases a formal definition of prostitution was developed, and all three kinds of intervention could be seen as efforts to control the phenomenon. Prostitution, however, appears to thrive particularly well outside of formal frames. Attempts to formalize it therefore tend to produce counter-reactions – the increased informalization of specific manifestations of prostitution – leading to spatial dispersal and to evasive behaviour. For four centuries, prostitution in Amsterdam has displayed mercury-like qualities. Every heavy-handed approach to this sector has caused many prostitution-related activities to slip out of the hands of the authorities and to retreat underground.

### **New Control Efforts in the Globalized Red Light District**

Has anything changed this time around, altering the dynamic between policies and prostitution in Amsterdam? While Amsterdam has been linked to global trading networks for centuries, two manifestations of recent, intensified globalization are immediately visible in Amsterdam and the red-light district, i.e., large-scale tourism and international immigration. Tourism and migration both shape real-and-imagined Amsterdam and play a crucial role in the real-and-imagined red-light district. Tourists see and possibly pay sex workers, most of whom migrated to the Netherlands. The red-light district is a globalized place; yet globalization is not something ubiquitous. Globalization is located in specific places that meet specific conditions, but that does not mean it is only located in similar places. Bangkok and Phuket (Thailand), Jamaica and Amsterdam cater to global sex tourism, but they do so in different ways and for different reasons. Amsterdam is located in a much more affluent country than the other dominant places in the imaginary of global sex tourism. Furthermore, Amsterdam's red-light district not only imports a large number of its customers, it also imports the lion's share

of its sex workers (around 75 per cent) – making Amsterdam’s sex tourism different than elsewhere. Moreover, the municipality has more resources at hand to police excesses and restructure neighbourhoods.

What drives Plan 1012 is that Amsterdam’s city council explicitly seeks a different kind of tourism and hopes to attract new businesses to the Wallen. Tourists are no longer valued only for the income they generate directly, but also for the status they bring, for the impressions of Amsterdam to which they respond and which they diffuse throughout the world. The city council seeks to increase Amsterdam’s symbolic capital globally, hoping this will generate more income in the long term. It aims to attract higher-end tourism and to change the impressions visitors have of the city. Like the *I amsterdam* city branding campaign, then, Plan 1012 functions as part of an image-management campaign, with its proponents hoping it will ‘redirect the tourist gaze’ (Zuckerwise 2008, 13). Both are indicative of a general strategy to adjust, revamp, and steer the international reputation of Amsterdam. Recent processes of intensifying globalization have, in effect, turned Amsterdam and its places of prostitution inside out, in the sense that what happens there is exposed to the gaze of the outside world more thoroughly than ever before, through the experiences of tourists and expats, internet information and images, foreign media interest, and international law-enforcement agencies such as Interpol and Europol. As a result, the city government attends and responds strongly to notions of Amsterdam circulating abroad, sometimes to the detriment of the direct interests of other local actors such as the city’s prostitutes.

While it is unlikely to be an effective tool for remedying social problems in Amsterdam’s prostitution sector, an economic argument in favour of Plan 1012 is the general re-appreciation of the value of the city’s central and historic districts. Until the 1980s, the centre was a convenient dumping ground for ‘disrespectable’ elements of society such as prostitutes, but with re-urbanization and globalization, the centre has now become too valuable to function as the city’s social landfill. In the post-industrial age, global cities – not just primary ones such as New York and London but also secondary ones such as Boston, Manchester, and Amsterdam – have come to rely increasingly on knowledge-intensive industries that operate transnationally and tend to concentrate in city centres (Sassen 1991; Taylor 2000). Through processes such as gentrification, the rise of creative industries and the heritage industry, city centres have become more valuable (Taylor 2000; Florida 2002). This spatial-economic paradigm has shifted the imaginary of the centre within the circles of policymakers and real-estate developers alike. Its narrow alleys, canals, and quaint cramped houses are now seen as the preferred hotbed of a post-industrial urban knowledge economy and as a potent nursery for creative enterprise. Firms and residents are jostling for a place here, explaining why Plan 1012 is supported by a number of department stores, investment funds, and high-end hotel chains (Aalbers and Deinema 2012). It is thus also a gentrification strategy, and this apparently requires the clearing-out of all ‘marginal’ elements from the area, as evinced by the creation of a so-called ‘Junkie Free Zone’, another provision of the plan. Proponents appear convinced that clean-ups are necessary to improve the image of the centre, to minimize blemishes to the much-vaunted *I amsterdam* city-branding campaign, to attract

more investments from abroad, and to create the right breeding ground for the creative urban economy.

One problem here, of course, is that in Amsterdam's red-light district, prostitution has long ceased to be an economically marginal phenomenon. The district as it is thrives, having become a paragon of yet another manifestation of twenty-first century Western capitalism, the so-called 'experience economy' (Pine and Gilmore 1999). Real-estate owners that let windows to prostitutes and owners of other sex-related enterprises in the district make so much money that enormous investments are involved in buying them out. It is hard to find other functions for their buildings that will plausibly recoup these expenses, as architects charged with coming up with renewal concepts for this area have discovered (de Boer 2009). The financial trouble that Plan 1012 has run into signals a social policy inertia effect with respect to Amsterdam's permissive reputation abroad. In former centuries, Amsterdam prostitution followed the flow of visitors and trade into the city. At present, it attracts them. Whatever the opinions of Plan 1012 proponents about the type of tourists who come to Amsterdam, its Sin City image continues to boost its tourist economy. Foreign visitors, accounting for over half of the sexual transactions on the Wallen, significantly contribute to the high profitability of window prostitution in this red-light district, which makes brothel owners there so expensive and thus difficult to buy out (Flight and Hulshof 2009). The Sin City image, then, has self-realizing effects in Amsterdam's red-light district, by providing the economic incentives to maintain, reproduce, or even expand sex-related businesses. This obvious economic interest in maintaining the red-light district as a tourist draw is countered by Plan 1012 proponents who aim to draw a different, more upscale tourist crowd to Amsterdam. However, increasing the attractiveness of post-Plan 1012 Amsterdam to upscale tourists may prove a pipe dream if the city's main unique selling point is abandoned.

### **Ravaged Prostitutes and Outperformed Amsterdam**

The red-light district still makes good economic sense. More importantly, in its present form it seems to satisfy quite well many of the goals of those concerned with the social management of prostitution and participants alike. The windows of the Wallen are relatively well-regulated, at least compared to the other sectors of prostitution. Because the red-light district has come to cater largely to tourists, the embarrassment of detection is limited for johns (the prostitutes' customers), despite the area's transparent orientation towards prostitution. To some extent the same goes for the (mainly foreign) sex workers here, even though their strict reluctance to be photographed or filmed shows that there are limits to their insulation from social sanctions and shame (Aalbers 2005). Furthermore, the red-light district does not strongly offend Amsterdam's inhabitants or violate the NIMBY (not in my back yard) principle because the district is well-defined, its residents and non-sex-related entrepreneurs have long accepted the prostitution there, and the Wallen is left mostly to the tourists and johns by other locals.

Why then has the broad local consensus, achieved a decade ago, about the so-

cial value of accepting window prostitution as legitimate, dissipated? The answer may lie partly in a steady erosion of Amsterdam's autonomy in moral affairs, similar to what occurred towards the end of the nineteenth century. Through tourism, increased globalization has allowed the red-light district to grow commercially, but bringing the world in may also have some adverse effects on the liberality that supports it. Although the Wallen stands largely outside ordinary day-to-day social life in Amsterdam, it has arguably become Amsterdam's foremost symbol in the global imaginary, dominating the city's external image and even representing Amsterdam society as a whole, presumably to the chagrin of the local government. At a time when inter-city competition for external investment is intensifying, the external image of Amsterdam in the world has taken up a new significance.

If Amsterdam is a real-and-imagined city, and the red-light district a real-and-imagined zone of openly practiced prostitution, who is doing the relevant imagining? While image considerations have long played a role, the novelty, at the present juncture, seems to be a matter of increased intensity and (global) scope or scale. Over the last decade, it seems, international discourses and perceptions about Amsterdam and the Wallen have increasingly shaped local political discourse, presumably as a result of the intensification of globalization. In a way, the worldwide pervasiveness of Amsterdam's association with prostitution partly defeats the social isolation of the sector from the great majority of Amsterdam's inhabitants as they are symbolically 'contaminated' by this controversial phenomenon in the views of the outside world. Caricatural stereotypes of Dutch people as incessant potheads and as sex-crazed are fairly widespread in the Western world (Schwammenthal 2007). Amsterdammers in particular are regularly confronted with such stereotypes, either jokingly or seriously, when they venture abroad or engage in international contacts. These tend to affect their status in social interactions with non-locals negatively (although in some contexts positively). The external image thus acts upon Amsterdam identities and prevalent attitudes towards prostitution within Amsterdam. Like the regulations of the nineteenth century, Plan 1012 partly represents an effort to contain risks of contamination, posed this time not by the diseases but by the stigmas – potential brand damage – associated with prostitution, not only for the city but also for its inhabitants.

Opinions formed in the outside world, well-informed or not, may be increasingly internalized by Amsterdam policy makers. Especially with the internet, and applications like Flickr, YouTube, Google Street View, and Twitter, people all over the world are enabled to act as a surveillance force in the red-light district. In the mutual confrontation of the red-light district and the world, the local mores of this Amsterdam district are unlikely to prevail. The internet has been called a 'global panopticon', and like Jeremy Bentham's prison design, this panopticon exerts strong disciplining power on Amsterdam policymakers, encouraging more conformity to the globally dominant moral disavowal of open prostitution (Foucault 1977; Mayer-Schönberger 2009). The strong reluctance of the window prostitutes to be photographed by tourists attests to a fear of being exposed beyond their control, especially on the internet where anyone, anywhere may be able to see them.

The way prostitution is imagined influences how and where prostitution takes place in a city and vice versa. The red-light district is where it is, and has become what it is, because of a fair share of indifference in post-war Amsterdam towards prostitution practices and towards this neighbourhood. This indifference is largely a matter of the past, though. An attitude of toleration first gave way to formal legalization and regulation, when because of its increasing visibility window prostitution could no longer be ignored. Now, regulated prostitution is often branded as crude commercialism or as ‘criminogenic’, while until recently many saw it as a progressive tool for labour emancipation. Even though tourism reinforces window prostitution in the red-light district, its status is again challenged, partly because the city of Amsterdam pays ever more attention to its global image. Post-industrial globalization has brought to the fore a global cultural economy, in which there is an increasingly strong agentic role for the imagination in social life and in the economy through branding processes, also in regard to places (Appadurai 1990; Lash and Urry 1994). Amsterdam’s city council is clearly aware of the need for image-management. Ironically, the real distinctiveness of Amsterdam’s former ‘toleration’ policies encouraged the intensification of globalizing, deterritorializing influences in the Wallen and in the city as a whole. Now, Amsterdam’s city council seems to be aiming at distinction, rather than distinctiveness, through conforming to its own conceptions of global norms of civilized urbanity.

With the city accused by some, such as former U.S. anti-slavery ambassador John R. Miller and the makers of the 2011 Al Jazeera series *Slavery: A 21st-Century Evil*, of being a modern-day sexual slavery capital, the need for better social management of the prostitution sector seems apparent (see also Skinner 2008).<sup>4</sup> But the history of interventions in prostitution shows that fairly crude measures such as medical visitation systems, wholesale prohibition, and full formalization through legalization have many unintended and unwanted effects. This warrants a subtle, balanced, and multifaceted approach to prostitution, rather than the dramatic contraction of the red-light district envisioned by Plan 1012. Time and again, prostitution has been banished to places outside the ‘normal’ social order, but formal limitations lead to expansion of informal sex work markets. Focusing on ‘taming’ only a small part of the sex work industry – that part which takes place in a clearly marked and highly visible red-light district – allows other parts of the industry to continue underground in less regulated, less concentrated, and less visible locations. Rather than combatting actual social ills, the city is fighting a global symbol which is open and visible to the world. Like nineteenth-century brothels, the Wallen functions as a public ‘lightning conductor’ for an extensive and widely diverging industry. Prostitution policies have surprisingly little effect on the prevalence of prostitution; they merely affect the visibility and presence of prostitution in specific locations. The degree of visibility recursively shapes the image of prostitution, which then influences policies on prostitution, thereby closing the circle.

Amsterdam’s window prostitutes are likely to share the dangerous fate of prostitutes in other cities who were ‘evacuated’ from ‘rebranded’ neighbourhoods as a result of gentrification schemes (Ross 2010). Plan 1012 will serve to displace

window prostitutes to less secure locations, either within Amsterdam or in other European cities, rather than to improve their working conditions. At best it will improve the conditions for safe investment, by turning a notorious red-light district into an extension of the highly expensive city centre – although it remains to be seen if Amsterdam can compete successfully with other European capitals for the attention of global investors without its high-profile and edgy tourist niche.

In short, there is every reason to question the wisdom of (effectively) recriminalizing and further stigmatizing the part of the prostitution sector in Amsterdam that is most easy to regulate: certainly in terms of social management goals, but also in terms of city branding and urban marketing strategies, as Plan 1012 aims to largely abandon Amsterdam's unique selling point in the global imaginary. It might be argued that a renewed red-light district that does away with its crassness (neon signs) and overt commercialism, blends lust, pleasure, and art, and manages to regain some of its former mystique, might be an economic masterstroke for the city. Red-light fashion and art may come to dominate new global niches. The social and economic sustainability of the district itself may be better assured by renewing and thus maintaining its titillating qualities, as well as the symbolic capital of 'authenticity' among the red lights. Nevertheless, it seems clear that many of the prostitutes will be displaced in this restructuring move, ending up in a world which for them is undeniably darker.

## Notes

- 1 In the 1980s American artists Edward Kienholz and Nancy Reddin Kienholz even recreated a part of the Red Light District, complete with red-lit windows and cosy drapery, in an installation titled *Hoerengracht* ('Whores Canal', a pun on *Herengracht*, which translates as 'Gentlemen's Canal'). The installation was on exhibit in galleries and museums in Berlin and London to great critical acclaim.
- 2 See [www.youtube.com/watch?v=G5OgAXneOo4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G5OgAXneOo4).
- 3 Plan 1012 and its implementation (known as Project 1012) are continually revised by the city of Amsterdam. The white paper *Heart of Amsterdam: Future Perspectives 1012*, referred to here, is the most recent English-language summary of the city government's intentions and efforts to restructure Amsterdam's main red-light district and the surrounding areas. For updates on the city's publications regarding Plan 1012, see the city's official website: [www.amsterdam.nl/gemeente/organisatie-diensten/sites/project\\_1012/1012/overig/publicaties-o/brochures/](http://www.amsterdam.nl/gemeente/organisatie-diensten/sites/project_1012/1012/overig/publicaties-o/brochures/).
- 4 See [english.aljazeera.net/programmes/slaverya21stcenturyevil/2011/10/20111010134454998749.html](http://english.aljazeera.net/programmes/slaverya21stcenturyevil/2011/10/20111010134454998749.html).

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## 16. Global Eros in Amsterdam: Religion, Sex, Politics

Markba Valenta

### Prelude

How should we think about religion in the city? For a long time, we (scholars, moderns, cosmopolitans) simply did not. The city was heterodox, industrial, liberating, avant-garde, sexy, and sexual. Religion was conservative, dogmatic, moralistic, boring, unsexy, and anti-sex. Religion was all the things the city was not. The more modern the city became, the more religion appeared left behind, in the country of bygone times. To become episodic and decorative. A cathedral, as on a postcard, to admire and then pass by, as you might a pretty woman on the street. Or religion appeared irrelevant, something simply to walk around, as around an unwashed indigent. The city was the future and religion was past.

Then religion returned. There were many signs of its imminent rise, but at the time they seemed incidental and unrelated: the public religiosity of the American president Jimmy Carter, Democrat though he was; the Islamic revolution in Iran; an upsurge of South-Korean Evangelical missionaries and West-African Pentecostals; restive Hindu and Sikh nationalists, orthodox Zionists, political Islam and a wave of Catholic democracy movements, along with rising Buddhist suicide attacks in Sri Lanka and the Falun Gong's swelling public visibility. But still we did not see these as more than a collection of eruptions here and there, not central to anything much except themselves and the world of religion. It would take the spectacle of 9/11, George W. Bush's Christian-infused global militarism, and mounting West-European distress about Muslim immigrants for all this to coalesce into something that we would analyze as a social force, a political event, a global process of our time. And then, suddenly as it were, religion seemed to be everywhere.

Urban theory has yet to catch up. Though geographers, anthropologists, and historians have been developing highly interesting work on urban religion, the significance of religion to the material and cultural formations, aesthetics, and politics of cities remains underexposed. Introductory overviews of thinking about the city such as LeGates and Stout's *City Reader* (2011), Simon Parker's *Urban Theory and the Urban Experience: Encountering the City* (2004), or Bridge and Watson's *The Blackwell City Reader* (2010) are unselfconsciously silent on religion. The same is true of more topical and situated overviews, such as Koonings and Kruijt's *Megacities: The Politics of Urban Exclusion and Violence in the Global South* (2009) or Kevin R. McNamara's *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of Los Angeles* (2010). In the first instance, this derives from the

fact that those most inclined to write and think about the modern city since the nineteenth century have largely been those most invested in the secular project, most inclined both to perceive the city in its secular guise and to anticipate the decline of religion. Max Weber, one of sociology's founding fathers, is the iconic example: a man who wrote both about religion and about cities but for whom the dynamic relation between flourishing urbanity and religious innovation under modernity was imperceptible and unimaginable. A more contemporary founding father, cultural studies' Stuart Hall, similarly based his work on the assumption that secularity is one of the most important defining elements of modern society. Until, that is, he rather suddenly felt himself confronted by the religious in the present:

You don't understand and I don't understand either how the long history of secular enlightenment ends up with the major opponent of the capitalist global system in a religious formation. We really don't know anything about how this came about. This is a cultural question, if there is a cultural question – what is the place of religion today and why does it move around in this way in relation to social struggles of different kinds? We don't have an idea and I don't know anybody writing about it whom I much respect, I'm sorry to say.<sup>1</sup>

As the quotation from Stuart Hall suggests, the fundamental framework within which our cities are analyzed is that of the flow of capital and consumption, even when other topics (planning, aesthetics, sexuality, criminality, ecology, violence) are the explicit subject of analysis. Those cities hailed as being most modern, most dynamic, and most global – such as New York and London, Tokyo and Singapore – are those that are most successful in nurturing and being nurtured by the constellation of power, networks, processes, and desires that we call (neo) liberal capitalism.<sup>2</sup> The world's iconic slum cities – Rio, Mumbai, and Lagos, among others – are those read as failing most spectacularly within this system; they are analyzed for their ballooning shantytowns, swathes of poverty, lawlessness, violence, and parallel forms of order, control, legitimacy, and identity.

This has important consequences for which cities we study most thoroughly and enthusiastically, for the ways in which we study cities and, ultimately, for the responsiveness of such studies to the urban religious. So, for example, the 2010 *Global Cities Index* defines 'global' as 'how much sway a city has beyond its borders' and is skewed towards measuring corporate business, capital flows, high culture, and formal political institutions. It is significant that a city like Baghdad – in which all these have been largely devastated, but which at the same time is deeply integrated with global movements of people, ideologies, technologies, and money, and whose developments are of considerable significance beyond its borders – will not show up on such an index. At the other end of the spectrum, a collection like Andreas Huyssen's *Other Cities, Other Worlds* (2008) focuses exclusively on global cities of the South while still positioning these as peripheral to the rich cities of the North (presented as the world's 'core cities'), even as Ashley Dawson and Brent Edwards's *Global Cities of the South* (2004) envisages these cities as structurally rife with 'portending disasters'. Work such as that of

AbdouMaliq Simone (2004), which combines a critique of urban injustice with the nuanced analysis of urban improvisation in African cities, framed in their own terms, remains all too rare.

Crucially, it is this logic which sidelines both the majority of the world's cities and issues such as religion in the larger discussion of global cities. The pre-eminent framework for understanding our cities is ultimately one that depends on a logic of wealth, development, and power, while reinstating the divide between North and South, the West and the Rest. Cities that are 'off the map' from this economic perspective are made marginal to the discussion: those cities not impressively rich, nor ballooning phenomenally, nor devastatingly poor and violent.<sup>3</sup> A city like Amsterdam, for example. Ranked third in the world on the 2thinknow Innovation Cities index (after Boston and Paris),<sup>4</sup> claiming the highest diversity of nationalities in the world (followed by Antwerp and New York),<sup>5</sup> and constituting the heart of one of the largest and most productive urban conurbations in Europe (the Randstad), Amsterdam is highly innovative in its experiments in governing everything from ethno-religious diversity, to urban development, to the aesthetics of public space, and yet it is rarely discussed in urban scholarship outside the Netherlands.<sup>6</sup> The point here is not so much the significance of Amsterdam in a world of cities, as the fact that cities like Amsterdam are consistently sidelined in discussions of creative and dynamic global urbanism through a process that privileges a small cadre of cities that lend themselves especially well to being encountered in a neoliberal mode or to being consumed as spectacle and/or disaster. This then is a circular process: the world cities of neoliberal capitalism are selected in light of their place within a neoliberal capitalist world, then interpreted in light of neoliberal capitalism in such a way as to affirm the centrality of neoliberal capitalism as the pre-eminent frame through which to read our cities.

As Stuart Hall indirectly suggested, this is the same logic by which religion in the city is sidelined in analyses, as religion is assumed to be irrelevant to understanding neoliberal society, the (ir)rationalities of urban development, and the productively rapacious vagaries of global capitalism.<sup>7</sup> This chapter seeks to put pressure on precisely these assumptions. The claims it makes are bigger than the space there is to sustain them, so the intention is to suggest engagingly rather than to persuade conclusively. What is suggested is that the dynamics of urban religion in Amsterdam – as it takes social shape in ideologies, architectonics, politics, geographic and economic exchanges – is especially suited to revealing the logic of a city under globalization and neoliberalization. Reading religion in Amsterdam entails reading the processes by which a city takes shape in space and thought as a kaleidoscope of desires, communities, mechanisms, and environments given shape in real time and space by real people, with all their foibles and ambitions. Like coloured bits of glass in a kaleidoscope, these are all being 'turned' into new arrangements, patterns, and possibilities through globalization.

Even as neoliberalism changes global social relations, so urban religion itself is changing. Religion here is neither absolutely subject to the logic of liberal capitalism, nor absolutely distinct from it. This is a highly complex process for which we still lack adequate concepts and analytic tools. One useful approach is to think through what is happening to religion in relation to other domains, notably

those of politics and sex. Different as they are, religion, sexuality, and politics are all what we might call ‘formations of desire’ that in modern society are highly regulated yet also saturated in indeterminacy. They take shape through a mix of creative play and legislative regulatory regimes, by which hard facts on the ground are enfolded into complex dynamics of power, compulsion, aspiration, anxiety, and hope. The concept of ‘play’ here refers not metaphorically but literally to the subtle, incisive elaboration of its importance to human life by D. W. Winnicott (1971). This is particularly relevant, since Winnicott himself partook of and stimulated the ‘spatial turn’ in child psychology, in which a crucial element of development entails a person’s relation to the (potential) space around it, in a fluid fusing and dissolution of imagination, environment, and objects. So we may read religious buildings, the Red Light District, and the city more generally as a potential space in the Winnicottian sense.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, this framing of our world as a field of desire resonates clearly with the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, though unfortunately Deleuze and Guattari appear to have had a rather reductive understanding of religion. So in *A Thousand Plateaus* they present religion as a form of absolutism tied to territory and lending itself particularly well to collaboration with the state. As such, they assert, it is antithetical to the ‘critical nomad’s’ atheistic understanding of the absolute. Nonetheless, Deleuze and Guattari offer an exceptionally fruitful starting point for thinking through the economies of desire that structure our world and through which religion goes to work.<sup>9</sup>

In order to begin untangling this process in Amsterdam, I look briefly but closely at one religious project: the failed attempt to build the Western Mosque. This I juxtapose to some parallel developments in the Red Light District. Both of these are highly politicized. Meanwhile the areas of overlap are striking and suggest a quite different understanding of both religion and sex in the city.

## **A Story<sup>10</sup>**

In 1993, a large garage stands empty in Amsterdam. Europe is in the midst of a recession, following an American slump and falling world oil prices. Sales of cars dip precipitously. One company, the Opel Riva dealership in Amsterdam, is taken over by the Stern Group, reorganized, and transplanted. Global capital has opened a space in De Baarsjes neighbourhood of the city.

The Aya Sofia enters it. Like many Muslim communities in Western Europe, the Aya Sofia community is both outgrowing its previous spaces and making the transition from temporary migrant to permanent resident. Permanence means thinking about establishing a more formal religious building. The sale of the Riva terrain to businessman Üzeyir Kabaktepe the next year offers the perfect opportunity. Kabaktepe is the director of Manderen, the investment office of the Milli Görüş movement in the province of North Holland, of which Aya Sofia is a member. While for now Aya Sofia occupies the Opel Riva garage, plans are drawn up for building the largest mosque in the Netherlands, surrounded by stores, commercial spaces, a sports hall, and a cultural centre. This is part of

a spurt of mosque-building taking place just then throughout the Netherlands, with a number of communities across the country competing for the greatest national visibility, largest size, tallest minarets, and most beautiful architectural style, to the distress of some Dutch and immigrant secularists who much prefer invisible mosques in garages.

Unfortunately, the local borough council already has its own plans. While it does not object to a small mosque, it intends to build apartments on the site (an intention that is now being realized as the adjacent Piri Reis complex). Both parties go to court, the borough wants to dispossess Kabaktepe, while Milli Görüş wants to carry out its plans on the ground one of its members owns. After tense street demonstrations by members of Milli Görüş, the mutual distrust increases. The media regularly presents the movement as fundamentalist and therefore threatening, while neighbourhood municipal organizations and leftist migrant organizations are just as resistant.

Yet the legal conflict gives way to secret negotiations after the election of a new borough council in 1998 and a simultaneous shift in the North Holland branch of Milli Görüş. Historically, the Dutch Milli Görüş movement has had close ties with the European head office in Germany and its Turkish home base. These have a strong hermeneutics of suspicion towards both European society and secular culture, fed by their long conflict since the 1970s with Turkey's secularist, pro-European government and the privileged position it gives to Diyanet (Turkey's official Islamic organization). The newest Dutch Milli Görüş generation – in the north, but not the south of the country – changes course, however, and sets its sight on entering the Dutch social fabric. All this is embodied by the new director, Hacı Karacaer, who quickly becomes highly popular in the media for his accommodation of homosexuals and apostasy, loud critique of Muslim scholars who accept husbands beating their wives, and desire to make Turkish immigrants and Muslims a part of Dutch society.

Kabaktepe approaches Frank Bijdendijk, the director of one of Amsterdam's building corporations, to mediate with the borough council. The mediation is a great success and by 2000 Kabaktepe, Karacaer, Bijdendijk, and Henk van Waveren (Labour chairman of the borough council) have entered into a relation of deepening trust based on their mutual vision of creating a syncretic mosque complex that will make a new Dutch Islam visible to all. In 2005, after overcoming a whole flurry of obstacles, Milli Görüş still lacks adequate funds to finance the mosque. Henk van Waveren contacts a sympathetic politician, who proposes an arrangement by which the city of Amsterdam rather secretly but legally buys the proposed mosque lot for two million euros above its taxation value in order to fill the gap.

The better Milli Görüş' negotiations with the borough go, the more the tensions with the German head office increase. In 2004, the new board of the German headquarters decides that the previous board's policy of European decentralization should be reversed and intensifies its claims on the Dutch branch. Nonetheless, in 2006, the first stone for the mosque – a 'Dutch brick' – is laid. The Dutch Minister of Justice speaks, as do a rabbi, a Protestant (woman) pastor, and an imam. Dutch neighbours and Turkish(-Dutch) Muslims mingle, Turk-

ish music plays, and more than one audience member has tears in the eyes. The mosque, designed by a Jewish-French team, will have a classic Ottoman design, layered tiers of cupolas and rising minarets, realized in the red-brick style of Berlage's 'Amsterdam School', and embedded in a host of other facilities that will serve the whole neighbourhood. Now renamed the Western Mosque rather than Aya Sofia, and having one shared entrance for women and men (a first in the Netherlands), it will be as Dutch as it is Islamic: materially, aesthetically, theologically, historically, and socio-politically.

A few days later, Kabaktepe is seriously reprimanded in Cologne by the European head of Milli Görüş for having sold the site to the city and for having the Dutch minister as key speaker rather than someone from the German headquarters. The progressive board of the Dutch mosque is replaced by a more conservative one, Karacaer departs, and some months later Kabaktepe is replaced by Fatih Dağ as financial director. The building corporation and borough council are rather shocked at the influence from Germany and the building corporation asks the new board of Milli Görüş (North Holland) to sign a statement of assurance that the progressive, Dutch-oriented Islamic position of the mosque will be maintained in the future and that ownership shares in the mosque will not be transferred to Germany.

The board signs the statement under pressure, while relations between all the involved parties quickly degenerate. Soon they are in court again. Kabaktepe is accused of extensive fraud; Milli Görüş wants to build its own mosque complex without interference from the building corporation and municipality; and all involved have lost all trust in each other. In late 2007, Dağ says that if they are not able to build the mosque, he will call for Europe-wide protest demonstrations by immigrant Muslims that will be sure to be of interest to Al Jazeera and the whole of the Arab world. The borough council feels threatened and angry. The complicated financial entanglements of the mosque and the building corporation, however, make it impossible to divorce and early in 2009 the court sentences all parties to continue working together. Neither the demonstration nor further collaboration have occurred, and the mosque's property remains a fenced void marked by pockets of quicksand. Even as I write this, the most recent court decision appears to have ensured that the mosque will not be built, due to ongoing conflicts between the architects, the (now independent) mosque corporation, the Milli Görüş organization, and the city borough.

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This is an account of an attempted integration of Islam into Amsterdam through conversion. It becomes in this way an extension of not only Amsterdam's history of religious incorporation and exclusion, but also of the Netherlands' more general logic of modern socio-political relations. But still, there is the question: conversion of what to what?

In the last century, the rise of the welfare state has increased state centralization but also the complex web of corporatist organizations (representing labour, business, ethnic, environmental, and a host of other interest groups) that ad-

vise and lobby, collaborate with and contest the state. So, the issue in Holland is almost always how to manage the resulting pluralist relations and interests. For a variety of historical and social-psychological reasons, the Dutch are classically averse to both public conflict and spectacle. Instead, the typical mechanism for managing conflicting interests is a hidden ('backroom') politics directed at achieving consensus, through a subtle economy of hierarchy and collaboration strongly influenced by relations of (dis)trust between those involved and their ability or inability to 'work' together. This ongoing process of dynamic consensus is structurally reinforced by the unwritten yet deeply institutionalized practice of *gedogen*, a set of informal rules and practices that 'tolerate' what is unwanted or illegal in the interest of maintaining calm and order (as well as saving money). In a crowded society with a high degree of formal regulation, administration, and oversight, *gedogen* provides an essential flexibility, even as the question of which rules shall (not) be enforced against whom remains a constant (potential) source of tension and controversy.<sup>11</sup> In recent years there have been experiments with alternative forms of politics that include much more aggressive and performative public conflict, notably in relation to the issues of Islam and immigration, but also to widely shared repudiations of mainstream ('left') politics and politicians as out of touch and overprivileged. In this setting, doing 'politics as usual' itself is a contested activity, even as this is the chronic inclination of all involved.

In concrete, institutional terms, Dutch socio-politics has given birth to a host of semi-public organizations, representative bodies, and advice commissions with varying and shifting degrees of influence in shaping government policy and decision-making. In terms of the urban setting the building corporations are among the most important of these. Their original formation at the beginning of the twentieth century corresponded closely with the increasing formal 'pillarization' of Dutch society that divided it into segregated communities (Protestant, Catholic, socialist, liberal/unaffiliated) linking confessional/ideological traditions, politics, and cultures into distinct domains that each had their own institutional representation and organizations. The building corporation working with Milli Görüş, Het Oosten (The East), was formed in 1911 to meet the need for housing Catholics, many of whom at the time were among the poorest of the Dutch people.<sup>12</sup> Its tasks extended far beyond issues of urban planning and construction to improving Catholic labourers' quality of life, morality, economic responsibility, and social relations with each other. The same was the case with other building societies, which all played an important role in shaping the expansion of Amsterdam following the Second World War. In this way, the tasks of the building societies melded their confessional/ideological origins with a commitment to social welfare and community uplift in a manner that translated the religious/idealist into the organizational, architectural, economic, sexual, and social.

Once pillarization began to be replaced by the Dutch with an undifferentiated 'mass' society in the late 1960s and 1970s, however, the explicit religious/idealist identities of building societies began to weaken significantly. By the 1990s, Frank Bijdendijk conceived the task of Het Oosten in more general terms of ensuring spaces for a wide range of social and low-income minorities, including artists, the elderly, squatters, Chinese, the homeless, and the ecologically minded. The



corporation has invented new rental and spatial arrangements to make all this possible. At the same time, it plays an important role in the fierce contest between the municipality and organized crime for territorial control over the use of buildings, women, and money in the Red Light District. Now half of the corporation's renters are of immigrant background, many of them Turkish. In working with Milli Görüş, the corporation sees a chance to emphasize its shared social interests with its Turkish renters and its respectful acknowledgement of Islam, while contesting those who would present the corporation as an exploiter of immigrants. At the same time, the mosque complex includes accommodations for elderly and youth whose presence embodies not only the vestigially Catholic social vision of Het Oosten but also the Islamic social philosophy of the mosque, while meeting specific social needs of the borough.

As the client base of Het Oosten was diversifying in the 1990s, there also was developing an increasingly vocal discourse of identity politics foregrounding the issue of immigrants' place in the Netherlands as a question of cultural compatibility and adaptation. After 9/11 the rhetoric of this discourse quickly shifted to religion, specifically Islam, to the point that there is a slippage in the rhetoric between Islam and immigrants, foreignness and criminality, terror and welfare dependency. The ideology of civilizational clash is performatively advanced by a variety of populist politicians, who see in it the possibility for channeling a diffuse body of resentments and frustrations among Dutch voters into a focused and highly successful anti-left, anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant political programme. The ostensible objective of this programme is to prevent the entry of more Muslims and immigrants, while requiring all Muslims and immigrants already in the country to internalize Dutch social norms and values to the point that their behaviour and convictions are indistinguishable from those of native-born Dutch. All those immigrants who are imagined to or actively do resist are threatened with social and economic exclusion and, in the extreme case, expulsion from the country. In this rhetoric, religious, cultural, political, and economic facts slip in and out of each other: poverty, segregation, welfare dependency, and petty criminality become signs of disinterest in Dutch culture and society, resistance to Dutch norms, cultural underdevelopment, authoritarian and totalitarian religious orthodoxy, and potentially violent intentions.

In striking contrast to this rhetoric, the developments around the Western Mosque reveal a very different process at work. This is not tied to problems of cultural or religious difference per se, but rather to the more fundamental challenge of integrating newcomers into the complex Dutch system of 'collaboration in difference' that itself is only semi-visible at best and whose rules are unwritten. In this case, as in many others, it depends on a relation of trust established between a minimal number of players: just four people. While each represents significant and distinct economic, ideological, and social interests, the medium of translation between them is not Islamic theology or Dutch culture or democratic ideology, per se, but rather a shared strategic response to current conditions: the recognition that each of them benefits by the construction of a mosque that embodies a progressive Amsterdam/Dutch/Turkish/European Islam that will be locally, nationally, and internationally visible. Critically, this vision is as deeply

territorialized as it is transnational; it blends the geo-historical traditions of two post-imperial 'Islamic' empires – the Dutch (who, until the independence of Indonesia, ruled over the greatest number of Muslims in the world) and the Ottoman – in order to represent a borough (De Baarsjes), a city (Amsterdam), a host-home country (the Netherlands) and country-of-memory (Turkey), as well as a West-European urban Islamicist movement (Milli Görüş) with ties to a rural Asian region (Anatolia), with its continental headquarters in another city (Cologne) and country (Germany). This movement is in competition with the Turkish state's official international Islamic network (Diyanet), even as it is itself ideologically divided into streams that are conservative and progressive, Islamic and Islamicist, anti-European and European-integrationist, Turkish-oriented and Europe-oriented, democratic and developmental, all of which are significantly shaped by their German, Dutch, French, Austrian, and other national contexts.<sup>13</sup>

'Conversion' here does not mean the abandonment of one set of beliefs in favour of another set, any more than religion itself is about belief in any pure sense untouched by social, political, and economic relations. Rather, 'conversion' here is the inscription of all concerned into the domain of globality as the framework and mode of debate, of politics, of relation. It is globality that determines the object of struggle: an Islam at home in Amsterdam and an Amsterdam at home in Islam, with all this entails politically, aesthetically, economically, spatially, culturally, and religiously. The religious in this case is not 'Islam', which emerges as a shifting identity and content, highly adaptable to being converted into both a progressive 'Amsterdam-Dutch' and a conservative, Turkish-transnational 'Islamist' framework. Instead it is the logic of conversion itself that is key, as it organizes relations between urban authority, corporate welfare, urban environment, and a multiplicity of local and global identities, all through the medium of money, legal contracts, personal relations, architecture, and public ritual. This is the case not only for this particular situation, but also for the host of others throughout the city of Amsterdam in which inherited ways of organizing space, ideology, belief, and practice seek to structure and are restructured through a host of new arrivals. In the process, the modern ideal of egalitarian democracy – as this authorizes Amsterdam politics – is converted from a national framework to a globalizing urban one.

## **A Second Story<sup>14</sup>**

When we look at the Amsterdam Red Light District around the time the Western Mosque was almost built, it is highly intriguing to observe that there is nearly the same configuration of players as there was in the mosque dispute in De Baarsjes. Once again there is the municipality, there is the building society Het Oosten, and there are Turkish immigrants, many of whom are coming from and have continuing links with Germany. In this case, however, there has never been any form of collaboration between the three. Instead, there is an ongoing contest for control of women, buildings, and the profits that they bring.

In the year 2000, prostitution was decriminalized in the Netherlands. The intended purpose of this was to make prostitution into a job like any other. This would make it possible both to ensure the working conditions of prostitutes and their payment of taxes, while further reducing the influence of criminals and pimps. In theory, once prostitution would be completely legal, both the possibility and the need for pimps would disappear. Correspondingly, pimping as a category of crime was also abolished, along with prostitution.

As a practice, however, pimping flourished. Since the 1970s, prostitutes in the Netherlands had increasingly consisted of women from outside Europe, especially Brazil and Latin America, some African and a small minority of Thai and Philippine women. Technically, they did not have work permits, but since they were prostitutes, this was impossible anyway. Once prostitution was legalized, however, these women were criminalized. That is, the law permitting prostitution also stipulated that the only foreign prostitutes allowed would be European ones. As a result, the legalization of prostitution actually had the effect of *increasing* illegal and hidden prostitution. Fewer prostitutes worked behind the windows, and many moved into apartment buildings, massage parlours, and hotels. Now that the 'natural' sources of labour for brothel owners began to dry up, they started to rely increasingly on middlemen to recruit women for them. In practice this meant an increase in the number of pimps and in the illegal traffic in women, along with the violence and manipulation that goes with it.

In 1998 two groups were fighting one another for dominance of the Wallen: on the one side were gangs with members from newly opened Yugoslavia, Albania and Russia, and on the other was a Turkish group led by two brothers named Halit and Nejat from Istanbul and the Turkish-German Serdar from Dortmund.<sup>15</sup> All the groups imported women from former Communist Bloc countries and put them to work on the Wallen. Eventually, the Turkish group gained ascendancy: more and more women were seen to have tattooed the names 'Halit', 'Nejat', or 'Serdar' on their bodies. In addition, the women who were the girlfriends of these men hired rooms at strategic locations that would allow them to monitor other women working for their boyfriends, in order to ensure that they did good business.

So there are several important points here. The first is the important role that a particular (progressive) Dutch idealized vision of womanhood and prostitution played in these developments. This was the desire that the woman selling her sexual labour be an independent, voluntary prostitute, the mistress of her own body and mind and money.<sup>16</sup> This ideal is in turn importantly linked to the vision of the emancipated sexual woman which is used to criticize Muslims in the Netherlands, and which plays such an important role in the discussions about Islam and debates about mosque-building. So in creating support for the Western Mosque it was vitally important that Hacı Karacaer, the chairman of Milli Görüş, loudly critique the abuse of women and it was important that there be a shared entrance for women and men into the mosque. The critical point is that certain kinds of fantasies around women and around sexuality that are broader than religion and deeply entangled with politics and economics, shape these contests around religious and urban developments in ways that overlap.

The second point is that this is a largely foreign affair in all respects. Not only were Dutch prostitutes increasingly foreign (by 2000, some 70 per cent), but so were their pimps and so are their customers. While 20 per cent of Dutch men have at some point gone to a prostitute, only 10 per cent go with any regularity.<sup>17</sup> This means the vast majority of those supporting the sexual industry are tourists and foreign businessmen. In the Red Light District, more than half of the clients are foreign, perhaps even as many as two-thirds.<sup>18</sup> So we have in a deeply Amsterdam neighbourhood a deeply foreign set of transactions taking place – almost everybody involved is not Dutch – even as this is understood both domestically and internationally to be a deeply Dutch approach to prostitution. As in the case of the Western Mosque, national ‘ways of doing things’ become subject to an international and transnational logic.

Meanwhile Dutch drugs criminals were using the brothels and property to whitewash their money. A member of the Hells Angels, for example, forced the owner of Amsterdam’s most famous brothel, Yab Yum, to sell it to him for less than 25 per cent of its value. It was at this point that the municipality stepped in, in order to regain control of the Wallen by disrupting both prostitution and criminal property possession. In order to achieve this, it approached the housing corporation Het Oosten. After closing one third of the prostitute ‘windows’ and divesting criminals of their illicit buildings, the municipality gave them to the building corporation to manage. The corporation itself then worked together with a fashion bureau called Red Light Fashion in order to develop a fashion presence in the Wallen. Individual designers were installed in the former windows, while the fashion bureau set up a project to mentor young talent and to develop international projects.

Crucially, this fashion company advertizes itself on its website on the basis of its location in the Red Light District, as working in the midst of ‘girls of pleasure’.<sup>19</sup> The fashion company here presents prostitution on the Wallen as a matter of desirable, ‘innocent’ naughtiness, erasing the violence that the city is unable to stop. At the same time, in its promotional film on the internet, the fashion company takes on the iconography of prostitution. In this film, it shows the work of each designer in a ‘window’ – in which mannequins ‘figure’ and play – even as it uses the sexy allure of its association with the Red Light District explicitly to sell itself internationally. In this way – saying it sharply, but with a critical truth in it – the fashion company profits off the prostitutes’ backs. It becomes itself a pimp by ‘stroking’ the prostitutes for their own profit, even as the coalition of designers ‘prostitutes’ itself through its literal self-framing and self-promotion in the former prostitutes’ windows.

In this way, the fashion company inserts itself into international circuits of desire and display, of viewing rituals and of visual consumption. At the same time, the mannequins of the fashion designers now take the place of the prostitutes – not, however, because the prostitutes are gone, but only because they have been displaced to other, invisible and less secure locations. This replicates the municipal logic of the Western Mosque. For the city, the purpose of the mosque was to displace the presence of an independent anti-European, transnational neo-orthodox Islam in the interest of presenting – locally and nationally – an image

of the city that is 'better' than the truth. The fact that this imperative is replicated in the city's management of the Red Light District suggests how little the problem of Islam in Amsterdam is a problem of religion per se. Precisely because of their shared modernity – realized through typically modern organizations – the city and the religious organization could work together with little trouble once trust had been established. Where they differ is not with regard to their modernity per se, so much as in regard to the larger modern global networks to which they respond and the modern projects they seek to realize. Prostitution, in fact, turns out to be much more problematic to incorporate because its organization is to this day more illicit than recognized. Decriminalization is not enough to incorporate it into the modern rationality of urban management, but only because at the very same moment the women who make it possible are criminalized as illegal aliens. In this sense – imagining religion as that which resists modern rationalization – foreign prostitutes are the true religious.

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Western Europe's cities are post-colonial grounds of encounter for modernities and cosmopolitan projects from across the world. In the process of their entanglement, the great European cities – once the epitome of Western metropolitan power and high modernity – are becoming the sites of Europe's conversion by the world modernity. This framework of historicized globality is particularly productive for reading religion in world cities such as Amsterdam. The key point about world cities is not so much that they contain a world of peoples, cultures, and politics within them but that as cities under globality they continually produce, shape, and engage their 'worldliness' as part of the daily business of politics, including the politics of religion (and sex). Politics emerges through the continual (threat of) dissolution and constant (attempt at) consolidation within a city being shaped by processes from far beyond its country's borders. World cities take on the logic and tensions of frontier regions: pre-eminent sites where the nation-state encounters the world as it does along the guarded lines marking the territorial state's limits on the ground. But the city lacks the (imagined) clarity, stability, and permanence of territorial border lines. In a world city it is never clear for long – even less clear than along lines on the ground – who is meeting whom, which culture or religion is where, or what precisely is being guarded, asserted, and contested by what means. The world city, in becoming infused with the world's politics and the world's histories, reinvents these as a politics and history without ground.

Correspondingly, in order to think about religion in Amsterdam, it is not enough to just consider religious life and institutions in the classic sense. Certainly, Amsterdam is one of the most religiously diverse cities in the world, with a greater number of nationalities living in its small domain than even in New York City. The city's churches, societies, and beliefs, however, tell us too little. Where we must look instead is at how the religious in Amsterdam emerges out of the intersection of the city's multiple 'logics of conversion', embodied in religious organizations, urban architecture, public corporations, the sex industry, the

creative sector, governing authorities, and global capitalism. In modern thought – sociology and science – ‘religion’ still is largely conceived as a distinct field, partitioned off from other social and epistemological domains. This is a useful conception for the project of modernity itself – especially modernity’s claims to offer a more truthful truth than religion – but in the process it obscures the centrality of excess, sacralization, ritual, and conversion to modernity itself. Religion in the city resides not uniquely in spaces and social formations marked as religious, but is part of the very fabric of modern urbanity in all its political and spectral materiality.

More specifically, religion manifests itself as institutional tradition, as a rhetorical construct and as amorphous flows of ‘excess’ beyond the grasp of city planning and politics. Religions in cities, then, go to work in and emerge from a larger domain of globality – a domain in and through which religions and cities evolve in conscious relations of agonistic cross-fertilization with religious and urban developments throughout the world.

## Notes

- 1 Stuart Hall, speaking at the *Cultural Studies Now* conference, which took place at the Centre for Cultural Studies Research, University of East London, from 19 to 22 July 2007. Hall is quoted here from the transcript of Plenary Session 2 of the conference, available at [www.culturalstudies.org.uk](http://www.culturalstudies.org.uk) (accessed 17 Nov. 2010).
- 2 See [www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/08/11/the\\_global\\_cities\\_index\\_2010](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/08/11/the_global_cities_index_2010) and [www.mori-m-foundation.or.jp/english/research/project/6/pdf/GPCI2009\\_English.pdf](http://www.mori-m-foundation.or.jp/english/research/project/6/pdf/GPCI2009_English.pdf).
- 3 See Jennifer Robinson (2002, 2006, and 2011), and David Bell and Mark Jayne (2009).
- 4 See ‘Innovation Cities Top 100 Index 2011: City Rankings’ ([www.innovation-cities.com](http://www.innovation-cities.com)).
- 5 See the article ‘Amsterdam stad met meeste nationaliteiten (177) ter wereld’, in *Trouw* (22 August 2007). See also a press release of the Gemeente Amsterdam: ‘Inwoneraantal Amsterdam blijft groeien en stad telt 178 nationaliteiten; één meer dan in 2009’ (28 June 2010).
- 6 For a notable recent exception, see Fainstein’s *The Just City* (2010, 139–64).
- 7 The arguments made here are stimulated in part by the very useful alternative approach developed by Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift in order to analyze the suffusion of economics with culture, particularly in relation to cities (Amin and Thrift 2004 and 2007).
- 8 See Guldi (n.d.).
- 9 See Deleuze and Guattari (1988, 422–4 and *passim*). Other works shaping the arguments made here include Ludwig (2002), Povinelli (2006), and Mitchell (2007).
- 10 This account is primarily based on news reports, particularly those found in the Dutch national newspapers. To date, more than 1,200 articles have been published that refer in some way to the Western Mosque (*Westermoskee*). Given the limitations of space as well as the nature of the argument being made here, I do not reference specific articles but instead present a distilled compilation. This obscures differences in viewpoints expressed by the various reporters, but it allows a coherent narrative to be told, foregrounding the essential developments and the larger patterns of which they were a part. For a very useful close reading of some of these events, see Uitermark and Gielen (2010) and also the older Lindo (1999). Regarding the divergences and continuities in Dutch municipalities’ governance of Islam more generally, see Maussen (2006 and 2007). See also the national report on Milli Görüş prepared by Flip Lindo for the Ministry of Housing, Neighbourhoods and Integration, *Activiteiten en doelstellingen van Nederlandse organisaties gelieerd aan Milli Görüş* (2008). On mosque controversies in Dutch cities, see Landman and Wessels (2005).
- 11 With regard to ‘gedogen’, see the useful analysis by Gordijn (2001).
- 12 For a history of Het Oosten, see van Toorn (2008). Further aspects of the history of housing corporations in Amsterdam, focusing respectively on Protestants and socialists, are Beekers and van der Woude (2008) and van der Lans (2008).

- 13 Extensive research is being done on the evolution of Milli Görüş movements across Europe. For a recent example, see Schiffauer (2010).
- 14 This account is largely based on several in-depth newspaper reports, including, in particular, Ruth Hopkins (2005 and 2005). See also Hopkins's website ([www.ruthhopkins.eu](http://www.ruthhopkins.eu)), which includes other newspaper articles that reference her work. In addition, see the television broadcast 'Reconstructie in zaak vrouwenhandel op de Wallen' in the television programme *Netwerk* (18 June 2007) and the documentary 'Seksslavinne' in VPRO's television programme *Tegenlicht* (2 April 2006). The newspaper *Het Parool* has a special section focused on 'De Wallen' on its website ([www.parool.nl](http://www.parool.nl)). The neighbourhood newspaper *Buurtkrant d'Oude Binnenstad* and the borough newspaper *Stadsdeelkrant Centrum* on occasion have had articles that address new developments and conflicts related to these issues.
- Academic scholarship on prostitution in Amsterdam's Red Light District is notably more extensive than scholarship on religion in Amsterdam. There is not the space here to give a detailed overview, but see, among others, Brants (1998), Outshoorn (2004), Aalbers (2005), Gregory (2005), and Hubbard and Whowell (2008). For municipal research and publications, see Asante and Schaapman (2005) and Flight and Hulshof (2009). Additional information can be found at the website for the Red Thread, the Red Light District lobby for the rights of workers in the sex industry ([rodedraad.nl](http://rodedraad.nl)). For some (Dutch) clients' own often highly functionalist-objectifying descriptions of the window prostitutes in Amsterdam whom they visit, see [www.hookers.nl](http://www.hookers.nl).
- 15 These names were invented by the journalist Ruth Hopkins. We now know that the actual names of the brothers Halit and Nejat are Saban and Hasan Raban.
- 16 See, for example, the Amsterdam municipal memorandum *Prostituee v/m Amsterdam – weerbaar en zelfstandig – Amsterdam 2008-2010 (The Male/Female Amsterdam Prostitute – Assertive and Independent – Amsterdam 2008-2010)*.
- 17 These are the statistics presented by the Red Thread, the lobby organization for sex workers, on their website ([rodedraad.nl/prostitutie-in-nl/cijfers.html](http://rodedraad.nl/prostitutie-in-nl/cijfers.html)). The organization, however, points out that all statistics having to do with prostitution continue to have much higher margins of error than other social data.
- 18 See Flight and Hulshof (2009).
- 19 For HTNK's website, see [www.htnk.nl](http://www.htnk.nl) (accessed 10 June 2011).

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*Imagining Global Amsterdam* brings together new essays on the image of Amsterdam as articulated in film, literature, art, and urban discourse, considered within the context of globalization and its impact on urban culture. Subjects include: Amsterdam's place in global cultural memory; expressions of global consciousness in Amsterdam in the Dutch 'Golden Age'; articulations of Amsterdam as a tolerant, multicultural, and permissive 'global village'; and globalization's impact on the ground through city branding, the cultural heritage industry, and cultural production in the city.

Written by an interdisciplinary team of scholars, and united by a broad humanities approach, this collection forms a multifaceted inquiry into the dynamic relationship between Amsterdam, globalization, and the urban imaginary.

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