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Ludic Conceptualism: Art and Play in the Netherlands, 1959 to 1975

Janna Therese Schoenberger
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LUDIC CONCEPTUALISM: ART AND PLAY IN THE NETHERLANDS, 1959 TO 1975

by

JANNA THERESE SCHOENBERGER

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
Abstract

Ludic Conceptualism: Art and Play in the Netherlands, 1959 to 1975

by

Janna Schoenberger

Advisor: Claire Bishop

This dissertation, the first extended study on art in the Netherlands in the 1960s and ‘70s, investigates the phenomenon of ludic art, taking its lead from Johan Huizinga’s definition of ‘ludic’ in his seminal Homo Ludens (1938). According to Huizinga, the ludic is characterized by masquerade, freedom, and purposelessness, to which I add my own theoretical contribution—absurdity. I argue that the key instantiation of Huizinga’s ideas is found in the utopian project New Babylon (1959–74) by Constant Nieuwenhuys. In the 1960s, ludic art was deployed as a strategy of social critique that attacked from an oblique angle, sometimes effectively, but often misunderstood. When ludic art of the period overlapped with the Conceptual art movement, a new genre emerged, for which I have coined the term Ludic Conceptualism.

The dissertation follows a diachronic thread of play in art, from the first iteration of New Babylon in 1959, until the death of Conceptual artist Bas Jan Ader in 1975. The roles of curators, museums, and governmental institutions were crucial factors in the production and legibility of the ludic exhibition, and I regard the manner of exhibiting ludic art as a potentially ludic endeavor in and of itself. Accordingly, particular attention is paid to Willem Sandberg and the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, and to four historically critical exhibitions—Die Welt als Labyrinth (1960), Bewogen Beweging (1961), Dylaby (1962), and Op Losse Schroeven (1969). A
chapter is devoted to a comprehensive re-examination of the career of Robert Jasper Grootveld, an outsider previously misunderstood as a madman. By revisiting his oeuvre through the construct of play as a critical strategy, I argue that Grootveld emerges as the quintessential ludic artist, an innovator who made seminal contributions to the development of this genre. The last chapter of the dissertation analyzes examples of Ludic Conceptualism that parody public institutions as a means of indirectly criticizing Dutch culture: the A-dynamic Group, AFSRINMOR, the Sigma Center, the Internationaal Instituut voor Herscholing van Kunstenaars (International Institute for the Re-Schooling of Artists), and the television program Hoepla.

I contend that Huizinga’s Homo Ludens provided the intellectual foundation of a disparate range of artwork characterized by myriad manifestations of play. Furthermore, I argue that playful art was fostered by the social, economic, political, and cultural conditions of post-World War II Dutch society. Created in an environment that benefited by strong institutional support, ludic art enjoyed an enthusiastic critical and public reception. Ludic Conceptualism thus offers a localized definition of art that does not fit better-known categories—such as Fluxus and Nouveau Réalisme—and attends to the particular social and political context of the Netherlands in the 1960s. The new term allows for a more specific categorization of Dutch art and artists, while providing a potential template for further research into ludic work made in other locales that may have been equally misrepresented, eluded categorization, or simply neglected within the history of art.
Acknowledgements

I began writing about ludic art for Claire Bishop in her course *Art and Social Engagement*, with a paper on Robert Jasper Grootveld and his *Marihu* game. I will be eternally grateful to Professor Bishop for serving as my dissertation advisor: she posed crucial questions that needed to be answered, and taught me how to develop small ideas into a comprehensive thesis. Her considerable investment of time, her commitment to the success of my project through her many close readings of multiple drafts, and her encouragement at times of doubt contributed immeasurably to the success of this project.

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Note to the Reader

The Netherlands, the main constituent of the constitutional monarchy the Kingdom of the Netherlands, comprises twelve provinces. Its inhabitants speak Dutch and are referred to in the English-speaking world as Dutch people. ‘Holland’, a term often used inaccurately to refer to the nation, was a province; now divided into North Holland and South Holland, it is the most populous area of the country, and contains the cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and The Hague. The Caribbean islands of Aruba, Curaçao, and St. Maarten constitute the remainder of the Kingdom.

Nearly all material available on the topic of this dissertation is written in the Dutch language. All translations into English are the author’s, unless otherwise noted.
Introduction

This dissertation presents the development of ludic art in the Netherlands from 1959 to 1975, and investigates its challenge to aesthetic categories, its social function as a mode of critique, and its historical significance in Dutch culture and the wider art world. The historical span of the dissertation begins with the first exhibition of Constant Nieuwenhuys’s *New Babylon* at the Stedelijk Museum in the Netherlands in 1959, and ends in 1975 with death of the Dutch Conceptual artist Bas Jan Ader, whose one-person craft was shipwrecked while completing *In Search of the Miraculous*, the unfinished work that concluded prematurely with his ill-fated attempt to cross the Atlantic Ocean.¹ In my effort to understand how and why the ludic—a term on which I elaborate below—became a tool for social criticism in the Netherlands, I will explore the historical context of post-World War II Europe, the political context of a welfare state that provided artists with financial support for their work, and the cultural context of a broad-minded experimental attitude held by Dutch museums and galleries in the 1960s. In narrowing my view to a particular geographic location and investigating play as a mode of artistic expression, I strive to demonstrate that a single idea (the ludic) can take different shapes across media, culminating in a playful mode of Conceptual art. All the artists discussed in this dissertation have in common the deployment of purposeless play. My hope is that my study of playful art in the Netherlands will also prove useful to other scholars of ludic art as manifested in other locales.

The dissertation addresses a number of contextual issues arising from social, cultural, and economic policies that allowed ludic art to flourish. From 1945 to 1973, the Netherlands developed social welfare programs that included monthly stipends for artists.\(^2\) I argue that this public policy contributed to the development of the ludic. Institutional support that allowed artists free rein in museums was a crucial condition for the rise of contemporary playful Dutch art. When direct confrontation was not possible, an oblique critique was deployed, but then the ludic became conciliatory in its concealment of attack, which rendered it ineffectual. In order to support these assertions, I make a distinction between direct and indirect critiques, investigate the circumstances that allowed artists the freedom to play, and consider the paradoxical purposefulness of seemingly purposeless actions.

The field of art history has long overlooked study of ludic art. In his 1972 lecture on Johan Huizinga, Ernst Gombrich pondered the dearth of writing about play and fun in art: “In my own field, the history of art, we have become intolerably earnest. … The idea of fun is perhaps even more unpopular among us than is the notion of beauty.”\(^3\) Scholarly neglect of ludic art has led to misattribution of playful works, a shortcoming that demands the identification of new categories, especially with respect to Conceptual art. In this dissertation, I propose a new genre, *Ludic Conceptualism*, to define the mode of Conceptual art that emerged and flourished in the Netherlands during the decade-and-a-half-long period that is the focus of this study. I use the term ‘ludic art’ to refer to work that follows Huizinga’s definition of the ludic. ‘Ludic Conceptualism’, on the other hand, designates Conceptual art that diverges from the language-

\(^2\) As I will demonstrate in Chapter One, the support provided by the Dutch government was at its height from immediately after World War II until 1973, when the objectives of the welfare state were considered to have been met. Ibid., 4:277.

centered Conceptual practices seen in the work of Joseph Kosuth, Lawrence Weiner, and Art & Language. Ludic Conceptualism flourished at the historical moment when ludic art merged with the international art movement of Conceptual art.

I. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, and Constant

The term ‘ludic’ as it applies to art may be traced to the work of Dutch cultural historian Johan Huizinga (1872–1945) in his book *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (1938). An ambitious interdisciplinary study devoted to the concept of play across cultures and time, *Homo Ludens* remains invaluable for its definition and analysis of play’s function in society. The importance of *Homo Ludens* may be measured by its continued relevance today, still frequently referenced by historians, sociologists, and art critics. For Huizinga, play is a crucial formative element of civilization. While Huizinga’s contention is easily subject to challenge because a society needs more than play in order to thrive—food, shelter, safety, to

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5 Second to Huizinga’s influence on the study of play is Roger Caillois’ *Lex jeux et les hommes*, 1958, translated as *Man, Play and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001). In the Dutch context, however, Huizinga is the more important theorist for understanding play and the ludic. I address Caillois in relation to Huizinga and the discourse on play in Chapter One.


7 Huizinga argues that a civilization lacking play is one that is “on the wane,” such as late Rome in the fourth and fifth centuries, but that the play element is strikingly manifested in the Baroque period, more so than in the Renaissance. Another decline of play in civilization began in the nineteenth century, when “Culture ceased to be play.” Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 176–182; 191–192.
name just a few elements—his controversial central thesis is that civilization “arises in and as play, and never leaves it.”

Huizinga’s utopian thesis provided a model for artistic production in the post-World War II era, when many artists had his ideas in mind during the postwar reconstruction of Europe.

The title *Homo Ludens* (‘Man the Player’) is indebted to Huizinga’s study of comparative philology at Groningen University. Huizinga surveyed the words for play in a wide range of languages in order to select the most apt term, and concluded that the Latin word *ludus* best expressed his concept of play:

Summing up the formal characteristics of play, we might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside ‘ordinary’ life as being ‘not serious’, but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings that tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means.

Huizinga’s use of the term ‘formal’ refers not to color, shape, composition, and so on, as it would in the traditional art history lexicon; rather, *form* is everything that is not *content* (although the two are inextricably intertwined). He includes in his definition of ludic form the use of costume, the voluntary nature of play (the absence of coercion or obligation), a delineated space and time, play’s parallel existence to everyday life, and the simultaneous occurrence of seriousness and fun. As part of Huizinga’s definition, there are three

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8 Ibid., 173.


10 In *Homo Ludens*, Huizinga lists the words for play in Greek, Sanskrit, Chinese, Blackfoot, Japanese, Arabic, Hebrew, and Latin. In addition, he devoted an entire chapter to “The Play-Concept as Expressed in Language.”

distinguishable formal elements that structure the ludic: masquerade, freedom, and purposelessness. To these, I add absurdity, on which I will elaborate in later chapters addressing individual artworks. Form, in this sense, is more concerned with how a work is structured than with the use of, say, a particular color palette. I follow Huizinga’s unconventional use of the word ‘form’ when describing the ludic art in this study.

Several paradoxes arise in Huizinga’s concept of play as incorporated by artists into ludic works of art in the 1960s and early 1970s. Although I will address such discrepancies fully in Chapter One when reviewing criticisms of Homo Ludens, I will offer a preliminary introduction to them here. Huizinga’s insistence that play has no purpose presents a paradox that he raises in his own examples. Play is not entirely purposeless, and there is often utility in activities that may seem pointless. Huizinga cites the ritual of the potlatch—a game in which the Kwakiutl tribes of the Pacific Northwest competitively give away or destroy their possessions—as an example of exchange without accumulation. The potlatch is more generally understood as a demonstration of wealth and power with the prospect that those who give away the most goods will gain the most respect and symbolic capital. Huizinga explains that the potlatch could also be seen as an

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12 Ibid., 2–3; 7; 13.

13 Huizinga writes that play “creates order, is order” and elaborates that the “impulse to create orderly form” is related to the field of aesthetics. “The words we use to denote the elements of play belong for the most part to aesthetics … tension, poise, balance, contrast, variation, solutions, resolution, etc.” Huizinga consciously finds a connection between play and vocabulary associated with aesthetics, writing, “Play has a tendency to be beautiful.” Further, in his definition of play, Huizinga repeatedly refers to its “formal characteristics” as a means to describe the qualities associated with play, as seen above. Ibid., 10.

14 Huizinga describes the Kwakiutl’s ritual as a competition, disregarding the benefits of exchange. Ibid., 58. French sociologist Marcel Mauss, in his highly regarded book on social theories of exchange, The Gift, writes that the Kwakiutl chief gives a potlatch in order to “maintain his authority in his tribe, village and family, and maintain his position with the chiefs inside and outside his nation. To do so, he must “prove that he is favorably regarded by the spirits, that he possesses fortune and that he is possessed by it. The only way to demonstrate his fortune is by expending it to the humiliation of other, by putting them ‘in the shadow of his name.’” Marcel Mauss, The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies [1954], trans. Ian Cunnison, Reprint (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing, 2011), 37.
act performed in order to receive. An example of the paradox of ludic art can be found in Constant’s New Babylon (1959 – 1974), a plan for a utopian city as a never-ending playground where citizens devote their day to leisure as opposed to work. New Babylon consists of drawings, maquettes, photographs, films, exhibitions, and a manuscript for a book, completed over a fifteen-year period. While Constant advocated a society relieved of the obligations of utility, he neglected to extend his analysis to the social contributions of a citizen who devotes an entire day to play and thereby lays the foundations of interpersonal relationships, a process by which, according to Huizinga, civilized society is built: that particular citizen’s purposeless has a demonstrable social value, ergo, it is purposeful.

In another seeming contradiction, Huizinga writes that play is simultaneously “not serious,” yet shares with this quality a player’s earnest absorption in his or her activity. This paradox appears throughout Huizinga’s book, although he never unravels this apparent contradiction. In the end, play cannot be separated from seriousness. The works of art discussed in this dissertation, no matter how playful, are all earnest endeavors. I submit that ludic art is always serious, although the seriousness may not be readily apparent; it may need to be discovered. Despite these ambiguities, Huizinga articulated a formal definition of play that artists integrated into their ludic art throughout the 1960s, and the inherent paradoxes of Homo Ludens recur in the application of this term throughout that decade. Artists employed play as a serious mode of critique in which form may obscure meaning, and the contradictions inherent in the ludic risk sabotaging the possibility that play in art can lead to social change.

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Following Huizinga, I argue that the principal characteristics of ludic art are masquerade, freedom, and purposelessness. Masquerade denotes the use of costume and disguise, allowing oblique and humorous critiques of authority.\textsuperscript{16} Play is a freely chosen activity, as opposed to a compulsory one. Play tends to have no clearly identifiable goal, as ‘playing’ is valued over winning, and for that reason may appear pointless.\textsuperscript{17} Its apparent futility allows for experimentation because there is no need to meet an objective. Without the pressure to achieve, and with the game itself being more important than its outcome, participants enjoy a freedom often absent from controlled activities such as work. However, each of these features has a drawback: masquerade may be misconstrued, play may not necessarily be entirely free—there may be an incentive to participate—and, in its pursuit of social change, purposelessness ultimately has a utilitarian purpose. Each work of art discussed in this dissertation incorporates at least one of Huizinga’s three essential features of play, which, as I will demonstrate, represent both strengths and concomitant weaknesses of ludic art.

\textbf{II. Ludic Art as a Genre and the Rise of Ludic Conceptualism}

In the 1960s, Dutch artists applied Huizinga’s concept of the ludic in three ways: by integrating the characteristics of masquerade, freedom, and purposelessness into the structure of their work, by deploying the ludic as a strategy of critique, and by incorporating ludic qualities into the content of their art. The first two modalities developed concurrently in 1959, and the

\textsuperscript{16} Huizinga writes, “The ‘differentness’ and secrecy of play are most vividly expressed in ‘dressing up’. … The disguised or masked individual ‘plays’ another part, another being. … The terrors of childhood, openhearted gaiety, mystic fantasy and sacred awe are all inextricably entangled in this strange business of masks and disguises.” \textit{Homo Ludens}, 13.

\textsuperscript{17} I follow Johan Huizinga’s lead in omitting professional sports from my definition of play: “with increasing systematization and regimentation of sport, something of the pure play-quality is inevitably lost … it is lacking in spontaneity and carelessness.” Ibid., 197.
third emerged in the 1960s, resulting in the creation of a genre: Ludic Conceptualism. The earliest application of Huizinga’s definition of the ludic as ‘form’ in the Netherlands appeared in 1959, in Constant’s *New Babylon*. The artist described his design as promoting a “free way of living,” and he often observed that his city was “without utility” or, to use another word, purposeless. For an artist like Robert Jasper Grootveld (1932–2009), the act of costuming and masquerade was central to his art; other artists concealed their work behind façades, e.g., creating fake companies. Masquerade can be configured in many ways, but it is above all the idea of concealment that is integral to the ludic. These three formal qualities also characterized exhibitions at the Stedelijk Museum in the early 1960s, of which *Bewogen Beweging* (1961) and *Dylaby* (1962) are prime examples. In ludic practice, the elements of masquerade, freedom, and purposeless do not adhere to any one outward appearance; they exist independently of content, yet determine a work’s expression, and thereby unite the art formally.

Throughout the 1960s, and particularly mid-decade with Grootveld’s performances in the center of Amsterdam, the ludic also operated as a strategy in service of social critique. Criticism from a playful standpoint was indirect: when the ludic functioned as critique, it often incorporated the element of masquerade by way of costumes or disguises. Ludic art offered new ways of thinking by obliquely posing alternatives to the current social order. It presented no direct attack or polemicism; instead there was simply an unwillingness to assert an unambiguous position. This imprecision was seen an asset, because without a clearly defined argument, there was less opportunity for counter-argument, thereby allowing further opportunity for play and new ideas. However, implicit critique can elude the comprehension of its intended audience, so

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while veiled criticism was occasionally an effective method of social change, it could also prove ineffectual or misunderstood, as can be seen in some works by Grootveld. For example, in a challenge to the racist portrayal of the Dutch folk character Zwarte Piet, Grootveld performed a parodic version of the figure. But Grootveld never directly pointed his finger at the problematic cultural representations of Zwarte Piet, who is typically played by a white male in blackface, and viewers failed to perceive Grootveld’s criticism.¹⁹ In a more successful endeavor, Grootveld and the anarchist group Provo helped restore the bicycle culture of the city of Amsterdam through ludic protests. Rather than directly challenging politicians’ embrace of the automobile, protesters intensified road congestion by causing traffic jams while distributing currants to drivers and pedestrians.

The ludic also functioned as a genre of work developing simultaneously with and in the context of Conceptualism, and in this sense, shares not only Huizinga’s formal characteristics, but also belong to the Conceptual art movement. Artist Sol LeWitt has presented a model of Conceptualism in which the abstract concept is the subject matter of the work: “The idea becomes a machine that makes the art.”²⁰ LeWitt further describes Conceptual art as “free,” as in free from technical skill or craftsmanship, and goes on to state, “it is purposeless.” In a 1969 interview, LeWitt went on to describe his Conceptual art as “irrational,” rejecting reason in favor of the intuitive and the absurd.²¹ Conceptual art in the Netherlands often falls under LeWitt’s

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¹⁹ The suggestion that Zwarte Piet is a racist figure only recently became a major item in the Dutch press, as I discuss in Chapter Three.


1967 definition, but it also frequently employs masquerade, as I will demonstrate in Chapter Four.

Huizinga remarks that play is an activity that has no material interest, a quality that can be compared to another interpretation of Conceptualism, i.e., as a trend toward dematerialization. Ludic and Conceptual art were conceived as attempts to escape the market. The ludic, as articulated by Huizinga, is free from commercial exchange. A game is often played by choice, in contrast to work, which is instrumentalized for financial compensation in support of subsistence. Conceptual artists initially made proposals that need not be realized—the underlying idea driving the art was sufficient for the art to exist, and moreover aspired to resist the art market by being difficult to buy or sell. Thus, both Huizinga’s description of the ludic and others’ accounts of Conceptual art similarly expressed resistance to financial exchange. The ludic and Conceptualism share other characteristics, too, expressing a desire for freedom and purposelessness. In the Netherlands, however, the particular mode of Conceptual art is ludic, adhering to Huizinga’s definition of play. As I will demonstrate in Chapter Four, Ludic Conceptualism occurs when form, strategy, and genre converge.

LeWitt writes, “Conceptual art is not necessarily logical … Ideas are discovered by intuition.” LeWitt, “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art,” 80.

\(^{22}\) In an article co-written with John Chandler, Lucy Lippard described Conceptual art as ‘dematerialized’, as the concept or idea takes precedence over an actual handcrafted item. At first, this dematerialization was associated with an anti-consumerist stance, because it was thought that ideas could not be sold like traditional art objects. See Lucy Lippard and John Chandler, “The Dematerialization of Art,” Art International, February 1968.

\(^{23}\) In Chapter One, I investigate the play/work dialectic. Play can be a utilitarian basis for society, similar to the way in which work may be understood. Creative work, such as writing or performing, may also be better described as play. Huizinga and Constant neglect the inherent relationship between the forces of work and play.

\(^{24}\) Lippard writes, “Conceptual art, for me, means work in which the idea is paramount and the material form is secondary, lightweight, ephemeral, cheap, unpretentious and/or ‘dematerialized.’” Lucy Lippard, Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972, 1st ed. (University of California Press, 1997), vii.
Ludic art also crosses paths with humor, irony, satire, and parody, and, for that reason, eludes concise definition. The ludic is experienced by the viewer as “fun and enjoyment,” writes Huizinga.  

Humor theorist John Morreall cites “amusement” as a chief aspect of humor: “amusing people is a way of playing with them.” Play and humor also take place under a similar set of conditions. According to Morreall: “in humans and animals alike, play usually occurs in the absence of urgent physiological needs, such as hunger, thirst, and escaping threats.” In addition, humor needs play for its genesis. Morreall asserts that play was necessary in order for humor to develop: early humans first had to acquire the ability to play with thoughts before humor evolved. Following Morreall, play is the basis for humor, but play is not necessarily humorous. A similar logic holds for types of humor, such as parody, irony, and satire. Ludic art may be parodic, but parody in itself does not make a work ludic. Parody, however, was widely employed by Ludic Conceptualists in the Netherlands as a mode of critique. The ludic may be ridiculous, with an irrational, hard-to-follow internal logic, or it may be ironic, although these characteristics are not essential. Irrationality, however, is most closely tied to the ludic as it relates to purposelessness. This quality of purposeless also connects play to humor and art, suggesting that humor can be an aesthetic experience. In both humorous amusement and the joy of an aesthetic experience, creativity and novelty are prized. Morreall writes, “with their emphasis on imagination and surprise, and their enjoyment of experience for its own sake, humor


27 Ibid.

28 The body of literature on humor is extensive and ancient, tracing back to Plato. In this dissertation, I will touch on humor theory, of which the most recent and precise example can be found in Simon Critchley, On Humour, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2002).

29 Morreall, Comic Relief, 43.
and aesthetic experience can be understood as kinds of play.\textsuperscript{30} Some artworks may aim to evoke amusement, and ludic art sometimes deploys humor in its execution, as in Grootveld’s ironic parodies. In another instance of overlap, jokes, like the ludic, can create a rift in thought; as philosopher Paolo Virno writes, jokes “share the tendency to deviate from the axis of discourse so as to introduce heterogeneous elements that were not previously considered.”\textsuperscript{31} Another crucial characteristic of the ludic is openness to the possibility of transformation, as I will argue later in this dissertation. The hazy borders between play and these different types of humor make it challenging to draw precise boundaries, especially because there are areas of considerable overlap.

In the Netherlands, Constant was the first to cite Huizinga as a conceptual source (in \textit{New Babylon}), constructing a model for subsequent artists to incorporate the ludic into their work. Antecedents of the ludic may be seen in Constant’s work with Cobra, the post-World War II movement known for painterly abstraction.\textsuperscript{32} In his 1948 “Manifesto,” published in the magazine \textit{Reflex}, Constant wrote about the search for freedom of expression that one might find in a child’s spontaneity.\textsuperscript{33} This echoes Huizinga’s point of departure, the “childlike play-sense” that is brought up so often in \textit{Homo Ludens}: “the world of the savage, the child, and the poet … is the

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 71.

\textsuperscript{31} Paolo Virno, \textit{Multitude between innovation and negation}, trans. Isabella Bertoletti, James Cascaito, and Andrea Casson (Los Angeles, CA; Cambridge, Mass.: Semiotext(e), 2008), 143.

\textsuperscript{32} Cobra, variously spelled ‘CoBrA’ and ‘COBRA’, is an acronym for ‘Copenhagen, Brussels, and Amsterdam’, the three cities for which the avant-garde movement is named. Coined in 1948 by Christian Dotremont, Cobra was formed by Dotremont, Constant, Karel Appel, Corneille, Asper Jorn, and Joseph Noiret on 8 November 1948 in the Café Notre-Dame, Paris, with the signing of a manifesto, “La cause etait entendue” (“The Case Was Settled”), written by Dotremont. I use the spelling ‘Cobra’ in this dissertation because it is the one most frequently appearing in the Dutch texts on which my research so heavily relies.

world of play.”34 While Constant does not refer explicitly to the ludic or to play, his reference to the child as a starting point for the creative process implies that Huizinga’s *Homo Ludens* was an important source for his “Manifesto.” In turn, Constant’s Cobra writing helped shape *New Babylon*, since he had already begun endorsing the creative capacities of play.

While Huizinga’s influence was implicit during Constant’s Cobra period, it had become explicit by the time of the 1974 iteration of *New Babylon*. In the catalogue, Constant’s “Definitions,” and a section titled “New Babylon, a Sketch for a New Culture,” he explains what he took from Huizinga as well as what he had modified. A prime example is his definition of ‘play’: the entry is notable because it shows a change of approach, essentially a critique of Huizinga’s definition of art as it relates to play. In *Homo Ludens*, Huizinga devotes his tenth chapter to the “Play-forms in Art,” but he concerns himself mostly with music and dance, attending only cursorily to visual art. Constant contends that Huizinga did not go far enough in defining play as the creative act *par excellence*: while he adheres to Huizinga’s assertion that play is purposeless, he expands the definition to include all art, concluding that the art that he had viewed over the preceding decade had been a reflection of ludic art:

The idea that art is play, and that playing is identical with the creative act, has grown among artists in more recent times. This understanding makes it necessary to revise the current criteria: much of the so-called ‘playing’ of the past, will not recognized as such, and some irrational behaviors we might refer to as ‘play’ in the sense that they are creative acts.35

Constant goes on to write that play should be defined as “free creative activities,” as well as anything that is purposeless.36

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36 Ibid.
By the 1960s, Huizinga’s ‘ludic’ had become a Dutch idiom.\textsuperscript{37} Exhibition reviews of \textit{Bewogen Beweging} regularly cite ‘ludic’ and \textit{homo ludens}; the terms were so familiar that Huizinga need not be credited. Reflecting on \textit{Bewogen Beweging} in a 1993-article, curator Jelle Bouwhuis quoted an epigraph from \textit{Homo Ludens}. Bouwhuis claims that Huizinga was the most cited author in reviews on \textit{Bewogen Beweging}.\textsuperscript{38} For example, a reviewer in the \textit{Arnhems Dagblad} states, “Many visitors will shrug their shoulders or say that this [exhibition] is the product of the homo ludens,” closing his review by explaining “people therefore look at this work as if it was a sight from a foreign country in a carnival tent, and are amused by the homo ludens present in the work.”\textsuperscript{39}

One movement that influenced the development of ludic art in the Netherlands was Nouveau Réalisme, a tendency identified in 1960 by French art critic Pierre Restany. The artists associated with this group were characterized by their rejection of autonomous art and expressionist painting and by the inclusion of mass-produced objects in their collages and assemblages. The Nouveaux Réalistes exhibited in the Netherlands, and their work was collected by the Stedelijk Museum.\textsuperscript{40} Similarly to ludic art, Nouveau Réalisme “instigated the ethic of fun,” but the movement “was hardly intended to breed enjoyment alone.”\textsuperscript{41} Unlike ludic art, Nouveau Réalisme responded to Art Informel and Abstract Expressionism by incorporating

\textsuperscript{37} Anton van der Lem, \textit{Johan Huizinga: Leven en werk in beelden en documenten} (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 1993), 252.


\textsuperscript{39} Chapter Two presents \textit{Bewogen Beweging} and its reception in depth, citing more reviews that refer to Huizinga. V. d. W, “Bewogen Beweging,” \textit{Arnhems Dagblad}, April 13, 1961, Knipselmap Bewogen Beweging, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.

\textsuperscript{40} A notable exhibition of Nouveau Réaliste art was \textit{Dylaby} at the Stedelijk Museum in 1962, discussed in Chapter Two.

industrially created items into their painting and sculpture. Conversely, artists who utilized the ludic were responding to less to abstract painting than to the historical, political, economic, and social conditions in the Netherlands.

Fluxus, led by George Maciunas, was an international “anti-art” movement that opposed the institutionalization and commodification of art, and emerged in the Netherlands at the same time as ludic art. The movement is best known for performances or “events” that employed everyday objects and actions. Often, their artwork took the form of ‘scores’—a set of instructions for others (who may or may not include the artist) to follow and perform. Although ludic artists in the Netherlands interacted and intersected with Fluxus more than with Nouveau Réalisme, ludic art does not constitute a movement in itself. As I describe in Chapter Four, Maciunas made Amsterdam the center for Fluxus’s European Mail Order Warehouse, led by the Dutch ludic artist Willem de Ridder (b. 1939).42 De Ridder actively promoted Fluxus and together with Henk de By and Wim T. Schippers (b. 1942) created an episode for a television show on contemporary art, Signalement (1963), and performed several “scores” by artists Nam June Paik, George Brecht, and Emmett Williams, among others.43 While Dutch artists such as De Ridder collaborated with Maciunas, they continued to create ludic art independently.

Ludic art is not a movement, therefore, but a sensibility: there is no defining exhibition or manifesto that links together the ludic artists who demonstrated common tendencies in their work. Ludic artists in the Netherlands did not form a group comparable to Fluxus or Nouveau Réalisme, nor have a spokesperson analogous to Maciunas or Restany. Ludic Conceptualism, however, describes a genre within Conceptual art that follows structuring principles of the ludic

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42 Maciunas created a publishing program, Fluxus Editions, and distributed scores and anthologies of individual artists’ works through showrooms he called Fluxshops and Mail Order Warehouses.

as elaborated by Huizinga. This dissertation is the first to suggest that the ludic might describe a mode of artmaking that crosses styles and spans a decade-and-a-half. By examining various artworks’ relationships to the ludic, I consider the strategic and sophisticated use of play, a perspective that would be lost if one adhered to the traditional boundaries of movements such as Fluxus and Nouveau Réalisme.

III. Literature Review

Conceptualism was a global phenomenon from its inception—and the Netherlands was an important center for playful Conceptual artistic practices—yet little has been written on the subject, and, in general, little scholarly attention has been paid to the function of play in art. Dutch art of the period was distinct from art produced in other countries, such as the dominant tautological strands of Conceptualism developed by Joseph Kosuth (b. 1945) in New York and works by Art & Language in the United States and Britain. Since the early 1970s, many authors have looked closely at Conceptual art, but few studies have examined the movement as

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44 Dutch scholars have written extensively on seventeenth-century art in the Netherlands (including the massive government-funded forty-six year Rembrandt Research Project), the nineteenth-century focus on Vincent van Gogh, and the twentieth-century movements, such as De Stijl and Cobra. With regard to contemporary art, however, Dutch art historians have shied away from writing about their own culture. For example, the recent book, *During the Exhibition the Gallery Will Be Closed: Contemporary Art and the Paradoxes of Conceptualism*, by Dutch art historian Camiel van Winkel, focuses on North American-based artists as On Kawara, Sol LeWitt, and Jeff Wall. Perhaps the most significant exhibition of Dutch Conceptual art, *In and Out of Amsterdam: Travels in Conceptual Art 1960–1976*, was held at the Museum of Modern Art in 2009, although there was one exhibition on Dutch and Belgian Conceptual art held at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam in 2002: *Conceptual Art in the Netherlands and Belgium 1965–1975*.


46 Joseph Kosuth has written extensively about Art & Language, a collaborative group that included Kosuth, and that has been cited as instrumental in the development of Conceptual art. Art historian Alexander Alberro writes that Kosuth’s model of Conceptual art was, and still is, the dominant mode. Alberro, “Reconsidering Conceptual Art, 1966-1967,” xx.
manifested in the Netherlands. Lucy Lippard’s annotated history of conceptual art, *Six Years*, mentions Dutch examples of Conceptual art, but she tends to miss the playfulness in these works. For example, Lippard cites a collaborative work completed in 1967, *The International Institute for the Re-Schooling of Artists*, as if it were an earnest effort to revolutionize art education. Lippard explains that, unlike in the United States, European artists attempted to create alternative educational institutes, and she offers Joseph Beuys as her prime example. The Institute was, in fact, a parody of education and the art market, as I discuss in Chapter Four. Lippard did note the “wit” of Dutch artist Jan Dibbets’s *Perspective Correction* works from the late 1960s, in which he “corrected” the recessive perspective of a space, be this in a gallery or outdoors, by drawing lines or laying a rope in a trapezoidal shape so that when photographed the trapezoid would appear as a square. Lippard included in *Six Years* one of these perspective corrections in which a tractor was filmed creating a rectangle in the grass corresponding to the television frame on which the video was shown. While Lippard conveys Dibbets’s humor, she presents it as an exception rather than as a dominant trend or attitude in the Netherlands.

The 1999 exhibition *Global Conceptualism*, organized by Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver, and Rachel Weiss, was the first curatorial and art historical effort to survey the varied expressions of Conceptual art that appeared concurrently in North America, Eastern and Western Europe, Latin America, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. Perhaps unavoidably, the exhibition’s catalogue essays, devoted to specific regions, were somewhat general. For example, Dibbets and Stanley Brouwn were represented as either related to or members of the Situationist International, even though they had no relationship to that

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47 Lippard, *Six Years*, xvi.

48 Ibid.
group. *Global Conceptualism*’s argument for localized histories, focusing as it did on particular social and political conditions, was a first step toward discovering the distinct expressions of Conceptual art in specific geographical locales, but its shortcomings make evident the need for research into the particular iterations of this genre in countries like the Netherlands where it does not fit established paradigms.

Art historians have found Dutch Conceptual artist Bas Jan Ader (1942–1975) equally difficult to place. In Alexander Alberro’s introduction to his and Blake Stimson’s critical anthology of Conceptual art, he groups Ader together with Adrian Piper, Christopher D’Arcangelo, and Vito Acconci, presumably because they all work with their own bodies. Ader did film himself cycling into a canal in Amsterdam in 1970 (*Fall II, Amsterdam*), but his plunge has more in common with Buster Keaton’s slapstick antics than with Acconci’s *Seedbed* (1972), a performance work in which the artist masturbated under a platform on which unsuspecting gallery-viewers trod. For similar reasons, Jan Verwoert, in his book on Ader’s *In Search of the Miraculous* (1975), compares Ader to body artist Chris Burden, best known for *Shoot* (1971), in which he arranged to be shot in the arm with a rifle. Verwoert characterizes Ader’s work as romantic, operating within the tradition of the sublime, which is understandable given that Ader became lost at sea while completing *In Search of the Miraculous*. Verwoert suggests that Ader committed suicide, but as recent scholarship by art historian Alexander Dumbadze has shown, Ader’s death was an accident, so Verwoert’s identification of Ader as a tragic, romantic figure is retrospective and due to calamitous coincidence. As there are no precise categories by which to


distinguish playful artists, Ader has been incorrectly identified as a (suicidal) body artist. A
better framework is needed to situate his and others’ ludic art; one of the aims of this dissertation
to provide that framework.

Dutch research on Conceptualism has focused on placing national art production within
global narratives rather than examining the specificity of local trends. In the 2002 exhibition and
catalogue, *Conceptual Art in the Netherlands and Belgium 1965-1975*, Dutch curators and art
historians show how the work fits into the international constellation of Conceptual art.52 Yet art
historian Carel Blotkamp’s contribution to the catalogue pays more attention to *When Attitudes
Become Form* (Bern Kunsthalle, 1969) and to Swiss curator Harald Szeemann than it does to the
Dutch exhibition *Op Losse Schroeven* (1969).53 Blotkamp goes on to explain that in that year,
Amsterdam played a small part in a larger field of artistic developments: Gerry Schum’s
Fernsehgalerie, the first issue of *Art-Language*, critic German Celant’s publication *Arte Povera*,
the exhibition *Konzeption/Conception* in Leverkusen, *Earth Art* in Ithaca, *Street Works* in New
York, *Letters* in Long Beach, and *Art by Telephone* in Chicago. In the same catalogue, art
historian Camiel van Winkel’s “The Obsession with a Pure Idea” addresses the history of
Conceptual art, framing it as a “fantasy” of dematerialized artwork. The narrative Van Winkel
presents includes well-known international artists, but only names two Dutch artists associated
with the movement in a list of Conceptual artists who have become influential teachers.54

52 Hripsime Visser, Suzanna Heman, and Jurrie Poot, eds., *Conceptual Art In The Netherlands And Belgium


54 Camiel van Winkel lists Michael Asher, Stanley Brouwn, Daniel Buren, Jan Dibbets, Bernd Becher, and
John Baldessari. Other than naming the two Dutch artists, van Winkel does not devote any attention to these artists
in his article. Camiel van Winkel, “The Obsession with a Pure Idea,” in *Conceptual Art in the Netherlands and
Sophie Richard’s *Unconcealed: The International Network of Conceptual Artists 1967-77 Dealers, Exhibitions, and Public Collections* (2009) attempts to insert the history of European Conceptual art into the U.S. discourse on Conceptualism. She rightly eliminates the hierarchical relationship between U.S. and European Conceptual art by examining networks of artists, collectors, galleries, and museums. Locations are briefly introduced and there is an effort to address particular cultural conditions, including government funding, but Richard is more interested in showing the interconnectedness of Europe and the United States than in analyzing artworks or modes of Conceptualism. Nor does she trace the social, political, cultural, or economic conditions in Europe to art practices or distinguish between U.S. and European Conceptualism. In her introduction, Richard writes that Conceptual art events in Europe have been neglected by scholarly literature, citing Seth Siegelaub’s exhibition in the London-based magazine *Studio International* (July – August 1970) as an overlooked example; ultimately she seeks to restore Europe to the stature of the United States in Conceptual art.\footnote{55 Sophie Richard, *Unconcealed: The International Network of Conceptual Artists 1967-1977 - Dealers, Exhibitions and Public Collections* (London: Ridinghouse, 2009), 36.} This first step allows for investigation into particular locales of Conceptual art, following Global Conceptualism’s lead. In Richard’s book, Amsterdam is recognized as a major center for Conceptual art, as are Düsseldorf, Cologne, Brussels, and Ghent. These cities had been considered peripheral until books such as *Unconcealed* showed that they supported well-known artists early in their careers with gallery and museum exhibitions.\footnote{56 Richard devotes chapters to “Purchases of Conceptual Art by Private Collectors,” and “Purchases of Conceptual Art by European Museums,” subdividing the chapters into areas, largely by nation, within Western Europe. In Chapter Four, “Purchases of Conceptual Art by Private Collectors,” she address: West Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Great Britain, France, Switzerland, and Italy, and in Chapter Five, “Purchases of Conceptual Art by European Museums,” she focuses on Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Great Britain. In addition, she includes appendices listing exhibitions in galleries and museums across Europe from 1967 to 1977. Ibid., 294–313; 364–393.} While *Unconcealed* demonstrates Amsterdam’s importance, it privileges transatlantic economic relationships over
local conditions, individual artworks, and institutions. The book recognizes that there should be research into Conceptualism as it appeared in European cities, but doesn’t yet accomplish this task.

The Museum of Modern Art’s exhibition *In & Out of Amsterdam: Travels in Conceptual Art 1960-1976* (2009) was the most notable recent attempt to address 1960s art in Amsterdam. This small show and accompanying catalogue demonstrated that Amsterdam occupied a central place on Conceptualism’s map by exhibiting major international artists’ work made in Amsterdam, including examples by Sol LeWitt and Lawrence Weiner. The show was based on a donation of artworks and documents from the archives of Art & Project (1968-2001), an Amsterdam-based gallery that supported Conceptual art and published its own magazine featuring works by the artists in the exhibition. While useful as a lens through which to view this period, Art & Project was presented as more important than Amsterdam as a whole, and yet again folded Conceptual art in the Netherlands into the panorama of its international counterparts without attending to the historical conditions that contributed to their differences.

Christian Rattemeyer, contributor to the MoMA catalogue and author of *Exhibiting the New Art: “Op Losse Schroeven” and “When Attitudes Become Form” 1969* (2010), points out that in 1969, the Dutch exhibition *Op Losse Schroeven* (Square Pegs in Round Holes) was given as much attention as the concurrent show *When Attitudes Become Form* (1969), yet *Op Losse Schroeven* has been written out of the history of Conceptualism. The exhibition was understood as important in the 1970s, but eventually fell out of favor, while *Attitudes* has remained a subject

57 Art & Project first opened in Amsterdam in 1968 with an exhibition of Charlotte Posenenske’s sculpture. It remained in Amsterdam at various locations until 1989, when it moved to the nearby city of Slootdorp. It closed in 2001. From 1969 through 1989 it published bulletins that were considered artworks.

of scholarship, a distinction that is probably due to Harald Szeemann’s subsequent importance as a curator. Rattemeyer argues that the Dutch exhibition merited greater notice, but due to its foreign language title, a curator who remained in the Netherlands rather than working internationally, and the absence of scandal, the exhibition received less attention than Attitudes. While Rattemeyer’s book contributes to our knowledge of Conceptual art exhibitions, the larger historical context surrounding Op Losse Schroeven and Dutch Conceptual art in particular has yet to be addressed.

Art and architectural historians have written about Constant’s New Babylon at length, and in Chapter One I discuss the literature on this work. However, two important readings of Constant’s work are worth noting here. Mark Wigley edited and contributed to two books on Constant’s New Babylon, published to accompany exhibitions of the work in Rotterdam and New York: Constant’s New Babylon: The Hyper-architecture of Desire (1998) and The Activist Drawing: Retracing Situationist Architectures from Constant’s New Babylon to Beyond (2001). Wigley emphasizes the importance of the Situationist International (SI) to New Babylon, overlooking the fact that New Babylon had an independent life and genealogy in the Netherlands. Constant’s international and Dutch influences, such as the architect Aldo van Eyck (1918–1999), are glossed over in order to maintain the narrative that New Babylon is solely an SI project. Dutch scholars have attempted to correct Wigley’s misreading in two notable publications. The first is a dissertation completed at the University of Amsterdam in 2002 by Marcel Hummelink, Après Nous La Liberté: Constant en de artistieke avant-garde in de jaren 1946 – 1960, which focuses on Constant’s relationships with individual artists and groups, including but not limited

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The second, *Exit Utopia: Architectural Provocations, 1956 – 76*, edited by Martin van Schaik and Marcel Otakar (2005), presents conference proceedings that responded to Wigley’s Rotterdam exhibition by trying to correct what the authors saw as a misinterpretation with occasionally blatant errors. Both books help to place *New Babylon* in a more complex Dutch context and successfully argue that Constant’s influences extend well beyond the SI. However, the ludic, with its critical capacity and its centrality to *New Babylon*, has been overlooked in all studies of Constant’s work to date.

The study of humor in artistic practice has begun to be viewed as worthy of inquiry, but play in art remains a neglected, even marginalized, area, and there is still much work to be done on the connection between play and humor. The seriousness of humorous art and play has only recently begun to be addressed as a subject worthy of art historical inquiry. For example, Gregory Williams’s *Permission to Laugh* (2012), a historical analysis of humor and politics in German art from 1960 to 1980, focuses on jokes and Witz as strategies of political critique. Monica Steinberg, in her dissertation *Finish Fetish: Art, Artists, and Alter Egos in 1960s Los Angeles*, analyzes artists’ humorous alter egos, including William Bengston (Billy Al), Larry

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60 Marcellinus Bernardus Emanuel Hummelink, “Après Nous La Liberté: Constant en de artistieke avant-garde in de jaren 1946-1960” (Dissertation, University of Amsterdam, 2002).


62 The Strong National Museum of Play in Rochester, NY, publishes the interdisciplinary peer-reviewed online journal, the *American Journal of Play*. The journal highlights education, psychology, and sociology, among other subjects, and has published an article on art and creativity, Phillip Prager, “Play and the Avant-Garde: Aren’t We All a Little Dada?,” *American Journal of Play* 5, no. 2 (2013): 239–256. Dutch historian Rudolf Dekker addresses humor in Dutch culture in the seventeenth-century, but he focuses mainly on literature rather than the visual arts. Dekker notes that humor is still important in Dutch culture today due to the wide vocabulary used to designate that something is amusing. Rudolf M. Dekker, *Humour in Dutch Culture of the Golden Age* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001): 2.

Bell (Dr. Lux), and Judy Gerowitz (Judy Chicago), as constructions of artistic identity. Sianne Ngai’s *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (2012) makes the case for these three terms as substantial aesthetic categories, looking to expand what she sees as too narrow a field. Ngai addresses play within the field of the “zany,” but only as it is related to labor or production. This dissertation may be understood, in part, as following Ngai’s lead in arguing for the ludic as an aesthetic category.

**IV. Methodology and Sources**

This dissertation offers a contextual reading of artworks in light of the relevant political, cultural, and social events of the period, relying on critical and public responses to the artworks as a way to grasp how they were perceived in their own time. These works of art engaged contemporary social issues, so a clear understanding of these and of audiences’ perspectives on them is necessary to appreciating how the works evolved and were received. I have drawn extensively upon newspaper articles reviewing exhibitions, performances, and television programs; correspondence between museum directors and artists; older interviews with artists published in newspapers, magazines, and journals; and recent interviews offering retrospective thoughts. I also looked at both contemporary and recent news broadcasts and documentary films.

Ultimately, however, works of art were my principal archive, particularly the collections of the Stedelijk Museum, the Gemeentemuseum, the International Institute for Social History,

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64 Monica Steinberg, “Finish Fetish: Art, Artists, and Alter-Egos in Los Angeles of the 1960s” (Dissertation, Graduate Center, CUNY, 2016).

and the Dutch Public Broadcasting system. Yet the artwork’s status today is often problematic. For example, installations and performances that are no longer extant can be analyzed only through documentary and archival material. Many of the artworks presented in this dissertation were exhibited over an extended time, thus undergoing several modulations, and some were completed in installments, such as the television program Hoepla and Constant’s New Babylon, demanding that the artworks be analyzed both individually and as a whole.

A number of contemporary social issues influenced the development of Dutch ludic art: the rise of a consumerist culture during the post-World War II economic boom, leading to a rift between generations; the dangers of smoking and the role of the government intervention; racism in Dutch culture, with a particular focus on the holiday Sinterklaas and the figure of Zwarte Piet (Black Pete); the role of foreigners and migrants from recently decolonized countries; and the position of artists, their relationships to museums, and the freedom they should or should not be given in the display of their work. In Chapter Four, I discuss changing governmental policies regarding funding of the arts and the consequences of government intervention. While government subsidies allowed artists to experiment, direct criticism of governmental policy, as in the last episode of the television program Hoepla, resulted in artworks being removed from the public arena. The foremost debate running throughout this period concerned postwar reconstruction and the formation of a modern welfare state. In the effort to rebuild, ludic art was seen as the basis for a ludic society, appealing to both liberal and conservative citizens.

66 The archive of the Stedelijk Museum has a wealth of history on its own exhibitions, as the museum staff not only archived correspondence, but also collected reviews and articles pertaining to shows held at the museum in knipsel mappen, (clippings folders). The Gemeentemuseum has the largest collection of work related to New Babylon by Constant, as well as archival files related to artwork and exhibition. I also made use of the Netherlands Institute for Art History in The Hague for sources on individual artists, such as Constant and Bas Jan Ader. Finally, the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam was a particularly useful resource on the artist Grootveld and his activities with Provo.
Two highly regarded texts on the 1960s in the Netherlands appeared in the 1990s: Hans Righart’s *De eindeloze jaren zestig* (The Endless Sixties, 1995) and, more importantly for this dissertation, *Nieuw babylon in aanbouw* (Building New Babylon, 1997) by James Kennedy.\(^67\) While the authors concur that the Netherlands modernized in the 1960s, Righart and Kennedy address the shifts in Dutch culture in the 1960s from opposing viewpoints. Righart submits that social change stemmed from what he called the “double generation crisis:” the pre-WWII generation did not cope well with wealth acquired in the 1960s and the postwar generation formed an oppositional attitude in search of new social patterns; Kennedy, by contrast, opines that cultural transformation was due to an “elite” support of the counterculture. As suggested by the title of his study, Kennedy argues that the Netherlands of the 1960s is most accurately understood through the context of Constant’s *New Babylon*; Kennedy’s viewpoint exerts a significant influence over this dissertation. Schuyt and Taverne’s *Dutch Culture in a European Perspective: 1950, Prosperity and Welfare* (2004), a recent volume challenging the 1990s research, focuses on economic changes in the Netherlands from World War II to 1975, highlighting the impact of the postwar boom and the 1973 oil crisis on governmental and cultural policies crucial to the 1960s Dutch artistic environment.\(^68\)

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\(^68\) Both *Building New Babylon* and *Dutch Culture* gloss over artistic practice in the 1960s, although they suggest their importance. In addition to the title of Kennedy’s book referencing Constant’s *New Babylon*, it also includes Constant’s drawing of *New Babylon, Mobiel Ladderlabyrint*, 1967 as the cover. James Kennedy, *Nieuw Babylon in Aanbouw: Nederland in De Jaren Zestig*, trans. Simone Kennedy-Doornbos (Amsterdam: Boom, 1997); Schuyt and Taverne, *Dutch Culture in a European Perspective*. 
V. Chapter Outline

Chapter One, “The Rise and Fall of New Babylon,” reviews Constant’s New Babylon and its relationship to Huizinga’s Homo Ludens, as well as addressing criticisms of the book.69 I argue that Homo Ludens was connected to New Babylon as early as its first exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam in 1959, and asserted the ludic as an inherent quality of art in the Netherlands. New Babylon represents a critical bridge in connecting Huizinga’s notion of the ludic to the Conceptual art of the 1960s. My chapter reconsiders New Babylon within a Dutch context, rather than confining it to the realm of the Situationist International. Constant’s New Babylon influenced Dutch artists and activists, including the well-known Amsterdam-based anarchist activists Provos, to whose journal Constant contributed several articles. A further reason to focus on Constant is that the reception of New Babylon over the course of fifteen years, from 1959 to the last major exhibition in 1974, demonstrates Dutch audiences’ changing attitudes toward the ludic. The public and critical response to the first exhibition of New Babylon was tentatively positive, becoming overwhelmingly so by the mid-1960s, and yet finally, by 1974, dismissive, with reviewers rejecting the entire notion of Constant’s utopian plan and instead championing his return to painting. Constant’s appropriation of the ludic in New Babylon includes the central paradox of Huizinga’s definition, i.e., that purposeless play is, in fact, utilitarian, serving to cultivate a new civilization based on the embrace of natural creative capacities that would otherwise be stifled through work. This contradiction will be explored in the first chapter and that sets up a pattern that will be revisited in subsequent chapters.

69 The chapter title, “Uprising of the Homo Ludens,” is the title of a book of articles by Constant, published in 1969, after the height of the anarchist group Provo’s activism, with which Constant was involved. He is likely referencing both Provo and his own project New Babylon. Constant, Opstand van de homo ludens: Een Bundel Voordrachten en Artikelen. (Bussum: Paul Brand, 1969).
Chapter Two, “Experiments in the Ludic Exhibition,” addresses the ludic as a mode of curating in which formal characteristics that can be traced to Huizinga’s definition of the ludic are operative. The chapter analyzes four exhibitions held at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, and considers each show’s relationship both to the institution and to the ludic. In 1960, the Situationist International (SI) proposed Die Welt Als Labyrinth. The exhibition was cancelled by the SI, ostensibly due to the museum director’s concerns over fire hazards; I argue that the show was too politically controversial and anti-institutional for the comfort of the director.70 Constant’s planned contribution to Die Welt was a labyrinth that was later realized (albeit in quite different forms) by other artists in two shows at the Stedelijk Museum: the lighthearted Bewogen Beweging, in 1961, and the more sober Dylaby, in 1962. In both group exhibitions, critique was disguised as play, and both shows were well received in terms of attendance and institutional support. The staging of Bewogen Beweging and Dylaby manifested elements of the ludic that were lost by the end of the decade, for example, in the now well-known Op Losse Schroeven. By 1969, any trace of idealism was gone and artists developed a more sophisticated understanding of institutional politics. As I will demonstrate, although Op Losse Schroeven is the most recognized exhibition of ludic art at the Stedelijk Museum, it was in fact the least ludic approach, especially compared to Bewogen Beweging and Dylaby, and—I argue—marked the end of the ludic exhibition as a form. Artists were highly critical of museum director Edy de Wilde’s close connections to galleries and the art market, and while they were able to make ludic art, it was curated in a traditional mode, as autonomous pieces were spaced regularly within the galleries, disengaged from each other and their surroundings. I challenge the widely held view of

70 Historians have proposed several alternative explanations for the show’s cancellation, which I discuss in Chapter Two.
Op Losse Schroeven as the artistic climax of 1960s Amsterdam, and argue that it marks the end of a fruitful period of experimentation at the institutional level. Its social critique was obscured by the playful elements in the shows, thus highlighting another inherent paradox of the ludic—that playfulness presents critique palatably and indirectly, but it may be implicit to the point of entirely failing to resonate as social critique.

Chapter Three, “Robert Jasper Grootveld: The Quintessential Ludic Artist,” discusses a single artist, Robert Jasper Grootveld, who provides a link between Huizinga’s concept of the ludic and the anarchist Provo’s well-known absurdist protest strategies. Unlike the more collaborative exhibitions described in the previous chapter, Grootveld worked alone; his followers, who attended his performances, eventually became the members of Provo. Grootveld wore outrageous costumes and played a deranged jester in performances that he called “séances,” which included laughing ceremonies to scare away the evil spirits of advertising. His ridiculous outfits and stage persona have been dismissed by art historians, and, because of his association with Provo, he has been positioned as an activist rather than as an artist. Yet his self-imposed ludic veneer, however confusing to the critics, allowed for a complex appraisal of post-colonial Dutch consumerist culture. Grootveld can be understood as a complement to Constant and his New Babylon: the artists used different methods to express similar ideas that propose a new and better society. Constant, as an artist regularly exhibiting in museums in major European cities, imagined and promoted a future society. However, he did so within gallery walls, remaining in

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71 As mentioned, Christian Rattemeyer’s Exhibiting the New Art is the foremost example in recent literature that suggests Op Losse Schroeven is the pinnacle of 1960s Dutch exhibition making.

72 Historian Niek Pas credits Grootveld’s role in helping form the image of Provo, but neglects to discuss Grootveld as creating artworks; instead, Grootveld is cited as an activist fellow traveler. Niek Pas, Imaasje! de verbeelding van Provo (1965-1967) (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 2003). Grootveld’s biographer, Eric Duivenvoorden, proposes that Grootveld was an artist, although he does not sustain this argument throughout his book. Eric Duivenvoorden, Magier van een nieuwe tijd. Het leven van Robert Jasper Grootveld (Amsterdam: Arbeiderspers, 2009).
the realm of high art. Grootveld, on the other hand, appropriated spaces for ludic activity throughout Amsterdam, such as his Anti-Smoking Temple and his séances around the *Lieverdje* statue in the Spui Square. Constant and Grootveld nevertheless crossed paths, and Constant described Grootveld’s Temple as the truest manifestation of *New Babylon*. Grootveld also contributed to social change: the preservation of bicycle culture in Amsterdam is due in part to his 1967 *White Bike Plan*, a bicycle-sharing program in which white-painted bicycles would be made available throughout the city. ⁷³ Grootveld used the ludic as a strategy to mask overt critique, in order to speak obliquely about social ills. I argue that Grootveld in fact embodied the homo ludens, employing several layers of masquerade, including a costume and an assumed public persona.

Chapter Four, “Ludic Institutions,” delves into the ludic as genre, arguing for recognition of playful Conceptual art as its own entity. The chapter opens with a discussion of the political context of the Netherlands, focusing on the cultural policies that enabled Ludic Conceptualism to flourish. Artists, museums, galleries, and collectors were well supported through governmental funding and subsidies. This assistance allowed artists freedom to critique the institutions on whose financial support they subsisted. However, they did so indirectly, camouflaging their intentions and thus preserving their financing. I argue that by the late 1960s, ludic artists possessed a sophisticated understanding of the world in which they operated, as shown by their complex, indirect critique of government bureaucracy. Rather than openly attacking issues in the establishment, artists mocked institutions through parody. Two important examples include a fake art school, *The International Institute for the Re-Schooling of Artists* (1967-1968), and a

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⁷³ The plan never took hold in Amsterdam, but a version of it is currently in use in De Hoge Veluwe Park, home to the Kröller-Müller Museum. Only recently was Grootveld properly credited for the *White Bike Plan*; previously it had been considered exclusively a Provo proposal. Mischa Cohen and Stephan Vanfleteren, “Terug naar de toekomst: Interview Luud Schimmelpennik en Daan Roosegaarde,” *Vrij Nederland*, February 28, 2015.
short-lived television program, *Hoepla* (pronounced *hoopla*, 1967). The creators used humor to criticize norms and values that were taken for granted, and in these examples, the ludic functioned in all three modes simultaneously—as form, strategy, and genre.

This dissertation presents a period of art history in the Netherlands that has been addressed only tangentially by Dutch and foreign scholars, paying special attention to play, an aspect of art that has long been neglected by art historians. The Conclusion, “Ludic Conceptualism in the Netherlands and Beyond,” offers an overview of Ludic Conceptualism, identifying the social conditions that enabled the ludic to flourish. It notes that it is a complicated, and complicating, term with regard to the diachronic study of the ludic in the Netherlands, as well as in relation to Conceptual art. The Conclusion revisits the oeuvre of Bas Jan Ader, placing him at the end of the trajectory of Ludic Conceptualism in the Netherlands.

One limitation of this study is the lack of interviews with artists who died in the years preceding or during the course of my research, including Robert Jasper Grootveld (2009) and Ger van Elk (1941–2014). I corresponded with Wim T. Schippers, who, while expressing an interest in being interviewed, was unavailable due to his busy schedule of acting in and writing for the theater. Jan Dibbets continues to have an active career, but was also unavailable for interview.74

Many more artists working in the Netherlands during the 1960s could have been covered in this thesis. In order to narrow the range of artists, works, and exhibitions highlighted in this dissertation, I selected artists that were recognized at the time and who are still held in high

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74 Jan Dibbets revisited his 1970s photographic project, *Color Studies* in 2010, under the title *New Color Studies* (2010 – 2014), which was exhibited at the Stedelijk Museum in 2016. Schippers has written and performs in his play *Hoogwater voorheen Laagwater* (Hide Tide Before Low Tide), which is scheduled to run through 2017. Schippers’s busy schedule has not permitted a meeting with the author.
regard by historians at the time of this writing.\textsuperscript{75} I also made it a point to study artists whose playful practices have been disregarded because they are ludic. Many examples were documented in the catalogue accompanying Wim Beeren’s 1979 exhibition \textit{Actie, werkelijkheid en fictie} (Action, Reality, and Fiction).\textsuperscript{76} Today the A-dynamic Group is less well known than Van Elk and Schippers. I also aspired to correct misinterpretations of ludic art and artists, and to explore examples that have not been addressed in an art historical context (e.g. \textit{Hoepla}).\textsuperscript{77}

This dissertation complements and expands upon social and political histories, especially those by Kennedy and Schuyt and Taverne. Their research laid the groundwork for further investigation into artistic practice, but their ventures are brief and necessarily superficial given the more general historical purpose of their works. My dissertation provides analysis of the art that is missing from Kennedy’s history, and while Schuyt and Taverne devote a chapter to art, it is cursory to the point of being misleading (like many, they fail to identify Robert Jasper Grootveld as an artist). As historians, a discussion of art is not within their purview, but their books demonstrate the need for an art history of the Netherlands in the 1960s. Moreover, I build on these works’ social and political histories: it is my contention that the Dutch post-World War II historical context, especially the transformation to a welfare state amidst growing secularization and modernization, determined Dutch ludic art’s character. My dissertation is thus deeply historicized: rather than viewing art movements as global phenomena, I aim to show the

\textsuperscript{75} For example, in the spring of 2016, the Rijksmuseum acquired one of Grootveld’s few surviving collages, and one of his scrapbooks is currently on long-term loan to that museum.

\textsuperscript{76} I translated nearly all the entries in \textit{Actie, werkelijkheid en fictie} for \textit{In and Out of Amsterdam}. \textit{Actie} was essential to the curator’s exhibition research and publication. The examples included in \textit{In and Out}’s published timeline were drawn from \textit{Actie}. Wim Beeren, \textit{Actie, werkelijkheid en fictie in de kunst van de jaren 60 in Nederland} (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, 1979).

nuances in local manifestations of Conceptual art. The particular mode of Conceptual art in 1960s Netherlands has been lost in a narrative dominated by U.S. artists such as Joseph Kosuth; Dutch artists and institutions interacted and collaborated with international artists and participated in worldwide movements, such as Fluxus, yet this has obscured the uniqueness of work that arose in the Netherlands. While there is value in noting intercontinental exchanges, cooperation, and alliances, there is also much to gain by focusing on one geographical location, demonstrating that particular social, political, and cultural conditions encouraged a ludic art practice. My dissertation’s narrative repositions art of the Netherlands as interrelated, and draws a genealogical line from Constant to Bas Jan Ader.

Scholars have shied away from playful art, likely due to its presumed triviality: play has been considered frivolous, insincere, and devoid of profound import. My dissertation demonstrates the seriousness and value of playful art, and urges further study of ludic works in order to discover more about art that heretofore has been dismissed as insignificant.
Chapter One
The Rise and Fall of *New Babylon*

I. Social, Economic, and Political Context

The enthusiastic reception of Johan Huizinga’s *Homo Ludens* and Constant Nieuwenhuys’s *New Babylon* should be framed within the post-World War II Dutch social, economic, and historical contexts, a period marked by an emphasis on personal freedom. While many historians concur that the Netherlands underwent a dramatic cultural shift in the postwar period, they disagree over precise dates. E. H. Kossmann argues that 1958 marks the end of the Catholic-Socialist coalitions, leading to a “time of experimentation” that concluded with the oil crisis of 1973. Kossmann submits that the economic growth of the 1960s could not be sustained beyond this date, as it was impossible to maintain due to a changing political and social climate. Hans Righart and James Kennedy agree that the Netherlands modernized in the 1960s, but for different reasons: Kennedy cites the overwhelming support of the counterculture by those in power, whereas Righart identifies social change stemming from generational crises of the pre- and post-WWII eras in regard to the economic boom—the prewar generation was poorly managing their newly acquired wealth, while the postwar generation sought a new and oppositional identity. Following World War II, the Netherlands had been deeply impoverished

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3 James Kennedy, *Nieuw Babylon in aanbouw: Nederland in de jaren zestig*, trans. Simone Kennedy-Doornbos (Amsterdam: Boom, 1997); Hans Righart, *De eindeloze jaren zestig: Geschiedenis van een*
due to the dismantling of multinational corporations such as Shell and Unilever, the destruction of cultivated land and infrastructure, and the depletion of natural resources, all while incurring national debt and losing wealth. In their comprehensive study, Dutch Culture in a European Perspective, historians Kees Schuyt and Ed Taverne contend that the Netherlands modernized as a result of the “economic miracle” that began in 1948 with funding from the Marshall Plan and ended with the oil crisis of 1973.  

Whatever the causes of the economic and social upheaval, questions about how to rebuild the nation, rather than assessments of its past failures, became central to Dutch politics and culture. Politicians, historians, and visual artists constructed a cleansed historical account after the war, one in which notions of heroism and victimization were cultivated. The Dutch collaboration in the murder of 102,000 Jews was obscured, even repressed. The Netherlands dealt with the past by suppressing memories of capitulation, collaboration, and persecution in order to advance a narrative of economic recovery and progress to build an idealized, modern Netherlands.

After the war, the Netherlands pursued an economic growth policy with industry at its center. In 1948, the Marshall Plan made available to the Netherlands $821 million USD in donations, $150 million in grants, and $156 million in conditional loans. The Atlantic Charter, a joint statement on policies intended to improve economic and social conditions, signed by

generatieconflict (Amsterdam; Antwerpen: Uitgeverij de Arbeiderspers, 1995). Righart uses the term ‘double generation crisis’.

4 Schuyt and Taverne, Dutch Culture in a European Perspective, 4:32–43.
5 Ibid., 4:35.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid., 4:38.
8 Ibid., 4:64.
President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill in 1941, laid the basis for the future welfare state, which Schuyt and Taverne define as “a system of governmental care which guarantees collective social well-being; the maintenance of a capitalist production system; and the continuity of a democratically based form of government.”9 The welfare state in the Netherlands—born in response to five years’ occupation by a totalitarian regime—served not only socioeconomic objectives, but moral ones as well.10 There was a far-reaching commitment to prevent a reoccurrence of the mass unemployment of the Great Depression and the privation of the war years. Before the war, any government’s attempts at social policy interventions were contentious, while after the war there was near-universal consensus that the Dutch government should play a central role in socioeconomic policy.11

The shift in the relationship between employer and employee is another cultural change that influenced economic development in the Netherlands after World War II. Schuyt and Taverne posit that throughout the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, the Dutch view was that “God approved of the class system,” a notion that began to crumble in 1950—owner and worker no longer viewed each other antagonistically, but rather saw themselves as a unit cooperating for the good of the whole society.12 This changing attitude toward social hierarchy allowed for the development of the welfare state, promoting equal opportunity and social equality in the decades following the war.13 The stance remained popular until 1973, the year Schuyt and Taverne consider that the goals of the welfare state had been achieved and, as a

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9 In the Netherlands, an effort was made to intervene in both economic and social life, whereas in Britain, the focus was social but not economic. Ibid., 4:73; 261.

10 Ibid., 4:263.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid., 4:86.

13 Ibid., 4:277.
consequence, social policies began to change. The reduction of income inequality in the Netherlands virtually eliminated class strife, and welfare programs and social security led to the relaxation of social frameworks in which the resultant cultural climate supported personal freedom and social equality.

One of the most dramatic changes in the Netherlands during the 1960s was rapid secularization. In the Netherlands, social activities, such as education, sports, health care, and entertainment, were linked to religious and ideological institutions that also owned or supported news media. These vertically arranged social entities, or ‘pillars’, fostered sectarianism and inhibited relationships across groups. ‘Depillarization’ describes the dismantling of these links among social activities and the fracturing of the rigid boundaries that separate groups and individuals. Schuyt and Taverne date the onset of depillarization to the early 1960s, when a state of unrest arose in church organizations.

Television broadcasting in the Netherlands was both a reflection of Dutch social pillarization and an instrument of its demise. Pillarized at its outset in 1951, television programming was aligned with religious, ideological, and political institutions, encouraging audiences to focus on belief systems with which they identified personally. In this unique

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14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., 4:276.
16 One measure of secularization was diminished church attendance. Ibid., 4:326–328; Kennedy, *Nieuw Babylon in aanbouw*, 86–90.

17 Schuyt and Taverne cite the broadcasts of “Ard and Keesie,” speed skating competitions which led to the modification of church schedules due to low attendance. Schuyt and Taverne explain that ‘secularization’ refers to individual behavior, whereas ‘depillarization’ refers to the activities of an organization or institution. Schuyt and Taverne, *Dutch Culture in a European Perspective*, 4:325.

18 For example, in the Netherlands, church attendance greatly diminished in the 1960s—especially among Roman Catholics—which the authors contend is a measure of declining religious commitment, and young people were alienated from the church based on varying attitudes towards sexuality and femininity. Akkermans and Stuurman date depillarization earlier, to the 1950s, citing a change in young people’s attitude towards sexuality and femininity. Ibid., 4:326–328.
system, a union of broadcasting companies, the NTF (Netherlands Television Foundation), owned all the facilities and provided airtime to individual broadcasting companies—each with a political, religious, or cultural affiliation—and every group was allotted space and time in this public forum as long as it had sufficient membership to justify their use of the airwaves. The intention of the system was to ensure freedom of expression for all groups regardless of the strength of their financing.\textsuperscript{19} From 1960 to 1964, one channel broadcasted four hours per night, so that religious and political institutions had to alternate dates and timeslots. Viewers who did not turn off their televisions—and there were many who did not—thus were exposed to unfamiliar views of society. When in 1964, a second channel began broadcasting programming that extended to Sunday afternoons, Calvinist and Dutch Reformed churches responded to the popularity of these television programs by canceling or rescheduling their religious services rather than conflicting with program times.\textsuperscript{20} Schuyt and Taverne argue that the greatest depillarizing influence came from pirate commercial programming, which began in 1964 as an unsanctioned outlier to the NTF, as it had no obvious ideological agenda, but simply presented popular culture and initiated a departure from the country’s rigid network system.\textsuperscript{21} Pillarized stations such as the VPRO (Liberal Protestant Radio Broadcasting Corporation)—which had become more liberal than Protestant over time—showcased popular culture and expanded cultural boundaries. One of its programs, \textit{Hoepla} (1967), which I discuss in Chapter Four, featured interviews with musicians such as Eric Clapton and Mick Jagger, and is perhaps best

\textsuperscript{19} The major broadcasting companies in the early 1960s were KRO (Catholic Broadcasting Organization); VARA (Association of Workers’ Radio Amateurs); VPRO (Liberal Protestant Radio Broadcasting); AVRO (General United Radio Broadcasting Organization); and NCRV (Dutch Christian Radio Association).


known as the first channel to broadcast a fully nude woman on television. The new television programming focused on “freedom and happiness,” which Schuyt and Taverne maintain had “enormous” sway with young people. These changing values in entertainment are emblematic of the larger shift in Dutch culture in which a previously pillarized and religious society transformed into a secular one that celebrated personal freedom: ludic television programs blossomed in the 1960s, as did ludic art.

II. Huizinga and Homo Ludens

Huizinga’s Homo Ludens (1938) appealed to postwar Dutch audiences because it touched upon crucial aspects of the cultural shift of the 1950s and ‘60s that was marked by an end to class tensions and increasing value placed on individual liberty and expression. Johan Huizinga studied comparative linguistics as an undergraduate, becoming a specialist in Sanskrit. He completed his PhD in 1897, writing a dissertation on the role of vidushaka (jesters) in Indian theater, and then taught at a high school in Haarlem until 1905. From 1903 to 1905, Huizinga lectured in Indian literature and culture at the University of Amsterdam. Despite his lack of formal education in history, in 1905, at the age of thirty-two, Huizinga was appointed chair of the history department at the University of Groningen. Free from allegiances to traditional

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22 Schuyt and Taverne, Dutch Culture in a European Perspective, 4:336–337.

23 According to the study God in Nederland 1966 – 1996 (God in the Netherlands), in 1966, 35% of the Dutch population was Roman Catholic, 20% Dutch Reformed (Protestant), 8% Calvinist, 4% other religions, and 33% non-denominational. In 1979, the Dutch population was 29% Roman Catholic, 17% Dutch Reformed, 8% Calvinist, 3% other religions, and 43% non-denominational. Ibid., 4:328.


disciplinary boundaries, he read broadly and applied his theories to a variety of fields, including
art history, in which he posited that art could be viewed as a form of play. In 1915, Huizinga left
Groningen to become professor of history at the University of Leiden.\textsuperscript{27} In 1933, the year he was
appointed president of the university, he spoke out against Nazi propaganda after an anti-Semitic
pamphlet was distributed on campus.\textsuperscript{28} In 1942, two years into the German occupation of the
Netherlands, Huizinga and fifty-seven fellow lecturers and professors submitted their
resignations in response to German control of the university.\textsuperscript{29} Four months later, Huizinga was
arrested and held in a detention camp, but through the intercession of his personal and
professional network, was released and sent to live in exile at De Steeg near Arnhem, where he
later became ill and died on February 1, 1945, mere months before the war’s end.\textsuperscript{30}
Huizinga’s major works are colored by his personal experiences during the prewar period and the
occupation, and, as I will discuss later in this chapter, it is telling that \textit{Homo Ludens} was written
during the rise of fascism in Europe.

Huizinga’s scholarship on cultural history began with his best-known book, \textit{The Autumn of the Middle Ages}.\textsuperscript{31} Published in 1919, after the devastation of World War I, it examines the

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\item \textsuperscript{27} Willem Otterspeer, \textit{Reading Huizinga}, trans. Beverley Jackson (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 36.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Huizinga confronted Johann van Leers, who wrote the pamphlet, and denied him entry to Leiden’s campus. Anton van der Lem, \textit{Johan Huizinga: Leven en werk in beelden en documenten} (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 1993), 229.
\item \textsuperscript{29} Twenty-two members of the group who submitted their resignation, including Huizinga, were subsequently dismissed because they were seen as instigators of collective action. Ibid., 269.
\item \textsuperscript{31} Huizinga followed in the tradition of Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt. The book’s title has also been translated as \textit{The Waning of the Middle Ages}. The original Dutch title reads \textit{Herfsttij der Middeleeuwen} and appeared in English in 1924. The subtitle, “A Study of the Forms of Life and Thought in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries in France and the Netherlands,” indicates Huizinga’s broad interest in culture. In \textit{The Autumn}, Huizinga analyzes how play provides an escape from everyday life. Dutch art historian Wessel Krul welcomed the 1996 English translation of the book, which includes Huizinga’s footnotes and references, and uses the more
cultural history of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century France and the Netherlands. Huizinga’s main argument is that the Renaissance had more in common with the Middle Ages than with the Modern period, a break with the traditional view that the Renaissance marked a new era in history. Concomitantly, he argues that the late Middle Ages did not introduce the innovation of the Renaissance, but was the first stage of a period of cultural decline.32 The Autumn of the Middle Ages considers chivalry and love, religious ritual, and the pictorial art of Hubert and Jan van Eyck, arguing that the defining characteristic of Burgundian nobility was taking refuge in dreams.33 Huizinga posits that only in dreams might one escape the reality that reform was not on the horizon, yet denial was no longer possible.34 Huizinga’s search in Autumn for underlying cultural values and artistic expression in the context of everyday life are themes that were to reappear in Homo Ludens.

In the Shadow of Tomorrow, first written as a lecture in 1935, revolves around Huizinga’s critique of National Socialism and communism. The book shares much with The Autumn of the Middle Ages in that in both works Huizinga writes of impending death and devastation as well as the decay of society. In Shadow, he devotes a chapter to comparing the present day to life around 1500. Huizinga describes great social change in the Middle Ages—discovering the structure of the planetary systems, exploiting the power of the printing press, and upheaval in the church—and observes that Europe did not recover until the French Revolution; he implies that a similar

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32 Otterspeer, Reading Huizinga, 45.
34 Ibid.
recovery will occur after the period of upheaval in which he found himself living.\textsuperscript{35} Huizinga widens his scope of scholarship in Shadow to address the nature of culture, and, in particular, art and literature. Dutch historian Willem Otterspeer writes that In the Shadow of Tomorrow can be understood as a “prologue” to Homo Ludens, not only in terms of chronology, but also because it introduces the conditions that make play no longer possible during the rise of fascism.\textsuperscript{36} In Shadow, Huizinga introduces the term ‘puerilism’, the type of adolescent behavior that characterizes the rise of fascism, and in Homo Ludens, he expands upon that term’s definition.\textsuperscript{37} Shadow was immediately popular, selling twenty thousand copies in its first six months; it was translated into nine languages during Huizinga’s lifetime.\textsuperscript{38}

\textit{In the Shadow of Tomorrow} and \textit{Homo Ludens} share several themes, as they both address culture and puerilism, but \textit{Homo Ludens} was the more influential work—translated into twenty languages—and introduced the word ‘ludic’ into the Dutch language, a term that was embraced in the 1960s.\textsuperscript{39} While both books reached domestic and international audiences, \textit{Homo Ludens} resonated especially with Dutch readers in the 1960s. The title \textit{Homo Ludens}, ‘Man the Player’, can be traced to two sources. One is Huizinga’s study of linguistics, as mentioned above.\textsuperscript{40} The other is a retort to Karl Marx’s \textit{homo faber}, ‘Man the Maker’, which posited that man can best be understood within the context of his relationship to production. Huizinga asserts that play, as

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{36} Otterspeer, \textit{Reading Huizinga}, 49.
\item\textsuperscript{37} Huizinga provides an example of puerilism: “renaming old cities after national figures of the day like Gorki or Stalin.” Huizinga, \textit{In the Shadow of Tomorrow}, 172.
\item\textsuperscript{38} Van der Lem, \textit{Johan Huizinga}, 237–238.
\item\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 252–254.
\item\textsuperscript{40} Huizinga devoted an entire chapter to “The Play-Concept as Expressed in Language.”
\end{itemize}
opposed to production, defines man and, moreover, lays the basis for civilization. In *Homo Ludens*, Huizinga expresses his thoughts on Marx:

As a result of this luxation of our intellects, the shameful misconception of Marxism could be put about and even believed, that economic forces and material interests determine the course of the world. This grotesque over-estimation of the economic factor was conditioned by our worship of technological progress, which was itself the fruit of rationalism and utilitarianism after they had killed the mysteries and acquitted man of guilt and sin. But they had forgotten to free him of folly and myopia, and he seemed only fit to mould the world after the pattern of his own banality.\(^{41}\)

“Folly” here is set against rationality. Huizinga argues that the predominance that Marx attributed to economic forces applies only to the industrial societies of Europe. Play, in contrast, pervades all aspects of life and is present in all civilizations, so it is more useful to understand societies by analyzing types of play. As class struggle in the Netherlands diminished greatly after the war with the advent of economic growth during the recovery of the 1950s, there was a social impetus to redefine the collective good and prevent a repetition of such disastrous events as the Great Depression, the rise of fascism, and war. Accordingly, Dutch audiences largely embraced Huizinga’s rejection of Marx’s emphasis on class distinction as an analytic tool.\(^{42}\)

In *Homo Ludens*, Huizinga investigates what he views as primitive culture in order to support his argument that play is the basis for all civilization, but in so doing he conflates the primitive with the child, as he understood both to be innocents: “to be a sound culture-creating force this play-element must be pure. … It must not be a false seeming, a masking of political purposes behind the illusion of genuine play-forms. True play knows no propaganda; its aim is in

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itself, and its familiar spirit is happy inspiration.” In contrast to ‘true’ play, Huizinga describes ‘false’ play, which he views as a sign of an uncivilized society that he terms ‘puerile’, as first described in Shadow. This distinction between kinds of play may be found in different approaches to games: cheaters knowingly break rules, yet continue to play; spoilsports abandon the alternate world created by the game; and players whose “insatiable thirst” for “crude sensationalism” participate in mass demonstrations and parades promoting intolerance and suspicion. Huizinga suggests that false play signifies a blend of adolescence and barbarity rather than an adult channeling of childlike innocence. In one of his rare references to fascism, Huizinga claims that in the previous two or three decades, “it would seem as if the mentality and conduct of the adolescent now reigned supreme over large areas of civilized life which had formerly been the province of responsible adults.” He continues:

According to our definition of play, puerilism is to be distinguished from playfulness. A child playing is not puerile in the pejorative sense we mean here. And if our modern puerilism were genuine play we ought to see civilization returning to the great archaic forms of recreation where ritual, style and dignity are in perfect unison. The spectacle of a society rapidly goose-stepping into helotry is, for some, the dawn of the millennium. We believe them to be in error.

Huizinga asserts that war can be viewed as play because it embodies chance, fate, judgment, and contest. But such was not the case at the time Huizinga was writing, when “the code of honor is flouted, the rules of the game are set aside, international law is broken, and all the ancient associations of war with ritual and religion are gone.” This is Huizinga’s only

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43 For example, in writing about the use of masks in rituals, Huizinga explains that “it carries us back to the world of the savage, the child, and the poet, which is the world of play.” Huizinga, Homo Ludens, 26; 211.

44 Ibid., 205.

45 Ibid., 205.

46 Ibid., 206.

reference to the political conditions surrounding him as he contemplated the decline of
civilization. If war could be play, then the contemporary conflict must be addressed by
distinguishing between war that is play and war that is non-play, between war that is fair and war
that is false.48

_Homo Ludens_, republished in 1949 and 1955, suited the ethos of postwar Dutch society
with its indirect criticism of European fascism in the thirties and forties that refrained from
laying blame on its perpetrators. After the war, the Dutch avoided questions about political and
societal failure and collaboration with the fascists. 102,000 Dutch Jews had perished in the
Holocaust (seventy-five per cent of the prewar Jewish population of the Netherlands, the highest
percentage of any Western European country’s Jewish fatalities).49 Yehudi Lindeman and Hans
de Vries cite the subservience of the Dutch police, mayors, and municipal administrators to the
German civil authority as one element of the catastrophe that beset the Dutch Jews.50 In the
immediate postwar period, the Dutch focused on the nation’s losses as a whole and its economic
recovery rather than examining the social conditions that allowed for the demise of their Jewish
neighbors. One explanation for this indifference toward the loss of the Jewish population is that
Jewish survivors accounted for only one half of one per cent of the Dutch population, and
therefore lacked the political presence to demand examination of Dutch collaboration with the

48 Huizinga writes, “Civilization today is no longer played, and even when it still seems to play it is false
play—I had almost said, it plays false, so that it becomes increasing difficult to tell where play ends and non-play
begins.” Ibid., 206.

49 In contrast to the high percentage of murdered Jews in the Netherlands, twenty-five percent of France’s
Jews perished. Yehudi Lindeman and Hans de Vries, ”‘Therefore Be Courageous, Too’: Jewish Resistance and
Rescue in the Netherlands,” in _Jewish Resistance Against the Nazis_, ed. Patrick Henry (Washington, D.C.: The
Catholic University of America Press, 2014), 185–188.

50 The most common explanations of the catastrophe of Dutch Jews during the war include: civil occupying
forces (the SS not the Wehrmacht), a compliant and organized network of police and municipal government, the flat
Dutch landscape and geography that did not allow for hiding in mountains or escape routes, and an insular Jewish
population governed by the _Joodsche Raad_ (Jewish Council) that promoted compliance. Ibid., 186.
Nazis. There was also a widespread belief that the Dutch Jews had been passive in their response to the existential threat, and a tendency arose to blame the victims.\textsuperscript{51} It was a bitter paradox that Anne Frank became a symbol of national pride in the decades after the war. When George Stevens’s 1959 Hollywood film based on Anne Frank’s diary premiered in the Netherlands, Queen Juliana was in attendance and the event concluded with the singing of the “Wilhelmus,” the Dutch national anthem.\textsuperscript{52} The Dutch were presented as a people who offered refuge, exemplified by Miep Gies, who aided the Franks. But there was no scrutiny of the morality of the Dutch person who likely betrayed the Franks, nor the Dutch police and civil administrators who transported them to the death camps.\textsuperscript{53}

The Eichmann trial (Israel, 1961) marked a shift in the Dutch view of themselves as blameless. In his defense, Adolf Eichmann asserted that he was\textit{just following orders}; Dutch civil servants might have made the same claim.\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Eichmann was niet alleen} (Eichmann Was Not Alone), a report on lectures presented by the “Process Eichmann” committee in Amsterdam in 1961, is testament to this trend toward franker scrutiny of Dutch collaboration in the Holocaust.\textsuperscript{55}

In 1965, Jewish Dutch historian Jacques Presser published \textit{Ondergang} (Downfall), translated into English in 1969 under the title \textit{The Destruction of the Jew}, for which he interviewed hundreds of survivors and challenged the false narrative of Dutch resistance, refuting the claim

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 188–189.


\textsuperscript{53} The Frank family presumably was betrayed by a Dutch citizen, although the identity of that person remains unknown. Ibid.; Lindeman and De Vries, “‘Therefore Be Courageous, Too’: Jewish Resistance and Rescue in the Netherlands,” 218.

\textsuperscript{54} Dewulf, \textit{Spirit of Resistance}, 211.

\textsuperscript{55} Dewulf, \textit{Spirit of Resistance}, 211; J.J. Buskes, \textit{Eichmaan was niet alleen} (Amsterdam: Comité Process Eichmann, 1961).
that the Dutch supported their Jewish citizens.\textsuperscript{56} The book condemns the Dutch government in exile, the Jewish Council in the Netherlands, and the Dutch people.\textsuperscript{57} The shock came when Dutch readers recognized themselves in Presser’s accusations, an indication of the change in their consciousness.\textsuperscript{58}

While \textit{Homo Ludens} and \textit{In the Shadow of Tomorrow} both indirectly address fascism, Huizinga was one of the first Dutch authors to speak out against Nazis Hans Freyer and Carl Schmitt, political theorists who influenced the development of racist and anti-Semitic ideology in Germany. He was most direct in his critique in \textit{Shattered World}, his last book, written while living in exile in De Steeg in 1943.\textsuperscript{59} Huizinga writes, “the painful tragedy is the fact that the triumph of National Socialism was reached by means of democracy.”\textsuperscript{60} Huizinga’s oblique critique of the Nazis in \textit{Homo Ludens} became untenable by the mid-1960s. The book was criticized for only ambiguously referring to fascists as a threat to civilization, failing to identify the barbarians whose identity we instantly recognize.\textsuperscript{61} Huizinga describes, instead, spoilsports

\textsuperscript{56} The most important act of resistance was the “February Strike” of 1941, brought on by German arrests of Dutch Jews, and a particularly violent round up of 425 Jews on February 22 and 23. On February 25, tens of thousands of largely non-Jewish Amsterdam state and municipal employees, factory workers, and others, went on a citywide strike, which was violently repressed and came to an end after one day. Lindeman and De Vries, “‘Therefore Be Courageous, Too’: Jewish Resistance and Rescue in the Netherlands,” 196–197; For more on artists and the resistance, see Jan van Adrichem, “Verzet en aanpassing in de beeldende kunsten en architectuur,” in \textit{Rebel, mijn hart: Kunstenaars 1940-1945}, ed. Max Nord (Zwolle: Waanders, 1995), 8–29.

\textsuperscript{57} Dewulf, \textit{Spirit of Resistance}, 211. Dewulf writes, “After reading Presser’s study no one could continue to pretend that the Dutch had merely been innocent victims during the occupation. To makes things worse, a problematic comment allegedly made by Eichmann on Dutch cooperation during the Holocaust was revealed: ‘The transport of Jews ran so smoothly from the Netherlands that it was a pleasure to see.’ From a nation of heroes the Netherlands had become a nation of culprits.” Ibid., 212.

\textsuperscript{58} Presser’s book created the awareness for further scrutiny of the history of the Netherlands in World War II. Schuyt and Taverne, \textit{Dutch Culture in a European Perspective}, 4:24.

\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Shattered World} did not receive as much attention as \textit{Homo Ludens}, nor was it reprinted after 1945. Van der Lem, \textit{Johan Huizinga}, 235.

\textsuperscript{60} Huizinga cited in Ibid., 275.

\textsuperscript{61} Colie, “Johan Huizinga and the Task of Cultural History,” 618.
who jeopardize play, and consequently society, a massive understatement when describing the murder of millions of people. In 1963, Dutch historian Pieter Geyl attempted to reconcile what he saw as Huizinga’s shortcoming with what he admired as an otherwise excellent work:

His error was connected with his blindness for certain realities of life, for politics, for economics, for social evils… He turned away from the whole of that sphere of care and struggle; and culture, as he understood it, stood apart from it. Homo Ludens, with that excessive and questionable elevation of play, was inspired by that aversion. Only in noble play did Huizinga feel at home. There he could realize his dream of a world in which the struggle would shed its rudeness and be transformed into a rule-governed tournament with which material interest, gain, improvement of living conditions, would have nothing to do.62

Geyl summarizes the main criticisms of Huizinga, including those of Dutch author Menno ter Braak and Marxist historian Jan Romein. Ter Braak, who committed suicide when the Dutch capitulated to the Nazis, had accused Huizinga of acting out of fear for his own safety.63 Romein found that Huizinga “degrades history to the level of a game” when it should be seen as a struggle, and echoes Ter Braak’s allegation that Huizinga sought his personal safety first, turning away from actual struggle and keeping to the comfort of his office.64 Geyl suggests that although Huizinga railed against the “National-Socialist madness,” it was an ineffectual effort on behalf of “beautiful culture.”65

Ernst Gombrich defended Huizinga against these criticisms. At an address given at Groningen University in 1972 in honor of the centenary of Huizinga’s birth, Gombrich explained: “What had sustained him throughout his life, indeed what had prompted him to reject romantic aestheticism in favor of an uncompromising search for truth, was a faith in absolute

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63 Ibid., 250–251.

64 Romein quoted in Ibid., 256.

65 Ibid., 261.
values, the values of Christianity and the values of rationality. What so deeply upset him was the spectacle of reason undermining rationality. In writing Homo Ludens, Huizinga was trying to cope with the horrifying world in which he found himself, i.e., the rise of Nazism and the impending invasion of his country. Although Huizinga’s indirect condemnation seemed weak in the eyes of some historians in the postwar period, it was perhaps for that very indirectness that Homo Ludens appealed to Dutch mass audiences after the war.

Other analyses of Huizinga’s Homo Ludens question the relationship between play and seriousness. In a 1978 article, “History and Play: Johan Huizinga and His Critics,” historian Robert Anchor surveys responses to Huizinga and focuses on the meaning of play and seriousness in Homo Ludens. Huizinga insists that play does not exclude seriousness, yet reiterates that the activities represent distinct categories of human endeavor. This imprecision was a point of contention for sociologist Roger Caillois, who wrote his own theory of play—a response to Huizinga’s Homo Ludens—in 1958. Caillois argues that Huizinga did not differentiate between form and content, and that he expanded play’s definition to such an extent that it includes everything. Caillois refers to church liturgy as an example: “I know that the entire liturgy is something of a game. However, if one considers not merely its forms, but the intimate attitudes of the officiant and of the faithful, I also see that sacrifice and communion are involved,


67 In a more recent response to Homo Ludens, Dutch art historian Sven Lütticken describes Huizinga’s account of the decline of play as pessimistic. Huizinga, however, wrote his book as the Nazis rose to power in the 1930s, so his pessimism may well have reflected his response to the looming war. Van der Lem, Johan Huizinga, 235; Sven Lütticken, “Playtimes,” New Left Review no. 66 (December 2010): 125.

68 “Huizinga is not able to distinguish when play ends and seriousness begins.” Robert Anchor, “History and Play: Johan Huizinga and His Critics,” History and Theory 17, no. 1 (February 1978): 87.

that one is then fully in the sacred, and as far removed from play as is conceivable." Caillois challenges Huizinga’s broad definition and attempts to draw a line between activities ordinarily considered serious, such as liturgy and play. For Caillois, there is a clear distinction between play and seriousness, where one ends and the other begins.

By contrast, I regard *Homo Ludens* as providing a model for ludic art. The book not only contends that play is at the root of civilized society, it does so in ludic fashion by alternating between poles of seriousness and play. I submit that for the artists discussed in this dissertation, play *is* serious—i.e., entirely earnest—and that ludic art, while always serious, is not only serious. I concur with literary theorist Jacques Ehrmann’s faulting of Huizinga for separating play from seriousness: for Huizinga, play can include seriousness, but “seriousness seeks to exclude play.”

Philip Prager, who has written on play in relation to Dada, revises Huizinga’s claim that play is purposeless by asserting that it only *seems* purposeless. This distinction is crucial, as it allows play to be serious, but at the same time risks its being mistaken as insincere, i.e., play can be misconstrued as unserious precisely because it *appears* purposeless. Acknowledging that play always has a purpose demonstrates that play is serious in its aims, if not in its manner, as, for example, in parody, which has as its goal serious critique.

Artists in the Netherlands in the 1960s, particularly Constant, were strongly influenced by *Homo Ludens*, incorporating into their work play as defined by Huizinga, so it is an appropriate starting point for analysis of the works of art in this dissertation that I examine the playful aspects of this art by considering the term ‘ludic’ as Huizinga conceived it, with the modification that ludic art only *appears* purposeless rather than its having no purpose. I will also delve into

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the contradictions implicit in the use of purportedly purposeless art as manifested in works such as *New Babylon.* In addition, I will expand upon Huizinga’s understanding of play by distinguishing how artists incorporated the ludic into their work, whether through form, strategy, or content.

The seriousness of ludic art is most evident when the ludic is used as a strategy. *Homo Ludens*’ oblique admonishment of the fascists is a quintessential example of ludic criticism. On the one hand, *Homo Ludens* is an earnest endeavor arguing for the necessity of freedom in society at a time when fascism was on the rise, while on the other hand, it offers only a concealed critique of fascism by failing to identify the Nazi perpetrators directly. Artists may employ a veneer of meaningless fun in order to provoke thoughtful critique. The ludic provokes rather than concludes, and thereby opens a conversation rather than asserts a position. In this way, it functions similarly to a joke, which philosopher Simon Critchley asserts is a form of play. He writes, “the anti-rite of the joke shows the sheer contingency or arbitrariness of the social rites in which we engage. By producing a consciousness of contingency, humour can change the situation in which we find ourselves, and can even have a critical function with respect to society.”72 The problem with such an open-ended strategy is its vulnerability to misinterpretation. A refusal to take a position may be misunderstood as not holding any position and therefore provoking merely for the sake of provocation.

*Homo Ludens*’ critics find fault with Huizinga’s failure to identify the Holocaust’s perpetrators, but they overlook Huizinga laying blame in *In the Shadow of Tomorrow* and *Shattered World,* works that bookend *Homo Ludens.* A more fruitful line of inquiry may be to ask why the Netherlands’ embraced *Homo Ludens* as a concept, integrating the ludic into Dutch

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culture in the decades after the war and creating a model for artists, including Constant, whose 
*New Babylon* was built on Huizinga’s precept that play is the basis for civilization.

**III. Constant: From Cobra to the Situationist International**

Constant Nieuwenhuys took up Huizinga’s concept of the ludic enthusiastically and 
applied it to his art. Constant is credited with formulating the basis for several artistic 
movements, including Cobra (1948–51) and the short-lived Dutch Experimental Group (1948), 
both of which looked to children and play as sources of inspiration for the regeneration of 
society, in the vein of Huizinga’s thinking. Dutch art historian Willemijn Stokvis locates Cobra’s 
international character and ‘collaborative ethos’ not in art movements, but rather in International 
Socialism, particularly the collective ownership of the means of production.\(^{73}\) The result was an 
insistence on collaboration in art: working in groups on exhibitions, publications, and even 
paintings. An example is the first joint Cobra artwork created by Asger Jorn, Karel Appel, 
Corneille, and Constant, in November of 1949. They began by over-painting an image they did 
not like, a piece owned by ceramicist Erik Nyholm, a friend of Jorn’s. Their project foreshadows 
the technique that Jorn would come to employ, *détournement*—modifying an existing artwork to 
create a new work. Constant, Corneille, and Appel continued their collaboration by covering the 
walls of Nyholm’s Danish farmhouse, floor to ceiling, inside and out, with animal and human-
like figures (figures 1.1).\(^{74}\)

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\(^{73}\) Stokvis does not indicate whether Cobra artists wanted to distinguish themselves from Communism 
associated with Stalin, however many Cobra artists were Marxists. Willemijn Stokvis, *Cobra: Geschiedenis, 
voorspel en betekenis van een beweging in de kunst van na de tweede wereldoorlog*, 3rd ed. (Amsterdam: De Bezige 
Bij, 1985), 153.

\(^{74}\) This conjoint Cobra painting is a ‘modification’, a predecessor to Jorn’s *détournement*, developed during 
his time with SI. Willemijn Stokvis, *Cobra: The Last Avant-garde Movement of the Twentieth Century* (Hampshire, 
United Kingdom and Burlington, VT: Lund Humphries, 2004), 208.
In their orientation toward International Socialism, Cobra described their artistic practice as embodying “dialectical materialism,” as the artists began with the material at hand as their starting point, using that material as a basis for question and answers—a reference to Marx. Constant explains, “As far as we are concerned, the true source of art can only be found in matter. We are painters and for us materialism is, first and foremost, sensual experience: sensual experience of the world and sensual experience of the paint.” An example of this practice may be found in Fauna (1949, figure 1.2), an oil painting that depicts three fantasy figures and a plant-like form. The spontaneous brushwork reveals unbridled movement across the surface of the linen, especially in the central sun. Blue lines are drawn directly over a yellow oval, allowing the colors to just barely mix while, at the same time, the oil paint maintains its integrity by virtue of its characteristic body.

Cobra was typical of the postwar imperative to “start over,” to formulate a new world order, a new society, and a new art. Accordingly, Constant was more interested in experimentation as a creative act than he was in producing finished works. For example, as Stokvis suggests, Constant was consciously pursuing anti-aestheticism in his paintings from 1948 to 1949, with references to children’s drawings, incorporating strong, dark outlines.

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76 Stokvis, *Cobra: The Last Avant-garde Movement of the Twentieth Century*, 194.


78 Nathalie Aubert, “‘Cobra After Cobra’ and the Alba Congress From Revolutionary Avant-Garde to Situationist Experiment,” *Third Text* 20, no. 2 (March 2006): 206.

79 Stokvis, *Cobra: The Last Avant-garde Movement of the Twentieth Century*, 268.
Cobra artists found inspiration also in folk and primitive art and art made by the mentally ill, seeking spontaneity and new pathways outside the Western tradition.  

In 1948, Constant published “Manifesto,” which preceded Cobra’s founding but later came to represent the group’s ideas. He rejected the intellectual interests of such interwar movements as Surrealism, which he viewed as bourgeois and elitist. Constant argued instead for a “people’s art” that would engage, rather than alienate, the viewer. Constant found inspiration in primitive cultures and children—innocent and socially unintegrated beings—as a basis for artistic production: “the child knows no other law than his spontaneous sense of life and has no need other than to express it. The same applies to primitive cultures, and it is this feature that makes them so attractive to people today who must live in a morbid atmosphere of inauthenticity, lies, and infertility.” It is likely that Constant is referring to the recent occupation of his country by the Germans. Constant concludes his manifesto by explaining that in this period of rebuilding society, new rules are being formed that will lead to new modes of creativity. New Babylon was an experiment in imagining a future society, rejecting previous societal frameworks, and establishing a space in which to speculate upon the redirection of human creative capacities for the future. New Babylon was the next logical step in Cobra’s development of the creative capacity of play. Recognizing play as a universal desire stifled by

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80 Stokvis, *Cobra*, 155.


82 Ibid., 7.

83 The fallacy of identifying some cultures as “primitive” while others by implication are “advanced” is more readily apparent now than it was in the mid-twentieth century, but the impulse for both Huizinga (during the war) and Constant (immediately following the war) was to locate an untainted basis for their work that could not in any way be connected to fascism. This does not excuse their ignorance, but it is helpful to be aware of their motivation when searching for examples. Ibid., 9.
society in such arenas as the classroom, Constant sought to reconfigure society through play in order to cultivate every citizen’s potential contribution.

After Cobra disbanded in 1951, Constant’s painting became increasingly abstract, abandoning figuration in favor of symbolic shapes and color that could more readily be translated into design. In 1952, Constant’s painting became schematic. For example, an image of a fist—a symbol of rebellion—in black, red, and white is pared down almost to the point of being unrecognizable (De Rode Vuist, 1952, figure 1.3). In Voor een Spatiaal Colorisme (For a Spatial Colorism), held at the Stedelijk Museum from November 1952 to January 1953, Constant collaborated with architect Aldo van Eyck, reproducing one of his abstract paintings on a large scale to cover one of the gallery’s walls from floor to ceiling in mural fashion (figure 1.4), demonstrating Constant’s transition away from Cobra painting and into the synthesis of painting and architecture. Constant describes his experiment in the essay “Spatial Colorism,” published on the occasion of the exhibition, in which he argues for “the absolute unity of form and color, in other words the purely plastic use of color,” and promotes the collaboration of painters and architects in creating work that is more meaningful than either painting or architecture alone.

Architectural historian Robert McCarter contends that New Babylon was inspired by Van Eyck’s work and ideas, because Van Eyck loaned Constant his notes from architectural school to

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84 Stokvis, Cobra, 180.

85 Van Eyck had long been acquainted with Constant and the Cobra artists: Van Eyck’s apartment was the Cobra artists’ meeting place, and he designed the 1949 Cobra exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum. Robert McCarter, Aldo van Eyck (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015), 33.

guide him toward architectural training. Yet there are several other sources of inspiration for Constant’s shift from Cobra painter to New Babylon architect, including his collaboration with architects other than Van Eyck and the Situationist International (SI). Stokvis cites Constant’s travels in London and Paris in the early 1950s as influencing his burgeoning interest in city design and architecture, while historian Marcel Hummelink traces Constant’s interest in the synthesis of art and architecture to a variety of Dutch sources. For instance, one of Constant’s points of reference for modern architecture was the Van Nelle factory in Rotterdam (1925–1931), designed by Jan Brinkman and L. C. van der Vlugt (figure 1.5). The building is an example of Dutch modernism, specifically that of the Nieuwe Zakelijkheid (New Objectivity) group, which consisted of functionalist architects with ties to Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne (CIAM). Constant visited the Rotterdam factory in July 1953, and left with the understanding that architecture could actively incorporate not only paintings or murals to create atmosphere, but also abstract color, form, and choice of material. That same year, Constant began to accompany Van Eyck to meetings of De 8 in Amsterdam and Opbouw in Rotterdam, two groups of New Objectivity architects and the Dutch branches of CIAM, where synthesis of the arts was a central concern.

In 1953, Jorn asked Constant to revive their Cobra collaboration, but Constant declined because he thought Jorn was clinging to the past. In the winter of 1953-1954, Jorn founded the

87 McCarter, *Aldo van Eyck*, 34.
88 Constant’s interest in functionalism may seem at odds with his utopian design, but he was drawn to CIAM and the Van Nelle factory’s focus on the synthesis of the arts.
International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus, a group opposed to functionalism in architecture, an idea that coincided with Constant’s interests. In 1956, Constant wrote to Jorn suggesting they work together, and Jorn invited him to a conference in Alba, which would focus on “industry and the fine arts.” Jorn and Constant eventually reunited in September 1956 at the Alba Conference, *Primo congresso mondiale degli artisti liberi* (First World Congress of Free Artists), the event that led to the founding of the SI. The conference was organized by the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus, and members of the Lettrist International, led by Neo-Marxist Guy Debord. The conference ended with a resolution in favor of the concept of unitary urbanism, which sought the creation of holistic urban environments. The statement, “The Alba Platform,” authored by the Lettrist International and published in November 1956, not only embraces unitary urbanism, it also rejects traditional limits of art in favor of artistic collaboration and the use of eclectic media, thus recalling Constant’s earlier text, “Spatial Colorism.”

In Alba, in December 1956, Constant made his first maquette, which he would later refer to in his 1966 manuscript *New-Babylon – Skizze zu einer Kultur* as the beginning of his interest in *New Babylon*. Constant encountered the Roma community in Alba, and was shocked to witness their harsh living conditions. His answer was to design a “permanent encampment” for a

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93 Ibid., 227–229.

94 Ultimately, the group of attendees at the Alba Conference spoke out against Le Corbusier’s functionalism and its privileging of work over leisure.


nomadic people, a flexible space to serve mobile groups.\textsuperscript{97} The resulting work, \textit{Design for Gypsy Camp} (1956, figure 1.6), was an adaptable, permanent space designed for a borderless, nationless, transient population. \textit{Design for Gypsy Camp} departs from Constant’s previous three-dimensional pieces in that it disperses its many components on several planes within the dominant spiral disc, a technique that creates the appearance of an architectural model as opposed to a sculpture—for Constant, maquettes were a medium of \textit{New Babylon}’s artistic expression. While \textit{Gypsy Camp} has been cited as the basis of \textit{New Babylon}, in his 1974 exhibition catalogue Constant presented sculptures in Plexiglas and metal from 1954 as related to \textit{New Babylon}, thus connecting his utopian project to his explorations of space in the early 1950s.\textsuperscript{98}

The SI was indebted to Cobra members Jorn and Constant for their intellectual contribution to their journal, and it is interesting to compare the groups’ differences and similarities. Many Cobra members were Marxists, and the majority of Danish Cobra artists were members of the Communist party.\textsuperscript{99} Debord insinuates a Marxist revolution into his 1957 “Report on the Construction of Situations” by beginning his text, “we believe the world must change,” and continuing that the international workers’ movement “depends on the defeat of the exploitative economic infrastructure.”\textsuperscript{100} Marxism is central to both Cobra and the SI, but the groups interpret “dialectical materialism” differently. Cobra artists, such as Constant, focused on the physical material or medium of which a work of art consists, essentially appropriating rather

\textsuperscript{97} Van Schaik, “Psychogeogram: An Artist’s Utopia. Part I,” 44.

\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., 44.

\textsuperscript{99} For example, Egill Jacobsen had been a member of the Communist party since 1933. Aubert, “‘Cobra After Cobra’,” 260.

than applying Marxist terminology, while the SI had a fraught relationship with the construction of art objects. Art historian Claire Bishop identifies the SI’s fundamental paradox: “art is to be renounced, but for the sake of making everyday life as rich and thrilling as art, in order to overcome the crushing mediocrity of alienation.” The group rejected art and simultaneously adhered to the fundamental belief in art’s capacity to create intense connection as an antidote to social isolation. By 1961, all artists in the SI had either been expelled or had resigned or withdrawn. Ultimately, very few works of art were associated with the SI, belying their self-appellation as an artistic avant-garde. This dearth of art produced by active members has prompted a revisionist history that re-attributes, and in my opinion, misattributes works such as *New Babylon* to the SI.

Although Constant’s first maquette, *Design for Gypsy Camp*, was constructed in 1956, he did not begin his serial project *New Babylon* until 1959; it concluded with a 1974 exhibition at the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague. The design employed various media over a period of nearly fifteen years, including maquettes, drawings, photographs, labyrinths, and films. To each exhibition of *New Babylon*, Constant added works, eventually constructing environments and labyrinths so visitors could acquire an experiential suggestion of life in his new world, most

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notably his *Deurenlabyrinth* (Door Labyrinth), constructed for his 1974 exhibition. Constant’s *New Babylon* was a conscious attempt to put into practice Huizinga’s theories in *Homo Ludens*. As critique directed at Le Corbusier’s modular rationalism, *New Babylon* was a city based on ludic principles that would assert creativity as the foundation of society. *New Babylon*, while fundamentally a work of art that incorporated traditional forms such as paintings, prints, and sculptures, can be considered an urban plan as well as a utopian political vision. Citizens would not be obliged to work, but would live as creative beings whose contributions to society would be found in their anti-rational and anti-functional play. *New Babylon* was envisioned to eventually cover the entire earth in a series of sectors that would hover above existing cities (figure 1.7 and figure 1.8). The ground level was designated for labor, which would be automated, and transportation. The endless interior space would not be fixed: every aspect of the environment, from light and sound to the placement of walls, could be adjusted according to one’s mood. Yet the plan was clearly utopian: Constant imagined that every individual would be satisfied, ignoring the inevitable conflicts that would arise when inhabitants’ desires clashed. Nor did he address the practical needs of inhabitants, such as food, shelter, and healthcare. Underlying *New Babylon* is the idea that by filling one’s day with play and leisure, one would live up to one’s creative potential—a classless city without laws or borders whose occupants would embody the spirit of *homo ludens* rather than *homo faber*.

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Constant never referred to his project as a utopia, because he believed that *New Babylon* would be realized. In a lecture at the University of Technology in Deft in 1980, he responded to critics who described *New Babylon* as a utopia: while he understood that *New Babylon* was a “distant prospect” that may only come to fruition after a revolution, he maintained that the project was *not* a utopia because a revolution had already begun with the onset of automation. Instead, he defines utopia as a society that “ignores material conditions, an idealization of reality.” The inconsistency of Constant’s logic succumbs to a paradox inherent in all utopias: in order for *New Babylon* to become utopian, Constant needed to disavow utopia, as intrinsic to a utopia is the steadfast belief on the part of its creator that it will eventually come into being—to renounce that possibility, to take away the imagined and promised ideals, removes that essential utopian element, altering it from an envisioned ideal society to a mere concept.

I argue that Constant’s *New Babylon* is both utopian and grounded in Dutch culture. It supplants the work ethos of *homo faber*, evocative of the post-World War II decline of the class system in the Netherlands, with *homo ludens*. In addition to being rooted in 1950s Dutch society, *New Babylon* offers an oblique critique of it by staging an alternative world inspired by the optimism of the post-war economic boom. In this respect, *New Babylon* is a product of the social, historical, and political climate of the Netherlands from 1959 to 1974, which was marked by hopefulness and an urge to rebuild a new society after the oppression of World War II.

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107 Ibid.

108 The only material condition Constant actually addresses is automation, which he believed to be both revolutionary and achievable.
Babylon conceptualizes an alternate world in response to contemporary conditions, so it is both a ludic proposition functioning as a strategy of critique and a utopian proposition according to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s interpretation of the term ‘utopia’.  

While Constant was at work on New Babylon in post-liberation Netherlands, there was a sense of freedom due to economic prosperity, which provided the momentum for Constant to conceive New Babylon and encouraged the Dutch public to believe that his vision was feasible. The Algemene Ouderdoms Wet (Dutch social security) was created in 1956 under Willem Drees, leader of the Labor Party and Prime Minister from 1948 through 1958. Real income rose from 1950 to 1970, and only began to slow in the 1970s. The optimism was arguably so blinding that Constant could not see the contradictions of his project. Shortly after Huizinga published Homo Ludens, the Netherlands suffered a lack of food and basic resources, especially during the ‘Hunger Winter’ of 1945; yet the memory of this had passed and would have no place in New Babylon. There is no history in New Babylon, only a gesture forward in a time of abundance, and, as a ludic design, a critique of the current social order that promotes a new social and political system liberated from the binary of labor and leisure.

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109 “Utopia does not split off from finite movement: etymologically it stands for absolute deterritorialization but always at the critical point at which it is connected with the present relative milieu, and especially with the force stifled by this milieu…The word utopia therefore designates that conjunction of philosophy, or of the concept, with the present milieu…” Deleuze and Guattari quoted in Kavanaugh, “Situating Situationism: Wandering Around New Babylon with Mille Plateaux,” 259. See also David Pinder, Visions of the City: Utopianism, Power and Politics in Twentieth-Century Urbanism (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005).

110 J.J. Woltjer, Recent verleden: De geschiedenis van Nederland in de twintigste eeuw (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Balans, 1992), 247.

111 The period from 1948 to 1973 has been described as the “Golden Quarter Century,” referencing that other Dutch “Golden Age” that was marked by unprecedented prosperity. “Real income rose in the 1950-1960 period on average 3.7 percent, and in the 1960-1970 period by 3.5 percent.” Schuyt and Taverne, Dutch Culture in a European Perspective, 4:245; 248.

112 During the winter of 1944–1945, the Nazi’s, aware of the impending end of the war, isolated western provinces that included densely populated cities, such as Amsterdam, resulting in scarcity of food and fuel.
Constant applied Huizinga’s formal characteristics of the ludic—masquerade, freedom, and purposelessness—to *New Babylon*. He designed the project in sectors that would lie above preexisting cities and envelope and camouflage them. In this sense, *New Babylon* demonstrates a type of costuming: it is a new city covering an extinct metropolis. Freedom is also fundamental to Constant’s vision of *New Babylon*. His *homo ludens* freely conceptualizes his own world, living in an “unfunctional and fantastic way,” because automation would provide a “free way of living.” Freedom is thus a central characteristic that structures *New Babylon*. The artist conflates freedom with creativity, positing that in a society unburdened by work, citizens would reach their potential, although he does not define what that entails. Constant insists that there will be “no outsiders” in spite of his acknowledgement that there are gradations among those who are more or less creatively inclined and intelligent. He offers a rather distasteful example of the latter, a “mentally handicapped person,” comparing him to an animal, and concluding that all *New Babylon* citizens can contribute to society through their social interactions.

A further inconsistency in *New Babylon* arises in Constant’s valuing the creative capacity of trained artisans over the population at large—although the artist overlooks the need for education in his plans. While he asserts that every citizen’s creative expression is necessary for the development and maintenance of *New Babylon*, the responsibility for realizing Constant’s future vision rests in the hands of a select group of architects and designers. Constant writes that

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116 Ibid.
city planners alone must “establish the material conditions of a free and creative life.”\textsuperscript{117} On the one hand, *homo ludens* constructs *New Babylon*; on the other hand, the city must be built by those trained in arts and design, thereby undermining the premise that all citizens will erect or establish *New Babylon*’s architecture and environment. *New Babylon*’s populace will therefore play all day rather than making something ‘useful’, continuing Huizinga’s problematic formulation of play as purposeless. *New Babylon* is the land of *homo ludens*, who will not be troubled by utilitarian demands: it is “not a utilitarian society,” but rather, “a playful one.”\textsuperscript{118} Constant positions utility and play as mutually exclusive, dismissing the utilitarian aspects of *New Babylon*, and its underlying paradox, that play has a purpose and therefore is useful.

A product of Dutch optimism, *New Babylon* reflects the cultural shift of the 1950s and ‘60s, when many of the ideals of mainstream society coincided with those of the counterculture, as in the case of the anarchist group Provo.\textsuperscript{119} As I will demonstrate in the following chapters, *New Babylon* also shaped the production of ludic art in the Netherlands until the mid-1970s, serving as a model for how the ludic could be used to criticize society indirectly. For example, in 1962, Robert Jasper Grootveld created the “Anti-Smoking Temple”—described by Constant as a small-scale *New Babylon*—a makeshift environment in which Grootveld’s attack on the tobacco industry was deployed as a strategy to indirectly challenge Dutch society’s increasing consumption of all commercial products. Other Conceptual artists in the 1960s integrated ludic aspects into their work, often enlisting parody as a strategy of oblique critique. In an example that I present in Chapter Four, artists criticized art education by forming an alternative art school,

\begin{footnotes}
\item[117] Constant, “Discipline or Invention [1962],” 142.
\item[119] Kennedy explains that the “elites” shared a rhetoric of renewal with their “young, more radical opponents.” Kennedy, *Nieuw Babylon in aanbouw*, 20.
\end{footnotes}
poking fun at trends in contemporary art and the art market. These works constitute a new genre of Conceptual art that I term *Ludic Conceptualism*.

The 1990s saw a revival of attention to Constant’s *New Babylon*, coinciding with a broader interest in politicized art from the 1960s as a result of the rise of socially engaged art. Architectural theorist Mark Wigley’s *Constant’s New Babylon: The Hyper-Architecture of Desire* was published in 1998 to coincide with an exhibition at the Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art in Rotterdam. Wigley’s writing shaped Constant’s reception by audiences outside the Netherlands, who, if they had heard of Constant at all, had known him only as a Cobra painter. He argues that Constant was not an architect, but rather a ‘hyper-architect’, i.e., he possessed the traits of an architect without actually designing architecture; his models were “architectural,” but too refined, according to Wigley, thus rendering them works of art. But Wigley focuses only on the moment of origin of *New Babylon* and the brief period during which Constant was associated with the SI (1957–60), ignoring the history of the project evolving over

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120 Notably, in her reply to the survey *How Has Art Changed?*, Saskia Bos, at the time director of De Appel in Amsterdam, wrote: “In the past 20 years we have seen a growing interest in the 1960s and 1970s, lately more towards artists’ attitudes and détournements than in material results. This is not nostalgia: awareness of the past contributes to imagining a future.” In: “How Has Art Changed?,” *Frieze*, October 2005, http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/how_has_art_changed/; On the history and theory of socially-engaged art, see Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London; New York: Verso, 2012).


122 Constant, who had a long career as a painter, exhibited his art as early as 1940, and continued until his death in 2005; he devoted a relatively short segment of his life to *New Babylon*. See Linda Boersma, “Constant,” trans. Sue Smit, *BOMB* no. 91 (April 01, 2005): 49.

many years—arguably through 1974, when Constant abandoned it and returned to painting.\textsuperscript{124} Wigley goes so far as to label Constant a “Situationist architect,” and neglects the prehistory of \textit{New Babylon} outside SI and Constant’s endeavors with architect Aldo van Eyck and the anarchist group Provo.\textsuperscript{125} He also overlooks the artist’s engagement with Huizinga’s \textit{Homo Ludens}, resulting in a faulty categorization of \textit{New Babylon} solely as an SI project, and positioning Constant outside Dutch influences.

As discussed in the Introduction, important studies by Dutch writers addressed \textit{New Babylon} at the start of the millennium. \textit{Exit Utopia: Architectural Provocations, 1956–76}, resulting from a conference held at the Delft University of Technology, contains a central text on Constant by Martin van Schaik.\textsuperscript{126} \textit{Après Nous La Liberté: Constant en de artistieke avant-garde in de jaren 1946–1960}, a doctoral dissertation about Constant by Marcellinus Hummelink, was published in 2002.\textsuperscript{127} The central argument in \textit{Exit Utopia} is that \textit{New Babylon} is a yardstick by which to judge other utopian projects, such as those created by Yona Friedman, Archigram, and Superstudio.\textsuperscript{128} Van Schaik claims that Wigley depoliticizes \textit{New Babylon} by presenting the project as “evasive, noncommittal and vague.”\textsuperscript{129} Hummelink’s contends that Constant is a key figure of the postwar avant-garde who should be understood in the context of his interactions

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 70–71.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 12.
\textsuperscript{127} Hummelink, “Après Nous La Liberté.”
with the historical avant-garde, his collaborating fellow artists, and postwar Europe. Both Van Schaik and Hummelink question the work’s indebtedness solely to the SI, thereby challenging the view held by Wigley and Simon Sadler.

IV. The Rise of New Babylon

The misattribution of New Babylon as an SI project can be traced to its origins, which were developed while Constant was a member of the SI, and because they intersected with unitary urbanism. While the SI continued through 1972, and New Babylon through 1974, they diverged after 1960. Constant was clearly influenced by the SI in the short period during which he was working with the group, from 1957 to 1960, but his interest in play dates to his Cobra period. Moreover, New Babylon followed a different trajectory after Constant withdrew from the SI. Nevertheless, there are important connections between the SI and the formulation of New Babylon.

Constant first presented New Babylon in a 1959 solo exhibition, Constructions and Maquettes, at the Stedelijk Museum, which he co-organized with Debord. The exhibition comprised his Cobra paintings, mid-1950s sculptures, and New Babylon maquettes. Debord had invented the title New Babylon; Constant’s earlier proposal had been “Dériville.” The

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130 Hummelink, “Après Nous La Liberté,” 376.

131 Sadler, The Situationist City.


133 Constant and Debord also collaborated on “La déclaration d’Amsterdam” (the Amsterdam Declaration), a document authored jointly by Constant and Debord that defined “unitary urbanism.” Constant and Guy Debord, “La déclaration d’Amsterdam,” Internationale Situationniste 2 (December 1958): 31–32. The exhibition Constructies en maquettes [Constructions and Maquettes] was held from May 4–June 8, 1959.

134 Wigley, Constant’s New Babylon, 16.
catalogue was published by the Bibliothèque d’Alexandrie, demonstrating the close relationship between them.135 Debord reported on Constant’s exhibition in an article for Potlatch in July 1959, wherein he explains that Constant’s art “calls for some sort of action, an action on a higher level having to do with the totality of life.”136 Debord’s investment in New Babylon is further evidenced by his commissioning photographs of Constant’s maquettes to illustrate his article “Le sens du dépérissement de l’art” (The Sense of Decay in Art), published in Internationale Situationniste 3 (December 1959) in which he argues that constructed situations, or the creation of new environments, are antithetical to works of art.137

After his 1959 exhibition, Constant formed a “Research Bureau for Unitary Urbanism,” which he hoped would function as a Dutch branch of the SI.138 He looked to the Liga Nieuw Beelden for recruits, and found two architects, Har Oudejans and Ton Alberts, and the artist Armando, who only briefly was associated with the SI in 1959. The “Research Bureau” guest-edited the August 1959 issue of Forum, a Dutch architectural magazine;139 Debord and Constant contributed polemical texts to the issue, while Oudejans and Alberts were responsible for the layout.140 Yet Debord opposed the “Research Bureau” over the “church incident” in which Oudejans and Alberts published their photograph of a model for a church next to Debord’s article on unitary urbanism. This infuriated Debord, as religious architecture was the antithesis of

136 Wigley, Constant’s New Babylon, 15.
137 Ibid., 15–16.
138 Debord was not fully supportive of bringing in outsiders who may not have been in agreement with the ideals of Situationism, according to a letter from Debord to Constant dated February 26, 1959. Van Schaik, “Psychogeogram: An Artist’s Utopia. Part I,” 47.
139 Ibid., 49; The events are also described in great detail in: McGowan, “Revisiting New Babylon: The Making and Unmaking of a Nomadic Myth,” 140–142.
Situationist urbanism.\textsuperscript{141} Debord threatened his Dutch colleagues that if they built the church, they would be ex-communicated from the SI.\textsuperscript{142} The “church incident” became the catalyst for several failed events, including the revival of the bulletin \textit{Potlatch} and the SI exhibition planned at the Stedelijk Museum, consequences that eventually led to Constant resigning from the SI in June 1960 to pursue his search for a new age through practical experimentation in construction.\textsuperscript{143}

After leaving the SI, Constant continued to use terms associated with the group, such as ‘unitary urbanism’, ‘ambiance’, and ‘constructed situation’. For example, he delivered a lecture titled “Unitair Urbanisme” (Unitary Urbanism) at the Stedelijk Museum on December 20, 1960.\textsuperscript{144} By 1962, however, he had given up the SI vocabulary in favor of terms such as ‘freedom’ and ‘creativity’, words more closely associated with Huizinga and the post-World War II Dutch context. Themes of freedom and creativity persisted in Constant’s \textit{New Babylon} through 1974, indicating the importance he placed on these concepts. The change in vocabulary can be seen in a Dutch language article, “New Babylon,” published in the magazine \textit{Randstad}; Constant explains that the activities he envisions for \textit{New Babylon} are currently unlawful, such as

\textsuperscript{141} Wigley, \textit{Constant’s New Babylon}, 32–33.

\textsuperscript{142} Van Schaik, “Psychogeogram: An Artist’s Utopia. Part I,” 50; the architects were eventually expelled from the group, although not until the time of the unrealized SI exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum, proposed for 1960. Oudejans and Alberts ouster was announced in the fourth issue of \textit{Internationale situationniste}, June 1960. McGowan, “Revisiting New Babylon: The Making and Unmaking of a Nomadic Myth,” 141. Pinder claims that the architects were not expelled immediately because the SI needed their help to organize the show. Once the show was cancelled, their assistance was no longer needed. Pinder, \textit{Visions of the City: Utopianism, Power and Politics in Twentieth-Century Urbanism}, 230.

\textsuperscript{143} Van Schaik, “Psychogeogram: An Artist’s Utopia. Part I,” 49–52; Wigley, \textit{Constant’s New Babylon}, 31–33. Pinder writes that Constant left SI because he was angry that Gallizio replaced their exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum. Constant understood Gallizio's art as painterly, individualistic, and so at odds with his own interest in architecture and unitary urbanism. Pinder, \textit{Visions of the City: Utopianism, Power and Politics in Twentieth-Century Urbanism}, 230.

joyriding, which he intends as a means of transportation for “New-Babyloniërs.”\textsuperscript{145} New Babylon is a city in which “freedom can be realized.”\textsuperscript{146} These key terms are even integrally connected in the sentence, “We want to be free, that is, we want to be creative.”\textsuperscript{147} In an English language manuscript, “Discipline or Invention,” sent to students at Pratt Institute in New York, Constant similarly asserts that “freedom can only be realized in creation,” and that architecture will enable “a free way of living.”\textsuperscript{148}

Constant’s first retrospective in the Netherlands was held in 1965 at the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague.\textsuperscript{149} The exhibition, which focused on New Babylon, included a labyrinth designed in collaboration with architect Nic Tummers, and was supplemented by a catalogue that illuminates themes within Constant’s oeuvre, relating his earlier Cobra work to the newest project via their common relationship to play.\textsuperscript{150} The tone of the show and the response to Constant’s utopian proposals were both overwhelmingly positive, an indication of the Dutch public’s receptivity to the ludic.\textsuperscript{151} Perhaps the most telling sign of the acceptance of New Babylon’s proposal is that it was reviewed and praised even in right-wing journals. In 1965,

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\textsuperscript{145} Although Constant does not explicitly indicate that joyriding means stealing cars, it is implicit in his proposal that illegal activity will take place in New Babylon.
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\textsuperscript{146} Constant, “New Babylon,” Randstad, 1962, 130.
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\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., 132.
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\textsuperscript{148} Constant, “Discipline or Invention [1962],” 142.
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\textsuperscript{149} The exhibition was on view from October 1–November 21, 1965. Constant, Constant (The Hague: Haags Gemeentemuseum, 1965). Less comprehensive shows were held in Bochum, Germany in 1961, Rotterdam and Krefeld, Germany in 1964 and Maastricht in 1965.
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\textsuperscript{150} Constant’s first proposal for a labyrinth was for the 1960 St exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum, which never materialized. As I will argue in the next chapter, two major exhibitions at the Stedelijk in the 1960s, Bewogen Beweging and Dylaby, can be seen as attempts to realize Constant’s initial proposal. Constant also built a kinetic labyrinth with Tummers in 1966 at the Experiment Studio Rotterdam.
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\textsuperscript{151} For example, critic Gijs Kording writes in the local Rotterdam newspaper, that New Babylon is not just Constant’s “‘play city’, but rather will turn out in retrospect to be a strong link to our future civilization’s survival.” Gijs Kording, “Constant: visionair ruimte vormer,” October 9, 1965, Constant, 1965, Gemeentemuseum Den Haag.
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*Elseviers Weekblad*, a predominantly right-leaning financial magazine, devoted several pages to the project.\(^{152}\) This response to *New Babylon* was consonant with postwar attitudes that focused on moving forward rather than critically examining the past, even if that meant dismantling the current order: as Kennedy succinctly states, “what is past is over, and that is a good thing.”\(^{153}\)

The exhibition catalogue contains several essay, including one by Constant, “The Dialectic of the Experiment” (1965), which offers a retrospective of the steps leading up to *New Babylon*. In it, he refers to his Cobra period, his experimentation with Aldo van Eyck, his work with Debord, and, finally, the new direction in which he was headed. Constant begins by citing his 1948 “Manifesto,” wherein he states that after the “difficult period”—likely referring to postwar reconstruction—a new art can be created in “this state of unfettered freedom … according to the dialectical method, a new consciousness will follow.”\(^{154}\) As he did in 1948 and again with the title of this essay, Constant holds to a dialectical method.\(^{155}\) He writes that after the postwar period, art had progressed toward a synthesis of the arts, dissolving distinctions among media.\(^{156}\) He offers ‘unitary urbanism’ as the prime example of such a practice, directly referring to

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\(^{152}\) The article begins by explaining that the magazine did not like museums, but that now they would have to soften their stance because of Constant’s exhibition. The authors explain that they are unable to express Constant’s ideas better than the artist himself, so they devote a great deal of space to reprinting lengthy quotes. The editors introduce Constant by writing, “we are convinced his view is the right one. With the modesty that befits us, that we are behind him.” The article concludes with the conviction that Constant’s future, no matter how “revolutionary” it seems, will transpire. “Praetwaeria,” October 16, 1965, Constant, 1965, Gemeentemuseum Den Haag.


\(^{155}\) As I will explain below, Constant was identified by others as a Marxist even when his statements eventually leaned more towards anarchism.

\(^{156}\) By ‘synthesis’, Constant meant the collaboration between artists (painters), architects, and designers striving to achieve an “entire transformation of social life,” as he recalled in his 1952 text, “Spatial Colorism,” the result of his collaboration on the *Spatial Colorism* exhibition (1952) with Van Eyck. Constant, “De dialektiek van het experiment,” n.p.
Debord and the “Amsterdam Declaration” in which they defined the term.\textsuperscript{157} Constant ends his article explaining that all his earlier work, including his collaboration with Debord, brought him to where he was at that moment, i.e., an artist seeking “the transformation of the entirety of social life.”\textsuperscript{158} Thus, Constant addresses his collaboration with Debord in order to move past it with \textit{New Babylon}.

In 1965, Constant’s anarchist sentiments grew more pronounced. He became closely involved with the anarchist group Provo, who supported Constant in October of that year by promoting \textit{New Babylon} in its official group publication, \textit{Provo}.\textsuperscript{159} Provo, which ran from 1965 to 1967, was known for absurdist actions intended to \textit{provoke} responses in a complacent public and those in authority, hence the name ‘Provo’. Scholars have downplayed the relationship between Constant and Provo, altering the reading and politicization of \textit{New Babylon}. The work is socially engaged through its association with the SI, but in the context of the SI, \textit{New Babylon} stands primarily as a piece of art associated with Debord’s theoretical program. However, \textit{New Babylon}’s political content is emphasized when its relationship to Provo is revealed. Wigley offers only a single brief mention of Provo, claiming—inaccurately—that Constant was its mentor.\textsuperscript{160} Media theorist Niek Pas writes that Provo-member and co-founder Roel van Duijn likely became aware of Constant through the Gemeentemuseum exhibition, which Pas describes

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{157} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{158} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{159} In my third chapter, on Robert Jasper Grootveld, who was closely involved with Provo and at times identified as a member, I will discuss the movement in greater detail. My intention here is to address Constant’s involvement with the group by examining his contributions to their journal, \textit{Provo}.
\item \textsuperscript{160} The belief that Constant was a mentor for Provo is entirely false and can be refuted with research into the Dutch-language primary and secondary documents, such as Provo’s journal and Provo-theorist Roel van Duijn’s memoirs, news broadcasts from the 1960s, and documentary films produced after Provo ended. Wigley, \textit{Constant’s New Babylon}, 70; Hilde Heynen, “New Babylon: The Antinomies of Utopia,” \textit{Assemblage} 29 (April 01, 1996): 25–39, doi:10.2307/3171393; Van Schaik and Otakar, \textit{Exit Utopia}.\
\end{itemize}
as the “definitive breakthrough of New Babylon to a large audience.”161 Yet Van Duijn’s interest in Constant was more likely aroused by poet Simon Vinkenoog, since he was an early and vigorous promoter of Constant’s work.162 Vinkenoog had been an editor of Randstad, the magazine that published Constant’s 1962 article, “New Babylon,” which had introduced the illegal activities associated with the utopian city. Vinkenoog was also involved with Provo, contributing to the third issue of their journal, published in September 1965.163 Hugo Brems, in his history of Dutch literature, goes further, suggesting that Constant’s 1962 article in the Randstad inspired the anarchist group Provo.164

The fourth issue of Provo includes an article by Constant, with an introduction by Van Duijn, entitled “New Babylon.” The magazine was published on October 28, 1965, during Constant’s exhibition at the Gemeentemuseum.165 The epigraph is taken from Constant’s 1964 article published in Randstad 8, suggesting that Constant’s anarchists ideas preceded Provo’s; it calls for “the revolt of the homo ludens,” and continues, “the young people of today are forming a movement, driven by an irrepressible tendency. … they provoke, they want to live free from the daily grind, they want to make life a game, by force if necessary.”166 As Van Duijn confirms in his introduction to the fourth issue, Constant’s description of young people as “provocative”


163 Pas, Provo!, 99.

164 Hugo Brems writes that as a free and creative city Constant’s New Babylon influenced Provo, and that Provo’s actions had, in part, an artistic character. Hugo Brems, Altijd weer vogels die nesten beginnen: Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur 1945-2000 (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2006), 257.

165 In Provo 4, Provo listed the number of published copies of their journal: the first issue, Provo 1, which appeared on July 12, 1965, ran to 500 copies; by Provo 4, circulation had increased to 5,000 copies.

166 Constant and Van Duijn, “New Babylon,” 2.
predates the formation of Provo. He describes *New Babylon* as “an anarchist vision of the future,” which is why the first article in that issue is devoted to Constant’s description of his project.\(^{167}\) Constant then presents *New Babylon* in its most anarchist form: the rejection of private property and authority, the claim that automation is the “deathblow” of capitalism, and the expectation that a “provotariat” will replace the proletariat.\(^{168}\) Constant goes on to argue for collective ownership based on a grassroots organization of society, and the city’s freedom from the demands of purposefulness. Because production would be collective and private property would be obsolete, any harm to an individual would be considered a communal offense, resulting in few disputes that would require the intervention of authority. The new society would rely on its citizens’ inherent high morality, which would emerge when given the opportunity to self-govern.\(^{169}\)

In his text for *Provo 4*, Constant returned to the idea of “joyriding” and how it would become the preferred mode of transportation in *New Babylon*. In the context of Provo’s proposal for a collectivized system of mass transportation, *The White Bike Plan*, Constant urges an expansion to include all vehicles. In *Provo 4*, “joyriding” evinces the rejection of private property, whereas in his 1962 *Randstad* article, it refers to the illegal act of stealing a car—although in their visions of future society, Constant and Provo both reject ownership of private property. “Joyriding” takes on another meaning in Constant’s pencil drawing of the same title.

\(^{167}\) Ibid., 3.

\(^{168}\) Ibid., 9.

\(^{169}\) While this is the first time that Constant explicitly describes *New Babylon*’s system of self-government, he had begun to address the consequences of the *homo ludens* revolt in “Rise and Fall of the Avant-Garde” in 1964, and would return to it in a 1966 interview. According to Constant, men would be free when they broke the shackles of production, which would awaken the *homo ludens* in all of us, and young people would develop new and exemplary patterns of behavior. Constant explains that *homo ludens* would no longer acquiesce to calls for patience and subservience to society, but instead would demand individual freedom. Constant, “Opkomst en ondergang van de avant-garde [1964],” in *Opstand van de homo ludens: Een bundel voordrachten en artikelen* (Bussum: Paul Brand, 1969), 47.
(figure 1.9, 1966), which features several fantastic wheeled contraptions that resemble New Babylon’s Plexiglas sectors, moving in various directions through an empty landscape. The drawing recalls bumper cars in an amusement park set apart in their own environment. While there is an element of playfulness in the fanciful vehicles, they evoke no sense of subversion. The purposelessness of play appears to be entirely purposeless, and conforms to a reading of New Babylon as a harmless funfair, undermining Constant’s revolutionary intentions.

In a 1966 interview, Constant identifies what he was reading at the time, choices that demonstrate how his anarchist ideas were developing. Having been immersed in Marx and Engels over the past six or seven years, he remarked that Marx was not a “Marxist,” because his followers “narrowed” his views; according to Constant, Marx was “a great artist and a utopian.” Constant explains that while he had ceased reading novels, he did read War and Peace; he doesn’t say why, but perhaps he was interested in Tolstoy’s role in creating “Christian Anarchism;” his followers, who formed colonies in Russia and abroad, are connected with many reform movements, such as vegetarianism, animal rights, communitarianism, and anarchism. Constant was also making his way through the Marquis de Sade’s complete works; while best identified with erotica, De Sade wrote a great deal about religion and proposed several alternative visions of civilization. A proposal described in Juliette, written in 1794 and

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published in 1797, promotes anarchy as an alternative to organized government and law.\textsuperscript{173} In all his writings, De Sade proclaims that private property is theft.\textsuperscript{174}

Why did Provo support Constant and feature \textit{New Babylon} in its magazine? One explanation may be traced the origin of the term ‘provo’, which Van Duijn had appropriated from sociologist Wouter Buikhuisen. In his January 1965 doctoral dissertation, Buikhuisen coined the term to describe people in their twenties who had too much free time and who lived only in the present rather than working toward a future.\textsuperscript{175} This “youth problem” came to public attention in the context of low crime and poverty rates in the Netherlands in the early 1960s thanks to the welfare state.\textsuperscript{176} Social scientists, who saw vandalism more as an annoyance than a crime, attributed juvenile antisocial conduct to boredom. In \textit{Provo 4}, Constant opines that Buikhuisen’s dissertation is “terrible”: Constant felt that while a bored youth should not sit idly watching television, young people were merely demonstrating a normal reaction to their frustrations with society. He suggests that \textit{society} should be improved, rather than criticizing and attempting to modify young people’s responses to it.\textsuperscript{177} The challenge lay in how to handle the new abundance of free time. Automation, Constant explains, frees up time, so Provo and \textit{New Babylon} proposed a future in which citizens would use their leisure time to play all day. Constant declares that provotariats will populate \textit{New Babylon}—they are the “Creative Leisure Time

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{173} Ibid., 146.
\item \textsuperscript{174} Ibid., 145.
\item \textsuperscript{175} Pas, \textit{Provo!}, 41. W. Buikhuisen, \textit{Achtergronden van nozemgedrag} (Assen: Van Gorcum/Prakke en Prakke, 1965).
\item \textsuperscript{176} Kennedy, \textit{Nieuw Babylon in aanbouw}, 129.
\item \textsuperscript{177} Constant and Van Duijn, “New Babylon,” 8.
\end{itemize}
Defenders of Tomorrow” building anti-functional environments for *homo ludens*. Thus, Constant created a valid position for Provo, legitimizing the group and providing them with a role in *New Babylon*, a well-respected work of art.

Provo’s support of Constant is best demonstrated in Provo 9, in which, in addition to publishing his essay “Nieuw Urbanisme” (New Urbanism), Constant is listed among the thirteen Provo candidates in the Amsterdam City Council elections. The candidates’ identities—first initial, last name, and photograph—were furnished on a single page of the magazine. The final candidate was “C. Nieuwenhuis,” identified by a painted self-portrait in the form of a mug shot (figure 1.10). Constant explains that he is participating only “out of sympathy.”

The City Council elections could be considered the end of Provo: the anarchist group gave up their stance of provoking change with revolutionary tactics and determined that a more feasible plan would be to work within the city government that they had criticized. Provo had arrived at a crossroads: in order to create significant social change, they came to believe they must have seats on the city council. This paradoxical conclusion contradicts their earlier anarchist rejection of centralized government. Provo won a seat on the Amsterdam City Council, thereby establishing themselves as a political party and marking the end of their anarchist revolt.

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178 Constant provides Robert Jasper Grootveld’s Anti-Smoking Temple as an example of an anti-functional space for the homo ludens. Ibid., 6–8.

179 In an absurdist twist, the photos were not always of the candidates themselves.


181 The decision to convert Provo into a political party led to a rift in the group. For example, Provo Rob Stolk stated that a demonstration could accomplish as much as a city council, and described democracy as “semi-fascist.” Richard Kempton, *Provo: Amsterdam’s Anarchist Revolt* (New Autonomy, 2007), 112.

182 Provo held a “ceremonial death” on May 15, 1967 in Amsterdam. Ibid., 113.
The tension between idealism and pragmatism inherent in Provo’s decision to join the City Council also exists in *New Babylon*. This can be seen in Constant’s projection of the time it will take for *New Babylon* to be realized—between fifty and one hundred years—because *New Babylon* cannot exist in the current economic and psychological conditions extant in the Netherlands.\(^{183}\) Constant explains that *New Babylon* will materialize through automation, but his description of this is vague, stating merely that as a result of automation there will be no need for work. His attempts to explain when and how *New Babylon* would come to fruition are remarkably imprecise, evincing a struggle to reconcile a utopian idea with a pragmatic goal. Throughout the fifteen years of *New Babylon*’s life, Constant’s assertion that his utopian project would one day be realized is in itself a paradox.

What drew Constant to Provo? While Constant identified himself as a Marxist, especially during his Cobra period, *New Babylon* presented a conflict with Marxism, because its focus on *homo ludens*, as opposed to *homo faber*. In Provo, Constant found a group that would not limit his ideas through the constraints of Marxism, but rather allowed him to fully develop his interest in freedom, creativity, and purposeless play. Moreover, Constant found a group of activists—and one artist, Robert Jasper Grootveld—who were willing to, or perhaps had already, become *homo ludens*. In the article “Provo een ééndagsvlinder?” (Provo, a Nine Day Wonder), Bert Voorhoeve suggests that Provo’s efforts should be focused on turning Amsterdam into a playground.\(^{184}\) By the time of his 1964 “Rise and Fall of the Avant-Garde,” Constant had rejected the idea of collaborating with what he described as an “artist group”—the SI—and was open to alternatives.

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\(^{183}\) Constant and Van Duijn, “New Babylon,” 3.

Provo offered something that neither Marxism nor the SI and Debord could: a new generation of *homo ludens* who would take action to create the society that Constant conceptualized.

The major difference between Constant and Provo can be understood in light of Provo forming a political party and entering the city council elections. Provo determined that their goals could not be reached by ludic actions alone, choosing to work on a small-scale in order to make practical changes in the environment. This development was antithetical to Constant’s *New Babylon*, which imagines a radical new world.\(^{185}\) While Voorhoeve argues for the same goals as Constant, such as transforming Amsterdam into a playground, he considers Provo’s joining the city council to be a responsibility and “absolutely not free play.”\(^{186}\) Although Provo’s decision to enter local government could not be further from Constant’s automation-revolution, he nonetheless endorsed Provo’s new direction by joining their political party as candidates for office.

Constant was inconsistent, especially when it came to his politics. In another 1966 interview published in the newspaper *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, Constant reiterates this ambiguity: “I could be a communist, maybe an anarchist. I don’t really know.”\(^{187}\) A key example, which demonstrates Constant’s tension between Marxism and anarchism, is an oft-cited 1966 interview with critic Betty van Garrel and architect Rem Koolhaas. Van Garrel and Koolhaas approach Constant with the presumption that he is a Marxist, introducing him as the “Marx-quoting son of a civil servant,” and assuming that Constant would be upset because Provo

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\(^{186}\) Voorhoeve, “Provo een éénagsvlinger?,” 33.

“hijacked” *New Babylon*. But Constant confesses he was “delighted” when Provo suggested that Amsterdam become the first site of *New Babylon*, and submits that with *New Babylon* the state would “whither away.” Constant’s proposal for a ludic revolution leading to a stateless society, without the need for an interim transitional government, reflects the essence of anarchist ideology. As *New Babylon* assumed its most extreme anarchist position, Constant focused on the execution of his project, and thus the ludic character of *New Babylon* dissolved.

V. The Fall of *New Babylon*

Constant’s *New Babylon* exhibition, his second retrospective at the Gemeentemuseum in the Hague, was held from June 15 to September 2, 1974, the year in which *New Babylon* is usually considered to have ended. In 1969, Constant stopped working on maquettes to focus on two-dimensional work, including painting and etching, which he exhibited in 1974. He offered various reasons as to why he had “returned” to painting, but in fact he had never stopped painting. During his stay in Alba, from 1956 to 1957, he was painting, but those works are difficult to reconcile with his demands for the end of “individualist art,” and, consequently have remained largely unaddressed by historians. His oil painting, *Homo Ludens* (figure 1.11, 1964), presents a light, playful crowd of acid green and vivid orange figures against a blank background. The schematic smiles across their faces together with the bright colors lend the image a cheery tone, and the painting’s whimsy is reminiscent of his Cobra period. Constant’s

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189 Ibid., 10–12.


*Homo Ludens* demonstrates that, even at the height of *New Babylon*, painting was a way of explaining ideas in parallel with that project.

Wigley points to May 1968 as a turning point for Constant, because after the riots in Paris, all sense of 1960’s optimism was gone. Yet May 1968 in Paris did not have the same impact in the Netherlands as it did in France. From a Dutch perspective, it is not mere coincidence that *New Babylon* ended within a year of the close of the economic miracle in the Netherlands in 1973. The end of *New Babylon* is closely tied to dramatic changes in Dutch society, such as a reversal of the achievements won by the university democracy movement, the disenchantment of the Dutch public with the welfare state, and emerging police violence. I will discuss each of these in turn.

In distinguishing the Dutch protest culture in the 1960s from those in other Western European countries and the United States, Kennedy correctly identifies that such movements in the Netherlands were more playful than their counterparts in Berlin, Paris, San Francisco, or New York. He explains that dry humor appealed to Dutch modesty, which was essential for consensus politics. While a ludic approach can be found across Europe and the United States, outside of Amsterdam, protests were more “politically loaded” because unlike in France and West Germany, there was no major social, political, or economic crisis in the Netherlands. By contrast, I argue that it was not so much a question of the *presence* of politics, but rather *how* politics were *presented*. In the Netherlands, particularly in Amsterdam, the ludic mode of critique gave the appearance of *purposelessness*, or, at the very least, the appearance of less overtly political campaigns.

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192 Kennedy, *Nieuw Babylon in aanbouw*, 120.

193 Ibid., 120–121.
The student protests in Paris in May 1968, which led to massive demonstrations and strikes amidst a period of increasing violence, had no parallel in the Netherlands. Street protests led by Provo from 1965 to 1967, which I will address in Chapter Three, were the closest equivalent. Students did protest and occupy the main administrative building at the University of Amsterdam, the *Maagdenhuis*, from May 12 to 21 in 1969, inspired by international protest movements, but the Amsterdam occupation was characterized by nonviolence—the eviction of the students who occupied Maagdenhuis has been described by Dutch historians as “civil.” Moreover, the student protests in the Netherlands did lead to administrative and bureaucratic changes: in 1970, the *Wet Universitaire Bestuurshervorming* (the University Management Reform Act) marked the beginning of democratic university management, and “evaluation discussions” replaced traditional exams. By 1973, however, the student movement had ended, and changes resulting from efforts to democratize, such as councils to reform major fields of study, ceased to function, as committees became defunct and students segregated into small groups.

1973 was the year of the oil crisis and marks the end of the “economic miracle” in the Netherlands. In the decades following World War II, the Dutch social system had expanded greatly, such that it led Europe in social expenditures from 1965 to 1975. After 1970, as unemployment rose for the first time since the war, the Netherlands had to manage demands that were not economically feasible. By the second half of the 1970s, the term “Dutch Disease” was

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195 Ibid., 4:303.
196 Ibid.
197 Ibid., 4:43.
198 Ibid., 4:279.
coined to refer to an economy that appeared healthy from the outside—the guilder was strong—yet had to cope with zero-growth, cuts in commercial investments, unemployment, a weakening international trade position, and high labor costs.\textsuperscript{199} Schuyt and Taverne argue that in addition to the transformation of the economic conditions in the Netherlands, there was a shift in consciousness among the Dutch population after 1973; namely, the belief that the objectives of the welfare system had been reached led the Dutch to criticize that very system.\textsuperscript{200} Unlike the policy of tolerance that governed the state’s response to Provo in 1965, police violence emerged in the Netherlands. The Nieuwmarkt neighborhood of Amsterdam, an area that Provo had proposed to turn into a play street in the mid-1960s, was peacefully occupied by squatters in 1968. By the early 1970s, there were plans to tear down buildings and create wide avenues to serve automobile traffic. On March 24, 1975, police attempted to clear the squatters, which led to a street battle involving teargas, paving stones, and Molotov cocktails.\textsuperscript{201}

It seems likely that diminished optimism, both for Constant and by his audiences, was a response to pressures produced by the faltering Dutch economy. Constant’s 1974 exhibition of \textit{New Babylon} was presented as if the project had ended, as is evidenced by the lengthy exhibition catalogue that functions more as a scholarly assessment than as documentation of the show. In the years since the 1965 exhibition, Constant’s main expansion on \textit{New Babylon} had been writing. In a 1969 collection of the artist’s essays titled \textit{Opstand van de homo ludens} (The Revolt

\textsuperscript{199} Ibid., 4:44.

\textsuperscript{200} Ibid., 4:277.

\textsuperscript{201} The large-scale plans were abandoned, although the Nieuwmarkt was redeveloped with a new subway station in 1980. Dutch journalist Geert Mak describes the Nieuwmarkt station as a “monument to the actions that had previously sought to prevent it; a high point in Dutch duplicity.” Geert Mak, \textit{Amsterdam: A Brief Life of the City}, trans. Philipp Blom (London: Vintage Books, 2001), 301–303.
of Homo Ludens), Constant traced his ideas from the early 1950s onwards.\textsuperscript{202} In 1966, he completed the German language manuscript \textit{New-Babylon – Skizze zu einer Kultur} with the help of German Fluxus artist Carlheinz Caspari, which Constant considered his final work about \textit{New Babylon}.\textsuperscript{203} It was never published, although he included extensive excerpts in his 1974 exhibition catalogue.

The 1974 exhibition and catalogue were unlike previous presentations of \textit{New Babylon}, and included extensive wall texts of lengthy quotes.\textsuperscript{204} The exhibition began with a survey of Constant’s Cobra work, and included an entire section at the end devoted to recent paintings dating from 1969 to 1974, the last artworks a viewer would encounter while passing through the exhibition. Thus, Constant framed the show by pre- and post- \textit{New Babylon} paintings, perhaps a conscious effort to move beyond \textit{New Babylon}. Nonetheless, this installation deemphasized the utopian nature of \textit{New Babylon} and the artist’s previously radical politics. In 1999, Constant addressed his focus on painting in two interviews, the first with Wigley in New York, in which he explained that he had ended \textit{New Babylon} because he had lost the optimism with which he had began the project. A few months later, in conversation with Chris Dercon, Constant said that \textit{New Babylon} was complete and he “couldn’t go any further,” so he had returned to painting.\textsuperscript{205} Declaring that his architectural period was over and that he was painting again allowed Constant to end the project and move on.\textsuperscript{206}


\textsuperscript{205} Constant quoted in Van Schaik, “Psychogeogram: An Artist’s Utopia. Part III,” 228.

\textsuperscript{206} Constant may have anticipated a change in the art market. By the late 1970s, Amsterdam art galleries turned, or returned, to painting. Art & Project, for example, stopped exhibiting Conceptual artists such as Jan
When Constant lectured on *New Babylon* in May 1980 at the University of Technology in Delft, he revisited the project; the transcript reveals that he was nostalgic for the ludic, even though the term had become diluted to the point of meaninglessness. He cites the “ludic shopping center” as an example of how the word had been overused. There is bitterness in his tone when he writes that he “seldom encountered any genuine sympathy,” and had to defend himself “against accusations of utopianism or technocracy depending on whether the attack came from the left or the right.”

The life of *New Babylon*, from its first major exhibition in 1959 through the concluding show at the Gemeentemuseum and its comprehensive catalogue in 1974, reflected changes in the Dutch relation to and reception of the ludic. The exhibition marked the end of *New Babylon*, reflecting the changing public and critical attitude toward the ludic in the Netherlands. The initial optimistic reception of *New Babylon* speaks to early 1960s utopianism, while the doubt and rejection of the project in 1974 parallels a move away from naïve idealism.

In his 1980 lecture, Constant referred to his and the SI’s plans for an exhibition that was to be held at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam in 1960. Despite its being unrealized, the proposal had a lasting influence on exhibition making. Artists and curators adopted the ludic as a form and a strategy, most prominently at the Stedelijk Museum. Here too, the paradoxes of the ludic reappeared. Criticism was misconstrued as innocent fun that lacked political import.

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208 Constant asserts that *homo faber* and *homo ludens* are the same person. Ibid., 232–233.

209 Critic Fanny Kelk focused her review of Constant’s 1974 exhibition on the fact that *New Babylon* was only an artwork, rather than an actual city plan that could be realized. Unlike the reviewers on the 1965 exhibition who found some aspects of Constant’s design relevant to society, Kelk explained that *New Babylon* maquettes are merely “suggestive spatial constructions”. Fanny Kelk, “Constant schildert weer,” June 15, 1975, *New Babylon*, 1974, Gemeentemuseum Den Haag.
next chapter, I will demonstrate how the ludic, via Constant’s translation of Huizinga’s *Homo Ludens*, influenced exhibitions and curatorial practices from 1960 to 1969.
Chapter Two

Experiments in the Ludic Exhibition

This chapter examines four exhibitions at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam that are related through their ludic art and exhibition tactics: *Die Welt als Labyrinth* (1960, cancelled before it opened), *Bewogen Beweging* (1961), *Dylaby* (1962), and *Op Losse Schroeven* (1969). These four exhibitions reflect the Stedelijk’s investment in the ludic in the 1960s. Despite never being realized, *Die Welt* provided a basis for experimental exhibition strategies that focused on artistic intervention in the Stedelijk’s galleries; subsequent ludic exhibitions built upon their predecessor’s innovations, and this chapter amounts to a survey of how play manifested in individual works and their presentation. The exhibitions reveal the dynamic relationship between artists and the institution over the course of a decade, and illustrate modes of the ludic both as a form and as a strategy. They also expose the limitations of the ludic: viewers and critics misread it as mere amusement lacking any value as social commentary. I argue that the ludic exhibition is intrinsically paradoxical in that it is capable only of implicit critique through playfulness, thus risking misinterpretation. I also contend that despite the attention that has been accorded *Op Losse Schroeven*, it marks the nadir of a radical period at the Stedelijk, not the pinnacle that other critics have assessed it to represent.¹

The Stedelijk Museum may seem an unlikely venue for artistic and curatorial innovation because during the 1960s museums tended to present history rather than contemporary practices.

¹ In his 2010 book, Christian Rattenmeyer analyzes the relative positions of *Op Losse Schroeven* and *When Attitudes Become Form*, trying to understand how the latter became canonical. His effort to equate the shows is an important step in recognizing the Netherlands as a center for conceptual art, but earlier exhibitions from the 1960s deserve more attention, as they experimented with radical breaks in traditional exhibition-making. Christian Rattenmeyer, ed., *Exhibiting the New Art: “Op Losse Schroeven” and “When Attitudes Become Form” 1969* (Afterall Books, 2010).
However, the Stedelijk was an important exception in this era—along with the Moderna Museet under the directorship of Pontus Hultén. The Stedelijk was founded as the museum of the city of Amsterdam in 1895 with a collection of furniture and antiques. In 1919, the municipality assigned the museum the task of collecting and exhibiting modern and applied art. An interest in presenting art historical overviews developed during David Röell’s directorship (1936–1945), and, in 1938, Röell hired Willem Sandberg, trained as a graphic designer, as his deputy. Sandberg, who became director in 1945 and served until 1962, was best known as an “anti-art historical” director, more invested in organizing exhibitions than in conservation. In a 1959 text, Sandberg explained that he was opposed to the concept of a traditional museum, instead wanting to create a dynamic “home” for contemporary art and an exhibition space without a permanent collection. Sandberg’s anti-art historical stance was particularly striking, in contrast to the attitude of his successor, Edy de Wilde, who directed the museum from 1963 to 1985, the period that includes *Op Losse Schroeven*, and who sought to consolidate the Stedelijk’s permanent collection. In 1963 Sandberg argued that, “if the museum does not only want to reflect what has

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2 The Stedelijk Museum translates as the ‘museum of the city’; several cities in the Netherlands have their own Stedelijk Museums, including Schiedam, Zwolle, and ’s-Hertogengosch. A wealthy citizen, Sophia Lopez Suasso, bequeathed money that helped finance the building the museum now occupies and donated the initial collection. The Stedelijk was privatized in 2006. Rixt Hulshoff Pol and Marie Baarspul, *In the Pocket: The Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 2012), 20.

3 Sandberg designed nearly all the Stedelijk’s printed matter once he was hired in 1938 until he left the museum in 1962.


6 A turn towards the permanent collection may not necessarily be traditional or conventional. For a theoretical discussion addressing the radical potential of museums’ permanent collections, see Claire Bishop, *Radical Museology: Or, What’s ‘Contemporary’ in Museums of Contemporary Art* (London: Koenig Books, 2013).
happened, but also be an active element in the process, [then] experimentation is essential.” He established the Stedelijk’s reputation for supporting innovative art with his high profile exhibitions, and has been credited with transforming the museum “into the most innovative and original modern museum in postwar Europe.”

The exhibitions in this chapter—and their critical and popular reception—reflect the Dutch anxiety over rapid modernization in the 1960s; while artists’ responses to technological advances and industrialization were not limited to the Netherlands, a close examination of the local historical context will demonstrate that the exhibitions at the Stedelijk manifested a particularly Dutch social and cultural ideal of the late 1950s and 1960s, i.e., the pursuit of individual freedom by artists and curators. The Stedelijk was a logical site for such artistic experiments, not least because it had been occupied by the Germans, who controlled the exhibition program for propagandistic purposes, such as mandating two exhibitions in 1943: *Kunstenaar zien der Arbeidsdienst* (Artists’ Views of the Labor Service) and *De Jeugderberg van Morgen* (The Youth of Tomorrow). As the first venue to exhibit Constant’s *New Babylon* (1959), the Stedelijk was a crucial supporter of Constant’s innovative incorporation of play in art, and a center for ludic exhibitions in the 1960s.

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7 Peter sen, *Sandberg, Designer and Director of the Stedelijk*, 25.


9 In 1942, the Stedelijk Museum staged *Stad en land* (Town and Country, 1942), an exhibition that Margreeth Soeting describes as a “smokescreen to help the resistance.” The museum commissioned photographs from artists who were forbidden to work, either because they were Jewish or because they had not registered with the Kultuurkamer (Chamber of Culture), thus providing subsistence income to destitute artists. Soeting surmises that photographic paper and supplies that were given to artists who served in the resistance were used to forge identity papers. Margreeth Soeting, “Museum in Wartime,” in *The Stedelijk Museum and the Second World War*, ed. Gregor Langfeld, Margriet Schavemaker, and Margreeth Soeting (Meppel: Uitgeverij Bas Lubberhuizen and Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 2015), 54–56.
As argued in the Introduction, ludic works of art are characterized by masquerade, freedom, seeming purposelessness, and absurdity. But in order for an exhibition to qualify as ludic, it is not sufficient merely to present ludic work—curatorial decisions and installations must possess the same ludic elements as the art they present. Moreover, the ludic exhibition needs to be coherent in order to convey its intention: individual works and their installation should support a position that can be gleaned from the show as a whole. By manifesting the formal aspects of the ludic, such exhibitions also deploy the strategy of oblique social critique, the object of which was not always immediately apparent. While this strategy possesses the strength of disarming opposition, as argued in my Introduction, it also shares the inherent weakness of the art contained in these exhibitions: ludic shows can be misread as harmless fun, comparable to a fairground. Herein lies one of the paradoxes of play as art (and art as play): disguising critique may make it palatable, but when the disguise becomes too opaque, it runs the risk of misinterpretation or, perhaps worse, of no interpretation. In what follows, I raise the question of whether the ludic was capable only of implicit critique because constraints imposed by venues such as the Stedelijk inhibited more incisive interventions.

While the ludic art addressed in this chapter shares media and approaches, some tactics are more ludic than others. For example, installation art lends itself to playful engagement by the viewer in a way that, say, a photograph or a painting does not. Claire Bishop’s *Installation Art* distinguishes categories of installation art according to the viewer’s experience. Bishop presents four modalities of installation art based on the viewing subject’s involvement: psychoanalytical, phenomenological, mimetic engulfment, and political. The last mode is most closely associated with the viewer’s experience of the ludic exhibition. As an example of a work

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that activates the spectator in a politicized aesthetic practice, Bishop describes Hélio Oiticica’s *Eden* (1969), an installation that presents the viewer with a series of boxes, some filled with sand, some with hay, followed by an area of dry leaves, and a cluster of small cabins, all meant to offer places to relax.¹¹ Like *New Babylon*’s labyrinth and *Dylaby*’s beach, *Eden* had no prescribed way to view it, but instead offered creative spaces to facilitate sensorial play. The ludic exhibitions at the Stedelijk presented immersive installations by which viewers could better understand the museum’s political and cultural ideology.

In the four exhibition discussed below, I demonstrate that a careful balance of desires and forces is necessary for the ludic exhibition to be realized. Confrontational approaches prevent a show from materializing. In *Die Welt*, the artists were too rigid in their demands, unwilling to negotiate or collaborate with the museum; in *Op Losse Schroeven*, the institution’s desires dominated, suppressing the experimental and ludic nature of the work of art. But *Bewogen Beweging* and *Dylaby* represent moments of perfect tension between artists and institution, each of whom moderated their desires and demands just enough for ludic exhibitions to be staged: the artists masked their critique with fun and humor, while the institution relinquished control over the exhibition space. These shows illustrate how the ludic exhibition is the result of negotiation between artists and the institution.

I. *Die Welt als Labyrinth*: Setting the Stage (for Failure)

*Die Welt als Labyrinth* (The World as a Labyrinth) was an exhibition planned by the Situationist International (SI) to open at the Stedelijk on May 30, 1960. *Die Welt* was a model for

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¹¹ The installation, *Eden* was part of Oiticia’s solo exhibition, ‘Whitechapel Experience’ at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London in 1969. The environments “aimed to be creative spaces for demystifying and internally transforming an alienated world.” Ibid., 108.
a new kind of exhibition at the museum. Rather than curators selecting completed works of art to fill the galleries, artists were to be given space in which to create a site-specific intervention.\textsuperscript{12} Despite the fact that the show was cancelled before it opened, the plans laid the groundwork for future ludic exhibitions at the museum with respect to content and exhibition design; \textit{Die Welt} introduced concepts and approaches that would be realized in later exhibitions at the Stedelijk. For example, Constant contributed a labyrinth design intended to disorient the viewer that reappeared in \textit{Bewogen Beweging} and \textit{Dylaby}. The SI’s plan to include audio recordings in order to manipulate the psychological ambience was taken up by artists in \textit{Dylaby}. However, \textit{Die Welt als Labyrinth} was explicitly political and anti-institutional, which led to insurmountable confrontations with the museum director and eventually ensured the exhibition’s demise.

Much of what we know about the history of \textit{Die Welt als Labyrinth} comes from an unsigned editorial of the same title published in the journal \textit{Internationale Situationniste} in June 1960.\textsuperscript{13} Organization of the exhibition began in 1959, after a failed attempt to hold a ten-year anniversary exhibition of Cobra.\textsuperscript{14} Sandberg had invited Giuseppe Gallizio to stage a solo exhibition, but Asger Jorn convinced Sandberg to install a more inclusive SI show instead: Jorn

\textsuperscript{12} Although \textit{Die Welt als Labyrinth} was the first proposed ludic exhibition, it was not the first time artists were given freedom to experiment in the museum. Sandberg allowed Cobra artists complete control of the organization and layout of their November 1949 \textit{International Exhibition of Experimental Art}, but the show did not deviate from conventional staging. Willemijn Stokvis, \textit{Cobra: The Last Avant-garde Movement of the Twentieth Century} (Hampshire, United Kingdom and Burlington, VT: Lund Humphries, 2004), 203.


hoped an SI exhibition would legitimize the group’s claim that it was Cobra’s sole legitimate heir.\footnote{Van Schäik, “Psychogeogram: An Artist’s Utopia. Part I,” 123.}

The exhibition plans consisted of two integrally related components: a labyrinth in the museum and a three-day dérive through the streets of Amsterdam. The SI planned to amplify recorded lectures from audio speakers placed in the galleries, and to post on the gallery walls a changing roster of texts espousing the group’s political beliefs.\footnote{In her study of participatory art, Claire Bishop noted that Die Welt als Labyrinth was SI’s only significant effort to clearly articulate a “constructed situation” for a broader public beyond the group. As noted, neither the exhibition nor the dérive was executed; as a result, the ideas remained on paper. Claire Bishop, Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship (London; New York: Verso, 2012), 87; “Die Welt als Labyrinth,” 5–7.} The “Dutch section” of the SI, which included architects Har Oudejans and Ton Alberts and artist Armando, proposed the construction of a labyrinth (figure 2.1). Debord, Jorn, Maurice Wychaert, and Hans-Peter Zimmer assisted with the labyrinth’s design, which was spearheaded by Constant and based on his earlier designs for New Babylon.\footnote{“Die Welt als Labyrinth,” 6.} According to the editorial describing Die Welt, the proposals for the labyrinth’s path varied from 200 meters to three kilometers in length, with a ceiling height ranging from 1.22 to 5 meters.\footnote{Ibid.} The interior was intended to evoke a variety of environments, from a furnished apartment to an exterior urban space. The plan called for artificial rain, fog, and wind. Heat, light, ambient noises, and dialogue would be introduced at various points in the labyrinth, and a system of doors operable from one side only, so that visitors could not retrace their steps, was designed to disorient the viewer.

These elements evoke Constant’s New Babylon, an interconnected space wherein light, sound, and climate conditions could be changed at will, thereby stimulating anti-rational play,
thus linking his proposal for *Die Welt* to the design of his future city. The labyrinth also foreshadows Constant’s later constructed environments in *New Babylon*. For example, the labyrinth he built with architect Nic Tummers for the 1974 Gemeentemuseum exhibition included similar one-way doors that were intended to confuse museumgoers and prevent them from going back the way they entered. And just as *New Babylon* was utopian, *Die Welt* was impractical, given the technological and financial limitations (the suggestion to simulate weather conditions, for example, speaks to the divide between concept and feasibility).¹⁹ The description of *Die Welt* included no practical information whatever on how to implement the design, so the proposal could never function as an executable scheme.

The planned three-day *dérive* required two groups of three Situationists to find provisional housing in the city, playing the part of nomads, much like the citizens that Constant hoped would populate *New Babylon*.²⁰ Constant was named “director of the *dérive*”; he would maintain contact with the groups, define their routes, and provide instructions for events or happenings at locations throughout the city. In their editorial, the SI explained that they intended to be provocative by demanding a salary of fifty guilders ($155 US dollars in 2016) per day for each participating Situationist during the three-day *dérive*, a request testing Sandberg’s limits.²¹

As in Constant’s *New Babylon*, participants in *Die Welt* were to fill their days with purposeless leisure. The SI articulated the connection between the *New Babylon*-like labyrinth and their planned *dérive*: they identified the labyrinth as a ‘micro-*dérive*’, while the actual drifting through Amsterdam was called an ‘operational *dérive*’. The SI’s editorial explains that

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¹⁹ Constant may have anticipated contemporary installations that simulate weather conditions. For example, the collaborative studio Random International created *Rain Room* (2012), which creates a rainy day within a gallery space.

²⁰ The Situationists suggested sleeping in hotels. “*Die Welt als Labyrinth,*” 7.

²¹ Ibid.
the purpose of the operational dérive was to realize a new game, making explicit the relationship between play, their exhibition, and New Babylon. However, there are important differences between Constant’s labyrinth and the dérive. While the latter challenged the demands of everyday life by moving according to spontaneous whims rather than schedules, it did so by using the existing structure of the city. Constant’s labyrinth, by contrast, was meant to evoke and inspire an entirely new city, a new civilization.

The SI cancelled its exhibition shortly before it was scheduled to open. In their editorial, the SI blamed Sandberg, because he insisted that the fire marshal approve the plans before the show opened, and because he demanded that the group seek outside funding from such sources as the Prince Bernhard Foundation. The SI presumed that the labyrinth would be deemed dangerous by the fire marshal, and accepting supplementary financing, according to the SI, would result in restrictions imposed by third parties who might demand that the group compromise its artistic vision. Jorn met with Sandberg to address these constraints, but felt that Sandberg was unwilling to make accommodations to facilitate the exhibition. The editorial cites Jorn attacking Sandberg, claming that the director “precisely represents cultural reformism:” a compromised embrace of pre-World War II modernism while neglecting to champion

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22 Ibid.
24 According to the SI’s editorial, the exhibition was cancelled in March. However, in a letter from Sandberg to Jorn, the exhibition was called off in May. “Die Welt Als Labyrinth,” 5; Willem Sandberg, “Letter from Sandberg to Asger Jorn,” July 29, 1960, File 5512, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.
contemporary innovation. For the SI, the failed exhibition was due to Sandberg’s “lack of courage” to stand up for the “real” avant-garde.

Sandberg responded to the SI in a letter to Jorn, dated July 29, 1960, in which he explains that Jorn notified him in May 1960 that the exhibition would not take place, and counters that the SI’s version of the facts is “completely false.” Sandberg writes that he had set aside two museum rooms for the SI’s use, but could not accommodate their request for 15,000 guilders to stage the exhibition (about $50,000 USD in 2016); he had suggested sources of additional funding and advised designing a less expensive exhibition. Sandberg asserts that he was supportive of the SI’s experiments, and was prepared to give all he could to the exhibition—which in this case meant gallery space—but he saw their requests as unreasonable and impossible to accommodate.

Art historian and curator Roberto Ohrt, in his 1990 book on the SI, *Phantom Avantgarde*, offers an alternative explanation for the failure of the exhibition plan. Orht refers to a 1981 recorded statement of Sandberg’s memories of Jorn, stored in the Galerie Moderne Silkeborg’s archives. Sandberg recalls that it was Jorn personally, not the SI, who wanted to withdraw: he remembers that Jorn said he did not like the exhibition and wanted nothing to do with it. Ohrt

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28 Sandberg, “Letter from Sandberg to Asger Jorn.”


30 Ibid., 220.
argues that Jorn and Constant were fighting over control of the SI exhibition, and that it was Jorn who eventually convinced Sandberg to cancel the show; he writes that the SI’s editorial reflected Constant’s views rather than Jorn’s, and that Jorn was critical of the SI’s response. Ohrt quotes Sandberg, who indicates that the decision to cancel the show would have pleased Jorn, because the exhibition favored Constant’s ideas and approaches. However, Sandberg explains that the demand to obtain outside funding was really the true point of contention.\(^{31}\)

I submit that *Die Welt als Labyrinth* was never staged because the SI’s critique of the museum and their demand for financial resources was too direct and confrontational, the opposite of a ludic strategy. Sandberg offered two galleries in the country’s most important museum of modern and contemporary art, yet the SI expected to control the space, disregarded pleas to ensure safety, and insisted that unreasonable amounts of funding be provided by the institution. As the SI acknowledged in its editorial, the salaries they demanded were purposely meant to test Sandberg’s limits.\(^{32}\)

In light of the SI’s unreasonable demands and vague proposal, it is possible that the SI may never have intended to realize *Die Welt*, but rather sought to create an exhibition on paper in order to provoke controversy and draw attention to their politics—an effort that failed in the short term, as the SI show was quickly replaced with Gallizio’s machine-made “industrial paintings.”\(^{33}\) *Die Welt* reflects the SI’s ambiguous position with regard to art in a capitalist society, in line with their 1957 “Report on the Construction of Situations and on the Terms of

\(^{31}\) Ibid.; Simon Sadler suggests that *Die Welt* was cancelled due to a shortage of resources and a lack of imagination on the part of the Situationists. Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 1999), 116.

\(^{32}\) “Die Welt als Labyrinth,” 7.

Organization and Action of the International Situationist Tendency”; this text explains their ambivalent relationship to existing “aesthetic structures,” that is, the entities that support art and artists, such as museums and collectors. Debord claims that the SI wanted to construct situations and “discard the relics of the recent past,” such as the art museum, but in order to do so, the SI had to rely on individuals and institutions for the resources they lacked; ergo, they engaged Sandberg and the Stedelijk, even while their aggressive approach left both parties without an exhibition. The SI’s confrontation with Sandberg is emblematic of their conflicted goals: working against and superseding established institutions while at the same time depending on their generosity. Their possibly disingenuous negotiations and obstinate stance produced an intellectual statement rather than a realized manifestation of artistic practice.

II. Bewogen Beweging: The Serious Ludic Exhibition

About a year after the SI show was cancelled, the Stedelijk staged Bewogen Beweging (Moved Movement), an extension of the concepts proposed in Die Welt. Held from March 10 to April 17, 1961, Bewogen Beweging was curated by two museum directors—Sandberg and Pontus Hultén, from the Moderna Museet, Stockholm—together with artists Daniel Spoerri (b. 1930) and Jean Tinguely (1925–1991). Bewogen Beweging featured nearly two hundred works by over seventy artists from the U.S. and Europe, all of whom contributed art that either moved

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36 The exhibition attracted over 50,000 viewers in its short run. Jannet De Goede et al., Jean Tinguely alles beweegt!, ed. Jannet De Goede (Rotterdam: Uitgeverij Thoth Bussum, 2007), 57. After the Stedelijk Museum, Bewogen Beweging traveled to the Moderna Museet under the title Rörelse Konsten (Movement in Art), with additions by Tinguely, including his Ballet des Pauvres (Ballet of the Poor), 1961.
or addressed movement, constituting a survey of Kinetic art. Tinguely was well represented, with twenty-eight works.37 Spoerri, on the other hand, acted solely as a curator without contributing a single piece. The exhibition marks the first time that a major museum recognized Nouveau Réalisme.38 It provided museumgoers with the novel spectacle of rusty wheels, chains, broken typewriters, strollers, and alarm clocks that moved and made noises. *Bewogen Beweging* was a ludic exhibition that served as a forum in which to question an indiscriminate embrace of machines. The artists’ playful critique incorporated illogical movements of mechanical components, demonstrating that play could be a serious response to and a questioning of the rapid industrialization and modernization in the Netherlands after World War II.

*Bewogen Beweging* honored Duchamp’s work as a precursor to Kinetic art, exhibiting a version of the *Bicycle Wheel* (1913) and reproducing an image of it on the cover of the catalogue (figure 2.2). Via telegrams, Duchamp engaged a local youth club in a transatlantic game of chess over the course of the exhibition.39 A gigantic chessboard hanging vertically on a wall of the exhibition, together with scaled chess pieces designed by Man Ray (figure 2.3), dominated the space with an allusion to art and play.40 The vertical orientation of the chessboard assumed the traditional role of a painting hung on a gallery wall, coupling the game with art. A reconstruction

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37 Most of the artists were represented by one to three works, but a few showed more, including Pol Bury (7), Alexander Calder (8), Marcel Duchamp (7), Robert Müller, (6), Bruno Munari, (6), Man Ray (9), Dieter Roth (8), Nicolas Schöffer (7), and Raphael Soto (10). These figures reflect these artists’ association with the avant-garde or Kinetic art, or both.


40 One reviewer described the board as a “Mondrian-esque chessboard-painting in black and white,” as if it was a geometrically abstract painting in the tradition of De Stijl. “Bewegende Kunst in Stedelijk Museum van Amsterdam: Extreme Gemotoriseerde Oud-ijzer Formaties,” *Amerfoortsche Courant*, March 25, 1961, Knipselmap Bewogen Beweging, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.
of Duchamp’s Door, 11 rue Larrey (1927), was also on view, and became a reference for Tinguely, in his role as co-curator, who described Bewogen Beweging as “the door that is always open and always closed,” … “a door that never opens and is never closed.” Duchamp lent historical legitimacy to the exhibition, and the installation of his nonfunctioning door recalls Constant’s plan for one-way doorways in his Die Welt labyrinth.

Many of the works on display incorporated various forms of bicycles, the perfect Netherlandish symbol of play, as it is both a child’s toy and the principle mode of transportation for adults in Amsterdam. Tinguely, presented as Duchamp’s heir, monopolized the exhibition with his humorous elaborate mechanical sculptures. His Cyclograveur (figure 2.4, 1961) is an anti-machine constructed from rusty parts scavenged from bicycles, cars, and baby carriages. The saddle, originally a two-person motorcycle seat installed sideways, was attached to a seat post twice the height of a typical bicycle’s, while the pedals were connected to several gears and four wheels. A large drawing board was positioned about a meter beyond the pedals. When a participant climbed on the bicycle to push the pedals, a fifth wheel, hidden behind the drawing board, rotated its surface via lanky arm-like metal rods, while another rod, positioned in front of the board held a functioning marker or pencil. A bookstand in front of the handlebars allowed the


\[42\] One work based on a bicycle, Robert Müller’s La Veuve du Coureur (1957), received press attention because it was deemed “pornographic.” It was a gray, elongated version of a stationary bicycle, which looks as if the body of a bicycle had merged with a coat rack. Müller had carved a hole in the saddle through which protruded a cream-colored phallic object. The object was rigged to the chain in such a way that it would move up and down through the hole when the apparatus was pedaled. Charges against Sandberg were eventually dropped. When the press asked about the affair, Sandberg quoted from the bible (in German): “Dem Reinen ist alles Rein” (To the pure, all things are pure). The director’s wit echoed the ludic nature of the exhibition. “Geen vervolging om ‘de Weduwe’,” Het Vrije Volk, April 22, 1961, Knipselmap Bewogen Beweging, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.

\[43\] The list of Duchamp’s works on view as listed in the exhibition catalogue are: Replica of the Bicycle Wheel, 1913; Duplicate of the Rotary Glass Plaques (Optique de precision), 1920; Writing with Word Games, 1926; Replica Door: 11 rue Larrey, Paris, 1927; Rotating Half Ball, 1922; 12 Rotoreliefs, 1935; 2 Valises, 1938

\[44\] The work is described in great detail in the review: “Pijltje gooien naar een vast gespikkerd overhemd.”
subject to read while pedaling, distracting the visitor from the creative process of the drawing, leaving the contraption to make artistic ‘decisions’; the participant was needed only to power the machine. Tinguely attached a cymbal and an upside-down metal bucket drum that were struck by mallets in the style of a one-man band to augment the already ridiculous clamor of the rickety machine. The bare bones of a toy car were towed behind Cyclograveur, as if from an appendage—a metaphor of subordination that mocked the ascendancy of the automobile (figure 2.5).

Cyclograveur alludes to Duchamp’s Bicycle Wheel, an assisted readymade that questions the role of the artist in the creative process, and, in Duchampian tradition, removes the functionality of the object by relocating it in the museum for intellectual consideration. Rather than condemning the Dutch embrace of machines, as exemplified by the recent widespread ownership of cars in the Netherlands, Tinguely created an anti-machine, with a thick veneer of fun, in order to mitigate his critique of industrialization. His machine did not produce much, except an ostensible work of art, thus it was ‘seemingly purposeless’. Cyclograveur subverts the Dutch bicycle: it maintains playfulness despite being static and fixed in place.

The art produced by Cyclograveur has little to do with the person operating the machine, thus Cyclograveur questions the authorial role of the artist. Duchamp’s Bicycle Wheel, too, had questioned the artist’s status, but in a different tone: unlike Duchamp’s work, Tinguely’s wonky machine made people laugh (figure 2.6). We usually expect a machine to function and to serve a purpose, but Tinguely’s machines rattled along uselessly until they broke (and they often did). They were also anthropomorphic, transposing physical humor of the human body onto contraptions: “His machines are as messy as people, but they still work miraculously and present

a balanced slapstick,” wrote one reviewer, further observing that “there are a lot of laughs at ‘Bewogen Beweging’, and not laughing at but laughing with the exhibition.”

Cyclograveur’s strength lies in its representation of the characteristics of masquerade, purposelessness and absurdity, and its employment of the ludic strategy of indirect critique.

Nearly all the reviews of Bewogen Beweging mention Tinguely, and frequently Cyclograveur, either in their texts, in accompanying photographs, or both, and many articles led with a description of one of Tinguely’s works. Many reviews were positive, but this media friendliness worked against the artists’ parodic but critical views of machinery, touching on one of the paradoxes of ludic exhibitions: Bewogen’s lighthearted play concealed its critique to the point of being misunderstood as mere amusement rather than as a serious critique of the machine age. In contrast, Die Welt’s aggressive stance was clear, but also sabotaged the realization of the show. In the case of Bewogen Beweging, the abundant public attention and media friendliness served to de-radicalize the exhibition, working against the artists’ aims.

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47 Not all the attention was positive. One article was titled, “The Bicycle Repairman’s Nightmare”: the author admits that he does not understand the art, and then proceeds with a detailed earnest mechanical analysis of Cyclograveur, explaining the flaws in the working of the wheel and chain. This review, while perhaps not enlightening from an art-critical standpoint, shows how the formal qualities of Tinguely’s work attracted the attention of a wide audience. Moreover, it underscores the seriousness with which the Dutch audiences treated their bicycles. “De Nachtmerrie van een fietsenmaker,” Zwolse Courant, March 17, 1961, Knipselmap Bewegen Beweging, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.

48 Bewogen Beweging’s oblique commentary on the modern machine age was naively read as fairground fun. For example, one reviewer referred to art as “carnival equipment.” G. K., “Stedelijk Museum te Amsterdam thans vrolijkste aller keukens,” Trouw, March 11, 1961, Knipselmap Bewogen Beweging, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.
Frank Popper, in his 1975 book *Art: Action and Participation*, examines Tinguely’s *Cyclograveur* as part of a broad study of kinetic art.49 Striving to explain how critique functioned by way of humor in Tinguely’s work, Popper writes:

For Tinguely, we must bear in mind, the machine incarnates human *intelligence*: its beauty as well as its capacity for movement help to explain its attraction for him. Thus we can expect that the metamorphoses of the machine will bring about a corresponding dynamic effect in the spectacle, which reaches the ‘summit of absurdity’ through its own intrinsic logic.50

This transposition of machine and man—in this instance endowing the machine with human properties such as the capacity to create art—brings out the ridiculousness of the machine, and thus allows the viewer to form his or her own judgment, rather than directly condemning the blind embrace of technology in daily life. The absurdity of a machine costumed in human characteristics addressed the Dutch anxiety about rapid industrialization by poking fun at the “promises” of the machine age. This operation evokes philosopher Henri Bergson’s study *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*.51 Bergson describes the comical as “something mechanical encrusted on the living”—his example is a man tripping and falling. The humor in such an act is found in the person’s “lack of elasticity”: the unfortunate man “continued like a machine in the same straight line” demonstrating a “mechanical inelasticity.”52 For Bergson, humor is located in the man’s embodiment of machine-like characteristics, being unable to catch his balance by spontaneously reacting to changes in the space that surrounds him, just as early machines could not adjust immediately to changes in the environment. But while

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50 Ibid.


52 Ibid., 5.
Cyclograveur expressed an anxiety about machines, its humor was the inverse of Bergson’s principle. Here, the comedic is not embodied by way of a human taking on mechanical characteristics; Tinguely’s machine is anthropomorphic. As Popper notes, we see it assuming peculiarly human traits, such as intelligence and creativity. This conflation of man and machine manifests the ludic characteristic of masquerade, and evidently struck a chord with Dutch audiences in the 1960s.

Art historian Pamela Lee examines Tinguely’s Meta-matics or Drawing-machines, of which Cyclograveur is one example, in her 2006 study of postwar art, Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s. Lee views Tinguely’s Meta-matics as absurd, with a focus on irrational movement: “Tinguely’s apparent indebtedness to the prewar iconography of the machine centered less on its promise as a bearer of standardization than in its capacity to invert such ideals.” The curators of Bewogen Beweging were well aware of the social-critical import of the exhibition and Tinguely’s work, warning readers of the catalogue that, “if you consider this art to be harmless, then you misunderstand it. It is a veiled attack on the established order. These machines are anti-machines rather than machines.”

Although the public may have paid more attention to the spectacle in Cyclograveur and Bewogen Beweging, a more sophisticated and informed view also emerged. A pointed review in the leftist newspaper Volkskrant focuses on the idea of the anti-machine and understood the

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53 Cyclograveur belongs to the Museum Tinguely’s collection in Basel. It is presented as a Meta-matic (a drawing machine), however the title indicates that the machine would create prints as opposed to drawings, thus not deserving the title ‘meta-matic’.


55 Ibid., 113.

exhibition to be “an attack on the technocracy of our time.” As the anonymous *Volkskrant* reviewer argues, exhibiting non-functional machines, or anti-machines, constitutes a critique of postwar functionalism and suggests an alternative to the social norms of the previous decade. The review continues by singling out the lightheartedness of *Bewogen Beweging*’s critique: “The grotesque and utterly useless, but diligently moving constructions, which you bump into here, are trying to be a witty provocation—certainly a challenge to the mechanization of all that is human.” The majority of critics, however, failed to pick up on the political import of the exhibition, treating it as innocuous carnivalesque fun.

As with the proposed SI exhibition a year earlier, Sandberg assumed a minor role, freeing up gallery space while permitting the artists to make conceptual and design decisions. While *Bewogen Beweging* largely consisted of two- and three-dimensional work, Spoerri and Tinguely staged the show as if they were creating installations in which chronological coherence was sacrificed for thematic consistency. Calder’s mobiles and stabiles filled an entire space and interacted as if the individual pieces were parts of a single work, as one can see in Ed van der Elsken’s photograph of a child surrounded by Calder’s art (figure 2.7). Tinguely lit his work from below, creating large shadows on the wall, as can been seen in a photograph accompanying a review of the show (figure 2.8), thus saturating the gallery with his sculptures. Although not

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58 Ibid.


61 Children were often employed as a trope, emphasizing the playful nature of the show and recalling Huizinga’s *Homo Ludens*.
every space was utilized in this manner, overall, the show gave the impression of a coherently orchestrated environment.

The advertising poster and the catalogue were also innovative aspects of the exhibition. The poster was designed by German artist Dieter Roth (1930–1998), whose work was on view.\textsuperscript{62} It is large and black, seventy by one hundred centimeters, printed with white dots. Large holes perforate nearly the entire surface (figures 2.9, 2.10), allowing viewers to see what lies beneath the poster.\textsuperscript{63} Just as the works in the exhibition encouraged the viewer to interact with the show (with Tinguely’s Meta-matics as the prime example), this poster invited playful interaction with the environment in which it was located, allowing the surface beneath to peep through.

The exhibition catalogue, too, was inventive and offbeat in both form and content.\textsuperscript{64} Described as “baguette-shaped”—about eighty centimeters long by eleven centimeters wide—it presented an experimental format at odds with traditional book design (figure 2.11).\textsuperscript{65} It included so many typos, whether by accident or design, that one critic described the catalogue as “illegible.”\textsuperscript{66} It opened with a series of quotes, the first from philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein: “Imagine a people in whose language there is no such form of sentence as ‘the book is in the

\textsuperscript{62} Swiss artist Dieter Roth (referred to as Rot in the exhibition catalogue) exhibited several of his books, which often included a process similar to his cutout design for Bewegen Beweging’s poster. That is, Roth would excise holes in his books, allowing for the pages to interact. Often, the codex was missing so that the pages could be easily rearranged, again, increasing the level of interaction and movement in the completed work.

\textsuperscript{63} The poster advertising Bewegen Beweging appeared pasted over a Dutch coffee advertisement, although it is unlikely that this was intentional. Editors of the exhibition catalogue, In & Out of Amsterdam, suggest that the pasting of Bewegen Beweging’s poster over one of Sandberg’s design was intentional, as Sandberg was known for his typography, in addition to his leadership of the museum. Phillip van den Bosche, Cathleen Chaffee, and Christophe Cherix, In & Out of Amsterdam (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2009), 150.

\textsuperscript{64} A note printed in the catalogue explains that Hubert Johansson insisted on the odd format, and that he “could not be persuaded to stray from his extravagant ideas.” Roodenburg-Schadd credits Hultén with the catalogue’s design. K. G. Hultén, Bewegen Beweging, 32; Roodenburg-Schadd, Expressie en ordening, 661.

\textsuperscript{65} Kijkelboom, “‘Bewegen Beweging’: Werk van gedreven grapjassen.”

\textsuperscript{66} “De nachtmerrie van een fietsenmaker.”
drawer’ or ‘the water is in the glass’, but wherever we should use these forms they say: ‘the book can be taken out of the drawer’, ‘the water can be taken out of the glass’. The lines suggest the possibility, or necessity, of movement in otherwise static situations, and set the stage for both movement and play. Political scientist Michael Temelini explains the benefits of Wittgenstein’s approach as one that “opens a space for, or can be complemented with, critically reflexive and transformative ways of thought and action.” The ludic’s indirect approach creates a similar space for critical thought; Wittgenstein’s writing was thus an apt choice to introduce Bewogen Beweging’s strategy of oblique critique.

In order to contextualize kinetic art historically and conceptually, Bewogen Beweging’s catalogue contains several pages of citations from philosophers and scientists (such as Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz and Jean Paul Sartre) to artists (such as Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Piet Mondrian, Alexander Calder, and John Cage), all of whom reference movement either directly or tangentially. The implication is that Kinetic art is not merely concerned with movement, but can be applied more broadly to concepts of time and dynamism. The unsigned essay aims to reveal the politically motivated roots of Kinetic art by focusing on the relationship between kinetic art and the Russian avant-garde, arguing that Vladimir Tatlin’s Model for the Monument to the Third International (1920) was the first work of this kind. While the essay highlights

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67 Hultén, Bewogen Beweging, 2.

68 Wittgenstein was a major influence on Conceptual artists such as Joseph Kosuth and Art & Language. In that sense, Bewegen Beweging can also be understood as anticipating the Stedelijk Museum’s quintessential Conceptual art exhibition, Op Losse Schroeven.

69 Michael Temelini, Wittgenstein and the Study of Politics (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 5.

70 A text by artist Hans Richter helped situate Kineticism in a larger conceptual framework: “I discovered that what I aimed at was really not movement-as-such, but the sensation to express Time and Time-Intervals, Becoming and Declining (of which movement is only one means of expression).” Hultén, Bewogen Beweging, 4.

71 It is likely that Hultén authored the main essay, although he is only credited with “compiling” the catalogue and Hugo Govers named as the Dutch translator. Tatlin’s Model for the Monument to the Third International (1920) was the first work of this kind.
several artists, such as László Moholy-Nagy, Calder, and Bruno Munari, devoting a paragraph to each, it concludes with a full page about Tinguely’s oeuvre, suggesting that his works represent the culmination of an avant-garde project that had begun with Russian Constructivism. The catalogue, however, does not quote Huizinga, although Huizinga’s thoughts on the ludic, including its transformative power, would have been well known to *Bewogen Beweging’s* audience.\(^\text{72}\) For example, a review in *Arnhems Dagblad* uses the term *homo ludens* to describe the museumgoer, and further indicates Huizinga’s influence by concluding, “there is no play without seriousness.”\(^\text{73}\) In another *Bewogen Beweging* review published in *Museumjournaal*, Marius van Beek focuses on *Homo Ludens*, asserting “it’s a shame that Huizinga died too early, otherwise he would have added this to his *Homo Ludens*.”\(^\text{74}\)

Play as simultaneously earnest and amusing was present in a variety of modes: in Wittgenstein’s “language-games” quoted in the catalogue, in the motif of a bicycle, and in an actual game of chess played by Duchamp over the course of the exhibition (again, a game that can be both fun and a serious endeavor evoking international feuds, such as Bobby Fischer’s world championship tournaments against Soviet players). Huizinga insists that the ludic is serious, and *Bewogen Beweging* supported his assertion.\(^\text{75}\)


\(^{73}\) V. d. W, “Bewogen Beweging.”

\(^{74}\) Marius van Beek, “Triangel in de jungle der machines,” *Museumjournaal* 6, no. 9/10 (May 1961): 205.

\(^{75}\) Huizinga’s play and seriousness binary appeared in reviews of the show, for example one anonymous reviewer from *De Gooi- en Eemlander* writes, “Don’t think that Tinguely is a comedian—he and his 49 colleagues intend to be serious artists … Seriousness is also Mr. Sandberg’s intention when exhibiting this not-yet widely accepted art form and being the first museum director in the world to let these moving designs be on view in his building.” “Schilderende fiets’ maakt 40.000 doeken per jaar,” *De Gooi- en Eemlander*, March 8, 1961, Knipselmap Bewogen Beweging, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.
Bewegen Beweging’s preoccupation with freedom was explicit in the catalogue. Its artists are presented as being at the forefront of a new society based on anarchist freedom rather than on socialist politics:

The art in this exhibition is on its way to becoming active and dynamic. It leaves behind old forms in a static world that was seeking stability in society. …[The artists] are outside all laws and are not bound to one system. They represent a freedom that would not exist without them. …This art is an example of pure anarchy in its most beautiful form.\textsuperscript{76}

The organizers explain that the artists represent freedom emblematic of a post-World War II Dutch cultural climate that values personal liberty, thus reflecting the desire to create and support an implicitly anarchist society free from the fascism of the war period.

While Bewegen Beweging read as a series of installations, repurposing individual pieces to create coherent environments is the key ludic element in this exhibition’s design. One of Tinguely’s untitled works, for example, can be seen as representing the ludic exhibition as a whole, highlighting masquerade and purposelessness. Consisting of scaffolding that obscured the museum’s façade—a chaotic mash-up of poles and bicycle parts over seven meters high and two meters wide and deep, whose movements one eyewitness described as shifting and changing in unexpected ways—its bulk alone attracted the attention of passersby (figure 2.12).\textsuperscript{77} While scaffolding usually signals repairs or improvement, in this case it signified dysfunction, as it did nothing more than obstruct the entrance to the museum.

Bewegen Beweging also deployed the ludic as a critical strategy, although not yet fully developed in a coherent manner. The show offset the artists’ critique of rapid industrialization with the desire to stage a well-attended exhibition; this delicate balance could occur because the

\textsuperscript{76} Hultén, Bewegen Beweging, 38.

\textsuperscript{77} The work is described in the review “Bewegende kunst in Stedelijk Museum van Amsterdam: Extreme gemotoriseerde oud-ijzer formaties.”
artists masked their critique with carnivalesque fun, while Sandberg relinquished administrative constraints that allowed the artists to experiment. Yet the seriousness of the artists’ critique was largely unrecognizable because the exhibition was disjointed: it was simultaneously a history of Kinetic art, a presentation of contemporary Kineticism, and an introduction to Nouveau Réalisme in the Netherlands. Some works, such as *Cyclograveur*, were created specifically for the show, while others, like Duchamp’s contributions, were more than forty years old. Was it historical or contemporary? Did it make an argument about Dutch art history or was it announcing a new French art movement? The expansive list of artists and the large number of works on display contributed to the lack of focus, precluding a coherent political or social statement. *Bewogen Beweging* nevertheless laid the groundwork for *Dylaby*’s more concise and legible statement.

III. *Dylaby*: The Dark Side of Play

*Dylaby* (the title is a portmanteau of ‘Dynamic Labyrinth’) can be seen as a belated manifestation of Constant’s original plans for *Die Welt*. The exhibition was held at the Stedelijk, from August 30 to September 30, 1962, about a year-and-a-half after *Bewogen Beweging* closed.78 Sandberg had collaborated with Spoerri and Tinguely on *Bewogen Beweging*; for this show the team added curator Ad Petersen (b. 1931).79 In a 1991 article recollecting his experience of organizing *Dylaby*, Petersen recounts that Sandberg reached out to Tinguely in 1960, while *Bewogen Beweging* was on view in Stockholm, in order to realize his “dream” of staging a “labyrinthine construction, with elements from the amusement park and theater,

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78 During the period between *Bewogen Beweging* and *Dylaby*, the Stedelijk Museum organized the first major exhibition of the Nul group, *Nul*, held from March 9 to 25, 1962. Nul was a movement of the neo avant-garde in the Netherlands, which lasted about two years. Bossche, Chaffee, and Cherix, *In & Out of Amsterdam*, 151.

79 Petersen recognizes Tinguely as being the driving force behind *Dylaby*. Ad Petersen, “*Dylaby im Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam,*” in *L’esprit de Jean Tinguely* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2000), 160.
combining an exhibition and a haunted house,” with the intention of “tear(ing) the viewer out of passivity.” The show would surround the viewer “with an exciting mix of visual physical, and psychological sensations.”

Building on Bewogen Beweging’s foundation, Dylaby represented a dialectic of fun and earnestness. Six artists, all born in either the 1920s or 1930s, were included: Per Olof Ultvedt, Robert Rauschenberg, Martial Raysse, Niki de Saint Phalle (the only woman in the group), Spoerri, and Tinguely. Each artist was assigned a gallery, although they collaborated on each other’s works. The exhibition consisted of seven rooms, laid out in a linear route, beginning with the labyrinth, followed by Ultvedt’s wooden constructions, Spoerri’s sideways museum gallery, Raysse’s Beach, Saint Phalle’s shooting gallery, Rauschenberg’s immense combines, and, finally, Tinguely’s balloon room. I will focus on Raysse and Saint Phalle’s galleries. Rather than choosing completed works, the curators asked the artists to produce installations in situ, in less than a month’s time. This arrangement by the director and curator to cede control placed an

80 Critics, artists, and historians have identified Dylaby’s labyrinth indebtedness to the proposal for Die Welt als Labyrinth. Gerrit Kouwenaar, Dutch poet and journalist, and a reviewer for the social-democratic daily newspaper, Het Vrije Volk, explains that Dylaby was unique for being a “one-time-only” manifestation of art, although he remarks that the labyrinth came from SI’s proposal. Dutch artist Jacqueline de Jong, who published the Situationist Times, which was conceived as an English-language counterpart to the French Internationale Situationniste, supports this connection between the Dylaby and Die Welt. The Situationist Times issue number four from October 1963, dedicated to labyrinths, included Dylaby’s map, and under the “Illustration-Index,” De Jong writes that Sandberg decided that Die Welt was not feasible, and states that it was the same director who approved the ‘Restany’ group to develop ‘their’ labyrinth,” implying that Dylaby’s labyrinth was a mere adaptation of the SI’s. Most recently in his book Biennials and Beyond – Exhibitions That Made Art History, Bruce Altshuler writes that the foundation of Dylaby can be traced to Bewogen Beweging and Die Welt, explaining that in the latter show, there was an underlying tension between SI’s demand for “total freedom” that grew in the confrontation between the institution and artists. Moreover, he writes that Dylaby “might be seen as a reconciliation between the claims of the institution and those of advanced art.” Ad Petersen, “Dylaby, Ein Dynamische Labyrinth Im Stedelijk Museum 1962,” in Die Kunst Der Ausstellung: Eine Dokumentation Dreißig Exemplarischer Kunstausstellungen Dieses Jahrhunderts, ed. Bernd Klüser and Katharina Hegewisch, trans. Anne Stolz (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1991), 160; Gerrit Kouwenaar, “Publiek is meemaker aan Dylaby in het Stedelijk Museum,” Het Vrije Volk, September 8, 1962, Knipselmap Dylaby, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam; Jacqueline De Jong, “Illustration-Index,” Situationist Times, October 1963, 180; Bruce Altshuler, Biennials and Beyond: Exhibitions that Made Art History: 1962-2002 (London: Phaidon Press, 2013), 27.

extraordinary degree of trust and freedom in the hands of the artists. The liberating potential of play evident in the ludic nature of the resulting works, and in the exhibition as a whole, can be traced back to Die Welt’s ideas for a New Babylon-esque labyrinth. However, Dylaby’s critique of society—more explicit than that of the earlier Bewogen Beweging—demonstrates that play can be not only serious, it can even be dark, as in its indirect references to the German occupation of the Netherlands.

Dylaby’s catalogue expanded the design experimentation of Bewogen Beweging. Printed in landscape format, it allowed for near-panoramic photographs. The catalogue contains several pages of written documentation charting the artists’ daily activities, from their initial meeting on August 8th to the opening on August 29th (figure 2.13). Mundane details of the artists’ daily lives were included: mode of transportation and arrival time, materials sought, progress made, and, in the case of Tinguely, which artists he assisted. Tinguely’s notes highlight the spontaneity of the exhibition’s making. Some early ideas evolved during the course of the installation, as suggested by a remark indicating that Spoerri decided to add lights to a few places in the labyrinth. The realized works reflected the creative process elucidated in the documentation, thus the catalogue asserts that the process was as important, if not more so, than the final products, thereby valuing creative play over commodifiable works. Accordingly, few objects from Dylaby circulated after the show ended, and Dylaby’s catalogue echoes New Babylon’s call for society’s recognition of the creative act. The exhibition also represents

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82 The text, written in Dutch, is signed “T,” suggesting that Tinguely is the author.

83 The details include Rauschenberg taking a bath on August 15, and Raysse eating too much on August 12. Willem Sandberg, Dylaby (Amsterdam, 1962), n.p.
Sandberg’s achievement of merging studio with museum, an idea he puts forward in the catalogue’s introductory essay.  

Pages of the catalogue unfolded to show a map of Dylaby’s seven galleries (figure 2.14), indicating which artist was responsible for each room. Artist-curators Spoerri and Tinguely jointly created the first installation—a labyrinth resembling a funhouse; this work closely adhered to Constant’s proposal in Die Welt als Labyrinth in that it intentionally created disorientation through the use of dim lighting and narrow corridors. Dutch photographer and filmmaker Ed van der Elsken documented Dylaby in a ten-minute film, capturing the experience of moving through the exhibition. Visitors describe getting lost and feeling their way through the dark space, unsure where to proceed. Some visitors shriek and run and wonder aloud whether the labyrinth might collapse as they move through it; lights flash on and off. In a voiceover, a child compares the space to an attic because “every once in a while you would feel something bump your head.” Groping visitors encountered wool, fur, foam, and chairs and shoes suspended from the ceiling by ropes. The emphasis on sensory experience was intensified by an ironic offer to wear eyeglasses designed by Spoerri called Lunettes noires (Black Eyeglasses, 1961), outfitted with needles pointing towards the wearer’s eyes (figure

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84 Sandberg’s introductory essay explains that artists usually work in their studios without any contact with their public, whereas in this exhibition, the audience could experience the artistic process. Ibid., n.p.

85 Ed van der Elsken, Dylaby, 16 mm, 1962.

86 Ibid.

87 In the film, the child, acting as a guide, explains that after passing through the labyrinth, one could choose among three doors. He describes what happens when you try them: open the first and a kettle would fall on your head; open the second door and a coffee pot would drop from the ceiling; the third door would not move at first, but finally would open with a jerk, so that he flew through, laughing. Confounding doors were introduced by Constant, then incorporated into Bewogen Beweging with Duchamp’s Door, 11 rue Larrey; finally, they were put to absurd use in Dylaby. Ibid.

88 Ibid.
This dangerous accessory hinted at the dark and threatening atmosphere permeating Dylaby.

Ultvedt’s room, which followed the labyrinth and consisted of a maze-like series of wooden structures, contained Tinguely’s Radio Dylaby, a piece that offers a point of comparison between Dylaby and Die Welt. A small electric motor continually moved a radio’s tuning knob so that it emitted a rhythmic white noise. The effect was unsettling, much like the exhibition as a whole. Radio Dylaby echoes Constant’s proposal to integrate ambient noises and dialogue in his labyrinth for the SI exhibition. The tone in each example differs, however, because Die Welt’s plans included pedantic lectures in addition to ambient noise, whereas Tinguely’s radio was added solely for atmosphere.

The manner of financing Dylaby also reflects the artists’ willingness to compromise. For example, whereas the SI had demanded salaries and inordinate sums to stage their show, Spoerri, in need of expensive mirrors, suggested asking a mirror manufacturer to donate discarded pieces in exchange for displaying its corporate logo and acknowledgement of their generosity in the catalogue. The SI’s combative and threatening position led to a failure of their show, whereas Spoerri’s conciliatory approach facilitated Dylaby’s staging.

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90 Radio Dylaby was the only freestanding sculpture in the show and one of the few objects immediately acquired for the Stedelijk’s permanent collection and it was acquired on August 31, 1962, a day after Dylaby’s opening. Caroline Roodenburg-Schadd, Expressie en ordening het verzamelbeleid van Willem Sandberg voor het Stedelijk Museum, 858.

91 According to Ad Petersen, Radio Dylaby was part of a larger body of Tinguely’s work, the so-called Radios désynchronisées. Petersen, “Dylaby im Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam,” 177.

Raysse’s Riviera beach was true to his initial plan proposed at the first meeting in Amsterdam, can be taken as exemplary of the whole exhibition. He mounted a plastic pool within a raised wooden floor, and transported inflatable beach accessories from Nice (beach balls, floating plastic swans, swimming shorts, et cetera). A jukebox—playing Chubby Checkers’s “The Twist” in Van der Elsken’s film—and other objects were purchased locally. Raysse fabricated one of his signature neon signs, this one reading “Rayssebeach.” In contrast to the rest of Dylaby, this room evoked a cheery atmosphere, although Raysse added a few jarring elements that were at odds with the holiday mood. The room was populated by cardboard cut-out dolls and mannequins striking awkward poses (figure 2.16), which made the lively scene seem morbid; the female mannequins were caught mid-twist, standing on one leg with their backs arched and wrists held at oblique angles to their bodies. A plastic dummy was bent to fit into a wicker beach chair (figure 2.17), precariously perched on the edge of her seat with one arm fastened to the furniture, and wearing a white sailor’s cap and oversized sunglasses and while holding a fluffy accessory in her left hand. This image was often reproduced in the media, and a close-up was included on Raysse’s page in the catalogue. The scene was especially bizarre when the gallery was filled with visitors: in still shots it is difficult to distinguish visitors from mannequins and cardboard cut-out-umbrella-carriers (figures 2.16, 2.18). It is at such moments that the lighthearted nature of the beach party becomes uncanny and we see the dark twist that is characteristic of Dylaby. In Bewogen Beweging, play was asserted (at least in the catalogue) to

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93 Petersen, “Dylaby Im Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam,” 184.

94 Van der Elsken, Dylaby.

95 A comparison could be made to Oiticica’s Eden, referenced in the beginning of this chapter as an example of activated spectatorship. Both Eden and Raysse’s beach offered places of respite in a cold climate, and created a place of leisure counter to the clear division between work and recreation in a capitalist society.
be serious, but in *Dylaby*, play acquired an ominous quality. Raysse’s installation resists being read as a funhouse because he added macabre elements.

   The fifth room, the largest in the exhibition, contained Saint Phalle’s celebrated shooting gallery. Saint Phalle fabricated several fantastical white-painted plaster creatures resembling dinosaurs (figure 2.19). Small bags of paint were attached to a windmill suspended above the sculptures. Viewers were invited to shoot the moving bags so that paint would splatter over the bare works. In a reference to big game hunting, a museum guard wearing a safari jacket supervised the carnivalesque installation.

   The shooting gallery received the most attention in the press and perhaps best characterizes *Dylaby*’s tone. The amusement-park atmosphere was often highlighted in reviews, and several writers drew a comparison between *Dylaby*’s shooting gallery and those found at county fairs. Occasionally, reviewers managed to look beyond the fun-house angle and focused instead on the fact that museumgoers were active participants helping to cover the sculptures in paint. A review in the Jesuit weekly *De Linie* describes how Sandberg extended the participatory element of *Bewogen Beweging*—the audience’s role in completing a work of art with *Cyclograveur*—by involving the public in painting sculptures. But while *Dylaby* appeared to be a continuation of *Bewogen Beweging* in terms of the audience participation, the tenor of the later exhibition can be best seen in this work. Shooting at bags of paint is simultaneously silly and sinister, both in the superficial risk of getting splattered with paint and the danger of firing a

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97 Van der Elsken, *Dylaby*.

98 Pisa, “Dylaby: Woede en vreugde om een getimmerte.”

99 Ibid.
gun (albeit a BB gun) in a crowded, enclosed space. Unlike *Bewogen Beweging, Dylaby* maintained a consistently dark undertone, conveying to audiences that play is more than mere fun.

In his essay “Forms of Violence: Neo-Dada Performance,” curator and art historian Maurice Berger addresses the aggressive traces in the Nouveaux Réalistes’ art by focusing on Saint Phalle’s shooting pieces. The works can be understood as a response to the machismo of Abstract Expressionism and to Saint Phalle’s circle of male artists. They can also be seen as injecting an element of experiential fun into the gallery space. Moreover, playfully enacting violence can have a cathartic effect. Berger cites Saint Phalle, who identifies her target: her father, whom she accused of incest. Saint Phalle’s destructive art provided an opportunity for “emotional liberation” that transformed an act of aggression into a moment of liberation. And as Saint Phalle’s act of shooting a gun had a cathartic effect on the artist, so could *Dylaby* be therapeutic for Dutch audiences in 1962, whose memory of the occupation was still fresh.

Perhaps unexpectedly, the exhibition brought up memories of World War II. A reporter for the Communist newspaper *De Waarheid* referred to the German occupation in his review: “It is a manifestation of maniacs and maniacs always exceed the limit of what is human. … They are maniacal in the elimination of reason. And there is danger in the irrationalism of maniacs: we were in the middle of that situation exactly twenty years ago.” Here, the reviewer is on the verge of claiming that the shooting gallery could lead to fascism; the freedom to try anything, once begun, has no end, and results in no rules and no morals. By contrast, George Lampe, writing in *Vrij Nederland*, saw the exhibition as anti-fascist, challenging (and playing with) the

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100 The piece of writing is an “imaginary letter” written by Saint Phalle, addressed to her granddaughter. Berger, “Forms of Violence: Neo-Dada Performance,” 79.

boundaries of what is art rather than delineating them. Lampe, alluding to the Nazi hegemony
over arts and culture, argued that since the occupation “we don’t have a need to declare what an
artist can and cannot do and what a museum should or should not exhibit.”

Lampe also sought to articulate why the public had a hard time grasping *Dylaby*. In trying
to comprehend the exhibition, he calls upon the binary of play and seriousness, and names art as
an expression of both:

One of the reasons why some have difficulty in describing phenomena like *Dylaby* lies in
the impossibility of satisfactorily representing the manifestations of “anti-art” in terms of
“art.” One of the traditions that is broken here is, for example, the leaden seriousness of
the concept of “art.” … It is replaced by “a game” between random and controllable
processes.

Lampe’s statement is reminiscent of Constant’s redefinition of art in his 1974 Gemeentemuseum
exhibition catalogue. In it, as will be recalled, Constant concludes that art is synonymous with
play. Lampe’s quote indicates the circuitous influence of Huizinga’s *Homo Ludens* on art in
the Netherlands. Constant appropriated Huizinga’s ludic—as simultaneously fun and serious—
applied it to his *New Babylon*, which then influenced exhibitions such as *Dylaby*.

Tinguely’s initial idea for the seventh and final room was destructive, evincing the darker
mood of the exhibition. The plan called for a machine that would smash tulips, wooden shoes,
cups, and saucers, but the plan was not executed due to the unavailability of tulips in September

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103 The phrase “random and controllable processes” dynamizes the concept of art and references an interest
in logical computational analyses and cybernetics, which was gaining popularity in the 1960s. Notably, the
opened one month after *Dylaby*, and included models of molecules and atoms. Ibid., 6.
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and the prohibitive cost of destroying the other objects.\textsuperscript{105} In its place, Tinguely constructed a tunnel under a raised floor drilled with holes under which fans blew air, and filled the space with colorful balloons printed with the show’s title; a photograph of this room with two children running between the balloons became one of most reproduced and emblematic images of the exhibition (figure 2.20). Everything is in motion and nearly out of focus, with the exception of one balloon at center right, tilted in such a way that the first four letters of \textit{Dylaby} are legible. It is interesting to consider why the image with children was prioritized: presumably, Tinguely wanted to emphasize the playful and seemingly purposeless aspect of the show and deemphasize its critical aspects. Could \textit{Dylaby}’s success be attributed to the artists’ decision to mask their intent? Or to Tinguely filling the final room with balloons instead of broken dishes? Yet critics used the metaphor of a nightmare to describe \textit{Dylaby}, thus suggesting that they recognized an ominous tone in the subtext of the show.\textsuperscript{106}

\textit{Bewogen Beweging} established the dialectical relationship between play and seriousness; \textit{Dylaby} built on the earlier exhibition’s foundation. In \textit{Dylaby}, artists employed a more sophisticated critique that was better understood by audiences, as evidenced by the response to the show: fewer reviewers equated the exhibition with a funhouse, and more drew connections between artistic freedom and the Stedelijk’s history during World War II. While the individual artists had autonomy, Tinguely assumed responsibility for unifying the show and collaborating with the artists, which resulted in a coherent program. For example, Saint Phalle’s shooting gallery, in which balloons were filled with paint, relates to the last room, in which balloons were

\textsuperscript{105} The idea of destruction is reminiscent of Tinguely’s violent machines, such as his \textit{Homage to New York}, 1960, which was performed and self-destructed in the Museum of Modern Art’s sculpture garden. Petersen, “Dylaby im Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam,” 207.

trampled on by visitors. The two spaces address play, one with a more innocent action than the other, although both require a degree of destruction on the audience’s part—popping balloons—for their realization. The ludic operates both as form and strategy in Dylaby, a show that I argue is the apogee of the ludic exhibition because its whole was greater than the sum of its parts in its cohesive immersion, displaying the characteristics of freedom, purposelessness, and absurdity.

Another reason for Dylaby’s success was the nature of its critique. Dylaby may have suggested the Stedelijk’s complicity in the Nazi occupation of the museum by staging a mock occupation by artists who invaded the museum for three weeks. Artists were allowed free reign, which can be understood politically as a guarantee of the freedom jeopardized during the occupation, and as a potential means of healing. Dylaby’s indirect reference to the occupation appealed to the early 1960’s Dutch tendency towards victimhoom, as discussed in Chapter One. Yet Dylaby’s critical position was also left open to interpretation, allowing for multiple viewpoints: the shooting gallery, for example, could be experienced as a game or a catharsis or a new trauma, or as a combination of all three. In this ambiguity lay freedom for the viewer, and success for the exhibition.107

IV. Op Losse Schroeven: Ludic Art on Exhibit

Although Dylaby stands out as the height of the Stedelijk Museum’s experimentation with process, concept, and play, Op Losse Schroeven: Situaties and Cryptostructuren (On Loose Screws: Situations and Cryptostructures) is the best known exhibition held at the Stedelijk Museum in the 1960s, partly due to its association with Harald Szeemann’s exhibition When

107 There were concessions in Dylaby, of course, most notably in the willingness to negotiate funding and supplies. Nevertheless, any successful exhibition requires compromise among artists, curators, and the institution, as well as sophisticated art and an appropriate curatorial position—in this case, one that conveyed.
Attitudes Become Form (Kunsthalle Bern, March 22 – April 27, 1969). Op Losse Schroeven opened on March 15, 1969, and ran through April 27, and included sixty-five works by forty-three artists exhibited in thirteen galleries, as well as in the museum’s café, on its grand staircase, and outside the museum’s walls. None of the participating artists had been included in Bewogen Beweging or Dylaby, and many of them had already been labeled Conceptual artists (Jan Dibbets, Ger van Elk, Douglas Huebler, and Lawrence Weiner). Artists associated with other movements, such as Minimal Art (Carl Andre), Arte Povera (Giovanni Anselmo, Jannis Kounellis, and Mario Merz), and Land Art (Michael Heizer and Walter De Maria) also participated. Curator Wim Beeren attempted to link various co-existing movements, as Harald Szeemann did with his concurrent, and now famous, exhibition.

Both Op Losse Schroeven and When Attitudes Become Form received critical attention for uniting art that had previously been presented in distinct groups, such as Minimal Art in Primary Structures at the Jewish Museum (1966) and Arte Povera at the Galleria La Bertesca in Genoa (1967). In addition, the exhibitions were among the first to present Western European and U.S. artists together, demonstrating the parallel tendencies in their work. Christian Rattemeyer argues that the better known When Attitudes can only be understood in tandem with Op Losse Schroeven, and even claims that Op Losse Schroeven should receive greater critical attention.\footnote{Rattemeyer explains that the two exhibitions had much in common, and in 1969 they were perceived as companion shows and reviewed together. Rattemeyer writes that the exhibitions shared not only organizational resources, but also intellectual and conceptual characteristics. Christian Rattemeyer, “‘Op Losse Schroeven’ and ‘When Attitudes Become Form’ 1969,” in Exhibiting the New Art: “Op Losse Schroeven” and “When Attitudes Become Form” 1969 (Köln; London: Afterall Books, 2010), 15–16.}

Rattemeyer addresses both exhibitions from a curatorial point of view, arguing that the curators sought to demonstrate what was “at stake in artistic practice and its public display at the end of the 1960s.”\footnote{Ibid., 62.} Dutch art historian Carel Blotkamp explains that Op Losse Schroeven set out to
present for the first time what was normally confined to small galleries and framed as singular
events: a zeitgeist.\textsuperscript{110} Sophie Richard, by contrast, asserts that \textit{Op Losse Schroeven} and \textit{When
Attitudes} were important because they were large-scale touring exhibitions of Conceptual art,
serving as models for future shows.\textsuperscript{111} Christophe Cherix, who curated \textit{In \\& Out of Amsterdam}
for the Museum of Modern Art in 2009, describes \textit{Op Losse Schroeven} as “provocative” for
presenting the newest trends in art.\textsuperscript{112} In terms of exhibition history, \textit{Op Losse Schroeven}
(together with \textit{When Attitudes}) is undoubtedly a landmark presentation of Conceptual art;
however, in the Dutch context, \textit{Op Losse Schroeven} was a conventional presentation of a handful
of ludic works. I argue that although the show contained examples of ludic art, it may not
constitute a “ludic exhibition” because, in addition to its overall inconsistency of content and
design, it was conventionally curated. By 1969, artists had a more sophisticated understanding of
institutional politics, and their artistic and textual responses to the museum and the art market
demonstrate a frustration with the limitations imposed by the Stedelijk. In \textit{Op Losse Schroeven},
we see play tested by, and ultimately incompatible with, a critical view of the institution.

The title, \textit{Op Losse Schroeven}, references an idiomatic Dutch expression that describes
something that is unstable or is falling apart. The literal translation is “on loose screws.”\textsuperscript{113}
Curator Wim Beeren expanded on the phrase in his catalogue contribution:

\begin{quote}
[the title]… presupposes a construction that, with proper connections and tight relations
between the parts, would make a unified whole. Loosening the screws a bit does not
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\textsuperscript{113} Rattemeyer proposed to translate the exhibition title into English as “Tentative Connections.” Rattemeyer, “‘Op Losse Schroeven’ and ‘When Attitudes Become Form’ 1969,” 50.
\end{flushright}
break those relations but only disrupts them. … [T]he figurative meaning of ‘op losse schroeven’ [offers] a negative description of unity as shaky, uncertain, without grip. The old concept of art, in the sense of order and sublimation, is in the process of being shaken and undermined. In this exhibition, we mostly see the active role that art plays in this process. In other words, here the art has not so much been thrown to the winds, as put many apparently logical relations onto shaky ground.\(^{114}\)

I submit that it is the ludic that fell apart in *Op Losse Schroeven*. Many of the works were presented as individual pieces, and the experimental strategies of *Dylaby*, such as artists using the museum as a studio, were abandoned. Consonant with the literal translation of ‘on loose screws’, rather than breaking new ground, the show merely wobbled.

While many of the works in *Op Losse Schroeven* were not ludic—challenging the exhibition’s the description as ludic—there were several playful and parodic site-specific installations that exemplify ludic strategies by disrupting the operation of the museum or damaging its physical property. Of all the artists involved in *Op Losse Schroeven*, Ger van Elk, Marinus Boezem, Jan Dibbets, and Michael Heizer’s contributions are emblematic of the artists’ frustration with the institution, and in their way, present the most effective ludic critique. Van Elk, Dibbets, and Heizer fractured the museum’s space both within and without its walls in order to challenge the museum’s hegemony and participation in the art market, while simultaneously acting as complicit partners in the exhibition. Van Elk installed tiles in the sidewalk, and Dibbets and Heizer dug into the ground surrounding the museum, as I will describe in further detail below.

In *Luxurious Streetcorner* (1969, figure 2.21), Van Elk replaced bricks in the sidewalk with glazed tile. He was pleased that the museum was “extremely open” to the execution of his

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work.\textsuperscript{115} The city’s permission to alter a public sidewalk also reflects the authorities’ responsiveness to experimental art in the late 1960s. It should be noted that \textit{Luxurious Streetcorner} did not actually damage public space, but rather added color and texture to an otherwise dull grey street. Nonetheless, in order for the work to be executed, the sidewalk was unearthed in a destructive act (figure 2.22), requiring approval from the city government and museum, although \textit{Luxurious Streetcorner} possessed an ameliorative quality in its decorative value. It was a ludic work because of its ambiguity: its deleterious action was counterbalanced by its added ornamentation, and, consequently, Van Elk’s critical voice was muffled by the pleasant mosaic. This work, however, was one of the outliers of the exhibition, which was otherwise populated by two- and three-dimensional works that could easily have circulated in the art market.

Van Elk’s two works inside the museum, \textit{Hanging Wall} (1968) and \textit{Apparatus Scalas Dividens} (Apparatus to Divide Stairs, 1968), were also disruptive and could be considered destructive to a degree. The former consisted of a brick wall installed above a table in the museum’s café such that two people sitting opposite each other would be unable to see one another (figure 2.23). The latter work was a curtain hung to divide the grand staircase leading up to the exhibition into two paths (figure 2.24). In a 1995 interview, Beeren said that climbing the stairs not knowing who was next to you “was an unforgettable act, even more than the little brick wall hung above the table in the restaurant.”\textsuperscript{116} At first glance, these pieces seem rather innocuous, though they bring attention not only to the space, but also to audience interactions within the museum. By creating these dramatic separations of viewers from one another on the


Dutch artist Boezem created a more light-hearted critical intervention: *Bed Sheets from the Windows of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam* (1969). The artist suspended linens from the Stedelijk’s second-floor windows (figure 2.25). Rattemeyer notes that it mocked the (still existing) Dutch custom of hanging bedding out of windows. The Dutch achieve several ends with their tradition: on a practical level, they are drying damp linens; on a social level, they show the world that they are clean and that they have nothing to hide.\footnote{Bed Sheets from the Windows of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam relates to another work in the show, *Weather Report* (1969), an installation that includes maps that Boezem created daily based on data from the Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute; a light box with the Beaufort Scale (a measure of wind speed); and speakers playing a recording from a familiar newscaster reading the weather forecast. In this example, sound is introduced, and reminiscent of the previous use of radio in Tinguely’s contribution to *Bewogen Beweging* and Constant’s proposal to incorporate audio lectures and sound in his labyrinth proposal. Boezem’s two contributions are interrelated: the sheets in *Bed Sheets from the Windows* acted as weather vane, a functional extension of the *Weather Report* displayed on the gallery walls. Rattemeyer, “‘Op Losse Schroeven’ and ‘When Attitudes Become Form’ 1969,” 29.} Boezem’s playful parody on Dutch traditions subverts the imposing status of the museum by converting the building’s exterior into an ordinary, and virtuous, Dutch household.

Dutch artist Jan Dibbets offered a more destructive work by excavating the grounds of the museum building in *Museum Pedestal with Four Angles of 90°* (1969, figure 2.26). Dibbets dug up the ground at the museum’s four corners, as if he were attempting to build a moat around the museum by starting at the corners (figure 2.27). Part of the sidewalk was removed along with the earth beneath it, thereby exposing the museum’s foundation and creating the illusion that the Stedelijk was resting on a pedestal. As I discuss in Chapter Four, such ludic actions could flourish only with institutional and governmental support, even as artists such as Dibbets directed
criticism at the very institutions on whose support they depended. In a 2009 interview, Dibbets recalled that he wanted to question the concept of the show by putting the institution on a mock pedestal. He would have preferred to dig out the entire perimeter of the building, but as he executed the piece entirely with his own hands, he elected to confine his endeavors to the four corners. Dibbets’s veiled remark was thus further subdued, especially in the context of the otherwise rather conventional show, and Dibbets’s *Museum Pedestal* was palatable to the institution because his critique was insinuated rather than explicit.

Other artists in the show echoed Dibbets’s ambivalent sentiment. Boezem said in a later interview that he wanted to yell “down with the museum!” and yet be included in the show. In the same interview, Boezem referred to Dibbets’s work as a “humiliating gesture” directed at the museum. “I thought the fact that Beeren allowed all that was quite impressive.” *Museum Pedestal* evokes Dylaby’s Saint Phalle’s shooting gallery, which might also have damaged the building, yet which could have been realized only with the cooperation of the museum.

In *Op Losse Schroeven*, not only Dutch artists physically disrupted the museum’s grounds. American Michael Heizer, mostly known for his large-scale earthworks, contributed a small-scale piece that was listed in the catalogue as *Wedge-shaped Excavation in the Pavement in Front of the Stedelijk Museum, Covered by a Metal Grate* (1969), now known as *Sidewalk*

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119 Van Elk and Dibbets collaborated on the International Re-Schooling of Artists, which was very similar in tone to their contributions to *Op Losse Schroeven*. They attacked the art world to which they could attribute their success.


122 Ibid., 246.
Depression (1969). As in Dibbets’s Museum Pedestal, Heizer removed sidewalk tiles and dug a hole in the middle of a sidewalk, which was then covered by a grate (figure 2.28).123

Dibbets and Heizer also contributed works to When Attitudes Become Form in Bern. Dibbets reprised Museum Pedestal with Four Angles of 90° for the Swiss show, although there are differences between the two site-specific interventions.124 As compared to his piece in Op Losse Schroeven, Heizer’s contribution to When Attitudes Become Form was even more destructive: he took a wrecking ball to the ground for his Bern Depression (figure 2.29, 1969). In Amsterdam, however, the Public Works Department actually dug the hole, under Heizer’s supervision (figure 2.30). Here is another case in which an authority—the city—facilitated an artist’s work. Local reviewers were amazed by this cooperation, but open to the intervention.125

Steven ten Thije, who has written on the reception of the exhibitions in both cities, noted the adverse criticism When Attitudes received in the Swiss press, especially for Heizer’s Bern Depression.126 Ten Thije writes that the Bern show was seen as “promoting art understood as

123 A related, yet sillier piece, Springy Sidewalk, installed on September 14, 1970, is by the dance couple American Ellen Edinoff and Dutch Koert Stuyf, who were commissioned to contribute a work to the Stedelijk’s 75th anniversary. Stuyf placed a thick layer of plastic foam beneath sidewalk tiles outside the museum. Passersby, without being given notice, felt the ground move as they walked over the apparently stable ground. That work was removed after a few weeks because the police viewed it as dangerous. By 1970, encouragement to experiment had begun to dwindle. Although the pieces are only related coincidentally, they are emblematic of the change over a decade. Wim Beeren, Actie, werkelijkheid en fictie in de kunst van de jaren 60 in Nederland (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, 1979), 137.

124 In a 2009 interview, Dibbets commented that Museum Pedestal with Four Angles of 90° was comparatively more difficult to execute in Bern because of the plants surrounding the building. The resulting work is less perceptible in documentation photos. Steeds, “Jan Dibbets in Conversation with Lucy Steeds, 14 January 2009,” 251.

125 One example is a review titled “Hole as Work of Art.” “Gat als kunstwerk,” Leeuwarder Courant, March 14, 1969, Knipselmap Op Losse Schroeven, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.

vandalism.” With few exceptions, *When Attitudes* was reviewed negatively. The exhibition closed a few days earlier than planned, and Szeemann resigned.

In contrast, there was overall approval of *Op Losse Schroeven*. While the two shows were closely related, even intervening in the public space in very similar ways, the Amsterdam audience was much more receptive than its Bern counterpart. As James Kennedy argues, Dutch authorities were adverse to conflict and accepted that social upheaval was inevitable; they had an anti-authoritarian approach that embraced “dialogue with the youth” in order to avoid a repetition of prewar and wartime history. Lighthearted critique was palatable to the Dutch curator and audiences, and the tolerance specific to the Netherlands in the 1960s is evident when contrasting the reactions to and reception of Heizer’s work in Amsterdam and Bern, although it should be noted that Heizer’s work was less aggressive in Amsterdam, and Beeren’s curating was tamer than Szeemann’s.

While there were a number of ludic pieces in *Op Losse Schroeven*, the curator’s choices on the whole were unadventurous, and the exhibition lacked cohesiveness, largely due to the wide variety of artistic practices on display. Unlike the immersive and site-specific works of Dylaby, *Op Losse Schroeven* exhibited autonomous and easily commodified objects, such as Robert Ryman’s *Classico V* (1968), a multipart painting; Carl Andre’s *Scatter Piece in Five Elements* (1968), consisting of piles of metal and plastic scraps; and Bruce Nauman’s neon piece *My Name as Though Written on the Surface of the Moon* (1968). In *Bewogen Beweging*, art was displayed in such a way that new environments were created: compare Calder’s room in

127 Ibid.

128 Ibid., 216-217.

Bewogen Beweging to Nauman’s in *Op Losse Schroeven* (figure 2.31).\(^{130}\) Calder’s mobiles and stabile punctuate the space, while Nauman’s three-dimensional works appear flat, and there is no interaction among Nauman’s works, rendering the surrounding space barren. The examples of Arte Povera in Giovanni Anselmo’s room have the same effect (figure 2.32). Ultimately, *Op Losse Schroeven*’s overall conventionality of curatorial choices stifled its few inspiring artistic utterances, resulting in a muted show.

Although *Op Losse Schroeven* included several ludic works, the show was one of the more traditional exhibitions at the Stedelijk in the 1960s. In 1995, Beeren reflected that “the original concept was much more conventional than the end result. It was after all conceived as an exhibition of objects, and De Wilde [then director of the Stedelijk] gave his go-ahead.”\(^{131}\) In a 2009 interview, Dibbets faulted Beeren himself for the relative tameness of the exhibition: “Beeren had a more old-fashioned and museological attitude, a more scientific approach, and as a result, he produced a more constricted exhibition.”\(^{132}\) In 1969, artist Lawrence Weiner is quoted as saying that had he known more about the exhibition, he would have withdrawn, as a symposium and catalogue would have been sufficient to convey his ideas.\(^{133}\) Gallery owner and critic Lambert Tegenbosch found that the art was exhibited in a historical manner that was bound to fail. He continues, “this makes the whole event, as happened so often before, a paradoxical

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\(^{130}\) The gallery dedicated to Bruce Nauman included *My Name as Though Written on the Surface of the Moon* (1968); four 16 mm films screened consecutively from one projector, including *Playing a Note on the Violin While I Walk Around the Studio, Bouncing with Two Balls Between the Floor and the Ceiling with Changing Rhythms, Walking in an Exaggerated Manner Around the Perimeter of a Square*, and *Dance or Exercise on the Perimeter of a Square* (all 1967 – 1968); and two works on the floor, *Steel Channel* (1969) and *Thick Mirror on a Steelplate* (1968).


presentation of a form of anti-art that wants to appear light, but is instead brought down in a single blow by the museum’s gravity.” The end result, as Beeren notes, was unexceptional, especially compared to previous exhibitions at the Stedelijk. Some of the Conceptual art had ludic qualities, and its exhibition catalogue was noteworthy in terms of its design, but the curatorial choices lacked the ludic character of cohesive immersion creating space for seemingly purposeless play, as demonstrated in Bewogen Beweging and Dylaby. Op Losse Schroeven’s disjointed installation, emphasized by the amalgam of diverse artistic practices, denies this exhibition the title “ludic.”

Van Elk pointed to the adverse influence of the U.S. market as the main source of the tameness of the exhibition; it was widely known that Stedelijk Museum director De Wilde, who took the position in 1963, promoted U.S. art in the museum’s collecting and exhibiting practices. Van Elk felt the economic value of art in Op Losse Schroeven dominated any aesthetic measurement. Van Elk’s comments reflect a transformation from a more open, optimistic, and playful attitude—at the Stedelijk Museum and in Dutch society—to one that was more cynical and commercial.

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134 Tegenbosch cited in Ten Thije, “‘Op Losse Schroeven’ and ‘When Attitudes Become Form’: Public Reception in the Netherlands and Switzerland,” 212.

135 For example, De Wilde staged two significant shows highlighting U.S. artists: American Pop Art in 1964, and De vormen van kleur (New Shapes of Color), in 1966–67, featuring such artists as Morris Louis, Frank Stella, and Ellsworth Kelly. In 1969, Van Elk explained his view of these competing trans-Atlantic interests: “the American art market has an interest in representing art movements, any art movement whatsoever. If European art were to become very important, then there would be an emphasis on the European art market. Then the American art dealers would have less money, and also lose their political power. And they want to avoid that at all costs.” He complained that museum shows of contemporary art were also intricately tied to the market. When asked to expand upon the relationship between Amsterdam galleries and the Stedelijk Museum in particular, he reported on a conversation he had had with De Wilde. Van Elk told De Wilde that he was, “suspicious of the museum’s policy, because the American galleries have too much say in what goes on. De Wilde said it was not true, but that he had trust in people (gallery owners), who had proved that they had good judgment. He didn’t believe that they had an influence on his policies, but of course they do. When a gallery owner tells him that one artist is very good and the other bad, then that leaves an enormous impression. It is almost as if artists are pre-selected by the market.” Hartzema, “Geen 10.000 man in één hokje.”

136 Ibid.
Despite *Op Losse Schroeven*’s conventionality, the catalogue was innovative, and has not received the recognition it deserves. While *Dylaby*’s catalogue is a clear precedent of *Op Losse Schroeven*’s, as it contained pages devoted to the process of organizing and realizing an exhibition rather than merely focusing on the art and artists in the show, Beeren’s catalogue essay explains how *Op Losse Schroeven* differs from *Dylaby*, which he describes as “environmental art”:

In my view, the museum was not at a loss when environmental art came into existence. ‘Dylaby’ (Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1962) was a complete realization of environment art: the environmental aspect did not abolish the museum, but it activated and expanded the work. In the process, it became obvious that an exhibition could no longer be limited to placing and hanging. … Yet the revolution of the environment was not so great that the museum should consider abolishing itself because of it. On the contrary, the machinery and the accessibility of the museum (albeit a changed museum) proved to be more useful than any other institutions for such works of art.137

In *Op Losse Schroeven*, by contrast, “the artwork of the environment is autonomous. It still relates itself to the exhibition room simply as a realistic, well-designed set on an empty stage.”138 Rather than exhibiting art that dominates a space, the work in *Op Losse Schroeven*, which he terms ‘situation art’, “takes up a certain relationship to the space—(it is) an art that corrects, bends, relativizes, affects and makes illusory existing situations, but never negates them. An art that notes, maps, and relates situations. An art that demonstrates the many possibilities of an object.”139 Beeren thus locates the distinction between the shows in how the art interacts with the world around it, however the Stedelijks’s galleries blunted its impact. The *Domus* review of *Op Losse Schroeven* addresses Beeren’s installation: “Art as a process in time, action that involves, a work that becomes transformed into destruction or regeneration, dies as soon as it is brought into


138 Ibid., 122.

139 Beeren’s use of the term ‘situation’ harks back to the unrealized SI exhibition of 1960, again reinforcing the lineage of the four exhibitions addressed in this chapter. Ibid.
a museum unless it arrives there already anaesthetized.”

Beeren may have been trying to extend the practices begun in Dylaby, but his intentions were not realized.

The catalogues for Dylaby and Op Losse Schroeven documented the process of assembling their respective exhibition. In the Dylaby catalogue, the documentation focused on the artists’ experience at the Stedelijk in the three weeks leading up to the opening. Attention was given to their everyday activities as well as to the art. The Op Losse Schroeven catalogue contains notes from a curatorial perspective, although its curator was Szeemann, rather than Beeren, writing about his process in designing When Attitudes Become Form, which demonstrates the close relationship between the curators, and their collaboration on “organizational resources;” Beeren thus recognizes his indebtedness to Szeemann.

Beeren’s catalogue contained a selection from Szeemann’s diary, written in German and left untranslated, including notes taken as he traveled to artists’ studios and met with curators and museums. Beeren even announced When Attitudes as a “concurrent related exhibition” on the title page of Op Losse Schroeven’s catalogue. Szeemann’s notes were not included in his own exhibition catalogue. When Attitudes thus depends upon Op Losse Schroeven for a full understanding of Szeemann’s curatorial process. For that reason, as Rattemeyer argues, When Attitudes and Op Losse Schroeven need to be read together.

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141 Szeemann had a larger budget and could fly American artists to Europe, so they were able to participate in Op Losse Schroeven, and Szeemann planned artists’ stops in Amsterdam on their way to Bern. Rattemeyer, “‘Op Losse Schroeven’ and ‘When Attitudes Become Form’ 1969,” 16.


143 Rattemeyer, “‘Op Losse Schroeven’ and ‘When Attitudes Become Form’ 1969,” 17.
documentation in *Dylaby* focused on the artists’ process once they arrived in Amsterdam, and ignored the curator’s role. As in the *Dylaby* catalogue, some days were broken down into hours. Szeemann’s notes, like those found in *Dylaby*’s catalogue, contain reports on day-to-day events. While the documentation in both catalogues provides insight into the more mundane aspects of staging an exhibition, their respective foci reflects the underlying interests of the show: the curator (*Op Losse Schroeven*) or the artist (*Dylaby*).146

*Op Losse Schroeven*’s catalogue evolved from its predecessors, *Bewogen Beweging* and *Dylaby*, by being conceived of as a work of art. It included serigraphs of artists’ contributions bound together as a special section within the book. Art historian Gwen Allen describes a paradoxical shift toward tangible media in dematerialized conceptual art practices: “the so-called dematerialization of art resulted in a re-materialization of print, as artists explored the formal

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144 For example, see this entry dated December 13, 1969, 4:30 pm: “Bob Morris. His newest work is a scattering of the most varied materials across the floor. With small mirrors, the flow of these materials is divided up for the eye, but not disrupted. Should this work be completed, he will send me all the details, so that we can make it in the kunsthalle with Swiss steel wool and copper wire. Otherwise, I will choose two of his felt pieces in Paris. He sees this new art as an interaction of work and material from the point of a view of a changing external form.” Only a section of Szeemann’s notes (starting December 9, 1968, misdated January 9, through February 20, 1969 in the original catalogue) was published in *Op Losse Schroeven*’s exhibition catalogue. An extended, translated version was published in: Harald Szeemann, “How Does an Exhibition Come into Being?,” in *Exhibiting the New Art: “Op Losse Schroeven” and “When Attitudes Become Form” 1969*, trans. Gerard Goodrow (Köln; London: Afterall Books, 2010), 178.

145 When viewing artists’ recent work, Szeemann included not only his observations about the pieces but also practical matters, such as what the artists would have chosen to exhibit were a given piece unavailable, as well as remarks about the nature of the work of art, likely gathered from discussions with the artists. On December 28, 1969, we read about obstacles that interfered with Szeemann’s cross-country trip: “9 am: Airplane does not take off / 11 am: The captain arrives. / Noon: Flight to New York. / 2 pm: Cannot land. / 3 pm: In Washington. / 3 pm – 9 pm: I read two books. / 9 pm: Our plane has to be replaced. / Midnight: Flight to New York.” Ibid., 184.

146 Szeemann has been acknowledged as one of the first artist-curators. My intention here is to focus on *Op Losse Schroeven* within the particular historical context of the Stedelijk Museum as it is related to a series of exhibitions held in the 1960s. For a recent article on Szeemann and *When Attitudes Become Form*, see Terry Smith, “Artists as Curators/ Curators as Artists: Exhibitionary Form Since 1969,” in *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/ Venice 2003* (Venice: Fondazione Prada, 2013), 519–530.

and conceptual possibilities of publications as spaces.” Allen draws attention to the exhibition catalogue as a work of art:

The catalogue was not only another site of mediation between art and its public, but also an important creative form in its own right. In addition to thinking about floor plans, paint colors and installation design, curators also had to consider typeface and page layout, envisioning how works of art and writing would be arranged physically and conceptually within this new discursive ‘space.’

The artists’ pages range from notes that describe unrealized works (Boezem), to drawings (Michael Buthe), sketches for actual pieces in the show (Ger van Elk), artists’ statements (Bernhard Höke), to an artist’s signature (Roelof Louw). This special section embraced the notion that the idea was central to Conceptual art, and in purchasing the catalogue, the visitor would leave with not just a souvenir and documentation of the show, but an actual work of art. While this is not as radical or as innovative as, for example, Seth Siegelaub’s Xerox Book (1968), with twenty-five pages dedicated to seven artists, Op Losse Schroeven should be understood within the context of the changing notion of printed material. In a 1969 interview with Charles Harrison, Siegelaub explains “The catalogue can now act as primary information for the exhibition, as opposed to secondary information about art in magazines, catalogues, etc., and in some cases the ‘exhibition’ can be the ‘catalogue’.” Not surprisingly, Siegelaub found that in Op Losse Schroeven, too much “emphasis was placed exclusively on the object.” Thus, on revisiting Op Losse Schroeven, more attention should be paid to the catalogue.

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149 Ibid.


Op Losse Schroeven was well received. Unlike Szeemann, who had resigned by the time his exhibition closed, Beeren was not forced out of the Stedelijk, but left to work independently on a project in a peripheral city that would grant him more freedom: Sonsbeek '71 Buiten de perken (Beyond the Pale), a triennial sculpture show held in Sonsbeek Park in the border city of Arnhem. Sonsbeek '71 allowed Beeren to experiment with staging various media in diverse venues across the nation.\textsuperscript{152} Op Losse Schroeven may have exhibited contemporary art, but while it broke the grounds of the museum, it broke no new ground in the art world. The Stedelijk imposed such constraints on their use of museum space that they all but silenced artists’ critical views. The change in museum directors contributed to the less experimental character of exhibitions at the Stedelijk: De Wilde was less provocative than Sandberg, and while Sandberg wanted to stage experimental exhibitions, De Wilde sought to expand the permanent collection and exhibit art objects suitable for the permanent collection, rather than to stage experimental exhibitions.\textsuperscript{153}

By examining one museum in the Netherlands over the course of nearly a decade, what becomes apparent is the changing relationship between artists and museums, and the tensions between the ludic and the institution. The strength of the three realized exhibitions at the Stedelijk Museum lay in the capacity of the participating entities to compromise, including the

\textsuperscript{152} Beeren’s theme was “space and spatial relations” and broadened the idea of sculpture to include Earth art such as Robert Smithson’s Broken Circle – Spiral Hill in Emmen, and film screenings by Conceptual artists such Bas Jan Ader, Boezem, and Van Elk. Beeren explained that he wanted to move from “exhibition” “to manifestation” to “activity.” In her essay on Sonsbeek '71, Dutch art historian Marga van Mechelen argues that Beeren’s 1971 show was a realization of an ideal that had arisen with Op Losse Schroeven, and supports her argument by naming artists who were invited to participate in both shows. Van Mechelen further explains that while Beeren emphasized “space” in his Sonsbeek '71 catalogue essay, the exhibition instead strongly referred to the ludic, which, she says, speaks to the democratic aspect of art, and was thus still tied to the 1960s Beeren cited in Altshuler, Biennials and Beyond, 143; Marga van Mechelen, “Sonsbeek na Sonsbeek,” in Als de kunst er om vraagt: De Sonsbeekententoonstellingen, ed. Jeroen Boomgaard, Marga van Mechelen, and Miriam van Rijsingen (Hardewijk: Flevoruk, 2001), 21–22.

\textsuperscript{153} Several works from Op Losse Schroeven were acquired after the exhibition, including: Mario Merz’s Città irreale (1968), Bruce Nauman’s My Name as Though it Were Written on the Surface of the Moon (1968), and Richard Serra’s Floor Pole Prop (1969), which was replicated in 1978 after the original had been lost.
museum itself, the city of Amsterdam, and the artists. An indirectly critical artist who was willing to cooperate with the institution was in the optimal situation when working with a museum director willing to relinquish control. However, the type of critique is also important. In *Op Losse Schroeven*, a rebuke was directed at the art world, and the Stedelijk’s place within it—a rather narrow object of criticism. In contrast, *Dylaby*’s artists called for artistic freedom amidst a climate of postwar victimization, a position that resonated more broadly.

As ludic art can critique only indirectly, context is necessary to ground the criticism and render it intelligible; any analysis of a ludic exhibition must take into account the individual works, their relationship to each other and to the museum or gallery in which they are displayed, and to the geographical, social, political, historical, and cultural contexts in which the exhibition is presented. In the ludic exhibition, the curator facilitates the formulation of a cohesive message, thus avoiding misinterpretation. For example, in *Dylaby*, the exhibition as a whole contextualized the ludic works, magnifying the play-serious dialectic, so that audiences understood its implications despite its oblique critique. In *Op Losse Schroeven*, however, a few ludic works of art were framed in a show that surveyed trends in contemporary art, thus deemphasizing and further obscuring an already ambiguous message.

Constant and *homo ludens* hovered over all four exhibitions—the influential labyrinth design reappeared, as did questions about the seriousness of the work on display. A 1969 article previewing *Op Losse Schroeven* begins with a quote from Constant: “Shock, once the weapon of the avant-garde, has no effect, nothing is able to shock us; besides, no one wants to be shocked anymore; at most, they want fun.”

The disenchantment one senses in Constant’s writing is

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consonant with the loss of utopianism discussed in Chapter One, and is reflected in other artists’ statements, such as Van Elk’s criticism of *Op Losse Schroeven*.

At the beginning of this chapter, I asked whether the ludic art’s tendency towards implicit critique was the result of constraints imposed by the venue. The answer is ‘yes’. But what types of constraint? In *Dylaby*, Sandberg’s Stedelijk allowed artists the freedom to experiment; the artists *chose* to be implicit in order to effectively convey their ideas to their audience. Constraints imposed by the museum, such as financial ones, were not strong enough to interfere with the staging of a ludic show. In the case of *Op Losse Schroeven*, by contrast, the museum introduced limits that interfered with the interpretation of ludic art, by placing it in a traditional exhibition focused on objects. Yet, this relatively minor limitation—the desire to exhibit easily commodifiable art—was enough to undermine the exhibition’s ludic character despite the inclusion of ludic art. *Op Losse Schroeven* is noteworthy for demonstrating the failure of play to allow for an informed critique of the institution.

Some genres of art, such as installation art, are more ludic than others. For example, in *Dylaby* the viewer was asked to consider politics and ethics when picking up a toy gun because the installation references the country’s and the museum’s history of occupation. Performance, as a genre, also lends itself to the ludic. As in installation art, audience members at a ludic performance are presented with a playful scene conjured by elements such as costume in order to create an alternative worldview. Furthermore, a ludic performance does not harangue, but rather opens up discussion, providing an opportunity for alternate visions that question the status quo. My next chapter takes up ludic performance in an examination of the work of Robert Jasper Grootveld.
Chapter Three

Robert Jasper Grootveld: The Quintessential Ludic Artist

In this chapter, I argue that Robert Jasper Grootveld (1932 – 2009), an artist often misunderstood as a madman, was the quintessential ludic artist. Both his art and his public persona were imbued with masquerade, freedom, purposelessness, and, especially, absurdity, resulting in a translation of Huizinga’s concept of the ludic into performance art as social critique, and providing seminal inspiration for Provo and the feminist group Dolle Mina.

Grootveld introduced ludic strategies to the Amsterdam protest movement that helped to develop the city’s bicycle culture.¹ His playful performances appeared at first to be inane and purposeless—audience members captured on film are seen laughing. But Grootveld touches on serious subjects, such as a burgeoning consumer society and the latent racism of Dutch culture. Grootveld’s performances demonstrate that play can be deployed as a critical strategy, highlighting ludic art’s social importance in the Netherlands in the 1960s. In this dissertation, Constant, customarily identified as an artist, is recognized for his activism and involvement with Provo, while Grootveld, known principally as an activist, will be credited for his artistic practice and disentangled from Provo.

Beginning in the spring of 1964, and continuing through the summer of 1965, Grootveld held Saturday evening performances in front of the Lieverdje (Beloved Little One, figure 3.1), a bronze statue of a carefree young boy that stands in the Spui, a public square in Amsterdam. While each performance was a unique occurrence referencing current events, repeated motifs connected them. The artist would appear in jester-like costume: shorts and tights with a hat and

¹ Grootveld’s suggestions for making Amsterdam more bicycle-friendly were carried out by political parties with links to the artist, such as Kabouter.
coat (figure 3.2), which he would modify, sometimes by applying paint or by sewing new sleeves on the jacket. He would always wear makeup, painting his face black, occasionally drawing circles around his mouth or applying white stripes to his cheekbones. His role was that of a reverend preaching to an audience that was reported to be as large as 150 people.\(^2\) The tobacco industry was his main target of criticism: Grootveld would describe the mass commercial media’s dependency on tobacco advertising, which, he asserted, served the “‘addicted consumer of tomorrow.’” In call-and-response “sermons,” Grootveld would use alliteration to describe Dutch society as the “misselijk makende middenstand” (nausea-inducing middle class). His audiences’ “response” would be “ugge, ugge, ugge,” mimicking a smoker’s cough with the Dutch guttural ‘g’. Grootveld sometimes incorporated fire into his performances: in one photograph, we see a garland in flames around the shoulders of the Lieverdje (figure 3.3).

As did Constant, Grootveld demonstrated how ludic qualities could serve as an artistic practice, but he worked outside the realm of galleries and museums. In this chapter, I demonstrate how Grootveld, remembered chiefly for his activism, developed into a sophisticated artist whose work was undercut by his ludic persona. This chapter begins with Grootveld’s biography—for which I rely heavily on Eric Duivenvoorden’s 2009 Dutch-language biography, as well as Grootveld’s archives at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam—highlighting important influences that later became references for his art, after which I will turn my attention to his performances at the Lieverdje. I will show how the activist groups Provo and Dolle Mina emulated Grootveld’s ludic strategies. The chapter concludes with a comparative analysis of Constant and Grootveld, considering their relationships to art and activism.

I. Biography

The chief elements of Grootveld’s performance at the Spui—his costuming and references to smoke and the Dutch holiday Sinterklaas—would reappear as motifs that can be traced to Grootveld’s biography. Grootveld was born in Amsterdam, his father’s family’s hometown, in 1932. The youngest of four children that included a sister and two brothers, he was eight years younger than his youngest sibling. His mother had hoped for a second girl; Grootveld attributed his life-long penchant for cross-dressing to his mother’s wish, explaining that as a child he had “a terrible desire to be a girl.”3 He recalled trying on his mother’s stockings when he was young and basking in her approval, a memory that stands out against his accounts that she physically abused him.4

Grootveld’s father was a carpenter who dreamt of becoming an artist but sacrificed his plans to support his family. He was self-employed because, as an anarchist, he had been blacklisted from employment in the mid-1930s.5 His mother, initially a house cleaner, stayed home to raise the children. Grootveld’s sister Jetti became an acrobat and performed with her husband Henk Korevaar in The Four Kentons.6 At the age of five, Grootveld accompanied his sister to the circus, fascinated by the clowns, an influence seen later in the artist’s costumes.7

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3 Eric Duivenvoorden, Magie van een nieuwe tijd. Het leven van Robert Jasper Grootveld (Amsterdam: Arbeiderspers, 2009), 42.
4 Ibid., 33;42.
5 During the period of high unemployment of the 1930s, Grootveld’s father’s anarchist leanings, which included his distrust of unions and his attempts to rouse his colleagues towards political action, required him to work independently, as no one would hire him. Ibid., 30.
6 The Four Kentons was Grootveld’s sister’s circus act. Ibid., 35.
7 Ibid.
Grootveld had a difficult time at school and was held back twice; he was obstinate, refusing to study the alphabet, and only learning to read outside school with his family’s help. He endured the ‘Hunger Winter’ of 1944–45, when the western provinces of the Netherlands (including Amsterdam, the Hague, and Rotterdam) were cut off from food and fuel while it remained under Nazi occupation. At fifteen, with only an elementary school education, Grootveld got his first job hand lettering billboards for the company Top, whose main client was the renowned Amsterdam movie theater, Tuschinski. He lost the job when a theater manager noticed that one of his signs read, “I am the ad-man,” rather than the film’s title. Altering advertisements became a strategy Grootveld deployed in his art.

In his early adulthood, Grootveld held various menial jobs, at times employed by a warehouse or washing windows. He also briefly worked as a prostitute in his early twenties, engaging in illicit relationships with men who held respectable jobs; for example, he maintained an ongoing liaison with a male banker. While unemployed in the early 1950s, Grootveld volunteered at the Gallery Le Canard on the Spuistraat in Amsterdam, a home for Cobra artists, poets, and jazz. Duivenvoorden traces Grootveld’s interest in language to the poetry he heard at

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8 Grootveld was almost held back for a third time, but his father intervened. Ibid., 37; 39; 54.

9 Ibid., 55.

10 Ibid., 56.

11 Wim Beeren, Actie, werkelijkheid en fictie in de kunst van de jaren 60 in Nederland (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, 1979), 32.

12 In the 1950s, homosexuality in the Netherlands was viewed as a sickness, an attitude that pressured homosexual men to marry and remain married women while seeking out illicit homosexual relationships. Grootveld spent the money he earned working as a prostitute to pay for female prostitutes for himself. Duivenvoorden, Magier van een nieuwe tijd, 63–65.

13 Ibid., 70–71.
Le Canard. At the gallery, Grootveld became acquainted with Constant and visual art, a world he quickly rejected as elitist.

In July 1955, Grootveld constructed a raft from trash and sailed Amsterdam’s canals. His voyage must have been a strange sight (figure 3.4), causing people to stop and stare, and the stunt garnered wide press coverage in local and national newspapers. The experiment evolved into performance art when he took to the water again in November 1955, this time dressed as Zwarte Piet—Black Pete, Sinterklaas’s helper; the figure is analogous to Santa Claus’s elves—on a raft to which he had affixed a small chimney, Zwarte Piet’s traditional entry point into Dutch homes. Grootveld’s trip was well timed: according to the story of Sinterklaas, Zwarte Piet and Sinterklaas arrive by boat from Spain in November, just before the holiday on December fifth. As an indication that his act was a performance, Grootveld affixed a marquee reading, “Robert Jasper in De Moor op het vlotje” (Robert Jasper in The Moor on a Raft, figure 3.5). This was the first time Grootveld posed as Zwarte Piet, a costume that was to become central to his oeuvre as he addressed racism in Dutch society.

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14 Ibid., 72.

15 Ibid.

16 The day after Grootveld took his boat to the canals, he received media attention in nearly all the local and national newspapers. Grootveld caught the attention of director Max de Haas, who then included Grootveld in his film, Amsterdam, stad aan het water (Amsterdam, City on the Water). Ibid., 100–101.

17 Ibid., 105.

18 The history of the Netherlands and Spain became intertwined when through a confluence of matrimonial machinations, Charles, Duke of Burgundy and ruler of the Low Countries became King of Spain in 1516, and Holy Roman Emperor in 1519. The Netherlands did not gain full independence until the conclusion of the Eighty Years War in 1648.


20 Ibid., 106.
In 1955, Grootveld read newspaper reports about marijuana, written by Jan Vrijman of the Amsterdam newspaper *Het Parool*, that informed readers about the drug and its effects, unknown in the Netherlands at the time.\(^\text{21}\) Grootveld was able to obtain marijuana at the Cotton Club in the Nieuwmarkt area, known for its Surinamese and Dutch Antillean population.\(^\text{22}\) In July 1959, as a consequence of tardiness due to his marijuana use, Grootveld was fired from his window-washing job.\(^\text{23}\) Marijuana became a theme in his work: in 1962 he created the *Marihu* game, which questioned the public’s reaction to what appeared to be a harmless drug, especially in contrast to their tolerance of the potentially lethal tobacco. Smoke, as it related to tobacco and marijuana, became a recurrent motif throughout his work.

After Grootveld was fired, his father helped him to secure a small welfare allowance from the government, which was expanding aid to Dutch citizens. As he lived at his parents’ home, Grootveld required little income, so he had free time to develop his interests.\(^\text{24}\) In September 1959, Grootveld approached Vrijman at a tram stop.\(^\text{25}\) Vrijman, who at the time was freelancing for the *Haagse Post*, took in an interest in Grootveld and hired him as a research assistant, tasking him with studying the Dutch communist Marinus van der Lubbe, who was executed in 1934 for attempting to burn down the Reichstag a year earlier as an act of protest.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., 129–130.

\(^{22}\) Ibid., 131.

\(^{23}\) Grootveld lived alone for a short time in late 1958 to early 1959, but after he was fired, he returned to his parents’ home. Ibid., 129–133.

\(^{24}\) Ibid., 142.

\(^{25}\) Ibid., 143.
against the Nazis.\textsuperscript{26} Van der Lubbe proved to be an inspirational figure to Grootveld, both in his heroic act and in his use of arson.

Grootveld next worked as a steward on cargo ships in 1960 and 1961.\textsuperscript{27} On a stop in apartheid South Africa, he purchased a shaman’s medicine case, which later figured in Grootveld’s use of shamanistic chanting and repetition in his performances, earning him the moniker ‘magician’.\textsuperscript{28} At the end of 1961, after returning to Amsterdam from his last cargo ship stint, Grootveld sustained a concussion while falling from a chair. During the subsequent hospital stay, he witnessed patients begging for cigarettes.\textsuperscript{29} He recalled hearing a patient yell, “Nurse, nurse, if I had a cigarette, I wouldn’t be so annoying!”; Grootveld used this exact phrase in his performances at the Liedje.\textsuperscript{30} Once he recognized the extent to which a large portion of society (including himself) was addicted to tobacco, Grootveld began his Anti-Smoking Campaign, which was active from 1961 to 1966, and which will be discussed in this chapter.

By 1969, Grootveld had turned his attention to promoting the use of marijuana, having co-founded the Lowlands Weed Company, which sold inexpensive marijuana plants.\textsuperscript{31} Grootveld set up shop across the street from a police station in Amsterdam as a form of provocation, a plan that led to multiple arrests of Grootveld and his cohorts, and that provoked heated debates in court about possession and criminalization, eventually resulting in the court distinguishing

\textsuperscript{26} Grootveld worked for Vrijman up until November 14, 1959, when Vrijman’s article on Van der Lubbe was published. Ibid., 148–149; 152.

\textsuperscript{27} Grootveld was hired, in part, for his above-average English language skills. Ibid., 159.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 172–173.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 175–176.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 176.

between ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ drugs, and the *gedoogbeleid* (tolerance policy), whereby possession of small amounts of marijuana would be de-criminalized.\textsuperscript{32}

In the 1970s, Grootveld continued to build boats out of refuse, demonstrating his interest in protecting the environment: the rafts provided an alternative use for garbage and could be suitable places to inhabit and—according to Grootveld—cultivate vegetation.\textsuperscript{33} In the 1980’s and 90s, Grootveld built floats together with his wife, Thea Keizer, but largely retired from public life, continuing to indulge in alcohol and marijuana, which interfered with his art and activism.\textsuperscript{34}

In 1986, Grootveld planned to cross the Atlantic in one of his Styrofoam rafts, from Amsterdam to New Amsterdam (New York), in order to demonstrate his inventions’ seaworthiness, but the trip was never realized.\textsuperscript{35} In 1999, Grootveld and Keizer received a commission from the city of Amsterdam to build floating gardens as a public park, but after Grootveld spent about two thousand guilders (one-thousand, three-hundred US dollars in 2016) of the grant on South African wine, city officials terminated the project.\textsuperscript{36} Keizer left him in 2000, and by end of his life he had trouble supporting himself financially and otherwise.\textsuperscript{37} In the early 2000s, he suffered from diabetes and pulmonary edema, and died of lung disease in 2009.\textsuperscript{38}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{32} Duivenvoorden, *Magier van een nieuwe tijd*, 375–381.
\item \textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 394.
\item \textsuperscript{34} In 2002 and 2003, Grootveld was hospitalized twice by court order at Sint Jacob psychiatric hospital, where he was treated for substance abuse, and was discharged only to relapse shortly afterwards. He did not receive a psychiatric diagnosis. Ibid., 408; 414; 426–429; 435.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 418.
\item \textsuperscript{36} The floating park would be cultivated with plants and gardens, and Grootveld and Keizer intended to provide work experience for people who had been diagnosed with psychiatric disorders who wanted to enter the workforce. Grootveld fought with city officials about which plants to grow. Ibid., 422.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 426.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 429.
\end{itemize}
public recognition for his art when, in 2007, his floats were acquired by the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam.\textsuperscript{39}

### II. Ludic Performance

Most often, Grootveld has been identified as an activist and a member of Provo rather than as an artist, likely because his performances challenged societal norms, particularly the Dutch acceptance of Zwarte Piet, nicotine addiction, and the burgeoning consumer culture of the late 1950s and 1960s. Grootveld avoided labeling himself, which may have been intended as a deliberate blurring of his identity. He eschewed conventional venues—museums and commercial art galleries—at a time when these were the chief places to show art. Nonetheless, he was presented as an artist when documentation of his performances was included in a 1979 exhibition at the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam, and the accompanying catalogue surveying art of the 1960s, \textit{Actie, werkelijkheid en fictie in de kunst van de jaren 60 in Nederland} (Action, Reality, and Fiction in the Art of the 1960s in the Netherlands).\textsuperscript{40} In this extraordinarily detailed and valuable tome documenting artistic activities of the 1960s, ranging from painting to performances, television broadcasts, and music magazines, Grootveld is listed along with Nam June Paik and Jan Dibbets. Grootveld is also included in a timeline published in the exhibition catalogue \textit{In & Out of Amsterdam}, although he is not addressed in the main essays and artist

\textsuperscript{39} After his death, Grootveld’s archives were moved to the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam. Ibid., 431.

\textsuperscript{40} The exhibition was curated by Wim Beeren, who also curated \textit{Op Losse Schroeven} discussed in the previous chapter. Beeren was director of the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen from 1978 to 1985, when he left to become director of the Stedelijk Museum. Beeren, \textit{Actie, werkelijkheid en fictie}. 
In Duivenvoorden’s biography on Grootveld, the author recognizes him as an artist, claiming that he has much in common with the absurdist Dada movement, and also points out Grootveld’s problematic relationship to the art world, although the attention to Grootveld as an artist is brief—a handful of pages—in a 450-page book.42

Outside these three sources labeling Grootveld as an artist, Grootveld has been identified more frequently in social and political histories of the Netherlands in relation to the anarchist group Provo. For example, in the first major Dutch historical account of Provo, by Niek Pas, a photograph of Grootveld dressed as Zwarte Piet graces the cover of the book (figure 3.6); Pas credits Grootveld with providing the “images” that helped define Provo.43 His book was edited, and released under a new title, Provo! Medefenomeen (Provo! Media Phenomena) in 2015, in which Grootveld’s role was minimized and the cover replaced with a Provo poster.44 In the only English language history of Provo, Richard Kempton’s memoir Provo: Amsterdam’s Anarchist Revolt, a chapter is devoted to Grootveld, dubbing him “The Prophet of Amsterdam.”45 In Composing Dissent, musicologist Robert Adlington describes Grootveld as an activist, while at one point comparing his performances to contemporaneous exhibitions at the Stedelijk Museum, Bewogen Beweging and Dylaby.46 Historians Hans Righard and James Kennedy also include


42 For example, Duivenvoorden quotes Grootveld who claims that the first Dutch happening Open het Graf (Open the Grave, 1962), was, “much too elite” for him. I describe this happening in section five. Duivenvoorden, Magie van een nieuwe tijd, 227.


45 Richard Kempton, Provo: Amsterdam’s Anarchist Revolt (New Autonomy, 2007), 23.

Grootveld in their accounts of 1960s Dutch history. Both discuss Grootveld as a precursor to Provo, identifying him neither as an artist nor as an activist, preferring to use the term ‘magician’—as did Pas and Kempton—although Righard devotes more attention to Grootveld’s artistic endeavors. In these sources, Grootveld is credited with inspiring Provo, but his role as a socially engaged artist influencing protest methods, and eventually local politics, is overlooked.

Grootveld cultivated his public persona by giving interviews as though they were performances: he engaged journalists and writers in the character of the “anti-smoking magician,” a construct intended to spark his audiences’ critical capacities. The artifice of Grootveld’s interviews was an essential element in maintaining the ludic nature of his performances. His stage persona innocently questioned the dangers of smoking rather than directly condemning post-World War II Dutch culture; this naive demeanor was perpetuated in his “off-stage” persona. I contend that Grootveld portrayed himself as naïve in order to temper his underlying aim of challenging Dutch practices, such as celebrating holidays underpinned by racist sentiments or smoking addiction. I will examine his public presentations, demonstrating that his eccentricity was constructed in order to critique Dutch mainstream culture.

While Grootveld’s works were not merely about smoking, the literature on Grootveld nearly always takes him at his word, failing to question what might have motivated Grootveld beyond the evils of the tobacco industry. The artist himself insisted that cigarette smoking and tobacco companies were his focus, but even his criticism of their advertisements was never presented as the heart of the matter. Occasionally, his veiled intentions broke through the

harmless veneer, revealing the extent to which Grootveld’s persona was indeed a conscious performance and not the result of insanity. In the first newspaper report about his ‘séances’—the term by which Grootveld described his performances, suggesting a mystical or religious quality—Grootveld spoke to reporter Wim Zaal about the larger implications of his work. Zaal had already published a highly complimentary report on Grootveld in 1962, so by the time he interviewed the artist regarding the happenings at the Spui, it is likely that Grootveld trusted him and, perhaps for that reason, disclosed more than he might have done at another time in his career. Grootveld explains, “It is a misconception that it’s only about smoking, that is only a symbol. People must learn to see through the hidden temptation.” Of what, then, is smoking a symbol? I argue that Grootveld was reacting to the dramatic changes in Dutch culture after World War II, that is, the intense consumerism that came with the rapid industrialization and increased wealth of the 1950s, as well as the rampant rise in advertising for new products and services. The tobacco industry was a prime example of these changes, especially as tobacco companies invested a large portion of their operating costs in advertising.

Performance art lends itself to the ludic, especially when it functions as a critical strategy. RoseLee Goldberg, in _Performance: Live Art Since the 1960s_, characterizes performance art as a provocative form that responds to changes in society. “Performance … provides incomparable material for examining contemporary viewpoints on issues such as the body, gender or multiculturalism. This is because live work by artists unites the psychological with the perceptual, the conceptual with the practical, thought with action.” Ludic artists employed

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50 Ibid., 9.
performance as a mode of critique, because, as Goldberg writes, it was a means to actualize ideas. Accordingly, performance art of the 1960s and 1970s resonates with protest culture of the time.\textsuperscript{51}

Performance art in the 1960s frequently demanded \textit{presence}. As an ephemeral form of art, it relies upon documentation, which severs the performance from a particular time and place. Performance art scholar Peggy Phelan writes, “Performance in a strict ontological sense is nonreproduction.”\textsuperscript{52} Marvin Carlson explains that in the 1960s, performance art “stressed physical presence, events, and actions, constantly tested the boundaries of art and life, and rejected the unity and coherence of much traditional art as well as the narrativity, psychologism, and referentiality of traditional theater.”\textsuperscript{53} Performance art’s focus on the live act, especially in the 1960s, was understood as a mechanism that could challenge the easy circulation of commodifiable art objects. Grootveld’s art fits this paradigm: its focus was on live action and nearly all of the remnants of his performances have disappeared, with the exception of documentary photographs taken largely by photographer Cor Jaring.\textsuperscript{54} Moreover, Grootveld’s critique of consumerism via his stance on tobacco was consonant with 1960s performance art’s aim of resisting the commodification of art.

In \textit{Performance: Texts and Contexts}, a definition of performance is put forward that includes features mentioned above, such as provocation and an opposition to commodification, but adds “an interest in play,” based on Huizinga’s and Caillois’ theories, specifically, parody


\textsuperscript{54} Although not a member of Provo, Cor Jaring appointed himself Provo’s photographer and is known for capturing Grootveld’s performances. Roel Van Duijn, \textit{Provo: de geschiedenis van de provotarische beweging, 1965-1967} (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1985), 9; Pas, \textit{Provo!}, 123.
and jokes. Play shares common ground with performance, functioning as inherent to its definition, according to the above authors. Ludic performance can be characterized by absurdity in costuming, as well as sound, scenery, and props, all of which contribute to ambience. Performance art, like installation art, has the ability to create an all-encompassing atmosphere: a space set apart from, yet in response to, contemporary society, like Martial Raysse’s Riviera beach in Dylaby. Notably, Grootveld’s performances embraced the ludic characteristics of masquerade, freedom, purposelessness, and absurdity. He was never without a costume and make-up, and he performed illegally in the street, leading to numerous arrests. Finally, his performances were utterly absurd, viz., his bizarre physical presentation and invented language.

III. Marinus van der Lubbe, Sinterklaas, and the Medicine Man’s Case

Grootveld cultivated his persona by referencing his personal experiences as they related to the larger Dutch context, and by invoking Dutch folklore, such as the history of Marinus van der Lubbe (1909–1934) and the tradition of Zwarte Piet, in order to contextualize his work. Van der Lubbe was revered in the postwar period as one of the few public figures of resistance. Grootveld admired Van der Lubbe and, rather grandiosely, saw himself in a similar role of speaking out against society’s dangers. By varying his performances to focus on Van der Lubbe or Zwarte Piet, Grootveld indicated that his work extended beyond tobacco addiction to address Dutch history and the popular culture of the 1950s and 1960s.

Grootveld’s art referenced Van der Lubbe as a symbol of free, rebellious youth. The Nazi government used the Reichstag fire in 1933 as a pretext for rounding up Hitler’s adversaries. Communists (including parliamentary delegates) were arrested en masse, allowing Hitler to

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consolidate his power. The only person found guilty of the arson, Van der Lubbe, was guillotined in 1934. In 1959, his case was reappraised in a series of articles in the German magazine *Der Spiegel*, in which Fritz Tobias argues that Van der Lubbe had acted independently, as opposed to the widely held belief that he was an agent of the Communist Party. Tobias lacked sufficient evidence, however, and Vrijman, who was sympathetic to Van der Lubbe, directed his assistant, Grootveld, to find evidence to support Tobias’s claims that Van der Lubbe had worked alone.

Grootveld took particular interest in Jef Last’s *Kruisgang der jeugd* (Cloister of Youth), a work of historical fiction based on Van der Lubbe published in 1939. The novel presented a Communist version of the events and suggested that Van der Lubbe was struggling with homosexuality. In a 1964 interview, Grootveld drew attention to Last’s book, explaining that it presents a “crusade of a youth.” Grootveld identified with Van der Lubbe because he saw himself as misunderstood and questioning Dutch cultural norms. Grootveld’s indirect criticism of consumer culture and racism is clearly not on the same scale as Van der Lubbe’s brave act, but Grootveld looked to Van der Lubbe as a model for challenging authority: “When Van der Lubbe was decapitated, the whole of progressive youth was beheaded.” Van der Lubbe also inspired Grootveld to include smoke and fire in his art as a reference and homage to his hero.

Grootveld’s performances trace back to the Dutch holiday Sinterklaas and the myth of Zwarte Piet, which also encompasses elements of costuming and smoke that reappear in

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56 The series questioned whether Van der Lubbe acted alone or with the backing of the Communist party. The article that posed the problem and points of view was Fritz Tobias’s “Stehen Sie auf Van der Lubbe! Der Reichstagsbrand 1993 - Geschichte einer Legende,” *Der Spiegel*, October 21, 1959.

57 Duivenvoorden, *Magier van een nieuwe tijd*, 150.


Grootveld’s performances. Sinterklaas (a corruption of Sint Nicolaas) is celebrated on December 5, or Saint Nicholas’s eve. Saint Nicholas was a Greek bishop, and his Dutch costume (red chasuble and bishop’s mitre) reflects this ecclesiastical origin; his helpers are called ‘Zwarte Pieten’, who are more often referred to in the singular, ‘Zwarte Piet’. According to tradition, Zwarte Piet carries gifts in a burlap sack, his main task being to distribute presents to well-behaved children. Naughty children, by contrast, would be abducted from their homes in Zwarte Piet’s bag to be taken to Spain. Zwarte Piet may also beat bad children with his switch. Over the last sixty years, this threatening image has merged with a caricature derived from the blackface minstrel tradition, demonstrating the racism and xenophobia still present in contemporary conceptions of Zwarte Piet.

Zwarte Piet is traditionally dressed in a colorful silk jester-like costume, reminiscent of a Spanish Moor, with a lace collar and feathered cap. He wears a black curly wig, bright red lipstick or red wax lips, and gold hoop earrings (figure 3.7). Usually, a Caucasian person in

61 Saint Nicholas is the patron saint of children, philatelists, and seafarers, as well as of the city of Amsterdam. Neighboring countries share a similar holiday on December 6, although each has its own peculiarities. As early as the tenth century, churches and chapels honoring Saint Nicholas began to appear in the Netherlands. After World War II, in line with the developing consumer culture, the Christian aspects of the holiday waned while the commercial features, such as gift giving, became increasingly important. Humorous poems meant to tease recipients were also often handed out with gifts. Rahina Hassankhan, *Al is hij zo zwart als roet …* (Den Haag: Warray, 1988), 32–35.

62 Sinterklaas and the Zwarte Pieten reside in Spain and arrive in the Netherlands by boat around mid-November. The holiday includes a parade at the time they dock in the Netherlands. On December 5, Dutch children leave their shoes next to the fireplace or radiator in hopes of finding a gift in the morning.

63 One of Zwarte Piet’s duties includes throwing pepernoten (a type of gingerbread cookie) at children when he and Sinterklaas arrive in the Netherlands.

64 Naughty children would be expected to make gifts for good children when brought to Spain. Zwarte Piet’s role is to frighten people, especially children, through his appearance and behavior. Hassankhan, *Al is hij zo zwart als roet …* , 38.

65 As alternative punishment for bad behavior, the children may find only coal in their shoes.

blackface plays him.\textsuperscript{67} There is some uncertainty about how Zwarte Piet evolved. One theory, harking back to the religious origins of the holiday, is that Zwarte Piet, a devil defeated by Sinterklaas, had turned black from the soot of Hell.\textsuperscript{68} Other theories suggest that Zwarte Piet received his name and color because he passes through sooty chimneys.\textsuperscript{69} Importantly, Zwarte Piet is seen as Sinterklaas’s servant, an aspect that Grootveld would highlight in his performances.

The racist and xenophobic overtones of a Caucasian man in blackface dressed as Zwarte Piet first appeared in the nineteenth century, and the earliest criticism of Zwarte Piet can be found in 1930 in the left-wing magazine \textit{Groene Amsterdammer}.\textsuperscript{70} In 1963, an elementary school principle in the small town of Wanroij in the Dutch province of Brabant, Arnold Ras saw the phenomenon of Zwarte Piet as a form of discrimination, and refused to let Zwarte Piet participate in his school’s holiday celebration.\textsuperscript{71} Zwarte Piet’s depiction can be traced to an 1850 book, \textit{Sint Nicolaas en zijn knecht} (Saint Nicholas and His Servant), written by Dutch schoolteacher Jan Schenkman, who first presented Zwarte Piet as a servant or a slave to Sinterklaas.\textsuperscript{72} Schenkman’s

\textsuperscript{67} Non-Caucasians have sometimes played the role of Zwarte Piet, but this is unusual.

\textsuperscript{68} Hassankhan, \textit{Al is hij zo zwart als roet ...}, 38. Another explanation for Zwarte Piet’s appearance is that Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet are really two sides of the same character.

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 45.

\textsuperscript{70} The 1930 article calls for a black Sinterklaas and accompanied by a white servant, with the intention of giving a black person a role of “honor” in order to influence future generations. Melis Stoke, “De negers in ons huiselijk verkeer,” \textit{De Groene Amsterdammer} no. 2759 (April 19, 1930): 36.

\textsuperscript{71} Arnold Ras’s protest of Zwarte Piet made headlines after an article published in the local newspaper edited by Ras himself, \textit{Wanroys nieuws voor iedereen} was picked up nationally. Ras’s small protest was forgotten before the end of the year. Herman Hofhuizen, “A. J. Ras gelooft óók in Sinterklaas, maar anders,” \textit{De Tijd De Maasbode}, November 4, 1963, 3.

interpretation of Zwarte Piet as a slave was a reflection of the colonial world he inhabited. Grootveld’s strategic use of the word knecht, together with his parodic costume suggests that Zwarte Piet is embedded in a history of racism and signifies the artist’s critical stance.

Two groups, “Zwarte Piet is Racisme” (Black Piet is Racism) and “Zwarte Piet Niet” (No Zwarte Piet), organized by 2011 to condemn the tradition and demand that Zwarte Piet be removed from the holiday, The first significant step towards change began in 2013 when, in an attempt to be more culturally sensitive, Amsterdam Mayor Eberhard van der Laan came to an agreement with the organization “Nederland Wordt Beter” (The Netherlands Improves), campaigning since 2012 against Zwarte Piet and racism, that Zwarte Pieten not wear gold earrings. Additionally, they have been encouraged to wear alternative lipstick colors and hairstyles, although blackface is still permitted. A United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination also weighed in on Zwarte Piet in a 2015 report urging the Netherlands to eliminate the character; the Dutch government dismissed the suggestion. A small step was taken in 2015, when the governments of Amsterdam, The Hague, Utrecht, and Maastricht mandated that schoorsteenpieten (chimney-Petes) be added to the parade. These modified characters would appear in partial, not full, blackface to promote the notion that Piet is covered

73 While it is possible that the Dutch may be somewhat tone-deaf to Zwarte Piet’s association with racism because slavery was never practiced in the Netherlands, and because until recently its population was homogenously white Northern European, it should be noted that the Dutch were the predominate slave trading nation in the second half of the seventeenth century, moving some half million Africans to the West Indies and the Americas, maintaining slavery in the West until 1863, and, under the hegemony of the Dutch East India Company, enforcing slave labor throughout Indonesia until 1862. The Dutch Boers were instrumental in establishing and continuing Apartheid in South Africa, where Grootveld visited as a merchant seaman. It seems likely that Grootveld’s creation of his parodies and protests display his sensitivity to the racist implications of celebrating a clownish, servile caricature of a black man in a country that bears so much responsibility for the suffering of millions of oppressed members of that race. For more on the history of the Dutch slave trade, see Markus Vink, “The World’s Oldest Trade’: Dutch Slavery and Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean in the Seventeenth Century,” Journal of World History 14, no. 2 (June 2003): 131–177; Markus Vink, “Freedom and Slavery: The Dutch Republic, the VOC World, and the Debate over the ‘World’s Oldest Trade’,” South African Historical Journal 59, no. 1 (2007): 19–46.

in chimney soot.\textsuperscript{75} Considering the fact that white men continue to parade in blackface, Grootveld was decades ahead of Dutch society with his critique; arguably that is why his position was not recognized, let alone heeded.\textsuperscript{76}

In interviews about the development of his performances, Grootveld related two autobiographical stories of the holiday of Sinterklaas, both tracing back to his early childhood. He remembered as a three-year-old seeing the saint appear on his white horse, learning that presents were brought into the home through a chimney (and the confusion that ensued as a result of his home not having a chimney), hearing festive songs, leaving a carrot in his shoe overnight for Sinterklaas’s horse, and finding a gift in the morning. He explained, “I was in an euphoric mood for days because the miracle had reached me.”\textsuperscript{77} This story emphasizes the mystical underpinnings of Grootveld’s understanding of Sinterklaas, which he would later recall when enacting his version of Zwarte Piet in his performances. Moreover, Grootveld’s adult retelling of the “miracle” he experienced as a child produced a strategic image of the artist as naïve, thus actively shaping his public persona as an innocent who lacks critical capacities.

Grootveld’s second account of Sinterklaas relates to a community event. In the Netherlands, Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet visit schools as part of the national celebration of the holiday, when children receive pepernoten and small gifts. Grootveld recalled:

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\textsuperscript{77} Duivendvoorden, \textit{Magie van een nieuwe tijd}, 146.
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Although I was too young for kindergarten, I could attend the Sinterklaas celebration that year [1935] at the school across the street. I would not get a gift, but I would see him. The other children had to walk up the stairs, because the scary figure sat on the stage with the Zwarte Pieten standing around him. I immediately saw that the Pieten were cross-dressed women. I stood there in front of the stage. There were many children who cried and grimaced out of fear of the man on whose lap they were supposed to sit. I didn’t have to. I could just watch. I saw under Sinterklaas's dress: black shoes and socks for men, which were held up by suspenders. I understood that it was just a guy dressed up.78

Rather than focusing on the factuality of Grootveld’s recollections, as his biographer Eric Duivenvoorden does, it is more fruitful to consider how Grootveld utilized his personal history in service of his performances. By invoking Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet, Grootveld wanted to bring attention to problematic aspects of Dutch cultural history and contemporary social practice. That is, the artist spoke to the racism of the Dutch portrayal of Zwarte Piet and the objectionable consumerism surrounding the gift-giving holiday of Sinterklaas, often through dressing up and performing as a mad version of Zwarte Piet. For example, a 1961 photograph of the artist in costume shows several elements related to Zwarte Piet: the rings of black paint around his eyes, mouth and on top of his nose, the tulle collar, and a matted headpiece in a mock Afro (figure 3.8). Notably, he is smoking a comically large pipe, which ironically relates to his anti-smoking smoking campaign. Grootveld made himself into a parody of the folk figure, a strategic approach deployed to criticize a deep-seated tradition.

A formative experience in Grootveld’s life was a trip to Durban, South Africa while working on a cargo ship in the early 1960s.79 While exploring an area of the harbor forbidden to white people—segregation in South Africa can be traced back to the colonial period—Grootveld

78 Ibid., 147.

79 A memorable trip, recounted in Grootveld’s biography, was a three-month tour from the end of December 1960 through March 1961 to south and east Africa aboard the SS Grootekerk. Ibid., 159; 172–173.
found a junk shop selling a small box that had once belonged to a shaman.\textsuperscript{80} The store’s owner explained that the natives were afraid of it, and for that reason no one had bought it.\textsuperscript{81} The box was filled with a variety of small bottles of liquids, rolling papers, and assorted trinkets, which Grootveld purchased and slept with under his pillow for the rest of the trip, afraid that his colleagues might steal or throw away his precious object. In a 2006 interview, Grootveld reflected on his acquisition: “I meditated on that box, I wanted to get to know the primitive side of society. … I started to think about what that is: a shaman. What is his function in society?”\textsuperscript{82} That figure became Grootveld’s role model for his performances: the artist would hold séances and smoking ceremonies while preaching to the Dutch youth. He imitated a shaman’s technique of repeating words and phrases and incorporated this into his own performances. For example, he would replicate and repeat a smoker’s cough or chant the words “ha ha ha.” Grootveld obliquely addressed the racism he saw in depictions of Zwarte Piet by becoming the character and at the same time channeling his meaningful experience in segregated Durban. Importantly, Grootveld never indicated that he was performing a parody and critique; his actions were taken at face value, giving the impression that Grootveld was, indeed, mad. As a result, Grootveld went unacknowledged as a ludi artist, and was misrepresented as merely drug addled and unhinged.

Grootveld not only linked the image of a shaman with Zwarte Piet, he also drew a connection to the field of advertising. Writing in a 1965 article about his performances at the Lieverdje, Grootveld compared the work of advertising executives to that of a medicine man: “I

\textsuperscript{80} Grootveld crossed officially segregated lines in order to acquire the shaman’s case in Durban. Back in Amsterdam, Grootveld entered unofficially segregated areas when he frequented jazz clubs and sought out marijuana. His experiences influenced his critical view of racism in the Netherlands and abroad, which was a driving force in his performances. Andre Du Toit and Hermann Giliomee, \textit{Afrikaner Political Thought: Analysis and Documents}, vol. Volume One: 1770–1850 (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1983), 6.

\textsuperscript{81} Duivenvoorden, \textit{Magier van een nieuwe tijd}, 172.

\textsuperscript{82} Grootveld is quoted in Ibid., 173.
consider journalists and all publicity-people to be the witch-doctors, shamans of our Western asphalt jungle, because they wield the magical spells, present magical images, and endlessly repeat exclamations and murmurings to God Joe Public trying to get him to behave as desired." At the Lieverdje, his critique of consumerism, religion, and advertising converged in the guise of an anti-smoking sermon.

Grootveld’s ubiquitous and multifarious use of the word ‘magic’ is a vestige from his trip to Durban; the term’s meaning for him ties together his experiences at home and abroad. In 1961, he explains that it was in Africa when he recognized the “disastrous” influence hypnosis and magic could have on a population; he understood the medicine man’s role of mesmerizing people under his power so they cannot control their behavior. Similarly, for Grootveld, advertisements were ‘magic’ causing healthy citizens to make themselves sick by consuming tobacco. In 1964, Grootveld described the Lieverdje as the “heart” of the “Magic Center” (Amsterdam), the hub of the “cartel agencies.” When referring to Amsterdam, Grootveld combined the phrases “Western asphalt jungle” with the “Magic Center”. Thus, his hometown presented a version of Durban, filled with medicine men (advertising agencies) casting spells over the unsuspecting populace. Numerous news articles referred to Grootveld as a “magician” when he assumed the role of preacher. While his experience in Durban is the origin of Grootveld’s use of ‘magic’, he also suggested other meanings, for example: “Smoking is a sacrifice that has something to do with primeval magic.” Moreover, ‘magic’ refers to recreational marijuana, consonant with his

85 Duivenvoorden, Magier van een nieuwe tijd, 211.
86 Henk J. Meier, “Heer geef mij een sigaret,” Ratio, April 1964, 8.
comparison of that drug with tobacco. In another context, ‘magic’ is closely associated with the miracle of Sinterklaas.  

Smoke as an element of his performances and as a metaphor unified Grootveld’s life and work. Grootveld was best known for his Anti-Smoking Campaign and related works of art, yet he was also a chain smoker who died in 2009 from illnesses associated with his lifetime addiction. Smoke forms a common thread among Grootveld’s interests in consumerism (addicts, like himself, had no choice but to keep buying tobacco, which represents a need to consume other products); racism (via the chimney smoke used to color Zwarte Piet’s face black); rebellious youth (Van der Lubbe and smoke from the fire he ignited at the German Reichstag); and, finally, pollution (the elimination of car exhaust as the object of the White Bike Plan). In Grootveld’s art, smoke also functions as a metaphor for the ludic in that it provides a veil that obscures easy interpretation—as did Grootveld’s persona, which he actively fabricated in interviews, resisting simple identification as an artist or activist.

IV. The Anti-Smoking Homo Ludens

Grootveld dated the beginning of his Anti-Smoking Campaign to September 1961, when he witnessed patients begging for cigarettes at the sanatorium in Amsterdam. For Grootveld, the issue was not only addiction per se, but the manipulation of the masses by corporate entities, motivated by a greed unhampered by any regard for health. His first step was to deface

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87 Beeren, Actie, werkelijkheid en fictie, 45.

88 In the Netherlands, reports on the dangers of smoking were released in 1957, although health organizations had long been aware of the health risks. Joop Bouma, Het rookgordijn: De macht van de Nederlandse tabaksindustrie (Amsterdam: L.J. Veen, 2001), 25.
advertisements. He saw the advertisements as a malignant symptom of a runaway post-war economic boom. In a 1964 interview, Grootveld poked fun at his country’s rampant consumerism (“we have such a terrible hunger for motorcycles, TVs, and whisks”). Advertisements were the material remnants of the new consumerism and Grootveld gave expression to his discontent and frustration by writing the word “kanker” (cancer)—or the letter ‘k’—on street advertisements. Sometimes he would vandalism advertisements with longer sentences, such as “Are you also on your way to getting cancer?” (figure 3.9).

Angry at tobacco companies’ attempts to convince people to smoke and thereby endanger their lives, he began to refer to advertising agencies’ work as “mass hypnosis.” Grootveld viewed repetition as an essential tool of this ‘mass hypnosis’: “I was fascinated by the phenomenon of advertising: the repetition of the image, that same image over and over, and the repetition of the advertising slogan.”

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89 In a 2006 interview, Grootveld recalled, “The ad was my enemy.” Duivenvoorden, *Magier van een nieuwe tijd*, 178.


91 Grootveld’s ‘k’ eventually took on multiple meanings as his work in the 1960s progressed.

92 A comparison could be drawn with the French artists, Jacques de la Villeglé and Raymond Hains, whose work has been described as *décollage*, based on defacing layers of advertisements. Grootveld’s actions are similar because he was responding, in part, to the economic miracle in Europe in the postwar period. The French artists and Grootveld operated in the street, as opposed to the studio, and both engaged in acts of vandalism. Unlike the French examples, however, Grootveld never referred to what he did as art and did not exhibit his defaced advertisements in galleries. In fact, as I will address below, Grootveld deliberately positioned himself against traditional art institutes and remained an outsider. For more on Villeglé and Hains see Benjamin Buchloh, “From Detail to Fragment: Décollage Affichiste,” *October* 56, no. Spring (1991): 98–110. Grootveld’s work can also be seen as anticipatory, resembling the Situationist International’s slogans in the streets in May 1968, and later feminist interventions on advertising billboards.


Grootveld reflected on his Anti-Smoking Campaign in December 1961: “I hoped to stir the subconscious of passersby, but that was disappointing because nobody noticed.”95 While his intended audience ignored his actions, however, tobacco companies observed his graffiti. Publex, the company responsible for the majority of billboards in the center of Amsterdam, lodged criminal complaints against the artist. In December 1961, Grootveld was incarcerated at the Huis van Bewaring (Detention Center) in Amsterdam for sixty days on charges of repeated acts of vandalism.96 Grootveld realized that because of his detention, he—ironically—received an enormous amount of publicity from the police report and the court decision, which led to notices in newspapers.97 While in his cell, Grootveld gave his first major interview, published in the illustrated weekly Panorama on January 27, 1961—which included a lengthy introduction by the artist himself.98 Yet defacing advertisements was the least ludic of the artist’s endeavors: Grootveld took a direct stance against the tobacco companies by literally attacking their advertisements, but his actions came across merely as polemical. After this initial act of civil disobedience, Grootveld learned that he could garner more attention through absurd actions leading to arrest and, thereby, to publicity, than from agitprop. Henceforth, his exploits became

95 Duivenvoorden, Magie van een nieuwe tijd, 180. Duivenvoorden references an article from the Haagse Post from December 16, 1961.

96 Pas, Provo!, 53.

97 Ibid.

98 Grootveld’s contribution to De Mari’s article is more polemical than in his later artwork. For example, he asks the reader, “Do you know that seventy percent of all the advertisements in the streets are for smoking? Do you know that all cigarette companies are aware that smoking is bad for your health? Henk de Mari, “Uche, uche, uche,” Panorama, January 27, 1962, Interviews with Robert Jasper Grootveld, International Institute of Social History, http://www.iisg.nl/grootveld/documents/panorama-27-1-1962.pdf.
more ludic. In February 1962, Grootveld was released from jail and sought a permanent location where he could practice his séances, which prefigured Dutch happenings.

On March 17, 1962, Grootveld opened the K-Church (or K-Kerk in Dutch), also known as the Anti-Smoking Temple, a space donated by restaurant owner Nicolaas Kroese, located on the Korte Leidsedwarsstraat near Leidseplein in the center of Amsterdam. There, Grootveld held a service every other night for smokers, which he called the “Bewuste Nicotinisten” (Conscious Nicotine-ists). The “Conscious Nicotine-ists” also smoked mind altering drugs, such as marijuana, following the advice of semi-doctor Bart Huges—a medical school dropout and ‘medical advisor’ to the Anti-Smoking Campaign, known for drilling a hole through his skull in an attempt to achieve a permanent high. Constant referred to the K-Church in his contribution to Provo’s eponymous journal in 1965: “the only anti-functional space that I have encountered thus far is the anti-smoking temple by Robert Jasper Grootveld in Amsterdam. There people play and nothing useful is done.” In other words, Grootveld’s temple was the closest example of New Babylon that Constant could find.

The ‘K’ in ‘K-church’ held several meanings for Grootveld. In a 1964 interview, Grootveld mentioned the first ‘K’-words that he learned from his anarchist father: kerk, koning, kroese.

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99 In the Panorama interview, journalist Henk de Mari related Grootveld’s descriptions of séances he conducted while alone in his cell. The artist explained that the séances were based on his observations of “African medicine men”—which is likely a fabrication. Ibid.

100 The location was previously Kroese’s carpentry workshop. Beeren, Actie, werkelijkheid en fictie, 43.

101 The phrase Bewuste Nicotinisten (Conscious Nicotine-ists) is more mellifluous in Dutch than in English. Duivenvoorden, Magie van een nieuwe tijd, 196.

102 Huges suggested that psychedelic drugs are not addictive. Beeren, Actie, werkelijkheid en fictie, 44–45.


104 It is possible that Grootveld may have had Constant in mind when building the Anti-Smoking Temple. Grootveld worked at a café where Constant exhibited his art, and Constant’s New Babylon had already been exhibited in Amsterdam.
kapitaal, karzerne, and kroeg (church, king, capital, barracks, and bars). Grootveld’s father had been a follower of the socialist Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis, a preacher turned first socialist Member of Parliament, who left his party to lay the groundwork for contemporary anarchism in the Netherlands. Grootveld said he grew up hearing about the five Ks and was raised to be against them all. Eventually, Grootveld added other K words, some of which did not begin with K in the Dutch language. They include Kanker, Karma, Krotsjef, Kennedy, Knoeien, Kafka, Kabaret, Koran, Kommunisme, Knecht (cancer, karma, Khrushchev, Kennedy, messiness, cabaret, Kafka Quran, Communism, and servant). This bizarre and disjointed diatribe—attacking everything from religion to popular entertainment—results in a self-parody. Grootveld’s K words were painted on the exterior of the K-Church, and written on the interior walls of the building (figure 3.10). He did not regard misspelling as a problem as long as the sound was close enough, and his indifference to the rules of grammar demonstrated his equation between language and the old, outmoded society against which he was rebelling, so it became fodder for ridicule.

Grootveld designed the exterior of his temple to refer to and mock artistic legacies, such as Abstract Expressionism. The creation of the space as well as the séances at the Anti-Smoking Temple were documented in a film titled Jasper en het Rokertje (Jasper and the Cigarette), made by Bas van der Lecq and Grootveld in the spring of 1962. The film captures Grootveld, dressed in a white smock, scarf, and beret, splashing paint on the temple’s exterior in a manner

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106 Duivenvoorden, Magier van een nieuwe tijd, 194.
108 Bas van der Lecq, Jasper en het rokertje, 16 mm, 1962.
reminiscent of Hans Namuth’s celebrated film of Pollock at work in 1950 (figure 3.11). In Grootveld’s film, however, we see his endeavor as parodic: he flings diluted paint at the wall, exerting so much energy that the artist himself nearly topples in a slapstick comedy. Grootveld finally empties a pail of paint in the general direction of the temple and walks away. The following shot shows his audience—largely passersby—laughing at his fruitless attempts at painting. The door was covered in planks of wood, which sometimes crossed and overlapped to form the letter K (figure 3.12). It was entirely slathered in thick layers of paint that were alternately applied with a brush or simply lobbed at the surface. The door is effectively a collage, reminiscent of Robert Rauschenburg’s *combinès* and Pollock’s drip paintings, which had been on view at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam as early as June 1950.109

The interior space, about 500 square feet, was covered in cigarette advertisements. Visitors were given chalk and encouraged to draw on the advertisements. The temple contained publications about Grootveld and his Anti-Smoking Campaign. He created an altar surrounded by ashtrays holding lit cigarettes waiting to be extinguished (figure 3.13), and, in a musical reference to colonial culture, played “African rhythms” on a tape recorder.110 Though Grootveld intended to question “primitivizing” trends in Dutch culture, his actions were often taken at face value. A fairly typical account of the opening of the Anti-Smoking Temple reads: “[Grootveld] sees smoking as a rite, as a hypnosis by cigarette manufacturers. That's why he wants to ritually fight the pleasure of smoking. He uses the primitive African music which also assists medicine

109 The Stedelijk Museum held two exhibitions featuring Abstract Expressionism: *Amerika schildert* (America Paints, 1950), and *Surrealism + Abstractie-keuze uit de verzameling Peggy Guggenheim* (Surrealism + Abstraction- A Selection From Peggy Guggenheim’s Collection, 1951). In 1958, the Stedelijk held *Jackson Pollock* in the summer and *Young America Paints* in the fall. Rauschenberg’s *Black Market* (1961) and Jasper Johns’s *Thermometer* (1959) had both been included in *Bewogen Beweging* at the Stedelijk a year before the temple opened. Beeren, *Actie, werkelijkheid en fictie*, 43.

men, in a stifling smoky room, where the members of the temple cough and sneeze.” A separate announcement describes Grootveld’s séances as poised between sincerity and jest, yet still doesn’t make connections to anything outside the tobacco industry, although Grootveld’s trip to Africa is mentioned to identify the source of his interest in magic and hypnosis. Few contemporary viewers questioned politics of his music, ritualistic activities, and costume. In Beeren’s exhibition catalogue, Grootveld’s work is seen as focusing on tobacco and addiction, and occasionally consumerism, placing smoking in a broader context. There is no mention, however, of the Dutch history of colonialism or current issues of racism or xenophobia.

*Jasper en het Rokertje* presents scenes from one of Grootveld’s séances. Grootveld begins his performance by bursting through a burning cigarette advertisement poster, emerging from the circle of flames like a circus lion jumping through a blazing hoop. Grootveld then starts his sermon: “To begin, we must understand that smoking is a ritual compulsion. After all, it [the cigarette] comes out of the ground, from the earth mother. It is dried, fermented, and processed into the body that is the cigarette. The fire is added, the sacred fire. The smoke, the soul of the body, rises.” Recitations follow: Grootveld begins his smoker’s cough song, a guttural chanting of “ugge, ugge, ugge.” An audience of people in their twenties—at least twenty audience members are depicted in the film—repeats the monotones, and several begin to cough while grinning (figure 3.14). Grootveld continues, “But to beat the spirit of the addiction, we

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114 In other speeches not included in this film, Grootveld addresses Van der Lubbe and his death sentence. Duivenvoorden, *Magier van een nieuwe tijd*, 197; Beeren, *Actie, werkelijkheid en fictie*, 45.
have to call on the spirit of publicity. We will do just that,” and he recites the “publicity song” in which the word “publicity” is maniacally repeated in an a cappella monotone. At the end, in keeping with the antic nature of the entire event, Grootveld calls on his audience to “laugh advertising away,” at which point everyone begins to sing the “ha-ha” song or the “laugh hypnosis.” Some the audience members chant “ha-ha,” while others break out in belly laughs. Grootveld then stands over a bonfire of cigarettes, which he eventually extinguishes to a soundtrack of drumbeats and singing, presumably the taped “African rhythms.”

For his séances, Grootveld painted his face and dressed up as a deranged Zwarte Piet. His lips were bright red, accentuated with a large white ring circling his mouth. He painted red, white, and black stripes on his face, which took on a different pattern each time he performed. He always wore headgear of some kind, often modified by the artist himself, for example, a soldier’s cap mounted with a device in the middle of his forehead to hold a pipe (figure 3.15), and a jacket with its sleeves cut off. Grootveld’s performance is entirely ludic and absurd, and takes the form of parody. He parodies shamanistic rituals, but the object of his ridicule is not the ‘medicine man’ of Durban, but rather the racist Dutch of the former South African colony. At the same time, he demonstrates the absurdity of the Dutch conception of Zwarte Piet.

Grootveld strove to incorporate ‘extinguishing ceremonies’ into his séance repertoire. He had wanted the temple to smoke constantly. “Visitors have to be in the smoke in order to realize the evil. No ostrich policy. I want to fumigate them.” The fire department paid close attention

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115 “Maar om de geest van de verslaving te kunnen verslaan, moeten we de geest der publiciteit oproepen. Dat doen we gewoon.” Duivenvoorden, *Magier van een nieuwe tijd*, 197.

116 Ibid.

117 Ibid., 197; Van der Lecq and Grootveld, *Jasper en het rokertje*.

to the Anti-Smoking Temple and tried to warn Grootveld’s audience that the place was a fire hazard.\textsuperscript{119} When he eventually set his temple on fire, Grootveld was looking to Van der Lubbe: just as Van der Lubbe had been manipulated as a Nazi pawn, so Grootveld had been manipulated by cigarette companies’ advertising. While Grootveld may have been paranoid, perhaps from smoking substances other than tobacco, he also understood that advertising worked and consumers were addicted to an injurious drug. The idea was to set the temple on fire, repeatedly, in a reference to Van der Lubbe’s attempt to torch the Reichstag building.

The first extinguishing ceremony went off without a hitch, but Grootveld was not as lucky with the second. On April 18, 1962, a month after the Anti-Smoking temple opened, Grootveld poured gasoline on a pile of sawdust and set it on fire. He had two fire extinguishers on hand as well as large buckets of water. The first extinguisher was inadequate to the task and the second was defective. Grootveld was unable to pour the buckets of water over the flames on his own because they were too heavy. By the time the fire department and police arrived, Grootveld had to be forcibly removed. Once outside the temple, he climbed onto the roof and yelled “Remember Van der Lubbe!” to the crowd below, which included the police (figure 3.16).\textsuperscript{120} (In this, Grootveld was reenacting the Dutch arsonist’s deed: while living in Leiden, Van de Lubbe climbed lampposts from which he gave anti-fascist speeches.\textsuperscript{121}) The second extinguishing ceremony came to an end when the temple burned to the ground.

Grootveld’s seemingly purposeless play suggests that his object of critique was bigger than cigarette smoking, but consonant with the paradox of the ludic, Grootveld’s purposeful critique of Dutch racism was (and still is) misconstrued by audiences, and his artwork was

\textsuperscript{119} Duivenvoorden, \textit{Magie van een nieuwe tijd}, 202.

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 202–203.

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 203–204.
viewed as innocent, purposeless play. Grootveld’s critical presentation of the underlying racism in Dutch culture is concealed by layers of seemingly unrelated material such that his critique is either lost or purposely ignored by Dutch audiences who never commented on the racist implications of Grootveld’s performances. It may also be a case of blindness through ignorance that persists until this day when white people continue to appear in blackface every December.

V. Open the Grave and the Marihu Game

Grootveld’s séances at the Anti-Smoking Temple were very similar to happenings, although the term ‘happening’ as applied to a work of art was not introduced into the Amsterdam art world until December 9, 1962, when the first Dutch happening, *Open het Graf* (Open the Grave) took place. It was organized by poet Simon Vinkenoog, Melvin Clay (an actor from the New York Living Theater), and film producer Frank Stern.\(^{122}\) As American artist Allan Kaprow explained in his 1961 essay, “Happenings in the New York Scene,” happenings were non-narrative performances that ranged from “sophisticated, witty works” to “Zen-like rituals,” as well as actions that are “crude, lyrical and very spontaneous.”\(^{123}\) Fleeting events that could take place anywhere, happenings were attempts to break the fourth wall that exists between audience and artist in a traditional performance, as well as the boundary between art and life. Dutch artists looked to European examples, such as Wolf Vostell (in Germany) and Jean-Jacques Lebel (in France), who were both active in Amsterdam. Günter Berghaus has described U.S. happening as apolitical, European happenings, on the other hand,


contained a conscious socio-political critique of affluent consumer society as it had developed after the Second World War. … Life as experienced in a Happening was no longer a mere reproduction or symbolic interpretation of our existential reality. It was rather a confrontation with our alienated existence in late-capitalist society, a discourse on the conflict between our real self and its alienated state. Through the performance the audience was encourage to experience the authenticity of their existence in opposition to “life unlived.”

In his 1968 text *On the Necessity of Violation*, Lebel predicts that anti-racism and anti-war demonstrations will end as happenings, conflating protest and art, a convergence that had already begun in Grootveld’s performances. In addition, Lebel emphasizes magic and myth, again recalling Grootveld’s invocation of Zwarte Piet. Finally, while Lebel’s theorization of the happening resembles Grootveld’s performances and *Open the Grave*, they differ with regard to sexuality: neither Grootveld’s performances nor *Open the Grave* had interest in or fascination with sexual liberation or eroticism.

Fluxus events also influenced Grootveld and happenings in the Netherlands, including *Open the Grave*. The first performance of international Fluxus artists in Amsterdam, entitled *Parallele Aufführungen Neuester Musik* (Parallel Performances of the Latest Music), took place at the Gallery Monet in Amsterdam on October 5, 1962, during the vernissage of Wolf Vostell’s *décollages*. The event included contributions by Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, Nam June Paik, Günter Berghaus, “Happenings in Europe in the ’60s: Trends, Events, and Leading Figures,” *TDR* 37, no. 4 (Winter 1993): 162.


The second Dutch happening, *Stoned in the Streets*, took place on January 11, 1965, in the basement of Café Williamsplace, on the Zeedijk in the center of Amsterdam, and included an erotic element, a collaboration between artists Marijke Koger and Simon Posthuma. Koger tore off her clothes on stage and then Posthuma painted her body and completed his work with a signature. The most important action that defined *Stoned in the Streets* involved Grootveld, Posthuma, and Huges. Grootveld and Posthuma removed a bandage covered with the words “ha ha ha” from Huges’s head to reveal that Huges had trepanned—he had drilled a hole in his forehead, a ‘third eye’ to help a achieve a constant high and an open mind. While the happening contained nudity by way of Koger’s striptease, *Stoned in the Streets* is marked by its more manic and drug-related acts. Cherix, “On the Passage of a Few Persons Through a Rather Brief Unity of Time: Amsterdam, 1960-1976,” 156.
Emmett Williams, Dutch artist Willem de Ridder, and the German Carlheinz Caspari (who at the time was co-authoring Constant’s book on *New Babylon, Skizze zu einer Kultur*). The program concluded with Paik’s *Moving Theater No. 1*, a parade through the city while singing Tibetan songs; participants threw a burning violin (with a radio inside the sound hole) into a canal, and Dick Higgins performed *Danger Music No. 17* (which involved juggling butter and eggs). After the last performance concluded, Grootveld, who had witnessed the event, proselytized to the remaining audience members that Amsterdam needed to become a ‘Magic Center’. At this time, Grootveld saw the ‘Magic Center’ (Amsterdam ’s sobriquet) as a place to find deliverance from advertising’s hegemony. Grootveld sought followers among the crowd lingering after the Fluxus event. While Grootveld remained dismissive of art and performances held in museums, he saw a correlation between his pursuits and those of the Fluxus artists, so surmised that participants in Fluxus events would attend his performances.

*Open the Grave* was held at artist Rik van Bentum’s studio at Prinsengracht 146 (also known as the short-lived Gallery LSD-25, a reference to the psychedelic drug), in the center of Amsterdam. Participants included writers Vinkenoog, Jan Cremer, and Johnny van Doorn, artists Lebel and Grootveld, and other prominent cultural figures such as Bart Huges. The name *Open the Grave* alluded to and was meant to mock the one-time television spectacle *Open Het Dorp* (Open The Village), which had aired just weeks before on November 26–27. This 23-hour television broadcast was a fundraiser for *Het Dorp* (the Village), a community for the disabled. *Open the Village* marked the first time that a nation-wide fundraising program was televised. The

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129 Ibid., 50.
title *Open the Grave*, took on a new meaning when the Dutch monarch Queen Wilhelmina died one day before the happening, as it now seemed to allude to her the death. The studio was decorated with pieces of rotting meat and cow’s intestines in addition to streamers, posters, paintings, and photographs. In honor of the recently deceased Marilyn Monroe, there was an altar comprising a urinal covered with photos of the actress.\(^{130}\) In his notes preparing the event, Vinkenoog listed his influences on *Open the Grave*: Marcel Duchamp, Antonin Artaud, Dutch filmmaker Louis van Gasteren, and Constant’s *New Babylon*.\(^{131}\)

For *Open the Grave*, Grootveld applied blackface and dressed as Zwarte Piet, wearing a costume of his own design that he had debuted during his performances at the Anti-Smoking Temple; in this iteration Grootveld emphasized Zwarte Piet’s role as a servant. In a booklet published for the occasion, he explains, “In the context of Amsterdam, the Magic center, (Sinter)Klaas appeared to me. I am now his servant, a Zwarte Piet, and I will testify for him, throughout the year, because he is a miracle. He brings the stuff from Spain, he is goodness itself, and I would love a baby doll.”\(^{132}\) It is telling that Grootveld referred to Zwarte Piet as a *servant*, rather than as an assistant; this deviation from the common understanding of Zwarte Piet encouraged the audience to question Piet’s colonial connotations by making his indentured status explicit. The artist emphasized Zwarte Piet’s race with his costume, specifically the makeup (figure 3.17). He described Klaas as “goodness itself,” not only because Klaas brings gifts, but also because Klaas could save the city from advertising by replacing mass media with Klaas’s

\(^{130}\) There was also a ‘soul telephone’ with a choice of celebrities to reach, including the names Freud, v.d. Lubbe, James Dean, Marilyn, and J. Christus. Ibid., 56.

\(^{131}\) In absurdist tone, Vinkenoog also gave credit to the psychedelic drug LSD, as well as to the Netherlands’ Eighty Years’ War with Spain that resulted in Dutch independence. Simon Vinkenoog et al., *Open het Graf: a Hommage to the Dead, a Warning to the Living: Wereld (world) Premiere Necrofilie Bi-lingual Multi-national Happening, Amsterdam 1962 (9 December 1962, Prinsengracht 146)*. (s.l.: s.n., 1962), n.p.

\(^{132}\) Ibid.
“magic.” Grootveld made a joke about wanting to receive a baby doll, conventionally a female-gendered gift, which also alluded to Grootveld’s personal history of cross-dressing. In this way, he was able to poke fun at the consumerism surrounding the Sinterklaas holiday without directly attacking the tradition or Dutch custom. His silly language, verging on absurd play, combined with his deadpan tone created an indirect way to rethink both Zwarte Piet and consumerism without alienating Grootveld’s audience.

As Italian philosopher Paolo Virno has recently theorized, jokes can make criticism legible while forming avenues for creative thinking. While Grootveld is not exactly cracking jokes, his use of parody to make an ironic statement on Dutch culture can be understood through Virno’s analysis of jokes. Virno explains how jokes provide a way to alter modes of thought:

[J]okes, as well as all endeavors to modify one’s form of life in a critical situation, are nourished either by the unusual combination of given elements or by an abrupt deviation towards ulterior elements, which are more or less incoherent with respect to the initial order of discourse.

A joke creates a productive fallacy that permits what Virno called an “exodus” in the listener, that is, an alternative route that changes a conversation. An exodus provides an opportunity to modify the rules of a game, rather than remaining bound to a particular set of circumstances. Jokes, according to Virno, allow deviation from “the axis of discourse so as to introduce heterogeneous elements that were not previously considered.” In Grootveld’s performance for Open the Grave, the artist’s ironic statements about Zwarte Piet, render the possibility of

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133 Beeren, Actie, werkelijkheid en fictie, 45.
134 Duivenvoorden, Magie r van een nieuwe tijd, 231.
135 Paolo Virno, Multitude between innovation and negation, trans. Isabella Bertoletti, James Cascaito, and Andrea Casson (Los Angeles, CA; Cambridge, Mass.: Semiotext(e), 2008), 145.
136 The “exodus” is a biblical reference to the choice of either facing the Pharaoh and staging a rebellion or leaving Egypt and thereby refusing to play by the rules of the game, allowing for an entirely new scheme. Ibid., 148.
137 Ibid., 143.
transforming audiences’ understanding of Sinterklaas. Grootveld’s *Open the Grave* act became the basis for his later happenings at the Spui in Amsterdam. Before he devoted himself to those performances, however, he first focused on the *Marihu Game*, also launched during *Open the Grave*.

The *Marihu Game* is played with *marihu*, a made-up word derived from the Dutch word for marijuana (*marihuana*) that refers to anything that can pass for marijuana that is not actually marijuana or tobacco. Marijuana was (and still is) illegal, so an element of the game was to provoke the police by having players exchange a substance that could be mistaken for it. Grootveld redesigned and refilled packages of rolling tobacco with *marihu*. In mimicking tobacco packaging, Grootveld conflated a substance whose usage he thought should be controlled (tobacco) with one that he felt should be legalized (marijuana). According to one account, he prepared hundreds of such packages and surreptitiously slipped them into cigarette dispensers. Grootveld would stand next to the tobacco machine and when someone bought a package by inserting coins and opening a drawer, similar to an old fashioned newspaper vending machine, Grootveld would ask to hold the drawer open and then shove a package of *marihu*, complete with a chain letter, into the tobacco dispenser. The letter contained rules, statements regarding the object of the game, and nonsense words that are puns in Dutch, French, and English. Grootveld encouraged the reader to alter the chain letter as s/he saw fit, by adding,

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138 Under Dutch law, cannabis is illegal, but in 1976 a policy of non-enforcement for possession or sale of up to thirty grams was adopted. The amount was lowered to five grams in 1995. The Dutch policy of tolerance is referred to as *gedoogbeleid*. Robert MacCoun and Peter Reuter, “Interpreting Dutch Cannabis Policy: Reasoning by Analogy in the Legalization Debate,” *Science* 278, no. 5335 (October 3, 1997): 48.


140 Duivenvoorden, *Magier van een nieuwe tijd*, 236.

141 For example, in his chain letter Grootveld included the play-words marivoodoo, marivoodoomari, maritaboo, maribooobytrap, mari-yoghurt, and marihuwelijk (“huwelijk” is the Dutch word for marriage). The puns also referred to brand names for Dutch cigarettes. Kempton, *Provo*, 2007, 26.
editing, and modifying the letter. The next person to buy tobacco would lose his or her money but unexpectedly receive the *marihu*. These “magic” chain letters, hidden inside packets of marihu, facilitated a game in which the purchaser became a player—often unwittingly.\(^{142}\)

*Marihu* functioned according to a point-based system explained in the letter. One hundred points would be awarded for an arrest in connection with *marihu*, fifty points for a raid at home, twenty-five for an interrogation; ironically, ten points would be deducted if someone was found with actual marijuana. For every 100 points, the player would receive a bonus packet of *marihu*. In his memoir, Provo Roel van Duijn recalled an incident that occurred in 1963. Grootveld and his friends were on their way to the opening of an exhibition by Fred Wessels in Dendermonde, Belgium, when they were detained at the border. The group was suspected of transporting marijuana—tipped off by none other than Grootveld—and their *marihu* was confiscated.\(^{143}\) Van Duijn wrote that the Belgian police were left with a large amount of dried oak leaves, grass, and cat food. Grootveld and his friends returned to Amsterdam with a record number of points.\(^{144}\)

Grootveld consciously employed participatory methods in his game. The chain letter, for example, was intended to circulate throughout a community, and participants were encouraged to alter the letter, thus further involving the ‘players’. The game receives brief mention in contemporary literature, but no one comments on how it actually functioned.\(^{145}\) The chain letter’s contents provide some evidence. Grootveld used it to explain the game’s intended effect on its

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\(^{142}\) A copy of the chain letter is printed in Beeren, *Actie, werkelijkheid en fictie in de kunst van de jaren 60 in Nederland*, 59. Grootveld wrote in the letter that if the package of marihu were sold then it would be a work of art.


\(^{145}\) Richard Kempton claims that there were “countless participants”. Kempton, *Provo*, 2007, 27.
participants: “People who play the game will experience a strange feeling of solidarity, from which they can draw great strength in this grey time of rapid economic growth.” His art, including but not limited to the *Marihu Game*, often employed strategic participatory methods to reinforce solidarity in a subculture—in this case, among those critical of the Dutch economic miracle. Many of the people who played *Marihu* went on to work together with the anarchist Provo.

Provo historian Richard Kempton explains Grootveld’s logic in creating this game:

In Grootveld’s view, the nonsense manifested in the marihu game mimicked an absurdity he observed in real life. Addicted potheads were being arrested by nicotine-addicted policemen, and the incidents were being reported by alcoholic journalists and read in the press or viewed on television by a public addicted to cigarettes and consumerism.

Grootveld employed parody in order to point out the irrationality of an aspect of Dutch culture, but he never explicitly stated his goals, maintaining uncertainty by making contradictory statements—for example, by explaining that he would play *Marihu* until it became illegal to advertise tobacco in the Netherlands. By employing ludic methods, such as masquerade, that veiled his underlying critique, Grootveld’s actions remained enigmatic and largely incomprehensible to his audience.

**VI. Happenings at the Lieverdje**

Grootveld is best known for organizing weekly happenings around the Lieverdje statue in the Spui in Amsterdam from 1964 through 1965. It is unclear when he began, but, according to

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Duivenvoorden, it is likely that the first event took place in May.\textsuperscript{149} The happenings were an extension and expansion of the séances at the Anti-Smoking temple, and moved into the streets. Many elements seen earlier reappear, including costumes resembling Zwarte Piet, references to Klaas and Zwarte Piet’s role as his servant, questions about consumerism, chanting and a ludic use of language, as well as the themes of tobacco and the dangers of smoking. The ludic here functions as a strategy, proposing a re-thinking of society.

To announce the happenings, Grootveld circulated a pamphlet and put up posters around the city center. The text from one such poster reads:

\begin{quote}
HAPPENING – around the Amsterdam Lieverdje sculpture. Spui. (The addicted consumers of ‘tomorrow’) – New Prophecies – Saturday, June 13th, 12 midnight – Also an opportunity to ARREST Robert Jasper Grootveld (who has to spend another 12 days sitting in jail for writing the word cancer on smoke-advertising).\textsuperscript{150}
\end{quote}

The performances were promoted as ‘happenings’, although Grootveld also used the word ‘séance’ to describe what he was organizing at the Spui. He again took on the role of shaman (the spiritual element manifested in the “New Prophecies”) and announced his Anti-Smoking Campaign, but what received top billing—after the time and place—was naming the “addicted consumers of ‘tomorrow.’” Language was a critical tool in Grootveld’s ludic art, and he places this politically loaded phrase in parentheses, indicating their secondary status, but also thereby directing the reader toward this larger issue. Grootveld promotes ambiguity, camouflaging his critique of consumer capitalism; yet his ludic sensibility is precisely located in this paradoxical

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\textsuperscript{149} Grootveld could not remember when he exactly began holding his happenings at the Lieverdje, though he did observe that no one attended in the beginning. On April 17, 1964, Vinkenoog wrote a journal entry about meeting with Grootveld in which the latter compared the Lieverdje to the Belgian \textit{Manneke Pis}. Grootveld’s happenings must have started after their conversation, but the exact date is unknown. Duivenvoorden, \textit{Magier van een nieuwe tijd}, 265–268.
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\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., 268.
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gesture. He also includes a line of self-mockery—as well as a poke at the police—by advertising an opportunity to arrest the artist.

In June 1964, printmaker Aat Veldhoen reached out to Grootveld because he was trying to find a wider distribution for his work. Veldhoen was frustrated that his prints were produced in small editions, sold to collectors, and never viewed in public. Grootveld was happy to collaborate with Veldhoen, who had developed his own rotary press to reproduce prints by the hundred, which Grootveld would distribute for free at his happenings. Later, he sold them for three guilders (equivalent to eight US dollars in 2016) while cycling through Amsterdam on a cargo bicycle. The subject matter of the prints was largely portraiture, including Grootveld dressed as Zwarte Piet, alone or together with his girlfriend Netty Dagevos (figure 3.18), as well as conventional portraits, including one of Stedelijk director Willem Sandberg. However, what received the most attention were erotic images of lovers’ embraces. Grootveld was charged with indecency, but the case was dropped over the course of the year. Duivenvoorden suggests that Grootveld welcomed the opportunity to give away Veldhoen’s artwork as it was appropriate to Grootveld’s performance as Klaas’s servant, whose role was to handout gifts during the holiday. I suggest that Grootveld was more interested in subverting traditional art economies, as well as finding atypical spaces for exhibition. Grootveld had his father build a makeshift gallery on top of his bicycle in which he could exhibit up to thirty prints at a time (figure 3.19). Veldhoen and Grootveld’s collaboration ended when Veldhoen wanted to move his business into a storefront, leaving Grootveld furious with the artist’s desire for money, dubbing

[151] Ibid.


[153] Duivenvoorden, Magie van een nieuwe tijd, 270.

[154] Ibid., 272.
him “Aatje Veldpoen” (little Ad Veld-dough; poen is Dutch slang for money, loosely translating into “dough”).

The happenings took place around the Lieverdje because Grootveld had noticed a plaque that stated that the statue was funded by Hunter, a cigarette brand. When the sculpture was proposed in the late 1950s, Henri Knap of Het Parool newspaper was supposed to pay for it, but his funding fell through, and Hunter stepped in. In the spring of 1964, Grootveld began referring to the Lieverdje as a symbol of the “Addicted Consumer of Tomorrow.” In 1965, he explained why: “Here it is clearly demonstrated that, ultimately, the large dope-syndicates and the nauseating middle class control the newspaper. This sculpture is a symbol of the press’s dependence on the dope-syndicates.” In this complex quote, Grootveld addresses several issues that appear in his body of work. He conflates tobacco with hard drugs, referring to cigarette companies as “dope-syndicates,” in a manner that recalls Grootveld’s Marihu game, in which legal tobacco, as opposed to illegal marijuana, was seen as the more harmful drug. The phrase ‘nauseating middle class’ (misselijk makende middenstand—the alliteration is lost in translation) is one that Grootveld repeated many times in speeches at the Lieverdje, as well as in interviews. It indirectly critiques the transformation of Dutch culture in developing a more affluent middle class with a new purchasing power unknown before the war. The media’s support of tobacco, through advertisements, outraged Grootveld. The issue for him was not only consumerism and the dangerous addition to tobacco, but the manipulation of the masses motivated by corporate greed. In Grootveld’s work nicotine is a metaphor for the addicted

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155 Ibid., 285.
156 Beeren, Actie, werkelijkheid en fictie, 79.
157 Van Duijn, Provo, 15.
consumer—addicted not just to tobacco, but to consumer goods, to shopping—as well as for the media’s dependence on advertisers for revenue.

In 1964, alongside the happenings at the Lieverdje, Grootveld created a female character to carry out anti-smoking actions. The new persona, *Acetone Miep*, drew on Grootveld’s abiding fascination with cross-dressing, and is a blend of performance art and activism. Throughout his life, Grootveld experimented with cross-dressing, and in 1956 he had a brief foray into fashion design. As Acetone Miep, Grootveld would don a kerchief, a dress, high heels, and apply feminine makeup. Miep would walk into a tobacco shop and ask to use the telephone. While on the phone, he would talk very loudly about the progress of his Anti-Smoking Campaign. He would then “accidentally” let a bottle of acetone slip from under his dress, which would break when it hit the floor. At that point, the acetone would evaporate and its fumes would fill the store. As the fumes settled on the store’s products, the acetone bonded to the tobacco and masked its smell and taste, one of the pleasures of tobacco. In this performance, the artist closes the distance between his art and activism. Moreover, Grootveld complicates the object of his critique: while Acetone Miep appears to be solely focused on tobacco, his Anti-Smoking Campaign is much more broad. Grootveld remains deliberately vague about the aims of his criticism and his actions, such that his ludic approach impedes an understanding of his artwork, as well as his status as artist.

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158 Grootveld’s experiments with fashion were born of his fascination with women’s clothing. He held his first fashion show on January 7, 1957, called *Ik was een nozem* (*I was a beatnik*). While his ventures into fashion were brief, his interest in costume and cross-dressing continued after he retired from public life and art. Duivenvoorden, *Magier van een nieuwe tijd*, 117.

159 Ibid., 288.

160 Ibid.

As he continued his weekly performance at the Lieverdje, Grootveld began to attract a regular crowd. By 1964, he had become a well-known public personality, which helped to further his campaign.\textsuperscript{162} Already in 1962, when asked about his own addictions, he admitted that “[I] became addicted to publicity and each piece in the newspaper is an injection for me.”\textsuperscript{163} Later, he explained that he saw his frequent arrests as more opportunities for publicity:

I was a willing prisoner. I was arrested dozens of times, perhaps a hundred times, and sat in police stations. I’ve also been kicked. I’ve been hit. And once I dislocated my wrists but I did not want to see the police, above all, as an object to provoke. In the police, I saw publicity, communication … And they write reports, call to offices, offices call police chiefs and chiefs can decide whether something is in the telex, if it ends up in the newspapers, and newspapers report it to the public.\textsuperscript{164}

With each arrest, Grootveld became more famous, and his stories were covered in national media, from the left-wing newspaper \textit{Vrij Nederland} to the right-wing financial magazine \textit{Elseviers}.\textsuperscript{165} He eventually attracted the attention of anarchist Roel van Duijn, who began to attend the happenings at the Lieverdje.\textsuperscript{166}

\textbf{VII. Provo and Dolle Mina}

Today, Roel van Duijn is chiefly thought of as a politician: he was a councilman in the city of Amsterdam for the Political Party of the Radicals from 1974 to 1976; in 1989, he was the national candidate for The Greens and went on to be a municipal councilor in Amsterdam for the

\textsuperscript{162} Duivenvoorden, \textit{Magier van een nieuwe tijd}, 283.
\textsuperscript{164} Pas, \textit{Imaazje!}, 101.
\textsuperscript{165} Cornelissen, “Jasper contra het rokertje”; Zaal, “Amsterdam, magisch centrum.”
\textsuperscript{166} Van Duijn, \textit{Provo}, 21.
party from 1990 to 1998.\textsuperscript{167} Yet in the 1960s, he was one of the main theoreticians of Provo. He published a memoir of Provo in 1985, largely drawing on his personal experience, in which he describes his relationship to Grootveld.\textsuperscript{168} Van Duijn indicates his own role in developing the politics and philosophy of Provo while Grootveld provided the ludic aspect.\textsuperscript{169} As Van Duijn recounts, Grootveld contacted him in 1965 because he saw the announcement of their upcoming publication \textit{Provo}, which Van Duijn distributed at one of Grootveld’s happenings at the Lieverdje. Van Duijn recalls Grootveld saying that his father was an anarchist and that Provo and the magicians should work together. This meeting marked the beginning of Grootveld’s association with Provo.

For Van Duijn, Grootveld needs to be included in the history of Provo: “I am writing about Jasper because he made the Amsterdam youth ripe for Provo, before he or anyone else heard of its name. His share in the Provo-movement has particularly been the introduction of street activities and the happenings as well as the symbolism and vocabulary that Provo utilized.”\textsuperscript{170} Grootveld brought in not only activities and symbolism—such as “Klaas,” Grootveld’s abbreviation of Sinterklaas, which would soon refer to Claus van Amsberg, the Netherlands’ future prince—but also images such as the \textit{gnot} (figure 3.20), taken over by Provo to become their icon.

The most comprehensive study on Provo focuses on the group’s use of imagery. Niek Pas’s \textit{Imaazje! De verbeelding van Provo 1965–1967} (Imaazje! The Imaging of Provo, 1965–

\textsuperscript{167} In 2006, Van Duijn became district councilor for GreenLeft in Oud-Zuid, Amsterdam


\textsuperscript{169} Van Duijn, \textit{Provo}, 15.

\textsuperscript{170} Ibid., 13.
1967) offers a history of the movement with an emphasis on how the group represented themselves in the public sphere. The word ‘imaazje’ (Dutch, transliterated from the French ‘image’) in the title can be traced to Grootveld, as he was the first to chant it at his happenings, using a mocking tone in order to criticize public relations agencies’ strategy of creating false images of products in their promotions. Moreover, the gnot symbol (pronounced g-nut with a guttural ‘g’) — a spade shape set askew with a curved line cutting through one side and a dot in its middle, somewhat resembling a schematic apple with a stem — which became a Provo icon was designed by Grootveld and Bart Huges in 1962. The term ‘gnot’ simultaneously references the words ‘god’ and ‘genot’, Dutch for ‘delight’. Grootveld and Huges initially saw it as a symbol for what they called “The Magic Center Amsterdam.” When Grootveld began his performances at the Lieverdje, he invented the slogan “Amsterdam Magic Center, here it will happen,” which was meant, in part, to be a pun on the term ‘happenings’. At the time, he predicted that Klaas would replace the advertising executive; the motto survived Klaas evolving from Sinterklaas into Prince Claus. After the gnot had been appropriated by Provo, Huges reflected that he should have registered the gnot as a trademark, but for Grootveld the symbol did not belong to anyone,

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171 Pas argues that the members of Provo carefully employed strategies of self-promotion and publicity in order to create a media commotion that turned the group into a cliché; they garnered attention due to a combination of lucky circumstances and a diverse group of colorful characters that included Grootveld and Van Duijn. Pas, Imaazje!, Pas, Provo!.

172 In the 1960’s, the idea that images (film and photographs) must support mental images developed as a popular concept for public relations firms and advertising agencies. Pas, Provo!, 55.

173 Duivenvoorden, Magier van een nieuwe tijd, 220–221.

174 Pas, Imaazje!, 89.


176 In a 1972 documentary, Grootveld explains that that the magic center eventually came to denote Amsterdam as a gathering place for hippies. At the end of the 1960s, KLM and PanAm worked together to advertise the Vondelpark as a “hippie park” that welcomed travelers in their sleeping bags. In the summer of 1973, about 100,000 tourists spent the night in the park. Duivenvoorden, Magier van een nieuwe tijd, 211.
and could be used by everyone.\textsuperscript{177} There have been many interpretations of the \textit{gnot}. Grootveld saw it as a graphic representation of the canal belt in central Amsterdam with the line indicating the intersection of the Amstel River.\textsuperscript{178} In 1965, historian Richter Roegholt suggested that the \textit{gnot} looked like an embryo with its umbilical cord attached, perhaps referring to fertility, or like a caricature of the addicted consumer, with a cigarette hanging from the side of his mouth, or like the mushroom-cloud of an atom bomb, and thus could be construed as a symbol of peace.\textsuperscript{179} By the end of 1965, the \textit{gnot} came to stand for the new city and a new generation, specifically Provo.\textsuperscript{180}

Grootveld, who was associated with Provo but was never a member of the group, had a different relationship with the police and the Dutch government. There was less animosity between the police and Grootveld, even though he was arrested regularly and was asked to report to the local police station after each séance.\textsuperscript{181} He would stay for an hour and wash off his make-up as requested. Once the crowd had dispersed, he would be permitted to return to the Spui without being charged.\textsuperscript{182} Provo, on the other hand, explicitly stated their antagonism toward capitalism, bureaucracy, the military, and the police.\textsuperscript{183} They were arrested and held in jail for much longer periods than Grootveld. In the spring of 1966, for example, Provo Hans Tuynman was sentenced to three months in prison after saying the word “imaazje” at the Lieverdje, because it violated the terms of his probation in which Tuynman had agreed to “abstain from

\textsuperscript{177} Pas, \textit{Provo!}, 66.

\textsuperscript{178} Duivenvoorden, \textit{Magie van een nieuwe tijd}, 221.

\textsuperscript{179} Pas, \textit{Provo!}, 66.

\textsuperscript{180} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{181} Duivenvoorden, \textit{Magie van een nieuwe tijd}, 275.

\textsuperscript{182} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{183} Van Duijn, \textit{Provo}, 29.
disruptive activities.”¹⁸⁴ Tuynman appealed the harsh sentence, but only after having spent two-and-a-half months in a prison in Hoorn, outside Amsterdam.¹⁸⁵ In the same year, Van Duijn, Rob Stolk, and Luud Schimmelpenninck were sentenced for inciting acts of violence in others: they were accused of instigating murder, a charge for which there were no grounds.¹⁸⁶ Van Duijn believes that the jail sentencing was intended to interfere with Provo winning seats in the upcoming city council elections. Provo’s direct approach led to an aggressive—and unwarranted—response from the judicial system. Even Provo’s most ludic actions led to unfair treatment by the police. For instance, Koosje Koster was arrested on April 23, 1966 for handing out raisins in the streets. Notably, Koster was one of the few women involved with Provo; in the police station, she was forced to undress and was interrogated for hours before being released.¹⁸⁷ She was arrested again on May 31, 1966 and held for five days after pasting up election posters in the city; the typical sentence for this, according to Van Duijn, was a fine of ten guilders (about twenty-five US dollars in 2016).¹⁸⁸ Grootveld, by contrast, not only incorporated the ludic into his art, he also projected a ludic persona that resulted in police tolerance.¹⁸⁹

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¹⁸⁴ Tuynman was taken into custody after organizing an un-permitted demonstration against the police. Van Duijn, Provo, 158.

¹⁸⁵ After his ten weeks in prison, Tuynman had to spend an additional three weeks serving another sentence because he was charged with illegally peddling waffles on the street. Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 159.

¹⁸⁷ At first, chief inspector Koppejan dismissed Koster’s complaints of mistreatment because they were coming from a recalcitrant woman. Van Duijn writes that the government eventually acknowledged Koster’s mistreatment, but he does not indicate when or by whom. Ibid., 158.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ironically, in 1979 and 1980, Grootveld was asked to cooperate in educating the police. In 1979, Grootveld led a module of a “management course” for police detectives. As a team-building exercise, he had the detectives wrap individual blocks of Styrofoam—reminiscent of Sinterklaas gifts—that would become the building blocks of a float Grootveld dubbed Management I. In 1980, Grootveld gave a talk to riot police-in-training on his experiences with Provo and the police in the 1960s. The purpose was to provide the police with insight into their opponents’ behavior and ways of thinking. Duivenvoorden, Magier van een nieuwe tijd, 404–406.
Grootveld and Provo’s divergent views are most clearly seen in their response to the Dutch monarchy. In June 1965, Grootveld’s incantation of “Come Klaas!” took on a new meaning when Queen Juliana’s successor, Princess Beatrix, announced her engagement to German aristocrat Claus von Amsberg. Like many young Germans of the period, Von Amsberg had spent part of his childhood in the Hitler Youth and had served as a soldier in the German Wehrmacht. Provo began to co-opt Grootveld’s “Klaas” to stand for “Claus.” Provo number 3, published in September 1965, contained a short one-page text calling for the end of the monarchy: “The Dutch monarchy will die out with Juliana. A monarchy, a king, belongs in a society with knights, tournaments, beautiful robes, and a people who are strictly divided into slaves and masters. But not in the 20th century. It has to end.” The fortuitous timing of Claus joining the monarchy further encouraged Provo to work with Grootveld, appropriating his slogans and his audiences. Under Provo, Grootveld’s happenings became protests.

Provo assembled a series of actions against the crown. Van Duijn cites the first as occurring on July 4, 1965, when Provo Jan-Huib Blans printed a flyer with the title “Which of the 3?” It asked the question, “Who was the ‘biggest democrat’?” and offered three options: current monarch Prince Bernhard, Don Carlos (the heir to the Spanish throne who was politically active in the right-wing Carlist movement of monarchists sympathetic to Francisco Franco), or Claus von Amsberg, Beatrix’s fiancé. Beneath the question was a text that reviewed each candidate’s allegedly fascist background. The flyer was then tossed from a bridge into

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190 Ibid., 303.


192 Writing in 1985, Roel van Duijn reflected, “If Claus had not come as a Klaas, then we would have had to invent him.” Van Duijn, Provo, 22.

193 Ibid.

194 Kempton, Provo, 2007, 43.
Princess Beatrix and Claus’s boat as they toured the city. The best-known Provo action against the monarchy took place on March 10, 1966, the royals’ wedding day. The wedding procession began at the Dam Square, home of the seventeenth-century town hall and Nieuwe Kerk (New Church), where protesters yelled slogans such as “Claus ‘raus’ (“Claus out,” in German) and “Return my bicycle,” a reference to the mass confiscation of bicycles by occupying German soldiers during World War II. Rumors circulated that Provo planned to spike Amsterdam’s drinking water with LSD or feed the carriage horses sugar cubes laced with the drug, neither of which occurred. Other actions did take place. About two hundred smoke bombs were set off over the course of the day, obscuring the visibility of the royal event as it was broadcast live on television. The smoke bombs angered the police, whose violent overreaction including clubbing, witnessed by, and in some instances sustained by, foreign and national journalists, caused a public relations disaster, leading to widespread resentment of the police by the Dutch public.

Provo’s protest of Princess Beatrix’s marriage marked the end of the group’s relationship with Grootveld. The artist spent the day of the royal wedding at home under the covers. In an article written six months later, in September 1966, Grootveld reflected on his feelings about Provo and the monarchy, using his now familiar vocabulary:

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195 Ibid.
196 Ibid., 63.
197 Duivenvoorden, Magie van een nieuwe tijd, 339.
199 Kryštof Zeman, “Provo Movement and It’s Influence on the City of Amsterdam” (University of Amsterdam, 1998), 4.
200 Duivenvoorden, Magie van een nieuwe tijd, 341.
I did not invent Provo, but I was the first link. I felt responsible. I thought someone will die soon and I did not know what to do about it. I also did not know in which direction it was going. I was never against the police. I was not against the monarchy. A year ago, I even thought that Beatrix could be empress of Europe. I was only against the dope syndicates, against the nauseating middle class, against the press who conspired with the dope syndicates to spread the image of the happy smoker.201

Grootveld disclaimed any participation in the royal wedding protests: “I locked myself up. I was not at the ceremony. I didn’t speak to Provo anymore. I was scared. We live in a paranoid state.”202 The last phrase refers perhaps to his own feelings or the Netherlands, or both—he was often deliberately ambiguous. He also explained his fear of being labeled a pyromaniac: someone had been setting fires in the area of the Nieuwemarkt in Amsterdam, and since Grootveld had burned down the Anti-Smoking Temple, he was worried that he would be blamed.203

As Provo was voicing its hard-line stance against the monarchy, Grootveld continued to make oblique, playful strikes at the dominant culture. His attitude was close enough to Provo’s that they could join in his happenings and blend with his followers at the Spui. Yet Grootveld’s position was anti-authoritarian—even timid and uncritical: “Provocation of authority means that authority completely develops. I believe that we live in a good country, in that respect. It’s a pop-artland. Amsterdam is still a Magic Center. Here, can’t you still speak freely?”204 His irony runs so deep that is difficult to pin down his politics.

Provo was strictly a polemical organization of activists who had co-opted Grootveld’s ludic tactics of absurd interventions into public space and playful use of language. Yet Grootveld

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202 Ibid.
203 Duivenvoorden, Magier van een nieuwe tijd, 340.
204 Grootveld cited in Ibid., 307.
also proposed ideas for lasting social change, such as the White Bike Plan, for which he took credit in a 1966 British television interview.\textsuperscript{205} It was the first of the “white plans” proposed by Provo: a free bike-sharing initiative introduced with a flyer “Provokatie #5” on July 27, 1965, and later elaborated in \textit{Provo}’s second issue (August 1965) in an article credited to Luud Schimmelpennick.\textsuperscript{206} The tone of the flyer was drawn from Grootveld’s vocabulary, while the journal article read more like a document to be submitted to the city council. The flyers, posted by Provo on the night of July 27, read:

\begin{quote}
Amsterdammers! The asphalt terror of the motorized bourgeoisie has lasted long enough. Human sacrifices are made daily to this latest idol of the idiots: car power. Choking carbon monoxide is its incense, its image contaminates thousands of canals and streets. PROVO’s bicycle plan will liberate us from the car monster. … The white bicycle is never locked. The white bicycle is the first free communal transport. The white bicycle is a provocation against capitalist private property, for THE WHITE BICYCLE IS ANARCHISTIC.\textsuperscript{207}
\end{quote}

The proposal published in the journal was more sober and avoided aggressive vocabulary. It called for the city of Amsterdam to purchase 20,000 bikes per year, at a cost of one million guilders (about 2.5 million US dollars in 2016), and make them available as a form of public transport. The city center would be closed off to motorized vehicles (cars and mopeds). Provo suggested that semi-public forms of transportation within the city, such as taxis, should all be electric and set to a maximum speed of 40 kilometers per hour, since driving in the city center was dangerous and unsuitable, especially considering the availability of alternative modes of

\textsuperscript{205} Michael Apted, “It’s a Happening” (England: Granada Television, November 18, 1966).

\textsuperscript{206} The other “white plans” included: the white chimney plan (air polluters should be taxed), the white wives plans (establishing clinics offering advice and contraceptives), the white chicken plan (a reorganization of the police, part of which called for giving up their arms), the white housing plan (promoting squatting to address the housing shortage), the white kids plan (collective parenting), and the white car plan (a car sharing project featuring electric cars). Luud Schimmelpennick, “Provo’s Fietsenplan,” \textit{Provo} no. 3 (August 17, 1965): 4.

transportation. The bikes would be painted white and “belong to everyone and no one.” Schimmelpennick explains that, “within a few years of introducing this method the traffic problems in the city center will be resolved.” Given the relatively calm tone of this proposal, it is no surprise, perhaps, that Schimmelpennick eventually became a member of the Amsterdam city council.

In the British TV interview, Grootveld described how he had discovered the idea for the White Bike Plan. It had come to him during the “Hunger Winter,” of 1944/45. Grootveld, who was twelve-years-old at the time, thought about the bikes that the Nazi’s took from the Dutch population during the occupation. Duivenvoorden supports the artist’s contention that the White Bike Plan was his idea, rather than that of Provo, to whom it is traditionally attributed.

First, as Duivenvoorden notes, Grootveld perceived the link between poisonous tobacco smoke and poisonous car exhaust. In the mid-1960s the tobacco industry was fond of blaming air pollution rather than smoking for the rising incidence of lung cancer; the hypocrisy of this stance would have been obvious to Grootveld. In addition, Duivenvoorden maintains that white was not a logical color for anarchist Provo to choose: the group preferred an “anarchist” color, such as

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208 Schimmelpennick, “Provo’s Fietsenplan,” 5.
209 Ibid., 4.
210 Ibid.
211 Just as Grootveld connected his Anti-Smoking Campaign to his personal history with Zwarte Piet, his travels to Africa, and his connection to Van der Lubbe, he tied the White Bike Plan to his personal experience during the German occupation.
212 Grootveld recalled: “I was playing with kids outside of Amsterdam [during the hunger winter] and I wanted a bike. But bikes weren’t there anymore, they were all stolen by the Germans. I got the idea of lots of people having free bikes. And it came into Provo again when I saw all these traffic jams in town. It is really impossible to go by car from one point of the center city to another, it’s really difficult, there are all kinds of traffic jams on the canals and streets. It’s also very noisy and it makes you nervous, because of lots of accidents, lots of dirt smoke, really poisonous smoke.” Michael Apted, “It’s a Happening.”
red or black.\textsuperscript{213} A 2015 interview with Schimmelpennick, author of the White Bike Plan in \textit{Provo} 3, confirms Grootveld’s role in Provo’s most significant proposal. If it were up to Schimmelpennick, the bikes would have been yellow, a color he associated with public transportation.\textsuperscript{214} He explains that Grootveld was the “anarchist visionary,” whereas he was the “practical man” who could realize Grootveld’s plans.\textsuperscript{215}

At the end of July 1965, Grootveld’s happenings at the Lieverdje assumed a grim tone, ultimately alienating him from the weekly gatherings he had initiated a year earlier. Provo Rob Stolk climbed the Lieverdje statue and poured a bucket of white paint over it.\textsuperscript{216} Instead of shouting anti-smoking slogans, the crowd began yelling at the police, calling them “fascists” and “Dirty-SS-ers.” They also shouted “Claus Raus” and “Hakenclaus” (a play on the Dutch word for swastika, “hakenkruis”), directed at Prince Claus.\textsuperscript{217} That night, seven people, including Stolk, were arrested and the police dispersed the group. In an article published in the leftist newspaper \textit{Het Parool}, Grootveld was quoted as saying, “I told Provo: learn from the Catholics. For centuries, they have been organizing silent processions, provocative processions where not a drop of blood is shed.”\textsuperscript{218} Violence at the Lieverdje marked a drastic change in his involvement in the group. In the summer of 1965, Grootveld stopped dressing up for the happenings and started to distance himself from the increasingly aggressive Provo. A March 1966 article found

\textsuperscript{213} Duivenvoorden, \textit{Magier van een nieuwe tijd}, 208.

\textsuperscript{214} Schimmelpennick references Grootveld’s famous, catchy slogan, which rhymes in Dutch: “fiets, net iets meer dan niets” (a bike is just a little more than nothing). Mischa Cohen and Stephan Vanfleteren, “Terug naar de toekomst: Interview Luud Schimmelpennik en Daan Roosegaarde,” \textit{Vrij Nederland}, February 28, 2015, 18.

\textsuperscript{215} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{216} Duivenvoorden, \textit{Magier van een nieuwe tijd}, 311.

\textsuperscript{217} Ibid., 312.

in Grootveld’s archives, describes Grootveld leaving Provo, quoting the artist, “I am against war, against violence, and it is clear to me that Amsterdam Provo are seeking violence at the moment. This is not to say that I approve of the police’s actions.”\textsuperscript{219} Grootveld’s position was complicated: he had not sided with the police or Provo, yet he was subsumed into the literature on Provo and so the artistic character of his ludic actions has been overlooked.

The end of Provo is often traced to their re-organization as a political party upon the occasion of winning a seat on the Amsterdam city council in June 1966.\textsuperscript{220} Grootveld was initially on the ballot representing Provo, but reportedly he removed himself from the running a few days after the royal wedding incident in March of that year.\textsuperscript{221} The official demise of the group was marked by a funeral procession, in the course of which documents related to Provo were “buried” in the archives at the University of Amsterdam library in May 1967.\textsuperscript{222} After Provo dissolved, former members, including Roel van Duijn, formed a new political party, \textit{Kabouter} (Gnomes). Kabouter took seats in the Amsterdam City Council election in June 1970, and remained an active party focused on nature and the environment through 1974.

Grootveld’s role in Provo has been both misunderstood and understated. In a 2007 interview, Van Duijn finally credited Grootveld for his role in the development of Provo, and particularly their use of absurdist tactics: “It is true that Provo gained enormous momentum by his ludic input. That is what gave Provo flexibility and made it attractive to the media, in a way that was lacking from classic anarchist movements.”\textsuperscript{223} But any actual changes in society were


\textsuperscript{221} Duivenvoorden, \textit{Magier van een nieuwe tijd}, 342.

\textsuperscript{222} NOS, \textit{Oorzaken in verwondering}.

\textsuperscript{223} Van Duijn is quoted in Duivenvoorden, \textit{Magier van een nieuwe tijd}, 331.
effected by Provo rather than by Grootveld alone. For example, the city’s investigation into the police’s use of force against Provo in June 1966 led to the dismissal of the Amsterdam chief of police, H. J. van der Molen, and later to that of the mayor, Gijsbert van Hall. Provo, and later Kabouter, whose memberships had significant overlap, helped create the Dutch bicycle culture of today through protests and legislation that fostered a bike-centered city. Moreover, Kabouter’s goal of legalizing squatting was realized in 1971; it remained legal up until June 2010. Grootveld’s ludic actions influenced Provo, and through them Kabouter.

Grootveld also had an impact on the lesser-known feminist activists, *Dolle Mina* (Crazy Mina); formed in January 1970 and active mainly in Amsterdam, the group took its name from the socialist Wilhelmina Drucker (1847-1925). They deliberately chose ludic actions based on Provo’s example. Dolle Mina was partly inspired by the lack of women in Provo; although principally they were responding to larger social issues related to the oppression of women in Dutch society. Dolle Mina marked the beginning of a strong feminist movement in the Netherlands in the 1970s. Dutch culture was patriarchic and chauvinistic, even in left-leaning segments of society. Provo was not immune: the group mirrored mainstream misogyny. Unlike Provo, Dolle Mina was distinctly socialist. Some of their ludic actions included tying pink ribbons around public urinals in to bring attention to the fact that they are only meant for men, not women or children, and occupying the editorial offices of women’s magazines in order to

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express their complicity in perpetuating negative images of women. In January 1970, men and women from Dolle Mina installed playpens—complete with toddlers—in front of the stock exchange at the center of Amsterdam to draw attention to the shortage of daycare in the city. Dolle Mina’s ludic protests caught the attention of the international press: their *nafluitactie* (catcalling action)—in which women catcalled attractive men on the street and then threatened to abduct them and leave them outside the city center to walk home—was even covered by the *New York Times*.

Dolle Mina also demonstrated for the right to abortion and access to free contraception: in 1970, they crashed a gynecology conference with *Baas in eigen Buik* (Boss of my own belly) written across their stomachs, an act that won widespread support in the Netherlands. In 1967, abortion was legal under certain circumstances, to be determined by a physician, but access greatly expanded after Dolle Mina’s actions. In January 1970, responding to public pressure, the minister of social affairs and public health, Bauke Roolvink, formed an “abortion committee,” to determine whether abortion could be granted under “psychological and social circumstances.” In the same year, the Dutch congress abolished the existing laws regarding abortion, making it legal and only dependent upon the woman’s own decision.

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228 A city official from the “urinal commission” commented that women can use men’s urinals, and in a follow-up action (a so-called *plasactie*, or “pee-action”) women attempted to find a way to use the urinals, which received press attention. Ibid., 7. Gisela Kaplan, *Contemporary Western European Feminism*, vol. 4 (New York: Routledge, 2013), 155; Bernard Weinraub, “Dutch Women’s Lib: Whistling at Men,” *New York Times*, May 20, 1970, 12; Geerlings, “’Crazy Mina’ Guerrillas Hit Holland,” 10–11.


231 Kaplan, *Contemporary Western European Feminism*, 4:155.


233 Ibid., 73–75.
abortion clinic opened, and by 1980, fifteen clinics existed.\textsuperscript{234} Dolle Mina’s abortion campaign was their only success; their contraception and childcare actions did not lead to effective change.\textsuperscript{235}

Lonneke Geerlings’s recent article argues that the Dutch group’s actions were more ludic than their American counterparts, such as one inspired by the *nafluitactie, The First National Ogle-In*, organized by BITCH and held in New York.\textsuperscript{236} In its 1970 book, *Dolle Mina*, the group explains that they used a ludic approach in order to soften its critique and makes it more acceptable; however, it acknowledges the risk that such strategies may also be easier to dismiss.\textsuperscript{237} Dolle Mina was aware that its actions might be interpreted as “fun and harmless,” an image that, according to the group, was strengthened by the media.\textsuperscript{238} Thus, in Dolle Mina’s ludic actions, we see the same paradox of the ludic arise: it can be an appealing strategy of critique, or its critical intent and seriousness may be lost beneath the veneer of play. I argue that while Dolle Mina itself feared misinterpretation and dismissal by the public, its ludic campaigns drew attention and support, which, in part, contributed to actual change in the abortion rights legislation of the early 1970s.

\textsuperscript{234} Moreover, from 1971 to 1980, eight abortion bills were brought to congress, each one adding to and expanding previous amendments, granting women the freedom to choose. Kaplan, *Contemporary Western European Feminism*, 4:155.

\textsuperscript{235} Kennedy attributes Dolle Mina’s successful abortion campaign to the widespread public interest in that area in the early 1970s, rather than giving the group sole credit for changes in policy. Kennedy, *Nieuw Babylon in aanbouw*, 138.

\textsuperscript{236} Geerlings writes that *The First National Ogle-In* was less “jolly” than the *nafluitactie*. In 1970 in a *New York Times* article, Dolle Mina Corry Ehlen explains why they resorted to using humor: “We think perhaps the groups in the United States are too serious, too angry. We are serious and angry also, but this is covered with humor—so society will notice and our cause will grow. ... After all, making people laugh is the best way of waking people up to the absurdity of our position in society.” Geerlings, “‘Crazy Mina’ Guerrillas Hit Holland,” 8; Weinraub, “Dutch Women’s Lib: Whistling at Men,” 12.

\textsuperscript{237} The title of Dolle Mina’s book translates as Dolle Mina: “A rebellious Woman is a Pearl in the Class Struggle,” which rhymes in Dutch. Dolle Mina, *Dolle Mina: Een rebelse meid is een parel in de klassenstrijd* (Amsterdam: SUA, 1970), 43.

\textsuperscript{238} Van Soest, *Meid, wat ben ik bewust geworden: Vijf jaar Dolle Mina*, 57.
VIII. Grootveld and Constant

Constant and Grootveld can be understood as opposing sides of the ludic coin. Constant was well aware of Grootveld, as seen in Constant’s *New Babylon* article in *Provo*, and Grootveld was influenced by Constant, although Grootveld, typical of his ludic persona, never directly named Constant as a source. Grootveld had contact with Constant and other artists, such as Dutch Cobra poet and painter Lubertus Jacobus Swaanswijk, known as Lucebert, in the early 1950s, when Grootveld worked at Gallery Le Canard. Grootveld was drawn there primarily for the jazz music, but visual artists were also present, and Constant exhibited his series of nine woodcuts there, inspired by a poem he had heard a year earlier. Grootveld, however, was generally irritated by the elitism he found in the Canard artist group. His disdain took the form of ironic commentary in his interviews: for example, during his first stint in jail, Grootveld wrote that, “here in my cell, I can deepen my art until it becomes art with a very large A.” He showed no interest in museums and instead preferred to interface with the public on the streets. Constant, on the other hand, exhibited at major Dutch museums and represented the Netherlands at the Venice Biennial in 1966. Grootveld moved art and performances into public spaces and alternative venues, but his allegiance to art vs. activism was unclear—Grootveld did not belong to Provo, yet he has not been given attention as an artist. Constant, on the other hand, inhabited a

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239 Duivenvoorden, *Magie van een nieuwe tijd*, 70.


242 De Mari, “Uche, uche, uche.”
recognizable and accepted high art context. Thus, Constant had the luxury of remaining an artist, and this title was never questioned. Grootveld’s self-estrangement—distancing himself from artists, art institutions, and activists—put him in an (art) historical purgatory, and his actions were overlooked, and worse, misunderstood.

Although Grootveld spoke critically about art and artists, he exhibited and half-heartedly attempted to sell his work. On August 3, 1962, Grootveld opened a group exhibition at the LSD-25 gallery, which was widely covered in newspapers and magazines, described as an ‘anti-smoking exhibition’, with paintings made by ‘Conscious Nicotine-ists’. Artists exhibited works with titles such as *Nude Woman with Nicotine*, and *Landscape in Punjab*, while Grootveld exhibited his collages. It is possible that one of Grootveld’s few remaining collages, *Klaas Komt Toch* (Klaas Will Really Arrive), was on view, although the work of art is not dated, and little information is known about the piece (figure 3.21). The collage incorporates the major characteristics of his body of work and persona. It is made up of torn advertisements pasted over a panel of wood held together with staples that serve as decorative elements. As a décollage, it closely resembles the work of French artists Jacques de la Villeglé and Raymond Hains, members of the Nouveau Réalisme group, as well as Vostell’s décollages on exhibit in October of the same year at Gallery Monet. The piece is covered in thick varnish, darkened by exposure to smoke, rendering it nearly illegible. At the top right corner, Grootveld covered a US dollar bill in staples that can be seen only on close inspection (figure 3.22). Grootveld wrote the words ‘ha ha’ as well as drew the *gnot* symbol on the surface of his collage, incorporating identifiable

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244 Duivenvoorden, *Magier van een nieuwe tijd*, 216.

245 *Klaas Will Really Arrive* was acquired by the Rijksmuseum in 2016.
elements from his oeuvre. *Klaas Will Really Arrive* seems to link the Netherlands’ economic growth to the money granted by the Marshall Plan after World War II. Writing on the back of the piece indicates a price of 1,000 guilders (about 300 US dollars in 2016). On the one hand, Grootveld was critical of art commerce, yet on the other hand he was an active, albeit ironic, participant.

On the one hand, Constant’s influence on Grootveld was unmistakable: in September 1966, Grootveld lectured on an alternative currency based on Klaas (the *Klaasbank* or the Klaas bank), during a public meeting organized by Provo at the Frascati Theater in Amsterdam.²⁴⁶ He began his talk by addressing the possibility of experimenting with leisure time. Grootveld explained that due to the increasing number of factories and the surge in automation, millions of people would be unemployed, a direct reference to *New Babylon*.²⁴⁷ Citizens would become only consumers and a new exchange system would be needed: ergo, the creation of the Klaasbank. Although the reference to automated factories making workers redundant is directly lifted from Constant’s *New Babylon*, Grootveld could also have been self-serving, as he was unemployed for years.

On the other hand, Grootveld’s art and interviews were much more absurd than Constant’s. Grootveld comes across as insane or stoned—the latter was likely, considering his advocacy of legal marijuana use. Grootveld embraced the absurd character of his persona, embodying the role he was “assigned” by reporters and journalists in the 1960s as the “anti-smoke magician.”²⁴⁸ Yet Grootveld’s ludic persona resulted in his art not being taken seriously.


²⁴⁷ Ibid., 348.

²⁴⁸ For example, Grootveld was not only consistently dubbed the “anti-smoke magician,” he was also described as an Amsterdam tourist attraction: Jaap de Vries, “Anti-Rookmagiër R. J. Grootveld: De toeristische attractie van Amsterdam,” *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, May 21, 1965, 23.
Van Duijn did not initially acknowledge the major contribution Grootveld offered to Provo. Unlike Grootveld, accusations were lodged against Constant’s *ideas*, calling them utopian or mad whereas Grootveld himself was seen as mad.

Kennedy attributes Provo’s struggle to turn Amsterdam into a “ludic center of individual freedom” to both Constant and Grootveld. Provo was inspired by Constant and wanted to create space for play; the group looked to Grootveld to find the means to realize their goals. Constant introduced the ludic (via Huizinga) to the Dutch public, and Grootveld actively embodied the ludic through his works of art and his behavior. At the same time, neither Constant nor Grootveld belonged to Provo, yet both represented Provo in the city council elections, albeit a little reluctantly. Grootveld, the artist most often associated with Provo, removed his name from their member roster after the royal wedding, whereas Constant, rarely recognized for his affiliation with Provo, remained a candidate. In this instance, artists were responsible for developing one of the most important anarchist movements in Dutch history.

The paradox of seemingly purposeless art is that it can be an instrument of social change. The ludic as a strategy can be marshaled towards demonstrable transformation, or at the very least, towards a shift in consciousness. Protest groups, such as Provo and Dolle Mina, as well as the political party Kabouter, unquestionably helped make headway towards social change. Amsterdam’s bike culture is in part attributable to Grootveld’s White Bike Plan, the basic element of which was taken up by the political party, Kabouter. In the city council, Kabouter politicians endorsed separate bicycle paths in Amsterdam, which created the bicycle-friendly city Amsterdam is known for today; Grootveld’s proposal of providing free bikes was never

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realized. The modern art museum Kröller-Müller, located in Hoge Veluwe National Park in Otterlo, currently offers free white bikes to be used on the museum’s grounds, a descendant of the White Bike Plan.

Ultimately, Grootveld’s persona impeded an appreciation of the profound ideas underlying his performances because he presented himself as naïve. He appeared crazy or idiotic, rather than enigmatic or utopian, and that image was accepted without question. He was, however, playing, and his persona was part of a clever masquerade. While he may have been stoned, he knew exactly what he was doing. Grootveld was not the ‘anti-smoking magician’: he was the homo ludens. Had Grootveld cultivated the title ‘artist’ he might have garnered greater recognition. In my next chapter, I present artists who did just that—creating ludic art within an institutional framework, and preserving their designation as artists, which helped their work be recognized and resonate in a larger cultural context.

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251 The white bicycles at the Kröller-Müller Museum, while a version of the White Bike Plan, stay true to the original intention because it offers free bicycles. However, the museum is in the middle of a national park, isolated from any urban areas, and the bicycles must remain on the museum’s grounds, thus they do not challenge principles of private ownership or conventional transportation, nor do they interfere with traditional modes of transportation because you still need a personal bicycle, automobile, or public transportation to reach the national park.
Chapter Four

Ludic Institutions

I. The Conditions for Play

In this chapter, I present Dutch Conceptual artists whose practices have in common a dependency on and criticism of the Dutch institutions that supported their production and subsistence. Some of these artists have been identified earlier as Conceptualists and have been included in surveys of Conceptual art, the most notable of whom are Ger van Elk, Willem de Ridder, Wim T. Schippers, Jan Dibbets, and Bas Jan Ader.¹ These artists’ works possess three features of Ludic Conceptualism: playfulness, a relationship or reference to Constant’s New Babylon, and a strategy of oblique critique. The chapter begins with a review of the social and economic context of the 1960s Netherlands that enabled artists to experiment with play, following which I will analyze examples of Ludic Conceptualism that parody institutions and successful artists as a means of indirectly criticizing dominant Dutch culture. Lastly, I explore the extent to which Ludic Conceptualists may be given carte blanche, and the tacit restrictions inherent in their apparent autonomy.

Ludic Conceptualism’s success may be traced, in part, to conditions fostered by Dutch governmental polices that allowed artists the freedom to play. After World War II, the Netherlands invested heavily in culture and the visual arts: the 1960s Dutch kunstbeleid (arts policy) was indebted to the German occupation during which time the arts were exploited for

propaganda purposes. The Dutch government continued German arts policy in order to support the growth of the welfare state: art was understood to contribute to the health of the nation. The state’s commitment to the arts can be seen in the growing number of civil servants in three distinct ministries devoted to culture—groups that were parodied by Ludic Conceptualists—Education, Culture, and Sciences; Welfare, Health and Culture; and Culture, Recreation, and Social Work. In the 1960s, the arts policy sought “democratization and renewal,” and in 1965, Minister of Culture Maarten Vrolijk called for “experimentation” in the creative and performing arts, thus encouraging a range of new artistic practices. Sociologist Warna Oosterbaan Martinius writes that most Dutch visual artists were dependent on government subsidies, and Ludic Conceptualists were no exception. Moreover, the kunstbeleid supported the production and distribution of art through grants and subsidies for individual artists and groups; art was promoted through public channels, including museum exhibitions, and radio and television broadcasts. Ludic Conceptualist experiments in primetime television can be traced to the kunstbeleid’s mission to make contemporary art available to wide audiences.

The Netherlands was unique in its creation of two policies that supported contemporary art. The state financed artists with the Beeldende Kunstenars Regeling (Visual Artists Program), a subsidy than ran from 1956 to 1987. Dutch artists could apply for funding for their work,

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2 Only after World War II was art a cause for public concern in the Netherlands, one consequence of being subjected to the arts policy of the German occupation. Warna Oosterbaan Martinus, Schoonheid, Welzijn, Kwaliteit: Kunstbeleid En Verantwoording Na 1945 (’s-Gravenhage: Gary Schwartz/SDU, 1990), 49; 10.

3 Ibid., 53.

4 Ibid., 69.

5 Martinus cites a 1988 study by the Tilburg Institute for Social Policy Research and Consultancy, which claimed that only five percent of Dutch artists were entirely independent from the government. Ibid., 10; 38.

6 Ibid., 11.

7 Versions of artists’ subsidies existed until 2012, after which artists were no longer treated differently from other entrepreneurs and employees. The change in policy can be traced to austerity measures taken by the center-
travel grants, and sustenance stipends, as well as for financing of publications and exhibitions. Artists who could prove that they could live by selling their work for a minimum length of time, and who had no disqualifying history, such as a criminal record, would receive weekly payments from the government in exchange for producing art. Paradoxically, once artists became market-successful, they could be liberated from the pressures of generating art for a market, granting them freedom to experiment. In its early years, this artist welfare program had few practical constraints, ensuring creative freedom and flexibility, yet some of the artists discussed in this chapter replicated bureaucratic structures, parodically critiquing the government support system on which they relied.

The *Aankoopsubsidieregling Kunswerken* (Art Purchasing Subsidy Rule), begun in 1960 and discontinued in 1979, reimbursed art collectors twenty percent of their commercial gallery purchases, to a maximum of 240 guilders ($450 USD in 2016); art had to cost less than 3,000 guilders ($5,350 in 2016) and be made by a living artist. Works sold directly by an artist from his or her studio were excluded from this program, as it was intended to support contemporary

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8 In May 1973, British art magazine *Studio International* dedicated an entire issue to the Netherlands, ostensibly to examine the unique governmental funding provided to artists, collectors, and museums, which was then under threat due to political and economic pressures after the oil crisis and budget cuts in the cultural sphere. The issue opened with Kröller-Müller Museum director Rudi Oxe naar presenting his assessment of the state of art and museums in the Netherlands, claiming how progressive his country was. R.W.D. Oxenaar, “On Art and Museum Policies in the Netherlands,” *Studio International* 185, no. 955 (May 1973): 204.

9 A chief criticism of the program was that artists could move too quickly from the Academy of Fine Arts to welfare without ever exiting the subsidy system. There was also the question of what society was to do with the massive quantity of artworks collected in exchange for welfare checks. In a recent article about the *Beeldende Kunstenaars Regeling* (1956-1987), it was reported that 55,000 works of art are owned by 193 city governments, 42,000 of them held in storage. Pim Van den Dool, “Tienduizenden kunstwerken onzichtbaar in depots,” *NRC Handelsblad*, May 14, 2015, http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2015/05/14/tienduizenden-kunstwerken-onzichtbaar-in-depot.

art galleries, thereby bolstering the commercial art economy. Through this indirect subsidy, the government influenced collectors to take risks on unrecognized contemporary art. The government subsidies, combined with a healthy economy, fostered small, forward-thinking galleries, such as Art & Project. These conditions also facilitated the emergence of Ludic Conceptualist art.

By 1973, there were more than five hundred art museums in the Netherlands serving a population of 13.5 million. Most of the museums were owned and operated by national or city governments. City museums, such as the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, had additional financial resources because more funding was available for exhibitions and acquisitions. Private endowments were unheard of; the government was the sole source of funding for the arts. These favorable conditions began to deteriorate by the early 1970s, as operating costs (such as salaries, utilities, and maintenance) rose while public cultural subsidies remained steady or were reduced. Under financial pressure, museums began to double and triple their admission fees.

The government’s support of artists began to change in the early 1970s. For example, in 1972, new constraints were added to the Visual Artists Program under the Regeling Complementaire Arbeidsvoorziening Beeldende Kunstenaars (Complementary Employment Scheme for Visual Artists), limiting the age of participating artists (none younger than 25 or

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13 Ibid.


15 Oxenaar points out that the income from admission fees was fed back to the general treasury, not to the Ministry of Culture, let alone to the museums themselves. Oxenaar, “On Art and Museum Policies in the Netherlands,” 203.
older than 65), and encouraging random selection of participants, among other restrictions. The 1972 ruling was a first step in the eventual termination of the artists’ subsidy, and these constraints contributed to the demise of Ludic Conceptualism.

Changes in the city museums’ programming also had an adverse effect on exhibiting ludic art. Museum employees were civil servants whose positions were guaranteed until retirement, and, like artists, collectors, and galleries, museums needed the financial support of the government, as security is a precondition for play. The result, though, was that there was little change in museum personnel from the 1950s through the 1970s. The depressed economy of the early 1970s further limited new appointments and left museums understaffed through attrition. Thus the very employment protection that had created the conditions that permitted curators to experiment—and thereby allowed contemporary art to flourish—paradoxically led to ludic art’s decline as the innovations of youth devolved into the conservatism of a generation of aging arts professionals.

In the pages that follow, I return to the early 1960s, chronicling the development of Ludic Conceptualism and arguing for its legitimacy as a genre. I will analyze emblematic works of art, exhibitions, and publications in order to show their complicated relationships to the institutions that sustained their existence. Constant’s New Babylon was the touchstone that signaled a break with postwar expressionist painting and introduced a new mode of playful art consonant with the hopeful outlook of the decade. I discuss the A-dynamic Group, then turn to Association for

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16 Other limitations imposed by the 1972 ruling included requiring artists between the ages of 25 and 35 to try to earn a living outside their artistic practice; demonstrating that the artist would not be able to support himself on an independent income; restricting the subsidy to Dutch artists; and indicating that the artist had made attempts at selling his work by staging exhibitions or by making other arrangements to earn money from his artistic practice.


18 Ibid.
Scientific Research in New Methods of Recreation (AFSRINMOR) and its related subcommittees, then the Sigma Center, and then move on to Van Elk, Dibbets, and Reinier Lucassen’s parody of an art school. The chapter will end with a section on Ludic Conceptualist television programs.

II. Mock Art Movements and Councils

Among the artists and collectives that thrived with help from government arts programs and state museum support, was the A-dynamic Group, which was given exhibition space at the Stedelijk-run Museum Fodor, and the Sigma Center, which was financed by the city of Amsterdam. While artists and collectives benefited from governmental measures, their work took aim at the bureaucratic institutions providing their subsistence and enabling their output. Not only were the art market, museums, academia, and pop culture objects of mockery, but eminent contemporary artists were also subjects of critique. Constant’s *New Babylon*, however, widely known after its 1959 debut at the Stedelijk, served as a reference point for Ludic Conceptualism and demonstrated how Huizinga’s concept of the ludic could be applied to art. The A-dynamic Group cited *New Babylon* as an influence, while the Sigma Center reiterated Constant’s pleas to address increased leisure time that would result from the automation of production.

The A-dynamic Group, active from 1961 to 1963, and given exhibition space by the director of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, is one of the earliest examples of a state-supported art experiment. The group consisted of Dutch artists Ger van Elk, Wim T. Schippers, and Bob Wesdorp. As its name suggests, the group was rebelling against ‘dynamic’, or expressionist, postwar abstract art movements, such as Cobra, which they viewed as out-of-date. The group
was both a serious endeavor and a parody of a modern art movement, complete with a manifesto. Its art was on view only briefly; its absurd statements were its principal contribution. The group’s manifesto, “The First (Provisional) A-dynamic Manifesto” (the title pokes fun at twentieth century artist manifestos), authored by Ger van Elk and published in the left-wing magazine Vrij Nederland, enjoyed wide circulation, and is regarded by scholars to have been as significant as their sole exhibition Adynamische werken (Adynamic Works) from December 1962 and January 1963 at the Museum Fodor in Amsterdam. The publication accompanying their show was an integral component of their artistic practice, a realization of their critical ideas on education and contemporary art. The A-dynamic Group’s complexity resides in a tone that vacillates between sincerity and parody, the one subverting the other, and thus seeming to defy a rational point of view.

Van Elk explains in the manifesto that painting has reached its logical conclusion and that the group is looking for new forms of art that eschew personal expression. He criticizes the Stedelijk Museum for organizing stale exhibitions—such as those curated by the Liga Nieuw Beelden (League of New Images, a Dutch artists’ group), which had presented Cobra-like painting—rather than showing innovative experiments or young artists. Likewise, in an article about A-dynamic Group published shortly before their manifesto appeared, the artists express frustration with their education at the Instituut voor Kunstnijverheidsonderwijs (currently the Gerrit Rietveld Academie) in Amsterdam, as, despite the school’s progressive reputation, instructors taught expressionist painting. The manifesto goes on to state that the A-dynamic

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21 Van Elk, Schippers, and Wesdorp all attended the Kunstnijverheidsschool. J. Eijkelboom, “Is Neerlands jeugd wel slap genoeg,” Vrij Nederland, July 15, 1961, 7; For more information on the Gerrit Rietveld Academie,
Group aspires to “enforce theoretical and practical ‘weakness’, dullness, and flaccid paintings, sculptures, and gouaches” in a consciously limp parody of modern art, choosing adjectives that resonate with their group’s title, i.e., words opposed to dynamism. Van Elk’s desire to “float large indefinable objects in the Amsterdam canals,” references Robert Jasper Grootveld, who began and ended his career by building makeshift rafts to sail on the city’s waterways. Van Elk maintains that the group aspires to “commodify art,” a statement that is antithetical to and critical of contemporaneous art practices that resist being bought or sold. The assertion is consistent with publishing their manifesto in a popular magazine. While the manifesto is a parody, it earnestly identifies Constant’s New Babylon as forward thinking, and at the same time ridicules Constant’s impractical plans: the project is described as “beautiful, but completely unfeasible … a world of concrete and asphalt, plans about plans themselves.” However, sincerity is insinuated into ostensibly insincere declarations. Van Elk writes, only half-jokingly, “We appreciate: the voice of Eisenhower in a satellite, space, serial music, the Association of Independent Dutch Butchers, Tinguely’s moving machines, the New Realists, Y. Klein and Constant.” This is an example of one of the group’s tactics: to mask their true influences by embedding their sources—Constant and Klein—among absurd references. But the approach led critics to doubt whether the statements possessed any degree of earnestness. The result was the dismissal of their ludic art as insincere and therefore lacking value, viz., if art contains jokes or puns, then it must be merely

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23 Ibid.

24 It is notable that Van Elk mentioned Constant here; by the mid-1960s, he had stopped making such references. Ibid.

25 Ibid.
frivolous and unworthy of serious critical consideration. I contend that the A-dynamic Group employed absurdity as a strategy to mitigate their critique of the academy and the Stedelijk. It did, in fact, appreciate Tinguely, the Nouveaux Réalistes, and Constant, but the ridiculous aspects of the pronouncements, intended to parody the practice of identifying artistic influences, sabotaged the effort, and therein lay another example of the paradox of the ludic approach and its potential for failure.

The A-dynamic Group mounted *Adynamic Works* at the Museum Fodor in Amsterdam, also under the auspices of the Stedelijk Museum, assisted by Stedelijk director Willem Sandberg. The A-dynamic Group manifesto had praised Nouveau Réalisme, naming the movement and Tinguely as influences; yet it also parodied *Dylaby*, which had introduced Nouveau Réalisme to the Netherlands. As in *Dylaby*, the A-dynamic Group created playful environments within the exhibition space, although in *Adynamic Works*, the artists pushed the bounds of absurdity, ultimately mocking *Dylaby*’s installations. In *Adynamic Works*, the visitor first encountered a dirty mattress in the entry hall, and subsequent galleries were filled with ordinary items, a strategy that had been employed by Martial Raysse in his beach or Tinguely in his final balloon room for *Dylaby*. The floor of the first room was coated with table salt several inches deep (figure 4.1), while a green plastic fountain at the center spewed a feeble stream of water and bore a sign reading: “Forbidden to be in Salt,” a phrase that sounds awkward in its original Dutch. The next room contained a six-inch layer of broken glass (figure 4.2) and the

26 The Museum Fodor, initially an independent institution, became a branch of the Stedelijk Museum in 1948. From 1994 to 2001, the building housed the Dutch Design Institute, after which it was taken over by Fotografiemuseum Amsterdam (Foam), which currently occupies the space.

27 The Dutch sign reads “Verboden zich in het zout te bevinden.”
sign, “Step on Glass at Your Own Risk.” Unlike the first two galleries, the last room was impossible to enter as it was filled thirteen-feet high with pudding. Dylaby was playful and dark, as were the A-dynamic Group’s rooms, but the latter took aim at installation art itself with all three rooms.

The Adynamic Works catalogue, essentially a folded poster with an excerpt from Van Elk’s manifesto and a text by Schippers, along with photos of sculptures on view, is itself a work of art, rather than a mere textual companion to the exhibition. Unlike a typical catalogue that describes the art on display, Schippers’s text establishes a pattern of offering information, followed by an irrational contradictory remark: “the adynamic (sic) is a new viewpoint. At the same time, that is not at all the case,” and “[The A-dynamic] is infinite in its limitedness.” The paragraph continues, “Let’s stop speaking about the adynamic (sic). However, we can continue to use the term.” Schippers’s writing is in accord with the strategy seen in Van Elk’s manifesto: earnest claims are undermined, confusing readers. This use of internal contradictions is typical of ludic works, as absurdity masks the catalogue’s intention to create a light parody of twentieth

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28 A related installation is Schippers’s Peanut Butter Platform. It is dated 1962, although it was not executed until 1969, at Galerie Mickery in Loenersloot, and was reprised in 1997 at the Centraal Museum in Utrecht, and again in 2011 at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam. Peanut Butter Platform was unlike the early A-dynamic rooms at the Museum Fodor in that the peanut butter was spread on a platform rather than directly on the floor—thereby functioning as a sculpture rather than as an environment. The Dutch title, Pindakaasvloer, translates to “Peanut butter floor,” though the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen used the English title Peanut Butter Platform, indicating a sculpture as opposed to an installation work. In Rotterdam, the Peanut Butter Platform resembled a muddied Minimalist Carl Andre lead floor, with several major differences: the smell of peanut butter was very strong, and it could be detected even before one entered gallery (sealed with a plastic curtain). The surface was inconsistent. As one might imagine, it was not possible to get a clean, glossy surface in this medium and traces of spreading were apparent—the hard-edged metal of an Andre became a soft, mushy, smelly, brown skin. Schippers executed his work after Minimal art, including Andre’s floor pieces, had been exhibited in the Netherlands in 1968. The Pindakaasvloer is a parody of Andre’s rigid and heavy lead floor.

29 Schuyt and Taverne, Dutch Culture in a European Perspective, 4:471.


31 Ibid.
century art movements by mocking self-important artist statements and vaguely written exhibition catalogue essays.

The catalogue, however, is not entirely impenetrable. Schippers indirectly alludes to Constant’s *New Babylon* when describing the A-dynamic Group’s utopian schemes as “unfeasible plans (including works that exist by virtue of never being feasible) that cannot be achieved because of technical, economic, or democratic barriers.” While this is the only reference to Constant in the catalogue, it echoes the description of *New Babylon* in Van Elk’s manifesto. Schippers is intentionally unclear in his reference to *New Babylon*: on the one hand, he pokes fun at *New Babylon*’s premise as a utopian plan that can never be executed; on the other hand, Schippers’s reference to *New Babylon* indicates the work’s importance to the A-dynamic Group and its status in the Dutch context—Schippers need not name *New Babylon*, because contemporary readers would have understood his reference. This deliberate ambiguity defies definitive understanding of the catalogue essay and Constant’s relationship to the A-dynamic Group, and, perhaps, reveals Schippers’s ambivalence towards *New Babylon* as a beacon of playful art, and, at the same time, a symbol of the establishment (the academy and museum) at which the A-dynamic Group is directing its criticism.

The catalogue includes blueprints for future shows. One of Schippers’s proposals is for an exhibition of “stench and then refreshing air.” He was to realize this concept in the office cafeteria of Pieter Brattinga’s printers in Hilversum, with an exhibition titled *Scent Program* (1965). The space was covered in white paper, lit with four unadorned light bulbs, and filled

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32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
with twelve black chairs. The aim was to provide as few distractions as possible so that participants might concentrate on their sense of smell. Scents such as orange, pencil, anise, and musk were dispersed sequentially from the ceiling, each aroma intended to stimulate a particular psychological effect. The exhibition catalogue explains that orange was meant to induce a lively mood, pencil to evoke serious work; anise was witty, and musk alluring. A-dynamic’s mention of Klein in their manifesto suggests a conscious reference to *The Void*, at Iris Clert Gallery in Paris (1958), Klein’s exhibition of an apparently empty gallery filled with “atmosphere.” In both the “Scent Program” and *The Void*, the immaterial is on “view,” with atmospheres produced by the artists, although Schippers’s version is more concrete: his scents actually appeal to one of the five senses, while Klein’s version depends on the viewer’s imagination. Schippers had created a parody of Klein’s work—questioning and mocking Klein’s concept of the immaterial by filling an empty gallery with an actual scent—yet the act of referencing Klein is also an acknowledgement of Klein’s influence. The twenty-two-year-old-year Schippers challenged the value of his education and pushed the boundaries of art beyond expressionist painting, but he was also just an audacious art student fortunate to be working in a social democracy that supported cultural production by providing funding and exhibition space and allowing him to act out a practical joke in the guise of a work of art. This ambiguity and the uncertainty of his gestures are hallmarks of Ludic Conceptualism, and represent both its strength and its weakness. As result, leading art historians have overlooked Schippers and the A-dynamic group’s complicated and perhaps overly contextual parody of art education and museum exhibitions.

The A-dynamic group has yet to be placed in a particular movement, although similar examples of Ludic Conceptualism have been misattributed to Fluxus—perhaps unsurprisingly, as

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35 Ibid.
Fluxus was prominent in the early 1960s in the Netherlands.\textsuperscript{36} The term Fluxus was coined by George Maciunas in 1961 (from Latin \textit{flow}, suggesting the fluidity of media); Fluxus artist Dick Higgins coined the term ‘intermedia’ in 1966 to describe the absence of media boundaries in the group’s efforts.\textsuperscript{37} Dutch Ludic Conceptualists arranged, staged, and participated in Fluxus events, thereby contributing to the conflation of Fluxus with Ludic Conceptualism.

Ludic Conceptualists, most prominently Willem de Ridder (b. 1939), collaborated with Fluxus artists, adding to the difficulty of distinguishing between the groups. For example, after Maciunas established a mail order catalogue and warehouse in New York in 1962 to distribute Fluxus publications, he set up a second one with De Ridder, in the Netherlands in the spring of 1964 (figure 4.3). De Ridder organized festivals, performances, and television shows in addition to overseeing the European mail orders.\textsuperscript{38} In a letter of August 22, 1963 to De Ridder, Maciunas explains in great detail (with accompanying drawings) the kind of programming he would like De Ridder to include on Fluxus television, which was eventually broadcast on the television show \textit{Signalement}, a thirty-minute monthly program on contemporary art, in 1963.\textsuperscript{39} Maciunas also encouraged De Ridder to insert his own pieces and use his judgment, inviting the Dutch artist’s input. De Ridder’s playful parody and indirect criticism of popular culture can best be categorized not as Fluxus, but rather as Ludic Conceptualism.

\textsuperscript{36} A selection of Fluxus events in the early 1960s include: \textit{Parallele Aufführungen Neuester Musik}, at the Kunsthandel Monet in Amsterdam on October 5, 1962, with performances by Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, and Dutch artist Willem de Ridder; Nam June Paik’s \textit{Piano for all the Senses} at the Galerie Amstel 47 in Amsterdam, from June to July 1963; Fluxus Festival at the Hypokriterion theater in Amsterdam on June 23, 1963, including George Maciunas and the Dutch artist Willem de Ridder, among others; Fluxus Festival street theater in The Hague on June 28, 1963; and the Flux Festival in Rotterdam on November 23, 1964.


\textsuperscript{38} Nam June Paik, who performed \textit{Piano for All Senses} in the summer of 1963, brought De Ridder into contact with Maciunas. Ruhé, \textit{Het beste van Wim T. Schippers = The Best of Wim T. Schippers}, 20.

\textsuperscript{39} The 1963 letter was reproduced in the catalogue \textit{Actie, werkelijkheid en fictie}. Albert Kuiper and Talitha Schoon, “Fluxus,” in \textit{Actie, werkelijkheid en fictie in de kunst van de jaren ’60 in Nederland} (Rotterdam: Museum Boymans van Beuningen, 1979), 159–164.
The distinction between Fluxus and Ludic Conceptualism can be discerned in a Dutch Fluxus performance: *Symfonie voor zeven obers* (Symphony for Seven Waiters), created by Dutch-Colombian artist Michel Cardena and held at Castle Drakensteijn, a residence of Princess Beatrix, who commissioned the event with Prince Claus for performance on January 20, 1969. The seven ‘waiters’ were Prince Claus, curator Wim Beeren, the Dutch conceptual artists Marinus Boezem, Ad Dekkers, Jan Dibbets, and Peter Struycken, as well as the Prince’s secretary. The seven performers stood in a line, each carrying a tray of glasses in his left hand, with white napkins draped over their arms. Cards referencing musical tempi—andante maestoso, rondo, allegro con fuoco, scherzo, allegro vivace, moderato cantabile, vivace con molto delicatezza—were placed over each set of glasses (figure 4.4). At a signal from Cardena, a performer would walk, causing the glasses to clink in consonance with the tempo on his card. After the waiters each took his walk, they let their trays crash to the floor. While this Fluxus event is playful and absurd, I would maintain that it is not an example of Ludic Conceptualism, because it lacks the element of parody of the dominant culture. *Symphony for Seven Waiters* may have relied upon the royal couple’s support, but it did not take aim at the palace, royalty, the government, or popular culture. In contrast, the committees, councils, and television shows that I next address criticized the very government agencies and other establishment institutions upon whom they depended for their subsistence.

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40 The royals wanted to hold a discussion about contemporary art, so they commissioned a performance. The castle is in the city of Lage Vuursche, which is in the province of Utrecht in the center of the Netherlands.

41 That the Prince and Princess commissioned *Symphony for Seven Waiters* demonstrates establishment support for contemporary art at the nation’s highest social level. The Netherlands is a constitutional monarchy, and Beatrix’s reign was recognized for her devotion to the visual arts, and her interest in Conceptual art in particular. Prince Claus was also a proponent of the arts. The well-known and highly respected Prince Claus Fund was established in 1996 in the Prince’s name in order to recognize his devotion to culture; it is supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Dutch Postcode Lottery, and private donors. Beeren, *Actie, werkelijkheid en fictie*, 131; Paul Hefting, Els Kuijpers, and Gert Staal, *De Vorm Van Het Koningschap: 25 Jaar Ontwerpen Voor Beatrix* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2005), 77–78.
In the Netherlands in the 1960s, artists formed groups that mimicked local government institutions, such as the event-planning board of a city council or the several ministries responsible for culture. Artists performed a veneer of bureaucratic administration to mock the government’s program of artist subsidies from which they nevertheless benefited. For example, they would form working groups and sub-councils, and create administrative paperwork as art, thereby acknowledging their own complicity in the *kunstbeleid*.

The Association for Scientific Research in New Methods of Recreation (referred to by its acronym AFSRINMOR) was an organization that presented Fluxus events, including the *Internationaal programma Nieuwste Muziek – Nieuwste Theater – Nieuwste Literatuur* (International Program of the Newest Music – Newest Theater – Newest Literature), at the Kleine Komedie in Amsterdam on December 8, 1963, with performances by De Ridder and Emmett Williams. AFSRINMOR, co-founded by De Ridder, Schippers, and Stanley Brouwn in 1963, included the subcommittees Society for Exhibition Organizing (SEO) and the Research Center of Administrative Systems (RCAS), which mocked the Dutch bureaucratic strategy of developing working groups. A goal of AFSRINMOR was to find ways to debate leisure, as Schippers satirically explains: “recreation is one of today’s most pressing problems.”

Schippers’s statement is an allusion to *New Babylon* and to contemporary social discourse. In this instance, Schippers’s reference to *New Babylon* is vague, but the way in which recreation is framed as a problem that requires attention clearly alludes to the paradoxes of *New Babylon*’s utopianism. Schippers might be citing the foundational conflict of *New Babylon*, namely, that all citizens would devote their day to play (leisure), so no one could ensure the stability of the city; this is the utopianism of Constant’s purportedly feasible plans. The subject of recreation and

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leisure was a political issue, not only for Constant and Provo, but also for sociologists such as Wouter Buikhuisen—as discussed in Chapter One—who saw the “youth problem” as a major obstacle. Buikhuisen’s doctoral dissertation claims that the emergence of delinquent youth in the 1960s can be attributed to excess of free time. The solution the government chose was to provide subsidies for clubs and organizations outside the traditionally pillarized youth groups: the reasoning was that more opportunities for play would lead to a diminishment of petty crime. Pedagogue Nicolaas Beets, who was influenced by New Babylon, assumed a comparable position, writing that young people “improvise play and find themselves clashing with police because there are no rules to keep the game ‘under control’. The major challenge for the immediate future appears to be: learning to play creatively together.” While a portion of society, including the police, disagreed with Beets’s view, a large segment of those in political power believed it was important for homo ludens to play in peace. Thus, Schippers might be pointing to New Babylon’s paradox, or to the discussion of play, or perhaps he was making a sarcastic comment about the abundance of leisure time in order to stimulate more funding. As a good example of Ludic Conceptualism, his statement is decidedly ambiguous.

The SEO functioned as a parody of cultural-planning organizations, and by 1964, their artistic practice included the production of documents. For example, the SEO created an order form for their services (figure 4.5). Under the heading “NEW,” the SEO set out a number of

44 Wouter Buikhuisen, Achtergronden van nozemgedrag (Assen: Van Gorcum/Prakke en Prakke, 1965).
45 Kennedy, Nieuw Babylon in aanbouw, 129–130.
46 Dux was published between 1927 and 1970, and was aimed at priests who were involved in teaching and guiding Roman Catholic youth. Emphasis in original. Beets cited in Ibid., 130.
47 Ibid.
occasions for which they could be hired, marketing themselves to individuals who might want to host an exhibition, or, as recommended in the text, those who want to surprise their friends with a show. Another target was museum staff and gallery owners who might be “exhausted or overwrought” and who therefore needed to take “a bath, a long vacancy and relax.” They promised fair prices and a complete package for those who were “fed up [with] organizing exhibitions,” and assured them that a feeling of “disappointment” would ensue. The SEO mocked museum employees’ comfortable positions, as Dutch museum staff members were civil servants who enjoyed all the benefits and security of government jobs, and contemporary art gallery owners who were aided by government subsidies. SEO’s parodic publication suggests that they could stage similar—if not better—“disappointing” exhibitions of their own.

Another venture was the Society for Party Organizing (SPO), established by De Ridder in 1964, the same year SEO was formed. As the group’s name indicates, they could be hired to throw a celebration, for any occasion. Surviving documentation includes an invitation to a Turkish party on August 16, 1964 (figure 4.6). On August 22, 1964, Turkey and the Netherlands signed a treaty to admit Turkish guest workers, formalizing a process that had already begun informally. It is likely that SPO’s party referenced this contemporary political and cultural development. A photograph of the party appears to mock the recent policy change by showing partygoers in fake beards, wrapped in sheets, and sharing a hookah, indicating an ignorant

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48 The order form was published in its entirely in Beeren, Actie, werkelijkheid en fictie, 73.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 The name SPO might be a pun suggesting a political party; for example, a major Dutch party is the SP, the Socialistische Partij (Socialist Party).

perpetuation of orientalism with their culturally insensitive costumes (figure 4.7). The SPO’s Turkish party recalls the public’s unquestioning acceptance of Grootveld’s Zwarte Piet costume discussed in Chapter Three. The lack of insight into the wider ramifications of mocking a minority group of migrant laborers evidences a significant blind spot in a culture that, in respect to its welfare system, would otherwise be considered progressive. It seems that the SPO’s aim, above all, was to throw a party. Entry was free, but partygoers had to bring a guest and a bottle of hard liquor.\footnote{De Ridder’s parties have been described as a kind of “game with a simple form that is open to everyone,” in a nod to Constant and Huizinga.} De Ridder’s parties have been described as a kind of “game with a simple form that is open to everyone,” in a nod to Constant and Huizinga.\footnote{De Ridder’s parties have been described as a kind of “game with a simple form that is open to everyone,” in a nod to Constant and Huizinga.}

AFSRINMOR International organized the Mars door Amsterdam (March through Amsterdam) on December 6, 1963, with De Ridder and Schippers credited as the creators. The video-recorded march was broadcast three weeks later (December 29) on the television program Signalement, discussed below. For the “march,” organizers invited participants to walk through Amsterdam along two routes, each walk lasting seventeen minutes (figure 4.8). The group was to act as if they were ordinary pedestrians with a destination, and not seek to draw attention to themselves as organized marchers. This inversion, or parody, of a Situationist dérивé, had a defined path and moved with purported intent.

The Sigma Center in Amsterdam, founded in 1966 by beatnik poets Olivier Boelen (1940–1977) and Simon Vinkenoog, was another artist’s group that parodied government cultural committees. Intended to develop into a multimedia platform supporting diverse artistic endeavors such as art, theater, dance, film, and poetry, the center was inspired by the ideas of writer Alexander Trocchi, associated with the Letterist International and the SI. The Sigma

\footnote{For those who were unclear, the instructions specified which beverages not to bring, including Fanta, Rivella, wine, beer, vermouth, chocolate milk, and tomato juice. The invitation is printed in Beeren, Actie, werkelijkheid en fictie, 72.}

\footnote{In 1979, Beeren writes that the party was a “game” for De Ridder. Ibid.}
Center sponsored a variety of artistic endeavors that otherwise might have been too small to receive funding on their own. It received 30,000 guilders (about 86,800 USD in 2016) from the Amsterdam City Council to establish office space and fund performances, with Boelen as director and Vinkenoog as president.\(^{55}\) Jeff Nuttall, reflecting on the Sigma Center in 1968, ascribed its existence to the astonishing support the Center received from local government, together with Vinkenoog’s efforts.\(^{56}\) The center’s activities were as diverse as its contributors; artists could practice in open rehearsal rooms, or study in a reading room, and there were plans to open a restaurant.\(^{57}\) The center hosted Fluxus events, such as Concert for Three Barrel Organs, in Amsterdam, from August to September 1967.\(^{58}\) On December 3, 1966, the Provos collaborated with the Center, organizing a teach-in on the Chinese Cultural Revolution.

The Sigma Center was influenced by *New Babylon* through Vinkenoog, a longtime supporter of Constant. In a lengthy statement published in the right wing Amsterdam newspaper *De Telegraaf* in 1966, Vinkenoog explains that the Sigma Center seeks “a solution for the ‘free-time problem’,” which would grow as labor becomes less important in society; moreover, it is the artists’ responsibility to find a solution to this predicament.\(^{59}\) Vinkenoog channels Huizinga,

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\(^{58}\) Willem Breuker composed the music and the concert took place on the Dam square, two afternoons a week for three weeks from August 25 through September 15, 1967. Three barrel organs, Pipo, ‘t Snotneusje, and ‘t Puntkapje (Clown, Little snot-nose, Pointy hat) were placed on each side of the square so that they would play in concert. The plan failed: the organs were placed too far from each other to produce a coherent sound. Beeren, *Actie, werkelijkheid en fictie*, 124.

asserting, “child’s play is our model.” Together with Boelen, he planned “Spel Amsterdam” (Play Amsterdam) for July 2 and 3, 1966, a citywide happening during which time the “homo ludens” would occupy the city. “Play Amsterdam” demonstrates the center’s ambivalence toward authority, simultaneously compliant and antagonistic: compliant in that the center was dependent upon funding and, to a degree, had to collaborate with the city; antagonistic because Vinkenoog and Boelen set out to occupy Amsterdam. Yet, “Play Amsterdam” was never realized. Its organizers canceled it due to “civic unrest,” as there had been several clashes with the police, including construction workers’ riots (supported by Provo) on June 13 and 14, and growing demonstrations against the war in Vietnam.

The Sigma Center’s best-known work is Continuous Drawing (1966), an example of Dutch tolerance, support, and acceptance of ludic art—not in terms of financing, as the center’s funding had been cut, but in terms of cooperation with elements of Dutch authorities, such as the police. Continuous Drawing was an international project, responsive to the distinct cultural atmospheres of the Netherlands and Britain, the two countries in which the project was executed. Dutch artist Tjebbe van Tijen conceived Continuous Drawing while teaching a drawing course at the Sigma Center. His students, Wendela Gevers Deynoot, Mara van Oss, Ammetje Schook, Floor Schook, and Adinka Tellegen, began Continuous Drawing in a London sewer near the Institution of Contemporary Art in December 1966 (figure 4.9). The students drew parallel lines in organic shapes with chalk, using all available surfaces, such as sidewalks and pedestrians’

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60 Ibid.


clothing, and extending to streets and buildings. In London, the artists were arrested on a charge of defacing royal property, for which they had to pay a small fine. The drawing moved to the Netherlands via airplane, where the seats and passengers stood in for canvases (figure 4.10). Unlike the British intervention, the Dutch authorities facilitated this subtly subversive artistic endeavor: at Schiphol Airport, the police stopped traffic so that the drawing could move to Amsterdam’s Central Station by bus, and then by taxi to the Stedelijk Museum, where it traveled down Paulus Potterstraat, up the museum’s façade into the building itself, up the grand staircase through the exhibition halls and the restaurant (figures 4.11, 4.12).

The Sigma Center enjoyed the city’s support because it assumed only a lightly critical position and enabled a reversible destructive act. I maintain that if the group had been more aggressive, or had permanently damaged the environment, they would have risked their collegial arrangement with Dutch authorities. Had “Play Amsterdam” been realized, it might have shed light on the question of what degree of provocation the government would tolerate.

III. Ersatz Art School

In 1967, Dibbets, Van Elk, and Lucassen formed the Internationaal Instituut voor Herscholing van Kunstenaars (International Institute for the Re-Schooling of Artists), a fake art school that mocked education, artists, and the art market. Their production was mainly ephemera: pamphlets that advertised their “school” in an ironic tone, and offered “courses.” Although the group created a handful of sculptures, there was no intention of permanence—they

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64 The drawings were visible on the exterior for years afterward. Rixt Hulshoff Pol and Marie Baarspul, *In the Pocket: The Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 2012), 89. Even the visitors were drawn upon. Beeren, *Actie, werkelijkheid en fictie*, 123. After Amsterdam, the drawing made its way to Rotterdam, its final destination.
even pushed one of their sculptures into a pond once their exhibition was concluded. The artists sought to re-think the system by which art is made and presented, and to look critically at the circulation of what they called “bad art.”

In the first brochure—a single sheet of paper (248 x 324 mm)—published in September 1967 (figures 4.13, 4.14), each artist advertised courses on contemporary art. A photograph of the artist was published alongside an alluring but fundamentally ludicrous description of the course, with the titles “pop art,” “hard edge,” or “sculpture.” Each teacher offered two courses, all referencing art historical movements. Lucassen gave “pop-art” together with “Nude in the Landscape.” In the accompanying explanation, he promised to provide “a sunny outlook on life. Up till now if you have been painting merely onions and eggs, after only one lesson you will find the beauty of a knockwurst.” A tag line states, “Lucassen will teach you to see the Lucy Ball Show [as] a source of inspiration.” Dibbets was responsible for the “hard edge” course and “New Installations.” The “hard edge” description states, “Away with trouble! Dibbets will tell you about tape and straight lines. Dibbets will spare you from every failure.” This description concludes with the Dutch alliteration “Dibbets doet de deur dicht!” (Dibbets closes the door!), meaning “Dibbets has it all wrapped up!” Van Elk’s course in “sculpture” seems straightforward, undermined only by his second course’s obscure title, “Doctrine of New Sight.” His advertisement reads, “Why mess with bronze and plaster? Under Van Elk’s expert guidance

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you’ll quickly become a sculptor with modern material.” “Plastic: light, airy and enjoyable, never dirty hands!” he enthuses. Van Elk assures the reader that he “opens a world!”

The pamphlet resembles popular newspaper advertisements for correspondence courses in painting or drawing, much like the advertisements for the Famous Artists School in the U.S. (figure 4.15). 69 In order to choose the most suitable Re-Schooling course, readers were asked to select the image that suited them best: a fairly realistic drawing of a dog, an abstract dog made of geometric shapes, or a line drawing of the dog on a pedestal. Based on preference, students were advised to take “pop art,” “hard edge,” or “sculpture,” respectively. This absurd ‘course match’ ridiculed both contemporary art movements and the promises of art schools. 70

The Institute’s approach was multifaceted, posing conundrums that were both ridiculous and thought provoking (figure 4.16). The same brochure asks, “Are you at a loss? … Have friends, collectors stopped looking at you? Does normal painting or sculpture no longer exist? Should every artist with integrity kill himself?” 71 The Institute’s mock courses were presented as a means to continue working as an artist despite the challenges and disappointments (“You can matter again!”). 72 The group also poked fun at the high prices of contemporary art. Their courses, they boasted, cost only a quarter of the price of a 150 x 150 cm painting. For a small fee, they would teach a “new, unique, modern form of earning money,” implying that anyone could become an artist. 73 The 1967 brochure guaranteed a free photograph of “your famous teacher”

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69 The Dutch variant was the “Leidse Onderwijsinstelling Succes.” Van der Heijden, “De famous artists van het Internationaal Instituut voor Herscholing van Kunstenaars,” 31.

70 Lucassen and Dibbets had trained to become art teachers in the early 1960s, and Dibbets taught drawing at a girl’s school in the Dutch town of Enschede from 1964 to 1967. Verhagen, Jan Dibbets: The Photographic Work, 18:17.

71 Dibbets, Van Elk, and Reinier, “Internationaal Instituut voor Herscholing van Kunstenaars.”

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid.
with every course subscription. The artists had a group photograph—an image Lucassen referred to as a “serious mug shot” (figure 4.17)—taken at Heino, a well-known photographic studio in the center of Amsterdam, because, according to Dibbets, no one else in the city would follow their request to make a bad photograph.\textsuperscript{74}

The image was also used in an advertisement for the group exhibition \textit{Gans Zijn Aarde Is Van Zijn Heerlijkheid Vol} (His Whole Earth is Full of His Glory).\textsuperscript{75} The show, held in Galerie Espace in Amsterdam in late December 1967, featured three collaborative works: \textit{Te Land}, \textit{Te Zee}, and \textit{In de Lucht} (On Land, At Sea, and In the Air).\textsuperscript{76} The exhibition’s title might at first be understood as a biblical reference, as it echoes a line from the Book of Isaiah, but the Dutch phrasing actually points to a contemporary debate regarding art and welfare, because ‘Gans’ also refers to Louis Gans, an art historian and curator who was actively involved in art and politics in 1965.\textsuperscript{77} Gans developed the \textit{International Kunsthuis} (International Art House), also referred to as “Plan Gans,” the purpose of which was to create a bigger market for young Dutch artists both nationally and internationally. He also supported subsidies for companies and institutions that purchased art, encouraged the promotion of artists through better advertising, and reduced costs through increased production.\textsuperscript{78} Artists and critics were divided over Plan Gans, some showing

\textsuperscript{74} Van der Heijden, “De Famous Artists van het Internationaal Instituut voor Herscholing van Kunstenaaars,” 33.

\textsuperscript{75} They used their group portrait as a selling point: “Subscribe today for one of our completely updated courses. The institute with the most bodacious teachers!” Dibbets, Van Elk, and Reinier, “Internationaal Instituut voor Herscholing van Kunstenaaars.”

\textsuperscript{76} Marijke van der Heijden pointed out that while the exhibition officially took place from December 15, 1967 through January 6, 1968, the gallery director, Rutger Noordhoek Hegt, recalls that the show was open for, at most, three days. Marijke van der Heijden, “De famous artists van het Internationaal Instituut voor Herscholing van Kunstenaaars,” \textit{Jong Holland}, 1986, 34.

\textsuperscript{77} The story is recalled in Ibid., 34–35.

\textsuperscript{78} One of Gans’s projects, \textit{Prent 190} (Print 190), ran from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s. The initiative sought to enroll 190 collectors in a subscription service that for a fee of 250 guilders (about $600 USD in 2016) would deliver a portfolio of ten prints from up-and-coming artists. “Subsidie,” \textit{De Telegraaf}, February 12, 1965, 2.
distaste for Gans’s treatment of art as a commodity, and many artists choosing not to participate. Gans’s idea of increasing artistic production was, for some artists, pointless, and merely a justification to create more unnecessary objects.

In 1968, the Institute issued two pamphlets as supplements to the March issue of the art magazine Museumjournaal, commissioned by Rini Dippel, editor-in-chief of the magazine and a curator at the Stedelijk Museum. Dippel, in her combined roles as editor and curator, represented the tastemakers at which the Institute directed their critique. One pamphlet, Tips voor verzamelaars (Tips for Collectors, figure 4.18), included a coupon for free advice that required the recipient to complete a form that asked for unusual data, such as annual income, shoe size, blood type, marital status, and childhood disease history (figure 4.19). In addition, one was to check ‘yes’ or ‘no’ as to whether one liked to go to parties. The pamphlet ensures collecting success and states that their work is based on the precedents of Duchamp, Moholy Nagy, Klein, and Man Ray—all artists who had played with ideas of authenticity, reproduction, and exchange. The Institute then names their students (i.e., collectors): Christo, Yayoi Kusama, and Livinus van de Bundt. Each of these artists was mocked either directly or indirectly in the

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79 Lucassen indirectly referred to the Plan Gans in an interview about his work with the Institute, published on the occasion of their 1967 exhibition: “We don’t expect to sell anything … Dibbets suggested the idea for this event. With this exhibition, there are several things to which we want to respond. We feel that an enormous amount of rubbish is made. We want to parody fashionable modernism, successful exhibitions, psychedelic stuff, painting on nudes, et cetera. Turning neon lights on a shelf on and off is not art, it’s not even a good idea. We can appreciate good ideas, even if it is not art, but often it is nothing.” Lucassen is quoted in Ben Dull, “Gevoel Voor De Slechte Smaak,” Het Parool, December 23, 1967, 11.

80 In 1955, Museumjournaal was established to be a source of information and advertising platform for the three major modern art museums in the Netherlands: the Stedelijk Museum, the Kröller-Müller, and the Van Abbemuseum. Rogier Schumacher explains that Van Elk contacted Dippel to discuss the inclusion of brochures in the magazine, but, based on notes from the editors in the archives at the Van Abbemuseum regarding a February 12, 1968 meeting, it is likely that Dippel was responsible for the Institute’s publication. Rogier Schumacher, Neo-avant-garde in Nederland: Museumjournaal als forum van een nieuw kunstbegrip (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 10; 133; 322; Van der Heijden, “De Famous Artists van het Internationaal Instituut voor Herscholing van Kunstenaaars,” 32.

pamphlet. For example, one photo is subtitled “empaquetage,” showing a fake Christo “wrap” installed in the Stedelijk Museum. Another image shows Dibbets, Lucassen, and Van Elk painting designs on a nearly naked woman, an allusion to Kusama and Livinus (figure 4.20).

During a party in Delft on November 3, 1967, at the Novum Jazz, the Dutch Nul artist Jan Schoonhoven offered his body as a canvas to Kusama. The party was held in conjunction with the openings of Jan Schoonhoven exhibitions held at the Gemeente Museum and Galerie Orez, The Hague. The occasion for the exhibitions was Schoonhoven winning the second prize at the Sao Paulo Biennial in 1967. Kusama painted and sprayed Schoonhoven’s body while Livinus’s light machine played in the background. In the Institute’s satirical version, the artists, aided by a bucket of paint, cover the woman’s body with hieroglyphic-like markings. The act also pays homage to Yves Klein’s “anthropometries,” in which he used women as living brushes, directing models to imprint their painted bodies on canvases, sometimes as a performance. The key phrase indicating this connection is the Institute’s caption: “The nude as a living paintbrush.” While Klein was cited as a source of inspiration, Kusama was named as representing an “essential avant-garde artist” receiving help “from their first and second class assistants (the do-it-yourselfers with artistic aspirations).” The Institute’s lists are at once homage and critique, and the artists are cast in both roles, implying that they had much to teach but also something to learn. The distinctions among those held in high or low regard may be seen in the status accorded the artists: Klein is named as a source, whereas Kusama is designated a student.

The Institute exploited the complexity of parody, employing the ludic characteristic of masquerade. Livinus was again referenced in the third photograph published in the Institute’s

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82 The fake Christo was originally on view in the Institute’s exhibition, *His Whole Earth is Full of Glory*, December 1967.

pamphlet. Just as they had made a “Christo,” here the three artists recreated a Livinus (figure 4.21). They arranged several cardboard cylinders alongside one white and one colored lamp, with the caption “psychodelic (sic).” The Institute mocked popular art they thought was silly, such as Christo’s wrapped objects or Livinus’s installations, by creating a parody, accompanied by a pointed caption should their intentions be misunderstood. While it may seem merely lighthearted play, the group earnestly declares the inspiration they drew from artists such as Duchamp and Klein.

The Institute’s third and final pamphlet, circulated in the March 1968 issue of Museumjournaal, was entitled Vele handen maken licht werk (Many Hands Ease the Work, figure 4.22), a Dutch proverb. Ocher-colored and about half the page-size of Tips for the Collector, the pamphlet’s title alludes to the collaborative art so popular at the time and widely perceived as a non-hierarchical, anti-consumerist undertaking characteristic of Fluxus events and happenings, or even, in a bit of self-mockery, their own practice. The Institute again replicated and poked fun at collaboration, suggesting that artists might have chosen this model of working out of laziness. The pamphlet includes a photograph of a collaborative piece by Dibbets, Luccassen, and Van Elk, but the image is printed askew, as an apparent result of carelessness. Dibbets recalled the difficulty he had in finding a printer who would agree to follow his

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84 Levinus Arie Cornelis Jan van de Bundt, or Livinus van de Bundt (1909—1979), was well known at the time and had been exhibiting regularly. Livinus initially made etches and woodcuts, before experimenting with light sources and light-sensitive material. See Livinus, W. A. L Beeren, and H. A. C Roem, Livinus schildert met licht (Den Haag: Gemeentemuseum, 1965).

85 The word was deliberately misspelled in Dutch. Dibbets, Van Elk, and Reinier, “Tips voor verzamelaars.”

86 This fake Livinus installation was also on view in the 1967 exhibition, His Whole Earth is Full of Glory.

instructions—not unlike his quest for a “bad” photograph.\(^{88}\) The off-center photograph shows a sculpture made by the three artists with the title, *Sea and Beach*, for which Lucassen painted clouds in the top right corner, Van Elk created the three-dimensional polyurethane element that spilled out onto the floor in an amorphous mass, and Dibbets connected the two, building a platform between the components.\(^{89}\) The deliberately poor reproduction makes it difficult to read the image’s details—and the work is no longer extant—but the text below the photograph connects the Institute’s idea to “Plan Gans” and references their 1967 exhibition:

Happily painting together. An entirely new form of art and very popular with artists. Encourage these currently popular forms of art
Buy more = higher demand = higher production = more chance of something good = etc.

This is the integrated work of art / Highly elaborate blend of personal ideas / And a great sacrifice of the individual creativity of the artist / The whole is anonymous / And of course, imbued with a comic sense / in short SOMETHING GOOD.\(^{90}\)

The last sentence of the first paragraph parrots Louis Gans’s scheme almost verbatim: more art leads to better art. This false premise was exactly what the Institute took issue with and criticized in a 1967 interview, when Lucassen explained that they did not seek to sell their art, but instead to “parody fashionable modernism.”\(^{91}\)

While the Institute’s 1968 publication poked fun at collaborative work, one of Dibbets, Lucassen, and Van Elk’s collective sculptures was on view in the small village of Finsterwolde, in the agrarian northern province Groningen, in the autumn of 1967. Experimenting on a large

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\(^{88}\) Van der Heijden, “De famous artists van het Internationaal Instituut voor Herscholing van Kunstenaars,” 33.

\(^{89}\) Beeren, *Actie, werkelijkheid en fictie*, 127.

\(^{90}\) Dibbets, Van Elk, and Lucassen, “Vele handen maken licht werk.”

\(^{91}\) Dull, “Gevoel voor de slechte smaak,” 11.
scale, they used a plot of farmland belonging to gallery owner Albert Waalkens. The design of the sculpture was attributed to Dibbets, who pumped polyurethane into a furrow on Waalkens’s property. Once the polyurethane had hardened, Lucassen was tasked with painting the object. After he completed the work in unmixed colors (white, red, orange, blue, and green), Lucassen commented ironically, “it turned out awfully beautiful, it is a work of art” (figure 4.23).

Waalkens, reflecting on the work in 1985, told a reporter that the artists pushed their sculpture into a nearby pond and for many years “children used it as a boat in the summer and as a bench to sit and tie their skates in the winter,” reveling in the public’s lack of regard for the object.

In a 1967 interview with Ben Dull, Lucassen expressed the desire to publish two more pamphlets: “One would be about exhibitions we would really like to make, and the other would be the conclusion, wherein the three of us would work against each other but all three of us would sign the piece.” Lucassen would thus challenge the idea of working independently, as it would ultimately be a collaborative pamphlet. Lucassen’s alleged goal for these last pamphlets, which were never produced, was to mock the trend of collective endeavors—and, ironically, to do so in a collaboratively. Once again, he sought to employ the aesthetics of administration in detailed and official-looking documents that served to legitimize their artistic practice, as it could

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92 Albert Waalkens, a farmer, began exhibiting sculptures in a renovated cowshed in 1962. He started with local artist friends such as Siep van de Bern and André Volten. He slowly branched out, until he eventually began showing work by Peter Struyken, Dibbets, Van Elk, and later, Bas Jan Ader. In 1983, he was asked by Wim Beeren to curate a show at the Museum Boijmans van Beunigen, where he was director at the time. Sikke Doele, “Waalkens: ‘Wat daar hangt, daar gaat het om’,” Leeuwarder Courant, December 2, 1988, 29; Beeren, Actie, werkelijkheid en fictie, 125; Van der Heijden, “De Famous Artists van het Internationaal Instituut voor Herscholing van Kunstenars,” 34.

93 Van der Heijden, “De famous artists van het Internationaal Instituut voor Herscholing van Kunstenars,” 34.

94 Lucassen quoted in Ibid.

95 Albert Waalkens quoted in Ibid.

96 Dull, “Gevoel voor de slechte smaak,” 11.
be (and sometimes was) mistaken for an earnest attempt to create an art school. It also poked fun, through parodic mimicry, at governmental intervention into artistic practices, at trends in contemporary art, as seen in the works of Kusama and Christo, and at an overriding concern for an art market driven by the demands of art buyers, a system in which they consciously participated.

IV. Primetime Television Interventions

Ludic Conceptual art is at once playful—in its amusing and absurd texts—and earnest, both as a practice and as a means of criticism. Some artists acknowledge their influences, similar to the A-dynamic Group or the International Institute for the Re-Schooling of Artists, while other artists reference pressing contemporary debates, as seen in The Sigma Center, indicating that their efforts were grounded in a genuine desire for social justice. In this section, I will address two notable examples of television programming that directly engage with the visual arts: a single episode of Signalement (1963), and the series Hoepla (1967–68). Their primetime appearance on public channels legitimized these television programs that sharply critiqued Dutch culture. The shows playfully deployed humor to aim lighthearted gibes at contemporary art movements such as Pop art, yet they did not only find fault; Signalement, for example, also paid earnest tribute to Yves Klein. Hoepla is notorious for having aired a naked woman on Dutch television for the first time, but the show had greater political aims, such as pointing out Dutch failures in decolonization and questioning military conscription. I argue that Hoepla and other

97 Lucy Lippard misunderstands The International Institute for the Re-Schooling of Artists as a serious effort to create an alternative art education program. Lucy Lippard, Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972, 1st ed. (University of California Press, 1997), xvi.
television programs of its ilk were most successful when embodying the strategies of Ludic Conceptualism.

Spiegel der Kunsten (Art’s Mirror), which premiered in December 1962, was the first television program to feature footage of Ludic Conceptualism, showing clips from the exhibition Adynamic Works alongside Schippers’s commentary.\footnote{Henk De By and Wim T. Schippers, “Spiegel der Kunsten” (VPRO, December 20, 1962).} Schippers made his debut as a television personality on this program, a fact generally omitted in the literature.\footnote{Schippers’s television career was prolific: he acted in many television programs, and performed the voices for Ernie and Kermit in the Dutch version of Sesame Street. Henk Van Gelder, “Normaal sta je daar gewoon nooit bij stil,” in Wim T Schippers’ Televisiepraktijken sinds 1962 (Hilversum: VPRO, 2008), 3.} His next project, Signalement, received more critical attention, both at the time and later. Airing from 1963 through 1976 on VARA, the Dutch public-broadcasting association, the show was directed by Henk de By, whom De Ridder and Schippers sought after.\footnote{VARA is an acronym for the Vereeniging van Arbeiders Radio Amateurs (Association of Amateur Radio Workers). Initially it had close links to left-wing labor and socialist parties. It had worked with resistance factions during World War II. Today, it is commonly understood to broadcast progressive television and radio programs.} The three men collaborated on an episode airing December 29, 1963 that began with a Fluxus score, Prelude by Nam June Paik, followed by Emmett Williams’s Voice Piece for La Monte Young (1962): the host announced (in English), “If La Monte Young is watching this program, will he please phone Amsterdam 243087.”\footnote{There is no record of La Monte Young calling the Amsterdam telephone number announced on the show. Beeren, Actie, werkelijkheid en fictie, 70.} Signalement included other foreign artists’ work, such as Light Event, by George Brecht, as well as Dutch artists’ performances, for example, clips from Schippers’s The emptying of a bottle of soda at Petten (1961), AFSRINMOR’s March Through Amsterdam (1963), and shots of the A-dynamic works in the Museum Fodor.\footnote{In this single episode, Signalement also broadcast shots of Paper Constellations by Willem de Ridder (first made in 1960); an interview with De Ridder about Fluxus events; a theater piece by De Ridder; interview with De Ridder and Schippers about Pop art in the Hilton Hotel; presentation of Pop art, including Roy Lichtenstein and...} The December episode was disguised as...
an ordinary culture broadcast, but was actually a ludic experiment in mainstream media. I will describe four of the show’s fourteen segments, which best illustrate how the program subverted traditional television broadcasting.

The first video clip in Signalement presented Schippers pouring a bottle of soda into the water at the seaside city of Petten. A voiceover, in newscaster mode, provided a commentary:

Sparking the interest of the local population, Wim T. Schippers emptied a bottle of soda into the sea at Petten, near the Hondsbossche Dam, at eleven in the morning. It was an event that first took place on October 29, 1961, and was repeated for the press and TV. Wim T. Schippers, whose a-dynamical works also hold international appeal, makes work for all the senses. The soda at Petten would perhaps best be called a kind of “fact art.” Instead of paint and canvas, he works with reality. In this case, the art is not a painting or a poem, but emptying a bottle of lemonade at Petten.103

Schippers cast his original 1961 Fluxus event in the guise of a news program, parodying both the news and contemporary art. Here art is in Schippers’s reframing of the performance as a mock news program. This episode of Signalement is exceptional in that it brought Fluxus to a wider Dutch audience, albeit subsumed into Ludic Conceptualism, with a light self-mockery that also provided an accurate description of the work: it was presented with deadpan humor, yet it was genuinely informative.

The show’s absurd character was most apparent in the interviews, regularly interrupted by the interviewer answering a telephone or lighting a cigarette, and which featured deliberately nonsensical and out-of-focus camera work, often leaving the person being interviewed out of the frame, or aiming at an empty chair. In one such interview, director Henk de By questioned

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Andy Warhol; work from the Zero artists and the Dutch Nul group; interview with Nul artist Henk Peeters; Stanley Brown during View of a City (1963); a presentation of Pop art by a mannequin in a bikini in a room decorated with garlands followed by commentary by De Ridder and Schippers; the last segment displayed and demonstrated The Endless Box, by Chieko Shiom, whereby boxes are removed from inside other boxes, similar to Russian nesting dolls. This last piece functioned as an advertisement, because the piece was for sale through the Fluxus Mail Order House. The Endless Box is only described in literature and is not on recordings, which reinforces its function as advertisement rather than content.

Schippers and Willem de Ridder about their involvement in AFSRINMOR and the A-dynamic group after screening shots from the *March through Amsterdam* performed a few weeks earlier. After agreeing to further discuss his art, Schippers paused mid-speech to offer cigarettes to the others, and De Ridder passed around a lighter. A woman entered with a trolley full of liquor and poured glasses of sherry. Schippers began to speak again, returning to the definition of “a-dynamic,” while De Ridder answered a ringing telephone. Schippers’s first attempt to explain the a-dynamic was clumsy: “It is a … trademark. The meaning—not especially dynamic—is of lesser importance.” Schippers questioned the idea of a “trademark” as an empty signifier by applying it to his work, a reference to Gans’s trend of assimilating artistic practices into business and institutional models. Next, the artist addressed AFSRINMOR by emphasizing that his efforts were “scientific,” drawing a connection between his A-dynamic works and academia:

> At the moment, I have notions such as boring-ness, uninteresting-ness under research. This research has a scientific character. It was in this context that last year in the Municipal Fodor Museum, with a large retrospective exhibition of A-dynamic works, I devoted two rooms to the genuinely uninteresting.104

Schippers description of the a-dynamic as a science situated his artistic practice at a point between parody and authentic endeavor, but any clear communication of Schippers’s art was impeded by his own disruptive gestures and his refusal to provide straightforward answers.

*Signalement* also attacked Pop art in the guise of informing an uneducated audience about the newest trend in contemporary art. In a segment that began with Schippers, De Ridder, and De By strolling into the Hilton Hotel and sitting down for coffee and cake, a substantial amount of time elapsed before they discuss art. The men walked a line between informative presentation and parody as they offered a definition of Pop art, spoke about its subject matter (cake, razors, 

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104 Here Schippers is referring to the rooms filled with salt and glass, as described earlier in this chapter. Ruhé, *Het beste van Wim T. Schippers = The Best of Wim T. Schippers*, 27.
washing machines, grills, hamburgers, tea sets, toothpaste, et cetera), and then pointedly commented on how popular and expensive this type of art is.\textsuperscript{105} The conversation ended with news of related European trends, such as Nouveau Réalisme. During the discussion of Yves Klein and his “immaterial” paintings, in an unusual risk for a television program, the screen went dark, an action that I interpret as suggesting the experience of “seeing” an immaterial work. De Ridder and Schippers next interviewed Daniel Spoerri, sitting around table cluttered with the remains of a meal, which turned out to be one of the artist’s assemblages. After the interview, Spoerri hung the table, complete with half-eaten food and wine glasses, on the wall.

*Signalement* parodied not only news broadcasts, but also genres of tv entertainment. Schippers and De Ridder discussed kinetic art, showing works by French-Hungarian artist Victor Vasarely and others. In a “kinetic” manner, the hosts not only zoomed in on pieces, but also brought them onto a stage and moved them around in order to get a fuller sense of the work. Schippers and De Ridder wore business suits and called upon a female model in a bikini to “demonstrate” the works of art.\textsuperscript{106} The presentation had more in common with a sexist game show than a news program. This episode of *Signalement* is emblematic of ludic work: it bore the semblance of an informative cultural program, which allowed the program to operate critically in the mainstream media. The absurdist content communicated somewhat progressive ideas on the nature of contemporary art, although with complete ignorance or dismissal of its misogynist attitude. Similar to the lack of understanding of postcolonialism as seen in the SPO, Dutch Ludic Conceptualists appear to have had little to no comprehension or awareness of feminism.

\textsuperscript{105} Schippers, De Ridder, and De By showed work by Roy Lichtenstein, Jasper Johns, Claes Oldenburg, Wayne Theibaud, George Segal and Andy Warhol.

\textsuperscript{106} The form was very much in line with long-running U.S. games shows, such as *The Price is Right*, in which each product is described while an attractive female model demonstrates or holds the object.
The December 1963 Signalement episode offered a brief taste of the absurdity that would put Hoepla on the map as the best-known, extended artists’ endeavor in popular television programming in the Netherlands in the 1960s. Hoepla aired only three episodes in 1967: on July 28, October 9, and November 23. A fourth episode, scheduled to appear on January 8, 1968, was never broadcast because, I argue, it was too aggressively critical. Schippers, photographer Wim van der Linden, and filmmakers Hans Verhagen and Trino Flothuis organized each hour-long show. The program was intended for teenagers and young adults, so the creators deliberately chose an “amateur presentation, with plenty of fumbling and ‘acting silly’.”

Topics included pop music, fashion, drugs, sex, and art. In describing Hoepla, Verhagen uses a vocabulary very similar to Grootveld’s: “We accept no standards, morals, decency, taboos, good taste, those are meaningless concepts for us. They are dividing lines, artificially created by the large, bulky middle group, the middle class, the middle-aged, the mediocre.” Reacting to the rampant consumerism of the 1950s, the artists aimed their critique at established social norms and values. Hoepla came under attack from the press and conservative politicians, and may be considered the breaking point in experimental mass media.

The first episode was the least offensive and most innocuous; it included interviews with Eric Clapton, Pete Townsend, and several segments on popular men’s fashion (interviews with a shop owner, a soldier, a politician, and an office worker). Subsequent episodes became increasingly provocative, in response to harsh criticism of the first broadcast.

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107 Beeren, Actie, werkelijkheid en fictie, 118.

108 Verhagen used alliteration and the same words that Grootveld famously included in his speeches around the Lieverdje, such as “middenstand” (middle-class). Verhagen quoted in Ibid.

109 Menno ter Braak, “Dr Peter Hofstede O mijn lieve Augustijn of de gevaren der onttovering,” in Het Barend Servet effect: Teksten van en refrécties op vijf shows van de VPRO (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Contact, 1974), 15.
In the introductory sequence of the first show, during a performance by rock musician Teddy Lee J., a female model (the Dutch artist Phil Bloom) walked around the set nude but for a wreath of plastic flowers. More a background figure than a center-stage attraction, Bloom’s naked body was disturbing: about a week after the broadcast, the left-wing newspaper *Het Vrije Volk* reported that Bloom’s appearance cost the public television station about seventy memberships, but that number eventually ran into the thousands, which translated into a loss of VARA’s financial resources and threatened its airtime.\(^{110}\)

The critical reaction to the first episode of *Hoepla* became material for the second installment, which made *Hoepla* infamous. The slogan for the show, “Strange, vague, suspicious,” repeated the media’s response as a badge of honor.\(^{111}\) Seven minutes into the show, Bloom appeared again (figure 4.24), sitting in a chair, naked, reading aloud a newspaper article titled “VPRO Cuts Out Naked Phil.”\(^{112}\) The text reported that the newest episode of *Hoepla* had been recorded a week earlier and that VPRO had guaranteed that Phil Bloom would *not* appear naked on screen, and that the show would be taken off the air if nudity occurred. After Bloom finished the article, she lowered the newspaper so that her entire body, this time without a veil of flowers, remained on screen for thirty-eight seconds (figure 4.25). The address to which to send complaints appeared in the final seconds of the segment, superimposed over Bloom’s image.\(^{113}\)

As with the first episode, a small number of people canceled their memberships, but the number

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\(^{110}\) Broadcasting companies were given airtime based on its number of members. Hans Verhagen, *De gekke wereld van Hoepla: Opkomst en ondergang van een televisieprogramma* (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 1968), 270; Bert van der Veer, *60 Jaar Televisie in Nederland*, ed. Jolien Langejan-Meijer (Baarn: Uitgeverij Marmer, 2011), 59.

\(^{111}\) The slogan is not taken from any one particular review, but rather is a summary of the press’s reaction to *Hoepla* 1. Hans Verhagen et al., “Hoepla 2” (VPRO, October 9, 1967).


\(^{113}\) About two thirds of the written feedback was negative, while a third was positive, although the article does not specify the total number of letters. The total number of letters was not made known “Blote Phil geen VPRO-boodschap,” *Het Vrije Volk*, October 17, 1967, 13.
of new subscribers equaled the number that had quit. This episode of Hoepla became notorious for being the first time a nude woman was seen on Dutch television.

The announcer, a young girl named “Pantera,” verbally linked the nude scene to the following, seemingly unrelated (and lesser-known) clip, rhyming, “And after Phil the KNIL” (Koninklijk Nederlands Indisch Leger, or the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army)—an interview with members of the KNIL, which included a critique of the Dutch government. The KNIL was an arm of the Dutch military whose duty it was to enforce Dutch authority in what is now Indonesia. It was composed mostly of Dutch nationals, but it also recruited locals, nearly all of whom were Ambonese, or South Moluccans. These native soldiers evolved into a subculture that was intensely loyal to the Dutch and who identified themselves primarily as KNIL. The Dutch recognized Indonesia as an independent state in 1949, and the KNIL was disbanded in 1950. In 1951, about 12,500 South Moluccan soldiers and their families were evacuated to the Netherlands for their safety. The influx of South Moluccans represented a vestige of the Dutch history of colonization, and the new immigrants, who were abandoned by the national government once they arrived, evidenced the Dutch neglect of former dependents. Hoepla brought attention to this significant issue—albeit obliquely—but the contemporary press ignored it, as have later scholars, preferring to focus on Phil Bloom.


In this *Hoepla* episode, “ex” KNIL military were interviewed in the Dutch countryside where they resided. The interviewees were a small group of South Moluccan KNIL who still supported the Dutch government, but who lived in dire poverty, without electricity or gas. The South Moluccans were questioned about why they do not accept welfare, and why they see themselves as still working for the Dutch military. The strong belief and loyalty of the ex-KNIL members was striking, as was the interview’s serious tone. This segment highlighted a major social ill: the recent colonial past and the government’s neglect of a large group of refugees despite the latter’s loyalty.118

The KNIL feature was followed by an interview with the Rolling Stones’ Mick Jagger, who talked about rebellions and race riots in the United States. Jagger contended that race was not an issue in the United States, but rather that the riots reflected dissatisfaction with the system as a whole. A celebrity speaking about social ills eased the transition to the next clip, an entirely absurd performance. “Pantera” announced that winter was approaching, so Olga Lowina, a champion yodeler, would bring “Spring in the Alps.” Shortly after World War II, Lowina had been described in the press as one of Europe’s greatest yodelers.119 In *Hoepla* 2, she was in traditional Swiss costume before a painted backdrop of the Alps; a sculpture of a bearded warrior with a staff stood on a pedestal to the left, while a pianist was seated to the right. Lowina began to sing a slow, traditional Dutch folk song about how the Alpine landscape inspires yodeling, and

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118 A major point of contention at the time was the status of the South Moluccans in the Netherlands and their divergent views of the future. The group did not identify with Indonesia and felt caught between their native nationality and the Dutch. They wanted to form an independent Republik Maluka Selatan (Republic of South Molucca, RMS), at a time when the Indonesian government was striving toward a unified state. The Dutch felt responsible for the South Moluccans, as they had suggested that members of the militia migrate, and the South Moluccans had agreed, not realizing they would be discharged from the armed services upon their arrival in the Netherlands. They were under the impression that their stay was temporary and that they would return to an independent RMS. Dutch authorities, meanwhile, believed that the South Moluccans would stay for a few months and then return to Indonesia, not to a free Moluccan republic. Ibid., 123.

then did so. “Pantera” closed the segment by introducing the final performance, Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention.

Sandwiching the KNIL interview between light and absurd performances lent an overall frivolity to the episode, when in fact the segment on the KNIL had been entirely earnest. The balance between play and seriousness varies throughout the show, so it is important to view the episode as a whole: Hoepla’s complexity is lost when it is only noted as the first program to broadcast a naked woman on Dutch television, but Hoepla also questioned the Netherlands’s role and responsibility to refugees from its former colonies, especially the KNIL, who had had little choice but to immigrate. It is important to note that Hoepla employed the ludic strategy of indirect critique: during the KNIL interview, no one explicitly laid blame on the Dutch government. In Verhagen’s book on Hoepla, the author reflects on the KNIL segment, explaining that while Phil Bloom’s nude appearance caused a media flap, nothing was published in the newspapers about the KNIL. Nonetheless, Verhagen reports, there was a rash of calls to the VPRO and the makers of Hoepla asking how to donate money or goods to the South Moluccans. The KNIL interview could indicate the effectiveness of oblique criticism through its viewers’ active response.

The third episode of Hoepla was set to air on November 10, 1967, but was delayed by about two weeks, initially because the network said it wanted more control over a striptease scene. It was reported that the network wanted to view the episode before it was broadcast, but

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120 Olga Lowina was interviewed about her role in Hoepla immediately after it aired: “I can imagine that many of my longtime fans called [the VPRO to complain] after it was over. And I agree with them: I was essentially a flag on top of a mud barge.” Ibid.

121 Hans Verhagen, De gekke wereld van Hoepla: Opkomst en ondergang van een televisieprogramma (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 1968), 92.

the initial plan to record and broadcast the same day did not allow for changes to be made. The third and final episode of *Hoepla*, which eventually aired on November 23, 1967, was even more controversial than the previous two shows. The first clip addressed the pressing issue of conscription by interviewing drunken Dutch soldiers about mandatory service and deployment to Vietnam, thus marking a turn in *Hoepla* from oblique critique to confrontational criticism.

The striptease scene was supposed to be replaced with footage of a hearing of the Dutch House of Representatives during which the morality of *Hoepla* had been debated. Hubert Kronenburg, a member of the conservative agrarian *Boerenpartij* (Farmers’ Party) had initiated the debate on *Hoepla*’s integrity. Prime Minister Piet de Jong declared his belief that the program is in “bad taste” but not a crime. Footage of De Jong’s decree was broadcast on *Hoepla*, supposedly as a substitute for the striptease, but in fact the striptease was broadcast anyway, smuggled in by the “*Hoepla*-team.” *Hoepla* taunted the authorities by airing both the parliamentary proceedings and the provocative nude scene, a striptease that was racier than the nude Bloom reading a newspaper.

*Hoepla* used its platform to attack not only the Dutch government, but also pop culture at large. The show included an absurd segment on popular Dutch writer Jan Cremer (b. 1940), known for his celebrated book *Ik, Jan Cremer* (I, Jan Cremer). Young and rebellious, Cremer

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124 The segment led to an investigation prompted by the Minister of Defense, to ascertain which soldiers participated in the interview, possibly leading to disciplinary actions. In January 1968, it was reported that the soldiers were not punished, but rather received a lecture during their Christmas dinner and were asked to no longer participate in programs such as *Hoepla*. Hans Verhagen, Wim T. Schippers, and Wim Van der Linden, “Hoepla 3,” November 23, 1967; “Marechaussee zoekt militairen, die aan Hoepla meewerkten,” *Leeuwarder Courant*, December 14, 1967, 5; “Voor militairen die meewerkten aan ‘Hoepla’ geen straf,” *Leeuwarder Courant*, January 16, 1968, 7.


was somewhat representative of the producers of *Hoepla*; he was the same generation as *Hoepla*’s makers, an artist and Dutch beat hero, yet he is presented as an arrogant, macho celebrity who had outgrown the Netherlands, an object of ridicule.\(^{127}\) We learn that Jan Cremer is in Coney Island, as he clowns around, pressing his face to the camera and evading the interviewer’s questions, a routine that resembles the ineffective interviewing style of *Signalement*. Cremer pointed to the ocean and said, “That’s where Holland is.” When asked by someone off-camera what he is doing creatively, a shot of him picking his teeth is screened. He claimed that his readership includes taxi drivers, politicians, celebrities, and soldiers (2,000 of his books were sent to Vietnam every month, according to the author). Afterward, the interviewer took to the streets of New York to ask passersby if they have heard of Jan Cremer. A few had heard of him, but others guessed that he was a tennis champion, “some Indian,” a singer, a fighter, or a man who sells silk linings for fur coats.\(^{128}\) In a move to discredit and humiliate the author, a soldier who had served in Vietnam responded that he did not recognize the name nor did he know of other soldiers in Vietnam who were aware of Jan Cremer. Concluding *Hoepla* with the segment on Cremer demonstrates that no one was immune to the artists’ parody: everything from Dutch political policy, to social mores, to the military, and to popular culture were subject to critique.

The fourth episode of *Hoepla*, recorded and scheduled for broadcast on January 1968, was never aired. After three *Hoepla* episodes, the VPRO experienced a net loss of over 5000

\(^{127}\) *Ik, Jan Cremer* was first published in 1964. A follow up, *Ik Jan Cremer Tweede Boek* (I Jan Cremer, Second Book) came out in 1966. They were both published in several languages, including English. The second book has been compared to Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* (1957).

\(^{128}\) One response from a passerby when asked if he knew who Jan Cremer was: “Yea, I know him, he’s a silk man. For lining. He’s located on 29th street.” The interviewer then explained that the Cremer they are referring to is a Dutch writer, and then the interviewer preposterously wonders if the silk dealer and the writer could be the same person.
members. Historian Hans van den Heuvel believes that Hoepla’s cancellation can be attributed to an internally divided administration within the VPRO, as well as a fear of declining membership, which put the company’s survival at risk. Yet we could argue that as the third Hoepla episode began to lose its ludic approach, it was perceived as more threatening and could not be tolerated.

VPRO is an acronym for “Vrijzinnig Protestantse Radio Omroep” (Liberal Protestant Radio Broadcasting Corporation); at the time of its founding in 1926, it was pillarized, as described in Chapter One. According to an internal brief, “the Hoepla program was a culmination of the tension between the old paternalistic government of liberal Protestants from a bourgeois environment and the ‘rebels,’ the ‘socially engaged, sometimes Christian, sometimes not, who looked to the VPRO for a kind of spiritual kinship.’” Hoepla marked a time of change in Dutch culture, and in the case of VPRO, it signaled the station’s transition from religious to political engagement as a manifestation of depillarization. Television was one of venues in which ludic art blossomed because artists were given space to experiment and because it was supported by the government as a means to disseminate work as part of the Dutch arts policy. VPRO board members described Hoepla as “playtime” for a younger generation. Moreover, Hoepla’s ludic nature, simultaneously fun and earnest, was understood by VPRO officials who characterized it as both “crazy” and “serious,” with an emphasis on free

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129 VPRO director Nicolaas Immink explains that the significant loss of membership translated into economic hardship, and while there were people who expressed their support by joining the VPRO, that did little to help. “Ledenverlies door Hoepla ligt rond de 5000,” Algemeen Handelsblad, January 10, 1968, 1.


131 The internal brief cited in Ibid.

expression: “The most interesting question is whether you can provide some leeway to experiment with new forms, which sometimes seem formless, and with a new mentality you may sometimes, as a mature and older person, find hard to understand and appreciate.” However, only indirect criticism and lighthearted play was permitted—once the ludic strategy of oblique critique was abandoned, the show was canceled.

This chapter has examined artists working within and outside museums and galleries, as well as those who operated somewhere between, such as the International Institute for the Re-Schooling of Artists, which circulated brochures in an arts magazine and exhibited at a remote farm. The spaces in which these artists’ work appeared affected their reception. For example, the Institute had a small, self-selected audience that was in on the joke; however, due to its limited following, the Institute’s views did not have much impact. Similarly, the SEO and SPO were largely insular. In contrast, the A-dynamic Group expanded outside the gallery world by publishing its manifesto in a magazine, while the Sigma Center received press coverage and increased its viewership when it took to the streets with Continuous Drawing. These groups had a wider impact through mass media, as had Constant and, even more so, Grootveld, who was indebted to extensive newspaper and magazine coverage for his notorious reputation. The scope of Ludic Conceptualism’s audience changed dramatically when some artists moved to primetime television. When Ludic Conceptualism disseminated its views via mass media, willing museumgoers and magazine subscribers were replaced by incidental and accidental viewers who unsuspectingly happened upon performances, at which point the art either resonated, or it alienated. As a prime example, when Hoepla, initially a popular and successful endeavor, became overtly confrontational by contravening the social norms of a general audience, it was...

133 Ibid.
cancelled. Artists given freedom to play in the socio-politically tolerant environment of 1960s Netherlands thus encountered the limits of that freedom.
Conclusion

Ludic Conceptualism in the Netherlands and Beyond

I. Ludic Conceptualism and Its Impact on Conceptual Art

Dutch postwar ludic art began in the late 1950’s with Constant’s *New Babylon*, a seminal work that gave rise to the genre of Ludic Conceptualism that emerged in the 1960s and drew to a close with Bas Jan Ader’s *In Search of the Miraculous* in 1975. I have used the term ‘ludic art’ to refer to work characterized by play as defined by Huizinga; Ludic Conceptualism, on the other hand, denotes Conceptual art that is predominantly ludic in nature, as distinct from the dry, tautological practices typified by Joseph Kosuth. Ludic Conceptualism thus can be understood as the culmination of ludic art dating back to Constant’s *New Babylon*.

This study suggests that particular factors associated with the ludic are necessary for the advancement of playful art. The reception of Constant’s *New Babylon*—and ludic art in general—paralleled the Dutch prosperity of the 1960s and 70s. During the period of economic growth that lasted until the mid-1970s, the Dutch government invested heavily in the cultural sector, later making cuts after the oil crisis of 1973. This dissertation argues that the economic history of the Netherlands is therefore central to understanding the rise and fall of ludic art.¹

For Ludic Conceptualism to have thrived, institutional assistance required more than financial support: tolerance of artistic expression and space for experimentation were indispensable assets that museums offered ludic artists. As demonstrated by Willem Sandberg’s leadership of the Stedelijk, providing gallery space to experimental artists did not necessarily

¹ If one were to research Ludic Conceptualism outside the Netherlands—as I hope other scholars will—comparable socioeconomic conditions might be found.
require sizable financial investment. After the Stedelijk pulled back from supporting contemporary experimental art, commercial galleries, such as Galerie Swart (1964 – 2000), assumed the role of exhibiting Ludic Conceptualism, but they continued to follow trends when Conceptual art was succeed by Neo-Expressionism in the late 1970s. For example, Art & Project, known for its commitment to Conceptual art since 1969, added Italian Neo-Expressionists Francesco Clemente in 1978 and Sandro Chia in 1980 to their roster of homegrown Conceptualists, such as Jan Dibbets and Stanley Brouwn.

The ludic characteristics found in *New Babylon*, Nouveau Réalisme, Grootveld’s happenings, Fluxus, and Conceptual art transcend previously identified delineations of artists and groups, yet ludic art does not constitute a single expression or modality in the Netherlands. In discussing play as a broader cultural phenomenon the (often opaque) overlap between art and activism is revealed, showing that artists who traditionally have been situated in narrow multinational categories instead had more meaningful cultural and political impact when viewed within the Dutch context. Constant, principally known as a painter, and a founder of Cobra, can now be seen as an example of ludic art, while Grootveld is repositioned as a preeminent forerunner of Ludic Conceptualism.

In addition to making art appealing and engaging for a wide public, the ludic strategy also delivered sophisticated, palatable critique, yet a central complication for the strategy is that it has often been misinterpreted. Grootveld’s performances encountered obstacles to resonating with the public and critics alike, in part because his ludic persona was so complete. Similarly, the carnivalesque nature of *Bewogen Beweging* overshadowed that exhibition’s critical ends. While *Bewogen Beweging* and Grootveld sporadically incorporated markers indicating the objects of
their critiques, audiences may have found it difficult to see through their playful veneers. Yet better signals would also have resulted in less alluringly ludic work. *Dylaby*, by contrast, conveyed critique of the German occupation through playful art that possessed ominous undertones, such as Niki de Saint Phalle’s shooting gallery, and Spoerri and Tinguely’s dark labyrinth. However, *Dylaby*’s playfulness dominated the exhibition’s tone, the underlying earnestness of which could be discerned only through deliberate analysis, as the balance between play and seriousness is precarious; *Dylaby*’s playfulness, in part, obscured its critical message. One conclusion to be drawn from these examples is that in order to be legible, artists’ playful works must incorporate signposts into their critique, yet the deployment of markers must not be overt. In seeking this balance, the strength of the ludic as a strategy is revealed also to be its weakness.

One question resulting from this study is whether ludic art’s indirect form of critique had any capacity to lead to social change. Constant’s utopian design was highly regarded by both conservatives and liberals, yet that enthusiasm did not translate into the revolution the artist envisioned. While evidence of social change can be traced to Grootveld, tangible transformation did not come directly from him. Provo city councilman Bernard de Vries and the political party Kabouters were needed to realize Grootveld’s concepts. Similarly, Dolle Mina, influenced by Grootveld’s art, was able to realize at least one of their goals, making abortion widely available to women in the 1970s. *Hoepla* is one of the few examples wherein oblique critique resonated with a broad enough audience to directly inspire a national conversation. Debates in the Dutch House of Representatives about *Hoepla*’s morality forced the Netherlands to question what art is, and what art may be, ultimately leading to the conclusion that *Hoepla* should not be censored
regardless of its controversial content, thereby upholding artistic freedom of expression. Ludic artists sparked dialogue through their oblique mode of addressing current issues because their strategy—when it worked—was non-threatening.

A further finding of this study is the need to identify and define categories within Conceptual art, a conclusion that comes with its own set of complications. This dissertation argues for a new genre, Ludic Conceptualism, as a distinct subset of a recognized artistic tendency. The exhibition and catalogue Global Conceptualism describes subdivisions of Conceptual art, asserting that each manifestation depended upon its social, political, and historical context. However, none of the headings directly engage in humor or play, validating Ernst Gombrich’s criticism that art historians tend to shun fun. Yet the ludic quality of Conceptual art as manifested in the Netherlands is so pronounced as to compel a title of its own. The slipperiness of ludic artists such as Bas Jan Ader, and their uncomfortable fit within existing categories, is reason enough to justify a new genre within Conceptual art. This study traverses the boundaries of art movements in order to demonstrate the connection among various artists; however, by proposing a new genre, I am arguably reestablishing walls that I had sought to demolish, or, at least, penetrate. But characterizing postwar art in the Netherlands as ludic need

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2 The authors divide Conceptual art into seven categories: dematerialization of the art object; institutional critique; art as protagonist; language and linguistic orientation; relation to mainstream conceptual art; Conceptualism’s legacy; the exhibition. The book is divided into regions, and Conceptual art’s subdivisions are addressed within geographical boundaries, taking into account social, political, and historical contexts. The focus on Conceptual art in Latin America concentrates not on playful or humorous practices, but on artists living in repressive regimes who feared for their lives. Camnitzer, Jane Farver, and Rachel Weiss, eds., Global Conceptualism (Queens Museum of Art, 1999).

3 Another problem in arguing for Ludic Conceptualism as a subset within Conceptual art is that subdividing the movement may lead to a point where there is nothing left of it. Art historian Alexander Alberro distinguishes among five distinct practices of Conceptual art (none of which addresses a playful mode of indirect critique): linguistic conceptualism (Joseph Kosuth); irrational (Sol Lewitt); decentering the artist … while incorporating the body into the work (Bas Jan Ader, Adrian Piper, Vito Acconci, et al.); dislocation of the sign (Lawrence Weiner); and analytical conceptualism (Hans Haacke). Beyond these five divisions, Alberro offers yet another category,
not compete with calls for a new genre or for refining an existing category. In choosing to emphasize the ludic, other characteristics of Conceptual art previously viewed as quintessential are de-emphasized. For example, for many Conceptual artists, language is a central tool, but in Ludic Conceptualism, the absurd and critical aspects of play receive greater attention. Even though publications such as brochures are largely textual, the artists’ parodic humor takes priority over word selection—both for the artists’ themselves, as well as in my interpretation of their work—as seen in pamphlets published by the Institute for the Re-Schooling of Artist’s and AFSRINMOR. In Ludic Conceptualism, language is important only to the extent that it serves to explain the object of mockery, or the social and political context, rather than being a fundamental device or an anti-visual gesture. In contrast to Joseph Kosuth, whose focus of inquiry concerns language and art that possess their own systems of structural logic, Ludic Conceptualists use language as a tool with which to parody the dominant culture.

II. Bas Jan Ader, International Ludic Conceptualist

During the 1960s, Conceptual artists in the Netherlands incorporated into their practices a ludic tenor consonant with Huizinga’s theories as interpreted by Constant in *New Babylon* in a faithful application of ideas from *Homo Ludens*, seen as early as his 1960 lecture ‘Unitary Urbanism’, delivered at the Stedelijk Museum. The result is the genre that I call Ludic Conceptualism. Huizinga’s theories offered a structuring principle by which this group of
seemingly disparate artists and their art coalesced into a coherent genre characterized by the parodic employment of masquerade, absurdity, and irony within a context of freedom and apparent purposelessness. Above all, Ludic Conceptualist art is distinguished by an oblique critique of the dominant culture from a marginal position.

While this dissertation concerns the specific socio-political context that gave rise to Ludic Conceptualism in the Netherlands, this type of Conceptual art is not exclusive to that nation. For example, on the West Coast of the United States, artists such as John Baldessari (b. 1931), William Leavitt (b. 1941), and Allen Ruppersberg (b. 1944) deployed playful strategies, and, not coincidentally, enjoyed successful careers in the Netherlands. The West Coast also attracted Dutch artists whose work possesses similar qualities to their U.S. counterparts, including Bas Jan Ader and Ger van Elk, the latter having immigrated in 1961, two years before Ader.

Ader is a prime example of how Ludic Conceptualism can offer better categorization of playful Conceptual artists whose work fits poorly into established groupings. Moreover, Ader demonstrates the spread of Ludic Conceptualism as it began to branch out internationally to California, where he lived and worked, suggesting that playful Conceptual practices also found a home outside the Netherlands. Ader’s death in 1975—a year after Constant stopped working on New Babylon—marks the cessation of playful Conceptual practices in the Netherlands. Thus, it is fitting to conclude this dissertation by examining a small selection of Ader’s work, which employs parody both as earnest gesture and playful critique.\(^4\)

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Bastiaan Johan Christiaan “Bas Jan” Ader (1942–1975) was a Dutch national whose youthful wanderings took him to California in 1963, where he eventually pursued an undergraduate education in studio art, and graduate studies in fine art and philosophy. In the early 1970s, Ader traveled between California and the Netherlands, creating works in both countries. In 1975, he was lost at sea during a one-man sailing trip from the United States to the Netherlands, a journey that was intended to be part of his work In Search of the Miraculous (1975); as a result, writing on Ader has tended to focus on the tragic, leading Ader to be placed in the tradition of the romantic sublime, in the company of artists such as Caspar David Friedrich, or labeled as a “Romantic Conceptualist.” While some art historians, including Alexander Alberro and Thomas Crow, have proposed analogies with body artists, I argue that Ader is best positioned within the framework of Ludic Conceptualism.

5 Ader traveled to Morocco shortly after returning home to the Netherlands once he completed a study abroad program as a teenager in Washington, D.C., in 1961. He met American Neil Tucker at a Casablanca youth hostel, where Tucker was recruiting crew members for the sail to Los Angeles, and Ader was happy to get the chance to return to the US. Ader completed his studies at the Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles in 1965, and earned a Master of Fine Arts at the Claremont Graduate School in 1967. Ader reconnected with his Dutch friend, Ger van Elk, while in California. Erik Beenker, “Bas Jan Ader (1942–1975 Missing at Sea): The Man Who Wanted to Look Beyond the Horizon,” in Bas Jan Ader: Please Don’t Leave Me, ed. Rein Wolfs (Rotterdam: Boijmans Van Beuningen, 2006), 14–15; Alexander Dumbadze, Bas Jan Ader: Death Is Elsewhere (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 107.


7 For example, Thomas Crow writes that Ader “shared a common territory with Nauman and Burden, who likewise used performance to ‘write’ verbal formulae with their bodies.” Alberro, “Reconsidering Conceptual Art,
The majority of Ader’s photographs and short films, made largely between 1970 and 1975, utilize Dutch tropes, such as flowers, bicycles, and references to the archetypal Dutch modernist Piet Mondrian, relying on the familiarity of these images in order to question their significance. His work can be understood with the help of Simon Critchley’s notion of *dissensus communis*. While it is generally understood that humor depends upon a *sensus communis*, Critchley proposes that jokes can serve as a *dissensus communis* that provides the critical function of an alternative view of the world. At first glance, Ader’s *Fall* films may seem to be nothing more than hapless slapstick, but they contain symbolic allusions to the Netherlands by which he creates a *dissensus communis* around Dutch popular culture and De Stijl. Consider the nineteen-second film, *Fall II (Amsterdam)*, from 1970, recorded on an Amsterdam street: the artist is shown in slow motion, riding a bicycle while holding a handful of flowers, pedaling headfirst into a canal (figure 5.1). The work is part slapstick, recalling Buster Keaton’s fateful car crash into a ditch in *Three Ages* (1923), and part serious Conceptual art, in the tradition of Bruce Nauman’s videos of everyday actions. Critic Jan Verwoert compares Ader’s *Fall* films to Chris Burden’s works, such as *Shoot* (1971), a performance in which the artist had his assistant shoot him in the arm with a rifle. While admittedly there is an inherent tension between the tragic and the comic in slapstick—had Ader been injured in the canal, the incident would have

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9 This explains, for example, why it is so hard to tell a joke in a foreign language: humor tends to be local, context-specific, and a form of insider knowledge. Ibid., 67.

acquired a different tenor—Fall II (Amsterdam) is more than self-harm for artistic ends. Ader exploits obvious Dutch clichés—flowers, canals, and bikes—which take on new meaning in his hands: what initially appears to be a deadpan trip through the city on an everyday mode of transportation turns into a purposeless dive into one of Amsterdam’s murky canals—a dreaded outcome that every cyclist tries to avoid. This absurd gesture is completely unexpected—and thereby humorous—so does not fit the dry Conceptualist mode exemplified by U.S. video artists such as Nauman or Richard Serra. In transforming the mundane act of cycling into a joke, Ader almost seems to parody Conceptual video by poking fun at its earnest monotony, but Ader’s bicycle tour is more than funny, it also draws attention to the absence of protective railings alongside canals, an oddity that we might speculate struck Ader as peculiarly Dutch. From the late 1960s to the early 1970s, Ader’s ludic art lampoons his rediscovered homeland. And, just as AFSRINMOR had parodied Dutch bureaucracy, Ader mocks Dutch culture, but his Ludic Conceptualism is distinguished by a taste for the slapstick that he had acquired in California.

Several works Ader made around the same time as Fall II also contain stereotypical allusions to the Netherlands and use slapstick, though the subject changes from bicycles and canals to a celebrated moment in twentieth century Dutch art history: De Stijl. One such work, the two minute film Broken Fall (Geometric), Westkapelle, Holland (1971, figure 5.2), shows

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11 Heiser tries to reconcile Ader’s tragedy with his comic sensibility, but I would argue that Ader’s romanticism is undercut by his slapstick. Heiser, “Curb Your Romanticism: Bas Jan Ader’s Slapstick,” 26.

12 In his monograph on Ader, Dumbadze links Calvin’s concept of will to the artist’s Fall films, explaining that falling could reference God’s will (gravity’s exertion on Ader); similarly Calvin sees a willed movement as God’s intervention. Dumbadze, Bas Jan Ader: Death Is Elsewhere, 27–28.

13 As I argue in my essay on Ader, the artist’s humor evidences influences from both sides of the Atlantic by applying ‘California Slapstick’ to typical Dutch landscapes. Schoenberger, “Bas Jan Ader’s Ludic Conceptualism: Performing a Transnational Identity”. For more on ‘California Slapstick’ see Charles Wolfe, “California Slapstick Revisited,” in Slapstick Comedy, ed. Tom Paulus and Rob King (New York: Routledge, 2010), 169–190.
Ader standing on a cobblestone road that leads to a lighthouse visible in the distance, and then, in a strong wind, toppling over onto a sawhorse. The allusion here is to the quintessential Dutch artist, Piet Mondrian, a member of the De Stijl movement from 1917 through 1925 who left over a dispute with Theo van Doesburg about the use of diagonal lines in his painting. Mondrian had painted that particular lighthouse several times, experimenting with a reduction of colors that would eventually lead to his primary color palette. In a 1972 interview, Ader observed that the earth and lighthouse were the horizontal and vertical elements present in a Mondrian painting, while the sawhorse and the action of falling constituted diagonals. In an act that combines homage and subversion, Ader recreates a De Stijl painting in the Dutch landscape, and then defiles it with Mondrian’s detested diagonals. Using his body to *perform* a diagonal line rather than *painting* one, Ader renders ludicrous the contretemps between Mondrian and Van Doesburg.

While the film *Broken Fall (Geometric)* is a conceptual nod to De Stijl, *On the Road to a New Neo Plasticism, Westkapelle, Holland* (1971, figure 5.3) makes a more formal reference to the De Stijl movement. In this series of four photographs, Ader masquerades as a Mondrian painting: dressed in black, he lies face down on the same road as in the film *Broken Fall (Geometric)*, his limbs splayed out at right angles. At first, only his figure and the tarmac can be seen, then, in sequential images, Ader adds a bright blue blanket under his prone body as a color field, then a yellow jerry can, and, lastly, a red hazard sign. Verwoert reads Ader’s photographs

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as a scene intended to evoke an accident, perhaps a pedestrian struck by a passing vehicle. However, I would argue that Ader is making a visual joke about Mondrian, momentarily subverting the highpoint of the Dutch avant-garde in a moment of *dissensus communis*. Ader turns the flatness of Mondrian’s picture plane into a kind of literal flatness with his body prostrate on the ground. His title not only alludes to the title of Mondrian’s seminal twelve-part essay *De Nieuwe Beelding in de schilderkunst* (Neoplasticism in Painting, 1917 – 1918), but conjures up other modernist titles as well, such as Le Corbusier’s book of collected writing *Vers une architecture* (Towards a New Architecture, 1923). Yet any utopian connotation associated with modernism is drained from Ader’s work as he acts out his title literally, and deadpan, lying on the road to Mondrian’s inspiration for Neoplasticism.

Ader’s parody of Dutch modernism balances respectful acknowledgment with playful subversiveness. While Joke Brasser contends that Ader’s works “explore emotionality and concern existential problems rather than absurd humor,” it is hard to sustain this view when looking at Ader’s photograph, *Pitfall On the Way To a New Neo-Plasticism, Westkapelle, Holland* (figure 5.4, 1971). This image shows the artist apparently writhing on the ground in the same scene as the earlier work, although in this image he is throwing the jerry can aside and bunching up the blue fabric, which now ceases to function as a color ground and reverts to being a just a blanket: the blurry *Pitfall* is nearly illegible without its art historical context. Ader continued to explore the formal aspects of De Stijl, especially the use of primary colors, in works such as the video *Primary Time* (1974), in which the artist gradually rearranges a vase of flowers

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16 Verwoert, *Bas Jan Ader*, 35.

so that the assortment changes from red to yellow to blue, and *Untitled (Flower work)*, a series of twenty-one photographs from the same year, which uses nearly identical content and camera angles as *Primary Time*.

Literary theorist Linda Hutcheon defines parody as “repetition with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity,” and goes on to assert that parody may be characterized by “ironic inversion.”[^18] In the act of parody, a recognizable source is appropriated and humorously altered; parody thus relies on audiences being familiar with the parodied object.[^19] Such imitation indicates the popular status of the person mocked, so as much as parody is an act of subversion, it is also a form of homage. Hutcheon uses the phrase “paradox of parody” to describe parody’s dual character as both authoritative and transgressive.[^20] Ader’s work typifies Hutcheon’s theorization of parody: none of his De Stijl-related worked are fully legible without awareness of the movement and Mondrian and their place in Dutch modern art history. Ader, however, does not only refer to De Stijl or Conceptual video art, he comments on their idiosyncrasies proposing a *dissensus communis*.

### III. Ludic Conceptualism Beyond the Netherlands

For Ludic Conceptualism to be widely recognized, study of artists who practiced outside the Dutch context is needed. Belgian art, most notably represented by Marcel Broodthaers and


Panamarenko, would be a logical place to search—one major Dutch publication and exhibition on Conceptual art has already noted the relationship between the two countries.\footnote{While the exhibition \textit{Conceptual Art in the Netherlands and Belgium 1965-1975} and catalogue drew connections between the Netherlands and Belgium, it neglected to even address, let alone analyze, the playful and humorous nature of Conceptual art in these countries. Hripsime Visser, Suzanna Heman, and Jurrie Poot, eds., \textit{Conceptual Art in the Netherlands and Belgium 1965-1975} (Rotterdam: NAi Publishers/Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 2002).} Scandinavian countries encountered similar economic, social, and cultural conditions, including a strong welfare state and tolerant figureheads, such as Pontus Hultén, director of the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, who staged \textit{Rörelse Konsten} (Movement in Art, 1961, the Swedish version of \textit{Bewogen Beweging}). Hultén had a close relationship with Willem Sandberg, and, like Sandberg, maintained a relationship with Jean Tinguely. While Danish artist Peter Land, known for his slapstick falls from chairs and ladders, shares a sensibility with Ader, Switzerland may prove to be a more fertile ground on which to seek expressions of Ludic Conceptualism. Alongside Tinguely stand Dieter Roth, who designed \textit{Bewogen Beweging}’s catalogue, Daniel Spoerri, Roman Signer, and the duo Peter Fischli and David Weiss.

The West Coast of the US offers another location of Ludic Conceptualism. In 2011, John Baldessari, in conversation with former Stedelijk Museum directors Ann Goldstein and Rudi Fuchs, strove to articulate why humor was a driving force in Conceptual art in California.\footnote{John Baldessari, Ann Goldstein, and Rudi Fuchs, \textquote{John Baldessari: Your Name in Lights- A Conversation Between John Baldessari, Ann Goldstein, and Rudi Fuchs} (Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, June 5, 2011).} He conjectured that the presence of the entertainment industry in Los Angeles, along with the absence of critical attention (compared to New York), provided artists with the opportunity to experiment: New York artists felt that every work or statement was scrutinized to such a degree that any tendency toward comedy was stifled, while in Los Angeles, a less intense critical
climate allowed artists the freedom to play. The relationship between New York and Los Angeles in the 1960s is comparable to Amsterdam’s marginal position in relation to Paris.

While Ludic Conceptualism—as I have defined it—may exist in Scandinavia, Switzerland, and California, a challenge to instituting Ludic Conceptualism as a genre beyond the Netherlands concerns the relationship—or lack thereof—to Huizinga. I have argued that, in the Dutch context, Huizinga shaped artists’ concept of the ludic, especially as manifested in Constant’s *New Babylon*. While Huizinga was read widely outside the Netherlands—*Homo Ludens* was translated into German for a Swiss readership in 1944, and a French language edition was published in Paris in 1951—it may prove problematic to analyze Ludic Conceptualism in locales where Huizinga and Constant had little or no presence.

I began this dissertation by investigating how Huizinga’s 1938 book resonated with Dutch audiences in the 1960s, and I believe that the ensuing chapters answered that question. But it is significant that Huizinga remains an important point of reference, not only for postwar art in the Netherlands, but also for present-day international artists and writers. *Homo Ludens* continues to be cited when playful work is investigated or on view: a recent book on play and art asserts that Allan Kaprow’s happenings are partially indebted to the artist’s reading of *Homo Ludens*; a review of the 2008 exhibition *Psycho Buildings: Artist Take on Architecture* traces the exhibited artists’ playfulness back to Huizinga, arguing that contemporary play has lost its

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23 In the same conversation, Fuchs also commented on humor in the work of Baldessari, Nauman, and LeWitt. Baldessari, Ibid.


sincerity; a 2014 article about the Institute of Contemporary Art in London refers to Huizinga when arguing that the ICA is playful institution similar to the Stedelijk Museum in the 1960s. Only this year, a New York Times review of Fischli and Weiss’s exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum opened with Homo Ludens’ thesis that play is the basis of civilization.

There is a tendency in art criticism to dismiss play and fun as vacuous, insignificant, and insincere. The Introduction to this dissertation cites Ernst Gombrich’s criticism that art history neglects fun as a subject of serious inquiry. My study is an answer to the challenge implicit in that critique; it is my hope that this dissertation will encourage further exploration of playful forms of art and the circumstances that permit it to flourish.

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