

## Article

# From Het Lieverdje to NDSM Historical Background of Amsterdam's Countercultural Places



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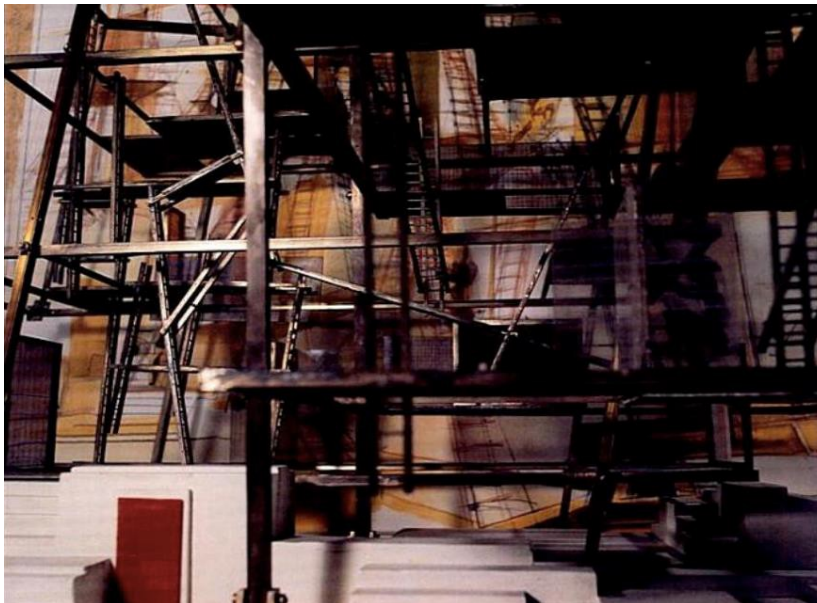
## Abstract

*Amsterdam's alternative urban spaces like the NDSM shipyard, De Ceuvel, De Nieuwe Anita, OT301, OCCII, Pakhuis Wilhelmina, Joe's Garage, Vrankrijk, and Paradiso are considered Amsterdam's rough, arty, free, naughty, best party spots. They are the places you go to after you have seen the canal district, the red-light district, the coffeeshops, the Rijksmuseum, and Van Gogh's paintings. These alternative places pose as Amsterdam's Berlin, even as Amsterdam's Christiania, where you breathe "the air of freedom." These spaces echo the flair of the 1960s countercultural movements, that occupied derelict buildings and turned them into underground hotspots. This retrospect takes us back to Amsterdam's Provo movement, and the transformation of its legacy: the hyper-organized and politicized squatter communities in the city center in the 1970s, their violent clearings in the 1980s, the occupation of the southern city docks in the 1990s, the squatters' jump over the waterway 't Ij to Amsterdam North, the subsequent creation of the contemporary cultural incubators (broedplaatsen) like NDSM, and the fading existence of old-school squatter communities (vrijplaatsen).*

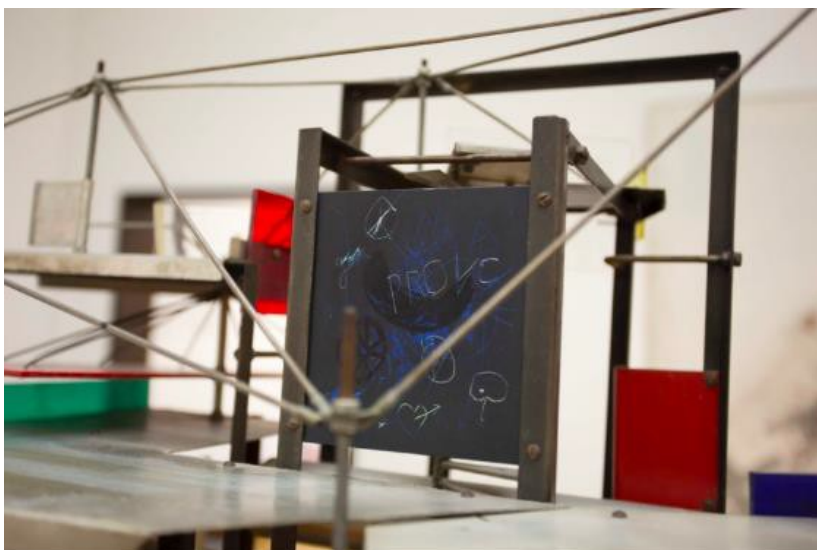
**Keywords:** Amsterdam, Provo, Countercultures, Bikes, Squatter Movement, Cultural Incubator, Housing Policy, City Development, Neo-Liberalism



**Image 1.** The gigantic steel frameworks carrying the colorful DIY fill-ins inside the NDSM hall, designed by Dynamo Architects © Photo: Akbar Simonse



**Image 2.** Inside the model “Labyrinth of the Moving Ladders” of New Babylon by Constant Nieuwenhuys, 1967 © Photo: Studio Constant Nieuwenhuys



**Image 3.** “Provo” graffiti on the model “Little Labyrinth” of New Babylon by Constant Nieuwenhuys, 1967 © Photo: Gemeentemuseum Den Haag

## The "Happenings" of Provo at Het Lieverdje

In the 1960s the whole world was shaken up by movements of young people who fought for social justice, freedom and peace. All sorts of mixes of students, intellectuals, political activists, hippies, artists, vagabonds, impostors, and rebels wanted to save the world and took to the streets to fight for it: "beat" groups in the USA and then in the UK, Situationists International in France, Fluxus groups all over the world, Zero Group in Germany, to name just a few. The legendary movement that started it all in The Netherlands in 1964 was the Provo, a group of young "provo"-cative anarchist fighters for social justice who opposed established politics and addressed societal and environmental issues. The Provos

*'were linked to the period of 'Amsterdam magic center,' the days in which the city became to youth culture what London had been in the early 1960s and San Francisco at the end of that decade: a hedonistic Mecca. To the Netherlands at large, Provo marked the coming-of-age of the Dutch welfare state and the rapid transformation of a rather sedate and traditional country into what the outside world began to look like a nation of pot-smoking progressives.'* (Van Schaik, 2005: 221)

A central tactic used by Provo to shake up people out of the complacent world view was to stage "happenings" of all sorts, that forced people to see the world in new ways. The movement started in 1964 with the anti-smoking campaigns of Robert Jasper Grootveld under the cigarette-industry-sponsored statue Het Lieverdje on the square Het Spui, symbolizing the naughty-yet-good-at-heart street boys of Amsterdam.<sup>1</sup> Each Saturday at midnight, Robert Jasper Grootveld, dressed in outlandish costumes, would fulminate under the statue about the consumer society and the dangers of smoking. Some of the people who came to watch, started the Provo movement: Rob Stolk, Roel van Duijn, Luud Schimmelpenninck, Willem de Ridder, Simon Posthuma, Hans Metz, Bernhard de Vries, Irene van de Weetering, and Cor Jaring.

The Provos were inspired by the Dada movement and Herbert Marcuse, as well as the CoBrA group, and the urban nomadism and performance-society of the Situationists, most prominently represented by Guy Débord<sup>2</sup> and Constant Nieuwenhuys. (image 2 & 3) The Provos identified with Constant's design of the megastructure New Babylon and let Constant appear twice in the magazine *Provo*.<sup>3</sup> Constant sketched there his visions of a future world, some 50-100 years from 1965, in which machines and robots did all the boring work, while humans created and played in hotel-like accommodations, clustered in units raised 16 meters from

the ground. The Earth underneath harbored nature reserves, agriculture, and historic buildings and monuments.

A great deal has been written about the connection between Constant and the Provo movement. Richard Kempton writes that New Babylon was – with the blessing of Constant – eagerly adopted by the Provos as their own. (Kempton, 2003: 85) “Roel van Duyn was enthusiastic about Constant’s vision, He referred to New Babylon as a cybernetic paradise in which total automation of the means of production would bring about total welfare, as well as a socialist-anarchist state in which authorities would be superfluous.” (Kempton, 2003: 86) According to Martin van Schaik: “In the catalytic Provo episode, New Babylon was the vital ideological agent. Constant’s project was commonly seen to be the 'Provo Utopia,' whilst Amsterdam’s 'magic centre' was declared the 'first sector of New Babylon.’” (Van Schaik, 2005: 221) Alan Smart stresses also that Constant would go as far as to claim that “the Provos were a contemporary manifestation of the *homo ludens* – a concept of ‘man at play’ – taken from the sociologist Johan Huizinga’s account of non-utilitarian play as the essential element of human culture.” (Smart, 2016: 7)

For fifteen months Provo published a monthly magazine called *Provo* with issue no. 1 on July 12, 1965 and the last issue, nr. 15, in February 1967. (image 4) As stated in no.1, the magazine was meant for: anarchists, provos, beatniks, people hanging around in public squares, saints, magicians, pacifists, charlatans, philosophers, carriers of diseases, chief stewards, happening makers, vegetarians, husslers, fire starters, *Klaazen* (Johnnys), nannies, etc. The magazine was banned by authorities shortly after its first issue because it had published a reprint from the 19th century *Practical Anarchist* by Jossiah Warren, including controversial instructions for making home-made explosives.<sup>4</sup> Another Provo favorite for reprinting in their *Provo* magazine was the social anarchist literature of Mikhail Bakunin, Paul Lafargue, and the Dutch anarchist Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis.

### **From Outlaws to Politicians**

In addition to opposing smoking, the Provos were against capitalism, consumerism, sugar consumption, fascism, nazism, catholicism, calvinism, bureaucracy, dictatorship, snobbism, racism, colonialism, militarism, the use of atomic weapons, the war in Vietnam, and against the marriage of Queen Beatrix to Prince-to-be Claus von Amsberg.<sup>5</sup> When the royal couple were riding through Amsterdam, the Provo let off a smoke bomb. (While speaking about the Provo-legacy, it is worth mentioning that, later on, Prince Claus himself applied sympathetic provocations in his own public appearances.)<sup>6</sup>



**Image 4.** Front and back covers of the *Provo*-zines nr. 1-12, 1965-1967 © Collection and Photo: Alan Adams Smart

The happenings of the Provos were political provocations, playing at the borderline of criminality, purposefully triggering reactions of the police as part of the show. The Provo movement arose thus around *Het Lieverdje* and the statue became the central meeting and display point of the controversial group.<sup>7</sup> (image 6)

The Provos called themselves *provotariaat*, playfully alluding to the social agenda of the *proletariaat*. Yet, they did not want to address the working class only – which they saw as enslaved anew by the post-war politics – but they explicitly wanted to be de-class, anti-class, or trans-class, cutting through all societal and intellectual levels:

*'The provotariaat is the last element of rebellion in our 'developed' countries. The proletariaat is the slave of the politicians. Watching TV. It has joined its old enemy, the bourgeoisie, and now constitutes with the bourgeoisie a huge, grey mass (klootjesvolk). The new class opposition in our countries is the provotariaat against this mass (klootjesvolk). But the provotariaat is not a class – its constitution is too heterogeneous for that. The provotariaat is an anti-class.'* (Provo, (1965-1967) 2014: *Provocatie* nr.8)<sup>8</sup>

Most importantly, *provotariaat* alluded to provocation as a way of the movement's self-expression. One of their last provocations was their declaration of their intention to participate in Amsterdam's municipal elections on June 1, 1966. Their manifesto for the elections focused on societal livability and clean environment. What started as a joke turned into a suicidal venture for Provo, since the Provo Bernhard de Vries actually won a position in the municipal council. On May 13, 1967, two days after this victory and the demise of Provo's main enemy, mayor Van Hall, the Provos officially annihilated the Provo movement as well. During a conference in Maastricht, they announced their own demise and that of the magazine *Provo*. The reason for this was that they did not want the Provo movement to be transformed into an establishment group functioning as an institution or political party. The members chose different paths and many chose to become politicians. Roel van Duijn, for example, one of the founders of Provo and the later Kabouter movement, became alderman for the Political Party of Radicals and later ward councilor for the political party *Groen Links*, (and then an ecological farmer).


The transition from provocative outlaws to respected politicians might seem contradictory, even a form of "betrayal to anarchistic ideals," but, as Felicity Scott points out in her *Outlaw Territories*, even Stewart Brand, the editor of the anarchist do-everything-yourself *Whole Earth Catalog* – ambivalently associated both government and outlaws as agents in fostering invention – either through law, or against it.

# PROVO'S FIETSENPLAN

AMSTERDAMMERS!

DE ASFALTERREUR VAN DE GEMOTORISEERDE BOURGEOISIE HEEFT LANG GENOEG GEDUURD. DAGELYKS WORDEN MENSEN-OFFERS GEBRACHT VOOR DE NIEUWSTE AUTORITEIT WAAR-AAN HET KLOOTJESVOLK ZICH HEEFT OVERGELEVERD: DE AUTO-AUTORITEIT. DE VERSTIKKENDE KOOLMONOXIDE IS ZYN WIEROOK, ZYN BEELTENIS VERPEST IN DUIZENDOUD GRACHTEN EN STRATEN.

**PROVO'S FIETSENPLAN** BRENGT BEVRIDING VAN HET AUTO-MONSTER. **PROVO** LANCEERT DE **WITTE FIETS, IN OPENBAAR BEZIT.**

DE EERSTE **WITTE FIETS** WORDT/IS WOENSDAG 28 JULI OM 3 UUR 'S MIDDAGS AAN PUBLIEK EN PERS AANGEBODEN BY HET AMSTERDAMS LIEVERDJE OP HET SPUI, DE VERSLAAFDE CONSUMENT. 

DE **WITTE FIETS** IS NOOIT OP SLOT. DE **WITTE FIETS** IS HET EERSTE GRATIS, **GEKOLLEKTIVISEERDE** VERVOERMIDDEL. DE **WITTE FIETS** IS EEN PROVOKATIE VAN HET KAPITALISTIES PRIVÉ-BEZIT; WANT

**DE WITTE FIETS IS ANARCHISTIES.**

DE **WITTE FIETS** KAN GEBRUIKT WORDEN DOOR WIE HEM NODIG HEEFT EN MOET ONBEHEERD WEER ACHTERGELATEN WORDEN. ER ZULLEN MEERDERE **WITTE FIETSEN** KOMEN TOT IEDER VAN HET WITTE VERVOER GEBRUIK KAN MAKEN EN HET AUTOGEVAAR GEWEKEN IS.

DE **WITTE FIETS** SIMBOLISEERT EENVOUD EN HYGIENE TEGENOVER DE PROTSEERIGHEID EN VUILHEID VAN DE AUTORITAIRE AUTO. IMMERS EEN

**FIETS IS IETS, MAAR BYNA NIETS!**

**PROVOKATIE N° 5 - ~~PROVO~~ ANARCHISTENBLAD**

**Image 5.** Pamphlet *Provocaties* no.5 “Provo’s Fietsenplan”, 1965 © Provo

Translation:

Provo’s Bicycle Plan  
Amsterdammers!

The asphalt terror of the motorized bourgeoisie has lasted long enough. Every day people are offered human sacrifices for the newest authority to which the small bourgeoisie has surrendered: the car authority. The suffocating carbon monoxide is his incense, his thousand-fold image is ruining canals and streets. Provo’s bicycle plan brings liberation from the car monster. Provo is launching the white bike, in public ownership. The first white bicycle will be/ is handed over to the public and the press under Amsterdam’s *Lieverdje* on Het Spui square.

The addicted consumer.

The white bike is never locked. The white bike is the first gratis, collective transport means. The white bike is a provocation of the capitalist private property; because the white bicycle is anarchist.

The white bicycle can be used by whoever needs it and must be left behind unguarded. There will be more white bicycles so that everybody can use the white transportation and the car danger is out of the way. The white bicycle simulates simplicity and health against the gaudiness and filth of the authoritarian car. After all, a bicycle is something, but almost nothing!"

According to Brand: “reasonable laws made by reasonable men in reasonable times proscribe everything, for a good reason: people get hurt trying stuff. If you are bound to try stuff anyway, then either you’re working directly for City Hall or you’re an outlaw, or both.” (Brand, 1970: 21, quoted by Scott, 2016: 11).

Whether it is due to – or in spite of – the Provo members’ transition from counter-politics to official politics, the fact remains that although the countercultural activities of the Provo movement lasted only fifteen months, some of their ideas developed during that short time-span echo until the present day in the politics and culture of Amsterdam, The Netherlands and even of the world. This retrospective briefly highlights three of them: 1. the phenomenon of an urban happening – embedded as a red thread running through their work – which would continue to accompany countercultures and be later used as an instrument by their opponents; 2. the “White Bicycle Plan” which provided a blueprint for the contemporary city-bike; and 3. the “White Dwellings Plan” which prompted the growth of the squatting communities, laying ground for present-day cultural incubators such as NDSM.

### **The White Bicycle Plan**

In addition to each monthly issue of *Provo*, there could be up to three additional supplements in the form of one-page pamphlets called *Provocaties* (Provocations). These pamphlets were unbound sheets, easy to copy for everybody at any time, whose role was to mobilize actions in the public realm. These were used especially to mobilize Provo's environmental-crisis actions: “White Chickens Plan” (replacing the police – dubbed “chickens” in popular slang – by social service agents), “White Chimneys Plan” (taxation of air polluters), “White Trams Plan” (trams for free), “White Taxis Plan” (electrical taxis), “White Kindergarten Plan” (collective child care), “White Wives Plan” (women’s health clinics and progressive sex education for girls), “White Dwellings Plan” (squatting of abandoned and derelict buildings), and “White Bicycles Plan.”<sup>8</sup> The concept of White Bicycles, free bikes without locks for everybody in the city to take, use and leave as they please, was introduced first in 1965 as part of Provo’s anti-pollution and anti- automobile campaign.

The pamphlet *Provocatie no. 5* entitled “PROVO’s Bicycle Plan” (image 5) reported:

*‘Amsterdammers! The asphalt terror of the motorized bourgeoisie has lasted long enough. Every day people are offering human sacrifices for the newest authority to*





**Image 6.** Provo Rob Stolk with one of the White Bicycles at *Het Lieverdje*, 1965 © Cor Jaring / Rina van Vorst



**Image 7.** John Lennon and Yoko Ono with the White Bicycle in bed during their Bed-In for Peace at Hilton Hotel in Amsterdam, March 25-31, 1969 © Dutch National Archives

*which the small bourgeoisie has surrendered: the car authority. The suffocating carbon monoxide is his incense, his thousand-fold image is ruining canals and streets. Provo's bicycle plan brings liberation from the car monster. [...] The white bicycle is a provocation of the capitalist private property; because the white bicycle is anarchist. [...] The white bicycle symbolizes simplicity and health against the gaudiness and filth of the authoritarian car. After all, a bicycle is something, but almost nothing!" And "At 3 o'clock in the afternoon, on July 28, 1965, the first White Bicycle will be presented to the public and to the media at the statue Het Lieverdje on the Spui square."<sup>9</sup> (Provo, 1965: Provocatie no.5)*

What finally happened in the afternoon of July 28, 1965 is that the 30 bikes that were provided by the Provos, were confiscated by the police as evidence of crime. According to Dutch law in those years, bikes without locks or owners were illegal objects provoking theft.

*'The police response was spectacularly and disproportionately extreme and served to amplify the Provo's message rather than suppress the project. The media was fed a sensational story, and photographs were taken of the rioting crowds, the brutal police and the confiscated bicycles being taken away in trucks. The Provos were able to generate sympathy for their cause and appeal both to Dutch cultural mythology and to Amsterdam's tradition of anti-authoritarian sentiment by making comparisons to the commandeering of bicycles by the Nazis during the bleak last winter of the Second World War.'* (Smart, 2012: 1)

The White Bicycle Plan kept re-surfacing in the media for some time. In March 1969 a White Bicycle was presented to the freshly wed John Lennon and Yoko Ono, who took the bike into their bed during their Bed-In for Peace at Hilton Hotel in Amsterdam.<sup>10</sup> (image 7)

In retrospect, the White Bicycle Plan can be considered to be a forerunner of the nowadays popular bicycle-sharing systems in around 1000 cities all over the world. Yet, there are important differences between the Provo White Bicycles and the contemporary city bike. The White Bicycles were without locks, free to be ridden by everybody at random. Finding them was left to chance, and they were considered to be an illegal, subversive provocation by the established power structures. On the contrary, the institutionalized bicycle sharing-systems are now embraced as desirable sustainability measures in city politics. The bikes are locked to their stations and only available to be ridden by fee-paying members. The unpredictability



**Image 8.** Pamphlet *Provocaties* no.59<sup>a</sup> “The White Dwellings Plan”, 1966 © Provo

Translation:

In the Netherlands stands a house, and in that house lives nobody. It is standing on The Dam, in the heart of Amsterdam. The palace on the Dam is the image of the dwelling shortage. Thousands of houses are standing empty in Amsterdam along the Grachtengordel [Canal District] and in De Jordaan [Former workers' neighborhood], Amsterdam's fortress of freedom.

Your house is your *gnot*-temple. You have the right to your own house and your share in the collective house ownership. No house in the magic center is allowed to be demolished as long as people are living there. New Amsterdam.

Provo's working group *Witte Huizenplan* launches a revolutionary solution to the dwellings problem: “The White House.” Everybody can enter “The White House” and choose his living space  in the  New Babylon.

The White Dwellings Plan.

The working group White Dwellings Plan took the following initiatives:

1. The nomination of the palace on the Dam square as the city hall of Amsterdam, the collective John-temple of the magic center.
2. The weekly publication of the list of addresses of vacant houses that will be handed out at 10 o'clock in the morning on the Dam square.
3. The painting with white paint of the door and the door step of vacant houses as a sign that everybody can move in there.
4. The establishment of an employment office to mobilize the youth during the summer months to fight the housing shortage.
5. The White Dwellings Plan will be part of the plan New Amsterdam.

Save your house, occupy your house, *gnot* wants it.

aspect remains - although the management services do their best, the inconvenience of not being sure if you will find any bike at the stand is still at play.

The original concept of the White Bicycle without any lock, however, has somehow still found a way to exist in the Hoge Veluwe National Park around the Kröller-Müller Museum in the East Netherlands. Also, at present there is a Provo Bicycle Collective in the USA, where the name Provo is a complete coincidence. It is part of a chain enterprise operating in the cities of Ogden, Provo, Salt Lake City, St. George, and the border lands between the states of Wyoming, Utah and Nevada. The mission of the Provo Bicycle Collective is to promote cycling as an effective and sustainable form of transportation, recreation, and as a cornerstone of a cleaner, healthier, and safer society. The collective provides refurbished bicycles and educational programs to the community, focusing on children and lower income households.

### ***Homo Ludens in the Palace***

Another of Provo's influential political protest activities – even more relevant to this story than the city bikes – was the occupation of abandoned buildings. The “White Dwellings Plan” offered "a revolutionary solution to the housing problem." The pamphlet *Provocatie* nr. 59a from April 1966 announced the start of the political squatter movement by calling out to occupy the Royal Palace on the Dam square in Amsterdam, turning it into a new city hall:

*'In the Netherlands stands a house, and in that house lives nobody. It is standing on The Dam, in the heart of Amsterdam. The palace on the Dam is the image of the dwelling shortage. Thousands of houses are standing empty in Amsterdam along the Grachtengordel [canal district] and in De Jordaan [former workers' neighborhood], Amsterdam's fortress of freedom. [...] Provo's working group Witte Huizenplan launches a revolutionary solution to the dwellings problem: 'The White House'. Everybody can enter 'The White House' and choose his living space [in the ]New Babylon.'* (Provo, 1966: *Provocatie* nr.59a) (image 8)

Nine months later, in January 1967, in the *Provo* magazine no. 13, in an article entitled “The First Bastion for The *Homo Ludens*,” J.H. van Lunteren wrote:

*'This building needs to be immediately given back to the community. It was financed by the slave-trade of the then international proletariat, built by our great-great-*

## EERSTE BASTION VOOR DE HOMO LUDENS



Een van de overblijfselen van de 17e eeuwse regentmentaliteit is het Paleis op de Dam. Op 28 jan. 1640 besloot de toenmalige vroedschap tot de bouw van dit 8e wereldwonder, waarvoor het geld bijeengeschraapt werd door het onderdrukken van de bevolking in de koloniën, de slavenhandel, terwijl het ten koste ging van het toenmalige proletariaat, dat verrekte van de armoe en uit de met juwelen versierde hand van de burgerij aalmoezen ontving (armenhuizen, weeshuizen etc.) Tot 1808 werd het als stadhuis gebruikt, nadien als Paleis. Lodewijk Napoleon, Willem I, Emma, Willemien en Juliana hebben het achtereenvolgens bewoond, hetgeen inhoudt dat dit gebouw, in een zo om ruimte schreeuende stad, dienst doet als een meestentijds leegstaand symbool van de reeds wankelende monarchie.

In 1935 heeft de Gemeente het gebouw voor 10 miljoen piek (nieuwwaarde was in de 17e eeuw al f.8½ miljoen) aan de overheid verkwaanseld. Het geld werd door min. Oud uit een werfonds betaald en zou gebruikt worden voor de bouw van een nieuw stadhuis, dat dan tevens als werkgelegenheidsobject dienst zou kunnen doen.

Toen in 1960 iemand in de Raad het al nodig vond naar deze vreemde

koehandel te informeren, antwoordde onze rechtschapen dierenvriend Van Hall, dat terugvragen onwaardig zou zijn-verkocht blijft verkocht- en zodoende is er nog steeds niets met het gebouw gebeurd, uitgezonderd de oranjekomedie op 10 maart.

Dit gebouw dient onmiddellijk aan de gemeenschap teruggegeven te worden. Het is betaald door de slavenarbeid van het toenmalige internationale proletariaat, gebouwd door onze betovergrootvaders en verkwaanseld door onze autoriteiten.

Wanneer het gebouw wordt vrijgegeven kan het dienst doen als het eerste bastion voor de homo ludens in het hartje van A'dam. Geschilderd in een popkleurtje dient het DAG en NACHT open te staan om iedereen te ontvangen, terwijl de zalen gebruikt kunnen worden om te kommuniseren, te krejeren of te dansen. Geen centrum voor: lief spelen met SigmaSimon of kluphuisje met verkapte evangelisatie en het inpompen van verschillende ismen, maar ruimte om de mogelijkheden van de individuele en kollektieve creativiteit.

J. h. van Iunteren.  
Als eerste begin zouden de autoriteiten de hekken rond het toekomstig bastion weg kunnen halen.

**Image 9.** Article in *Provo* nr. 13, "First Bastion for the Homo Ludens", January 1967 © Provo

Translation:

The First Bastion for the *Homo Ludens*

One of the remnants of the 17<sup>th</sup> century regent mentality is the palace on the Dam square. On January 28, 1640 the town council from those years decided to build this 8<sup>th</sup> world wonder, for which money was collected through oppression of the population in the colonies, the slave trade, while it went at the expense of the proletariat, that was dying from poverty and received alms (houses for the poor, orphanages) from the jewel-decorated hands of the bourgeoisie. Until 1808 it was used as city hall, after that as palace. Lodewijk Napoleon, Willem I, Emma, Willemien and Juliana have been subsequently living there, which means that this building, in a city that so screams for space, figures as most often empty standing symbol of the already wavering monarchy. In 1993 the municipality has sold the building for 10 million (the new worth was in the 17<sup>th</sup> century already 8,5 million). The money was paid by minister Oud from a working fund and would be used for building a new city hall, that would also become object for employment opportunity. When in 1960 somebody in the Council found it necessary to ask about this strange cow trade, our animal friend Van Hall answered that asking it back would be unworthy – sold is sold – and, like this, still nothing happened with the building, except the orange comedy on the 10<sup>th</sup> of March. Orange is the allusion to the name of the Royal family: Oranje, translating to English as the name of the color, Orange.

This building needs to be immediately given back to the community. It is financed through slave trade of the then international proletariat, built by our great-great-grandfathers and squandered by our authorities.

When the building is released, it can serve as the first bastion for *homo ludens* in the heart of A'dam. Painted in a pop color it should be DAY and NIGHT open to receive everybody, while the rooms can be used to communicate, to create or to dance. Not a center for: play nicely with Sigma Simon or club house with disguised evangelism and the pumping in of various isms, but room for the possibilities of individual and collective creativity.

*grandfathers and squandered by our authorities. When the building is freed, it can serve as the first bastion for the homo ludens in the heart of A'dam. Painted in a pop color it should be open DAY and NIGHT to receive everybody, while the rooms can be used to communicate, to create or to dance.'* (Provo, 1967, *Provo* no.13) (image 9)

This was at a time of severe "housing shortage," when the middle classes desired to move to the new healthier dwelling districts in Amsterdam's suburbia, and many buildings in the center stood abandoned and signs of individual or more organized occupations were already visible here and there.<sup>11</sup> The Provos went on to formalize these occupations and load them with political significance. On February 13, 1969, the former Provos opened Woningbureau de Kraker – The Provo Squat Real Estate Office.<sup>12</sup> In May 1969, they brought out the first *Handleiding voor krakers* (*Handbook for Squatters*) which provided:

*'a collection of rudimentary instructions for breaking and re-installing locks, fixing toilets, and repairing damaged floors and roofs. These are paired with a sharp critique of planning and development policy, and an assertion of modes of spatial and political practice oriented towards autonomous self-organization and community mobilization.'*<sup>13</sup> (Smart, 2016: 3) (image 10)

During those years the squatting of buildings found support in the Dutch law, which protected the city from having too much *leegstand* (vacancy) on one hand and prevented inflating prices of real estate due to housing shortage on the other hand. Nazima Kadir explains the whole legal situation that made squatting such a common practice in Amsterdam. First, squatters relied on a statute from 1914 that declared that someone can occupy or use a space without having legal entitlement to it. This statute meant in practice that the occupiers had to organize the space such that it presented the basic signs of habitation, and declare a collective intention to live there to the police. The basic signs of habitation were: a lock on the door, a table, a chair, and a bed. After the police certified such a place as a residency, it was not easy to remove the squatters from it. In 1971, this residency-law was further enforced in favor of squatters by another rule of the Court of Higher Appeals. The 1971-rule stated that squatting was not only not punishable as a criminal act, and that squatters can claim the right to the fundamental human right of *huisrecht* (domestic peace). This meant that squatters could refuse entry to their residency to anyone, including the owners and the police. "Only a court order, often obtained after a lengthy procedure, could evict squatters." (Kadir, 2016: 21)



**Image 10.** The cover of the “Handbook for Breaking In”. Amsterdam: Federatie Onafhankelijke Vakgroepen & Buro de Kraker, 1969 © Buro de Kraker



**Image 11.** “We will not let us be demolished and we will not go. De Blaaskop stays put” poster against ‘clearing up’ of the squat “Blaaskop”, 1981 © Duivevoorden, 2005, 127

Those early squats grew into community centers which fulfilled multiple functions at once: dwellings, community centers, workshop spaces, radio stations, cinemas, give-away shops, street medic centers, refugee asylums, bike repair centers, concert venues, and night clubs. In one of the squats there was also the weekly *kraakspreekuur* (squatting advice hour), where people who were interested in squatting or who had squatting-related-problems to be solved, would gain legal and practical advice. The squatters put a lot of effort into making these buildings livable through renovation and laying infrastructure for water, drainage, electricity and communication lines. Refurbished with the available minimal funds and maximal creativity, these countercultural hotspots gained a specific kind of aesthetics: cheap materials, found objects, bric-a-brac, colorful graffiti.

### **The Autonomous Squatter Communities in the Center and Their Eviction**

Although not institutionalized, the squatter community grew throughout the 1970s to become a well-organized political force towards the beginning of the 1980s. For example, according to Jaap Draaisma, the 1978-founded Squat Group Grachtengordel (canal district) grew so fast, that within two years, more than hundred houses were part of it (Poppe and Rottenberg, 2000: 16). There were around 20 similar groups in total across Amsterdam. This was, according to Lizet Kraal, “a well-organized, intelligent movement with people who helped each other to find solutions for the dwelling shortage.” (Verhoeff, 2016: 140) The “squatter alarm list” or “squatter line” was crucial for the squatter community as a means for communication and cooperation. If one place was in danger of being evicted by the police, the whole community would mobilize within minutes via the “squatter alarm list” to gather at the endangered spot and demonstrate *en masse* against the eviction.

For example, the “Alarm List Grachtengordel May 1984” (image 12A, image 12B) is a compact document divided into seven sections: Instruction, Block 1, Block 2, Block 3, Block 4, Block 5, Miscellaneous. The instruction tells:

*‘Call for alarm one of the five start-numbers, preferably one from your own blockfirst. Tell briefly but clearly what is the matter and tell that this is the first number that you are calling. The person having received this message under this number calls all the other start-numbers and the numbers of his or her own block, and possibly also other districts.’* (image 12A)



Following this instruction, there is a list with all the numbers within each of the five blocks in the district. There, we find street names of the canal district of Amsterdam with well-known street names such as: Singel, Herengracht, Keizersgracht, Prinsengracht, Brouwersgracht, Rozengracht, Westermarkt, Spuistraat, Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal, Weteringschans, etc. Next to street and phone numbers, the nicknames of the now long-gone iconic squats like: De Tijd (The Time), De Tempel (The Temple), Dubbele Worst (Double Sausage), Poppenhuis (Doll House), Noordkaap (North Pole), Zwitserland (Switzerland), Zwarte Kat (Black Cat), Fate (Fate), and Vrankrijk (playful way to say *Frankrijk*, meaning *France* in Dutch). In fact, Vrankrijk was legalized through ownership in 1991 and it is one of the squats from those years that still exist.<sup>14</sup>

Under the category “Miscellaneous” at the end of the list, we find contact information to all kinds of services such as cargo-bikes, tools kit depot, a van (for actions), squatter cafés, collective money point (for actions) and squatter consultation hours.

Kraal remembers:

*‘I found the 80's fan-tas-tic. Take for example the squat line. Looking back, you think: How could we have been able to sustain it without portable phones? On Singel 445 we did not have a phone. We were using the phone of café De Schutter in the Voetboogsteeg. There was a coin phone. If it was urgent and there was a customer talking there, we would drag him off the phone and the bar tender would shout to him: ‘No. Important. Keep the squat line open!’ (Verhoeff, 2016: 141)*

The golden years for squatters in Amsterdam were between 1980 and 1984 with 160,000m<sup>2</sup> of new squats as opposed to 20,000m<sup>2</sup> evicted ones (Breek and De Graad, 2001: 48).<sup>15</sup> The violent eviction of a squatted house on the Jacob Lennepstraat by the police in 1978 and the fortification and militarization of the De Grote Keyser (Keizersgracht 242-252) in November 1979 marked the start of armed wars between the police and the squatter community. There were barricades, beatings, shootings, tear gas, water cannons, tanks, helicopters and even burning trams (as protest against the eviction of Lucky Luyk) in the streets of Amsterdam.

Initial evictions led to public condemnation of the police and more support for the squatters. The police were then forced to use all kinds of tricks in order to evict a squat in an apparently peaceful way. An iconic example was the eviction of the house at Grote Wetering on December 2, 1980. In order to smooth the eviction process and positively influence public opinion, the police organized a ludicrous performance dressing up as Santa Claus (image 13),

**ALARMLIJST GRACHTEN - GORDEL.**

-MEI 1984-

**INSTRUKTIE** Bel voor alarm één van de vijf ingangsnummers, bij voorkeur die van je eigen blok. Vertel kort maar duidelijk wat er aan de hand is en zeg dat dit het eerste nummer is dat je bereikt.  
Het ingangsnummer belt dan de andere ingangsnummers plus het desbetreffende blok door, eventueel ook andere buurten.

*gremblen 200963  
di/vr 1700-1900um*

*in 3 nu Vello  
Koes 5268*

*dames 352164*

*Ar. intr. 3 nu 241907  
Ar. intr. - group: 248390*

*255951*

**BLOK 1**

-BROUWERSGRACHT 77-79..260902	-NIEUWE NIEUWSTR. 27..220602
-BROUWERSGRACHT 152...244022	-NZ VOORBURGVAL 22....250695
-BROUWERSGRACHT 274...279013	-NZ VOORBURGVAL 77-79..241128
-BRANDELIJN MONTMUNEN 3-5...268754	-OUDE BRAAK 16.....274336
-HERENGRACHT 12.....259226	-OUDE BRAAK 29.....276405
-HERENGRACHT 20.....267116	-SINGEL 46.....255278
-KEIZERSGRACHT 18a.....220543	-SFIJSTR. 57 "De Tijd".....220480
-KORTE PRINSENGRACHT 17-19...250929	-SFIJSTR. 63
-NICOLAASSTRAAT 12-14 + 37	-SFIJSTR. 82 "Heils".....227006
-NIEUWE NIEUWSTRAAT 39-41 "Automo"	

*255951*

**BLOK 2**

-HERENGRACHT 148 <sup>e</sup> ...277675	-ROZENGRACHT 61.....260618
-HERENGRACHT 227 <sup>1</sup> ...277687	-ROZENSTRAAT 13-15.....269840
-HERENGRACHT 96 "De Tempel"....265106	-ROZENSTRAAT 51.....249131
-KEIZERSGRACHT 200.....258142	-SINGEL 114.....270165
-KEIZERSGRACHT 242-250..227168+258852	-SINGEL 158 <sup>2</sup> .....270774
-DRIE KONINGENSTR. 1.....230851	-SINGEL 158 <sup>3</sup> .....251075
-PRINSENGRACHT 187 "Pakhuis"....271240	-SINGEL 162.....259243
-PRINSENGRACHT 349	-SINGEL 186.....230537
-PRINSENGRACHT 353-355.....235910	-SINGEL 266.....247913
-PRINSENGRACHT 357 "Bourtpend"....227645	-SINGEL 300.....253145
-PRINSENGRACHT 359.....268147	-SINGEL 302 "De Loodmi'n".....259843
-PRINSENGRACHT 237 Brandweer..267115	-TORENSEEBG 5.....270750
-LAURERSTRAAT 10.....275803	-WESTERMARKT 5.....227581
-ROZENGRACHT 83	-WESTERMARKT 9.....270238

*1190  
1977-79*

**BLOK 3**

-NRC..245430+252833+277044	-SFIJSTRAAT 199
-NZ VOORBURGVAL 312 "Automenkerk"	-SFIJSTRAAT 216 "Vrankrijk".....248350
-SINGEL 233	-SFIJSTRAAT 219-221 <sup>3+4</sup> .....255854
-SINGEL 286-291.....226834	-SFIJSTRAAT 231.....222314
	-SFIJSTRAAT 234-236.....229654

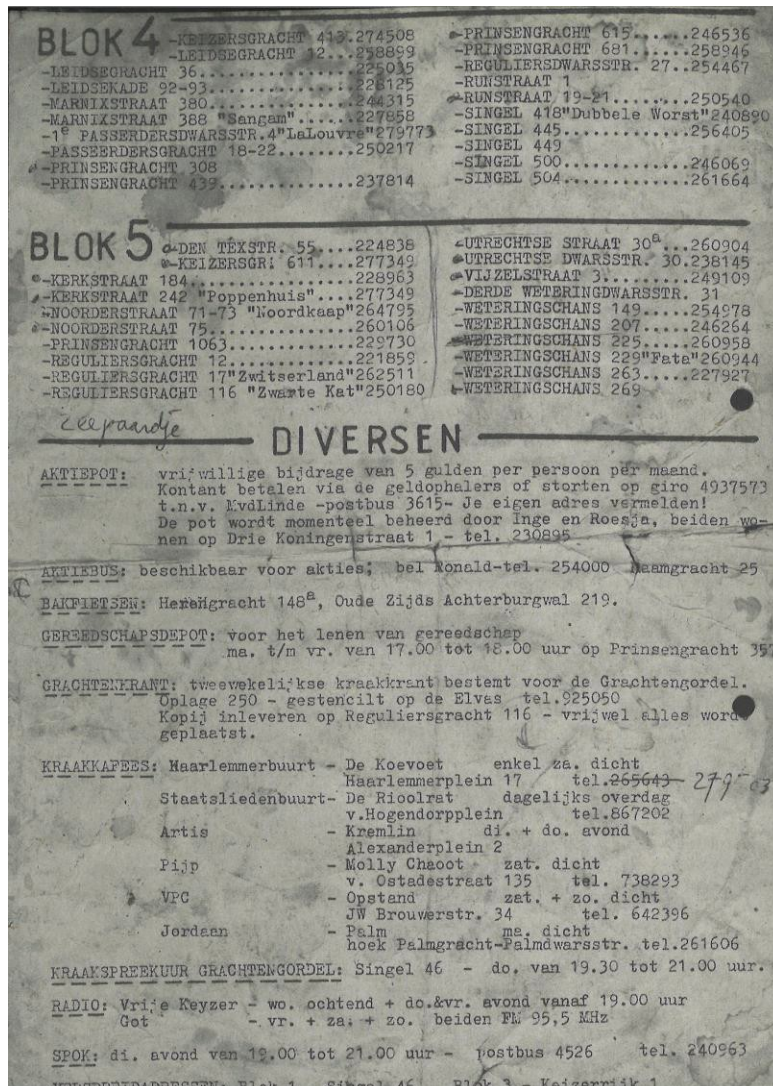
**Image 12A.** The squatter line call sheet (upper part) of the squatter community in Amsterdam’s Grachtengordel (Canal District), May 1984 © Anonymous, on the inner covers of Uitgeverij De Balie, Ine Poppe and Sandra Rottenberg.

Translation:

ALARM LIST GRACHTENGORDEL  
-May 1984-

INSTRUCTION: Call for alarm one of the five start numbers, preferably one of your own block. Tell briefly, but clearly what is going on and say that this is the first number that you are calling. The start number calls all the other start numbers plus the own block, optionally also other neighborhoods.

- BLOCK 1 .....223120 (S46) – reserve number.....220480
- BLOCK 2 .....277675 (H148) – reserve number .....259843
- BLOCK 3.....245430 (NRC) – reserve number .....252833



**Image 12B.** The squatter line call sheet (lower part) of the squatter community in Amsterdam's *Grachtengordel* (Canal District), May 1984 © Anonymous, on the inner covers of *Uitgeverij De Balie*, Ine Poppe and Sandra Rottenberg.

- BLOCK 4.....240890 (S418) – reserve number .....256405
- BLOCK 5.....260944 (W229) – reserve number .....258379
- BLOCK 1  street names, street number, phone numbers
- BLOCK 2  street names, street number, phone numbers
- BLOCK 3  street names, street number, phone numbers
- BLOCK 4  street names, street number, phone numbers
- BLOCK 5  street names, street number, phone numbers

**MISCELLANEOUS**

**COLLECTIVE'S SHARED MONEY FOR ACTIONS:** voluntary contribution of 5 guilders per person per month.

Pay cash to the money collectors or pay via bank to account number 4937573 of MydLinde - post box 3615 – don't forget to put your own name!  
 At this moment, the collective's shared money for action is managed by Inge and Roesja, both living at Drie Koningenstraat 1 – phone.230895.

**ACTION BUS:** available for actions, call Ronald-phone. 25400Naamgracht 25

**CARGO BIKES:** Herengracht 148a, Oude Zijds Achterburgwal219.

**TOOL KIT DEPOT:** for borrowing of tools

Mon-Fri from 17.00 till 18.00 on Prinsengracht 357

**GRACHTEN NEWSPAPER:** two-weekly squat news for the *Grachtengordel* district.

Print 250 pieces – stenciled on Elvas phone. 925050.  
 Submission of contributions on Reguliersgracht 116 – almost everything is published.

**SQUAT CAFÉ'S:**

Haarlemmerbuurt – De Koevoet	only Sat. Cclosed, Haarlemmerplein 17	tel.265643—279503
Staatsliederenbuurt - De Rioolrat	daily during the day, v.Hogendorpplein	tel.867202
Artis - Kremlin	Tue. + Thu. Evening, Alexanderplein 2	
Pijp - Molly Chaoot	Sat. closed, v. Ostadestraat 135	tel.738293
VPC - Opstand	Sat. + Sun. closed, JW Brouwerstr. 34	tel. 642396
Jordaan - Palm	Mon. closed, Hoek Palmgracht-Palmdwarsstr.	Tel.261606

**SQUAT CONSULTATION HOUR:** Singel 46 – Thu. From 19.30 til 21.00

gently alluding to the earlier Santa Claus jokes of the Provos.<sup>16</sup> When Grote Wetering was re-squatted again, the police took on a new, more aggressive, face during the re-eviction on October 8, 1981. (image 14) Yet, after the squatter riots on the coronation day of Queen Beatrix – April 30, 1980 – the public opinion started to divide and the squatter movement was not unconditionally supported anymore. (Kadir, 2016: 26)

During the end of the 1970's and the beginning of the 1980's, the disadvantages of living in Amsterdam's suburbia became apparent and the city center with its mix of dwellings, public and commercial uses regained its attractiveness. The middle class sought to return to the city center, and after 1985 the squatter communities came under pressure from both the municipality and the private real-estate developers. Breek and De Graad present a complex explanation for the phenomenon: the growing attractiveness of the city center as a place for business and living, internal struggles within the squatter movement, and most of all, changes in the law facilitating reclamation of the city center. (Breek and De Graad, 2001: 47-59)

The *leegstandswet* (vacancy law) was established in May 1981 and commenced on January 1, 1987 (Van Noort, 1988: 158-159). It was intended to prevent buildings from being left empty for an unnecessarily long time on one hand, and from being illegally occupied on the other hand. The vacancy law stipulates first of all, that every municipality must keep records of which buildings are vacant in a vacancy register. Secondly, owners could offer to rent out their vacant property temporarily, while before they could only rent out on a permanent base. Thirdly, through another law introduced at the time, the owners could sue squatters anonymously, while before they needed to have at least one name of the squatters in order to call them to court. In the year 1993, also the article 429 went into effect stating that a building could be squatted ONLY if the building has been standing empty for more than a year, without the owner putting it to some use. This meant that occupiers needed to provide adequate proof in the form of a documentation before their residency was approved. (Kadir, 2014: 40)

Since the 1990s the owners started to rent out their buildings to *anti-krakers* (anti-squatters) – legal occupants – for very low rents and on conditions more favorable to the owner, like one month's or three months' notice to vacate. The presence of anti-squatters protects the building from illegal occupations and enables the owners to empty the building without violence or legal hassles with the occupants, and reduces the financial losses for the owners during the period of near-vacancy. Naturally, following the introduction of this law – and up to the present day – owners of vacant buildings have preferred to have anti-squatters instead of illegal occupants.

After the clearing of the squatter communities in the Grachtengordel (canal district) of



**Image 13.** The police dressed up as Santa Claus and his helper *Zwarte Piet* at the clearing of squat De Grote Wetering, December 2, 1980 © 2016 Lecturis, Bert Verhoeff, Rogier Fokke en Sietse van der Hoek, p.44.



**Image 14.** The police fighting squatters at the re-clearing of the squat at De Grote Wetering, October 8, 1981 © Lecturis, Bert Verhoeff, Rogier Fokke en Sietse van der Hoek. From: Verhoeff, 2016, 60.

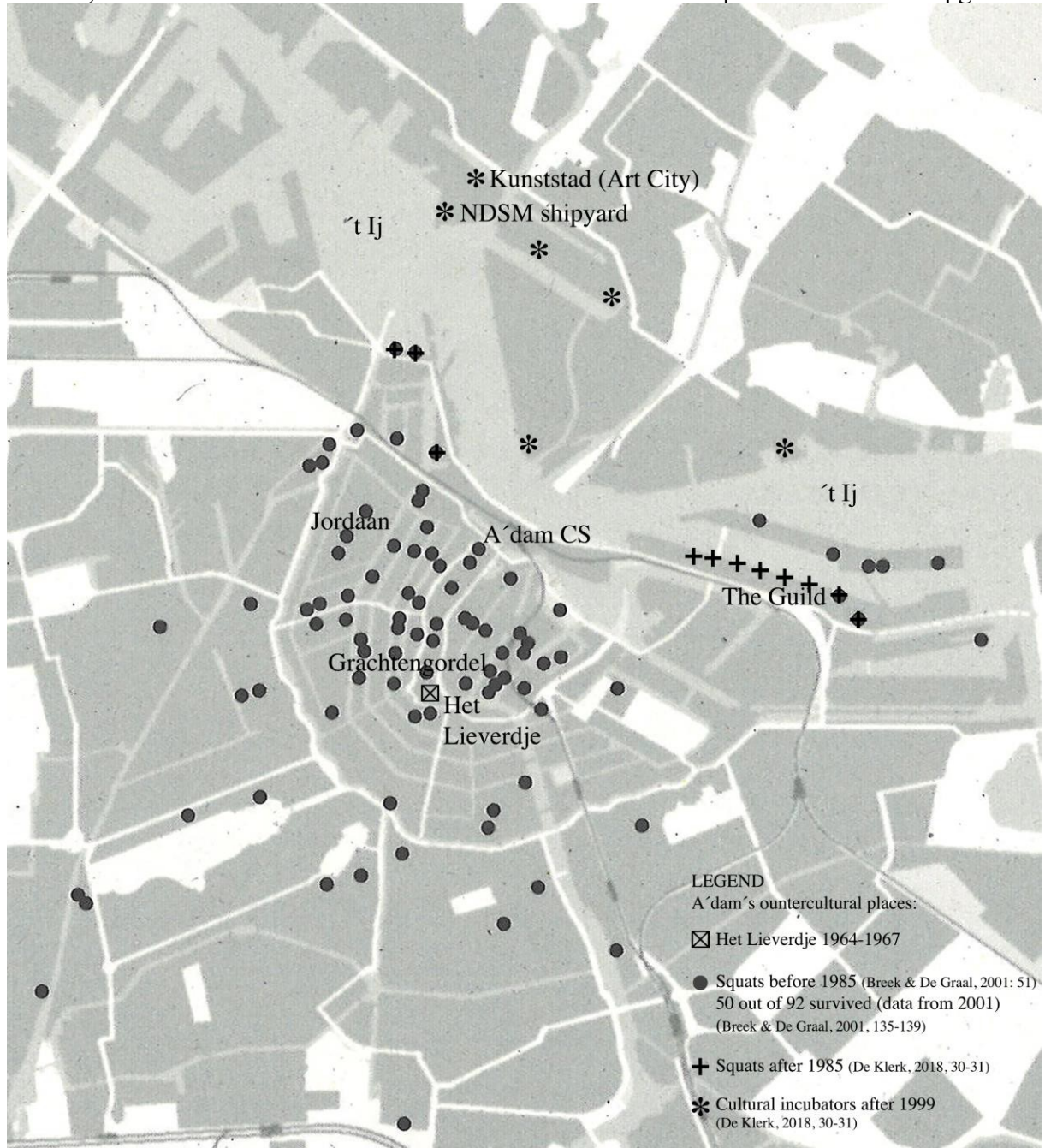
Amsterdam, the occupation movements moved to the abandoned industrial buildings at the south waterfront of 't Ij. There, new squatter centers emerged such as: Het Veem, the Graansilo, the Douaneloods, Pakhuis de Zwijger, Vrieshuis Amerika, Zeezicht, Pakhuis Argentinie, and Pakhuis Wilhelmina. They formed collectively The Guild of Industrial Buildings at 't Ij. (image 15) In the beginning of the 1990s Amsterdam sought to develop a financial district in the city, preferably on the south bank of 't Ij. Rem Koolhaas was commissioned to design a Manhattan at 't Ij in which all old industrial buildings were envisioned to disappear in favor of large-scale office blocks. There was major public opposition to this plan, and the central player, ABN AMRO bank, wanted to place the financial district on the Zuidas instead. The Manhattan at 't Ij failed, but the squatters were forced out of the area anyhow. Pakhuis Wilhelmina stayed. Due to the astute efforts of Caroline Veldbrugge, the Guild began to work together with a housing association (Het Oosten, now Stadsgenoot), scientists, advisers, artists, designers, and investors. Together they created a manifesto *De stad als casco (The City as a Shell)* that was issued in two parts, in 1994 and 1997. *De stad als casco* was a development strategy

*'based on existing structures, physical ones such as those of the city and its buildings, and social ones such as those of the users. Management and development are not separated from each other but constantly overlap. Physical forms remain, but their use continues to change. In the development process, returns from both use and value development benefit all owners, users, and financiers. The commitment this creates stimulates grassroots investments'*

wrote Frank Bijdendijk in the foreword to the manifesto. (De Klerk, 2018: 45) In the end, this strategy was not enough. Caroline Feldbrugge decided to buy Pakhuis Wilhelmina and only as its owner she was able to keep the community center.

### **NDSM and the Birth of the *Broedplaatsen* Policy**

In the meanwhile, the NDSM shipyard at the other side of 't Ij ended its activities in 1984 and the 90-hectare area was bought by the city district municipality Amsterdam Noord.<sup>17</sup> For both the squat-community and other citizens, the abandoned NDSM area remained on the periphery of the city map, until a theater happening in 1994 launched the place as Amsterdam's new hotspot. During the period of one month the theater group Dogtroep<sup>18</sup> performed the site-specific performance *Noordwesterwals*. In Dutch, *Noordwesterwals* has a double meaning



**Image 15.** The map of countercultural places in Amsterdam 1964-2018 © Beata Labuhn on the basis of the map by Breek & De Graad, 2001: 51 and the map by De Klerk, 2018, 30-31.

which can be translated as *The Walz [a dance] of North-West* or *The Roller* [the machine for destroying – the one that rolls everything flat] *of North-West*. The performance was staged on the former slipway, a gigantic ramp rising from the dry-docks towards the NDSM shipyard. The slipway could be filled with water from 't Ij with an up- and down moving lock, which inspired Dogtroep to work with a story of a small village that is fighting against its landlord and the water. Both the actors and the public sat on the ramp of the dry-dock. The play included a fat landlord, construction workers and village inhabitants, the latter provided a couple who were the main protagonists. The main role in the play, however, was played by 1.2 million liters of water. The climax of the show was the opening of the lock and the flooding of the ramp.<sup>19</sup> (image 16)

After Dogtroep's performance at NDSM, when the real-estate development started to press on the squatter communities in the southern docks, some of the occupants moved to NDSM, while others choose to go to the ADM area, OT301, or Plantage Doklaan. The public commotion caused by the endangered squatter communities on the south side of 't Ij coincided with national and international criticism on the impoverishment of the art- and music scene in Amsterdam, while Richard Florida was about to bring out his influential book on the importance of subcultures in city development, *The Rise of the Creative Class*. Suddenly the municipality of Amsterdam belatedly realized the importance of artists and bottom-up initiatives as an ingredient for a lively city culture and they understood that they had to do things differently. The then-mayor of Amsterdam, Schelto Patijn, said: “there is no culture without subculture.” (De Klerk, 2018: 81)

The municipality announced a public tender for urban regeneration of the NDSM area in 1999. At that point the squatter community organized themselves into a workgroup and, from 2000, became a foundation with the name *Kinetisch Noord (Kinetic North)*.<sup>20</sup> They hired a team of advisors, designers, and writers, for “no cure, no pay” and they composed a massive book that ‘did not fit into any drawer’ – on purpose, so that their plan could not be put away somewhere. Their plan was based on Carolien Feldbrugge's *De stad als casco*-strategy, meaning that the plan was building forth on what was already there: the existing structures, both physical and social. The document submitted for the tender was ‘speaking the language of developers and managers:’ “The proposal aims to realize, with and for cultural producers, a self-managed shared business-building with a manifestation in the NSM site. The proposal prioritizes collectivity and the interaction between the users and the public, as well as the creation of employment for the potential users themselves [...] culture producers versus culture consumers with a high degree of public





**Image 16.** Shots from the movie *Noordwesterwals* by Dogtroep at the NDSM shipyard, Amsterdam, 1996 © Dogtroep, IDTV and AVRO

accessibility.” (De Klerk, 2018: 77) In short, it was a plan for affordable ateliers and working-spaces combined with public cultural activities inside the hangar, the slipway with its old trams, the crane and the pavilion Noorderlicht. The foundation Kinetic North sent their proposal, just as did many other applicants, including established real estate developers, and they won!

One of the highlights of the plan of Kinetic North was the transformation of the big NDSM hangar into *Kunststad* (Art City). The vision-makers were artists from the NDSM-community, Rienke Enghardt and Bob Bakhuijsen, who worked together with external consultants such as Filip Bosscher, a philosopher and an architect. Searching for a concept, they let themselves be inspired by Constant’s New Babylon, Louis Le Roy and Joahn Huizinga’s *Homo Ludens*. They developed a concept of steel frameworks which provided space for dynamic openness within. (De Klerk, 2018: 98) Dynamo Architecten gave this concept form as a system of gigantic steel frames positioned in the middle of the hangar without touching the 1920s hangar’s structure or facades. The steel frames, configured over two floors, created “streets” in between them. Users could rent a section of the overall frame and build their own cubicle inside of it, creating a colorful DIY structure within a total aggregate area for workshops of 7500m<sup>2</sup>. (image 15) The steel mega-structure with colorful infills particularly reminds of Constant’s “Moving Ladders” from New Babylon. (image 1, 2, 3) For Eva de Klerk, the steel structure with infills became the literal architectural manifestation of *De stad als casco*. After many challenges in the project’s execution, concerning fire regulation and the hangar becoming a protected monument, the construction was undertaken between 2004 and 2007. Kinetic North received an innovation subsidy from the state of 15 million euro for the renovation of the existing building. The users invested another 10 million in exclusive loans for the realization of the self-built ateliers.

The NDSM project became a great success prompting *Get Lost in Amsterdam!*, the guide to the alternative, cool and countercultural places in Amsterdam, to euphorically report in its 2006-edition:

*‘After forcibly closing most of the affordable spaces for artists (and their audiences) in the center, the City Council is now helping to fund this complex on the site of a squatted wharf in North Amsterdam – far from any real estate that’s currently of interest to their developer friends. Cynicism aside, it’s turned into a pretty happening place. The area is still being developed, but there are already big art and theatre festivals here, a fantastic skatepark (see Hanging Out chapter), cafés, galleries, and a big monthly flea-market (see Shopping chapter). The culture ship Stubnitz has docked here a couple of*

*times and thrown some great parties featuring cool bands like the Electric Fans. There are also plans for more performance spaces, cheap studios, and a cinema. There's a direct ferry that leaves regularly from behind Central Station and takes about 10 minutes. It's a pleasant ride and the view over the water is gorgeous.'* (Pauker, 2006: 110)

The NDSM-project can be seen as marking the launch of the *broedplaatsen* (cultural incubators) politics in Amsterdam in 2002. From that moment on, the municipality started to engage and even employ some of the former troublemakers and squatters to help them create more new cool places in the rest of the city. Together they started to manage Amsterdam's squat politics and *broedplaatsen*, the new legalized squat-community places. What used to be playful and naughty became part of city politics and law. A new era with an unprecedented kind of consensus emerged: the municipalities, the real estate developers, and the vagabonds started to work together in order to build the cultural incubators, calling it a soft, slow and sustainable kind of city development. In the words of Richard Florida: "Capitalism has also expanded its reach to capture the talents of heretofore excluded groups of eccentrics and nonconformists [...] setting them at the very heart of the process of innovation and urban growth."<sup>21</sup> (Florida, 2002)

The NDSM area became the first and biggest *broedplaats* in Europe and the new cultural hotspot of Amsterdam, attracting tourists and new investors looking for a special place with a certain kind of vibe. In 2006 came MTV Networks that, after the redesign of Max van Aerschot, turned the old woodwork workshop into its offices (Steenhuis, 2011: 90). One of the directors of MTV said that he found the alternative character and industrial appearance of the area charming, but that it was also time to add some neat parking spaces with good lighting. (De Klerk, 2018: 111) Next to the initial Noorderlicht café, multiple coffee- and restaurant places such as Pilek established themselves. Then, also Hilton built a 4-star hotel on NDSM, whilst the crown of the gentrification process was Faralda, a luxurious hotel of three rooms positioned high in the old NDSM crane. One night in the room with the amazing view over the terrain and the city of Amsterdam costs nowadays 700 euro. (image 17)

In the meantime, the foundation Kinetic North did not feel safe. In 2007 they learned that the local city district government Amsterdam Noord wanted to sell the NDSM hangar to the developer De Principaal. By that time, they had just completed the project after seven years of investing their own money, their own time and "kinetic" energy. And now, all this would be

just sold out. Protests were raised against this injustice. In the hangar hung a protest banner: “Principaal is stealing our capital!” (image 18) Due to the financial crisis, the transaction between the city district municipality and De Principaal did not take place, allowing the foundation Kinetic North sufficient time to develop a strategy to buy the hangar themselves, which occurred in 2014.

Yet, not everything was well. There are tensions between the NDSM-community and the board of the foundation Kinetic North, now partly composed out of external people as to “avoid conflicts of interest.” First the skate park was pushed out of the hangar, then the board moved dance events inside the hangar instead of keeping them outside. Finally, the board decided in 2015 to end the contracts with the tenants as per 2017. According to the *broedplaatsen* policy, contracts cannot be prolonged beyond the agreed time span, which in this case were set at 10 years from 2007 till 2017. The NDSM-community got to work again on a new document *Moving Forward Together at the NDSM* demanding an exemption from the temporal *broedplaatsen* agreements and to be given influence over who will be in the board. (De Klerk, 2018: 157-169)

In the meanwhile, the shadowy sides of successful gentrification started to manifest in the space of the Kunststad. In 2014 Lucy McMackin performed an examination – though on-site observation and via interviews – on the extent to which the NDSM wharfs primary creative culture has been affected due to the mass regeneration of the area. She noticed clear signs of increased privatization and enmity towards visitors in the Kunststad: the private waste bins, signs asking you to refrain from walking near certain units, covering up of graffiti. McMackin concluded that the type of users in the Kunststad was changing. Some of the interviewed people, like Michael – the co-initiator of the skate park, that at that point in time was at odds with the board of Kinetic North – confirmed this: “In fact the most promising artists are long gone.” (McMackin, 2014: 11) McMackin also notices that the people from the companies who arrived in the area after the gentrification set in – to the West of the NDSM hangar – do not identify with the countercultural roots at all: “comments included ‘not something we are in to,’ ‘THIS is the nice side’ and ‘I would never go to the other end, except to go on the boat.’” (McMackin, 2014: 17)

### **The Difference Between *Broedplaatsen* and *Vrijplaatsen***

As we can read on the official site of the municipality of Amsterdam, there are 68 *broedplaatsen* – cultural incubators – in the municipality of Amsterdam (Gemeente Amsterdam, dd. October 3, 2019). The same site reports also on the existence of 14 *vrijplaatsen*

– free-places – actual old-school squats. Eva De Klerk quoted the following distinction between *broedplaatsen* and *vrijplaatsen* from the special issue of AGORA on *vrijplaatsen* in her 2010-rapport for the city district West:

*‘Cultural incubators or free-places. It seems to be a huge difference. A cultural incubator is a breeding machine of artists and other bohemians, controlled by the municipality, designed to promote the future urban economy. A free-place, on the other hand, is a location acquired cheaply by left-wing creative people in the heart of the city where they do everything that God (the municipality) has forbidden.’* (De Klerk, 2010, 11)

Maryse Halffman sketches the difference between *broedplaatsen* and *vrijplaatsen* as follows: *broedplaatsen* are not usually *vrijplaatsen*, but *vrijplaatsen* are often *broedplaatsen*. The main difference between a *broedplaats* and *vrijplaats* is that in a *broedplaats* – cultural incubator – there is no combination of living and working. The main function is artists’ ateliers without much of a public sphere – the idea of a public community center is absent. A *broedplaats* is legalized. A *broedplaats* is partly in the hands of municipality or a real estate agent that works together with a group that inhabits or runs it. A *broedplaats* is often just about culture, not so much about political or social ideas. A *broedplaats* is not necessary a tight collective. The ateliers and workshops that reside there have at least a minimal commercial profile.

*Vrijplaatsen* are a result of illegal squats. *Vrijplaatsen* are uniting: individual living spaces with working places and with a public sphere (like bar/cafe/lecture rooms). *Vrijplaatsen* are organized and managed by an autonomous collective that works together. *Vrijplaatsen* are often driven by individuals with alternative political and cultural ideologies. *Vrijplaatsen* are not driven by commercial pursuit and are for low incomes. *Vrijplaatsen* are free to experiment. *Vrijplaatsen* are outside of the law. The municipality does not have much power there since they do not exert influence though subsidies. (Halffman, 2010)

It is quite peculiar of these 14 *vrijplaatsen* to exist at all. On October 1, 2010, squatting became a criminal act for the Dutch law and is punishable by one year of detention in prison and a fine of a third grade. In case of violence during eviction, there is two years of detention in prison and a fine of fourth grade. But, the squatters still enjoy some protection from the *huisrecht* as part of the fundamental human laws, present both in Dutch constitutional law



**Image 17.** The squatted trams, the old crane turned into hotel Faralda, and in the back the NDSM hangar, 2018. Photo: Jeandonné Schijlen.



**Image 18.** The protests of the container community in the NDSM hangar against selling of the property to the real estate developer De Principaal, 2007 © Photo: Ronald Tilman (De Klerk, 2018: 142-143).

article no.12 and the European law article no.8. If they manage to create a home fast, the *huisrecht* is on their side and eviction needs to be fought in court.

The Amsterdam squatter scene – both the new and the older, already legalized places – list all their activities as usual on the global squat radar (<https://radar.squat.net>), offering an alternative experience of the city, almost for free (Ksiazek, 2014). Many activities of the squats are also listed on the official culture and music-venues sites of the municipality of Amsterdam (<https://amsterdamplanner.nl>).

### **Concluding: Amsterdam's Countercultural Image**

*'The word 'image' had become the Provo's malediction applied to monuments and symbols of power they hated'<sup>22</sup>*  
(Smart, 2012)

When we compare Amsterdam's counter-cultural hot spots now and then – their attitudes, ideals and community dynamics – we see a shift. Provo happenings and the first squats in the 1970s and 1980s created semi-legal, content-driven, community-based places. Cultural incubators are institutionalized, economy-driven places, indulging in the DIY image of improvised scrap wood with a pinch of graffiti. The thing that remains unchanged, for both, is the exploitation of the economically vulnerable non-capitalists who work hard – and often for free – while creating places for their community. Yet, they do not own those places and therefore have no rights. In cultural incubators – like in the old-school occupied buildings – artists function as the avant-garde for gentrification of existing structures. The contracts for the cultural incubators are two, sometimes five, or at most ten years. As soon as the neighborhood is upgraded and the area becomes a hotspot – and the place starts to attract a more middle-class clientele – the artists, students and anti-squatters can no longer afford their cultural incubators and have to leave.

Roel Griffioen, one of the fierce critics of the cultural incubators in terms of human freedom and rights, says that soft city development is not different from hard city development. The only difference is that the soft city development is being used to smooth out the transition from "a problem area" to "an ideal Brave New World place". According to Griffioen, the creative class is the gel in this smoothing process. The legal renters with full rights are gone and the creative class accept temporary contracts with a minimum of rights, just because they fall for the possibility of creating their own cultural incubator, the opportunity of creating social

projects or art projects or getting a homestead – living somewhere for a low price for a while. Griffioen is angry that in some cultural incubators one day a week of obligatory community work is included in the rental contract. He calls it a new kind of slavery (Griffioen, 2017: 57-78).

If we might learn something from the empowered former communities of the past who managed to save the community centers like Vrankrijk, Pakhuis Wilhelmina, Het Fort van Sjakoo, or NDSM, there seems to be no other way out of the miserable situation than to take a loan, become an owner and put (at least modest) prices on all that you offer, so that you can pay for your credit and your rights. It is also important not to take any subsidies. Eva de Klerk recalls Carolien Feldbrugge, who could not have put it more clearly:

*'Yeah, right. By getting people to squat properties there, the city is trying to get that land cheap and then once the development starts we'll get kicked out? No, thanks! I don't think you can do that as a city. People spend the best years of their lives on such a project and make it successful. And then are told: 'it was always meant to be temporary and now it's the big boys' turn. And no, you won't be compensated.' That means you are totally finished, because the investments everyone made have been a waste of money. It is an important reason to own the property out right. And unsubsidized. 'They brought all kinds of subsidies we could use to our attention. But what if that subsidy stops? It's a tool politicians use to exert influence, one we prefer to do without. It has to be possible to run a building without subsidy and so that's what we did'.*' (De Klerk, 2018, 53)

*Broedplaatsen* – the new cool places of Amsterdam – are part of the official city politics now and attract tourists with their countercultural image. Yet, in fact, they are part of the global network of "alternative places" that are a commodity of capitalist production. What a paradox that the squatter spaces from the 1960s and the 1970s have inspired a new wave of the *trivialization* and *homogenization* criticized by Guy Debord in 1967 (Debord, 1967: 120), but now with themselves as role models. The new *broedplaatsen* – analogous to the ruins described by Tim Edensor when he quotes Kathleen Stewart – are not “a picture-perfect re-enactment” of the 1960s countercultures, but “an allegorical representation of the remembered loss” of those cultures. (Edensor, 2005: 140)

On a more positive note, within the context of the new governmental policies, Constant's vision of the New Babylon – that until then was lingering in the Dutch



countercultural circuits for so long as a concept crystallizing only in models and photographic reproductions – finally found its way to a real architectural manifestation in the form of *Kunststad* in the NDSM hangar. Of course, exactly this part of the project was financed by the users from the NDSM-community themselves, but still, it was framed by the top-down renovated hangar and a changing political climate. The stories of outlaws becoming politicians, countercultural happenings becoming instruments of the police and theater groups, white bicycles inspiring city bikes, and squats transforming into cultural incubators, are stories about the shift from radical – semi-legal or criminal(ized) – activism to an established system of regulations that negotiate between social ideals and economic feasibility. Stewart Brand's conflation of outlaws and governors from 1970 is now more fact than ever. Squatters became business(wo)men and real estate developers. Governors want to be inspired and all societal groups work together. It is the end of dualisms and a time of a new integration. So, let's just enjoy pop-up restaurants, movie evenings with beer from the micro-breweries, urban gardens with long-forgotten vegetables, and fair-trade coffee places with furniture from scrap wood. Let us all earn so much money that we can effortlessly pay 700 euro per night for sleeping in the crane container, that is floating in the air, overlooking Amsterdam. Having chosen that, we must let go the utopia of non-capitalist social paradise for good, and decisively embrace being part of another system of values.

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<sup>1</sup> The name *Lieverdje* was used by Henri Knap for the first time in 1947 in the section "Amsterdam's Diary" in the Dutch newspaper *Het Parool*. There Knap told the story of a small boy of about ten years old who had rescued a dog from drowning in Amsterdam's canal. After this first story more *Lieverdje*-stories followed. *Het Lieverdje* symbolized the street boys in Amsterdam, who, while always looking for some trouble, were in fact 'good-at-heart'. The Activities Committee in Amsterdam, who also set up the now legendary, yearly arrival of St. Nicolaus on the 5<sup>th</sup> of December, took the initiative to commission the sculptor Carel Kneulman for a statue of *Het Lieverdje* as the archetypical street boy. The plaster model was unveiled on May 2, 1959 by Jan and Nel Voortman. It was gone after a few days. Henri Knap agreed then in a conversation with the organizer of festivities and children's games that a bronze statue was to be made instead. He approached a Rotary who was working for cigarette manufacturer Crescent from Eindhoven and found the person willing to finance the project. On September 10, 1960, the wife of Mayor Van Hall unveiled the statue *Het Lieverdje*.

<sup>2</sup> Guy Débord was skeptical towards the activities of the Provo movement (Smart, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> *Provo* nr. 4 was a special on Constant (28 October 1965: 2-11) and Constant's article "Nieuw Urbanisme" was published in *Provo* nr.9 (12 May 1966: 2-6).

<sup>4</sup> Roel van Duyn, Rob Stolk, Luud Schimmelpenninck, and Hans Metz were arrested after the appearance of the first issue of the *Provo* magazine.

<sup>5</sup> On March 10, 1966 Provos protested against the marriage of Queen Beatrix to Claus von Amsberg – who used to serve the Hitler Jugend and Waffen SS during WWII - by shouting 'Claus Raus' and 'Claus, give me my bike back', and by firing a smoke bomb, purposefully provoking police interventions. On March 19, 1966 the Provos made a photo exhibition about their protests from March 10, after which riots have broken out and police intervened once again. A day later, on March 20, Provos protested again, now against the police interventions at the exhibition. They again gathered around the statue *Het Lieverdje*, played drums, spread protest-pamphlets, put an Orange scarf – the color orange being the symbol of the Dutch Royal Family – on the statue, and set it on fire. The day-to-day diary of all doings of the Provo movement are meticulously documented by Richard Kempton in his *The Provos. Amsterdam's Anarchist Revolt* from 2003.

<sup>6</sup> After his wedding to Queen Beatrix, Prince Claus (1926-2002) worked hard to win over the trust and sympathy of the Dutch population. He did so through his engagement in the help for the Third World and his various, almost Provo-performances. Legendary is his "Declaration of the Tie" that he performed after presenting the annual Prince Claus Award to three African Fashion Designers on December 9, 1998. Claus told "workers of all nations to unite and cast away the new shackles they have voluntarily cast upon themselves." With the shackles he meant the necktie, calling it "that snake around my neck", after which he encouraged everybody to "venture into the open collar paradise." He then removed his own tie and threw it on the floor. The men in the room later followed his example by throwing away their ties.

<sup>7</sup> During the summer of 1965 police was guarding *Het Lieverdje* "like", in Stolk's words, "it was made out of diamonds and Dr. No or James Bond wanted to steal it" and whoever tried to stage there anything, was arrested. At the end of the summer Provo's political activity shifted to another statute, that of Johannes Benedictus Van Heutsz – the "Pacifier of Aceh". The Provos revealed him as a brutal oppressor and image of Dutch colonialism laying parallels with the Vietnam War. The Provo group that formed there was bigger and slightly different in its composition than the initial Provos from under *Het Lieverdje* (Smart, 2012). At the end of 1966 it became quieter around *Het Lieverdje*, although the statue was still regularly dressed up in a festive way, covered and even once kidnapped. On 20 November 2012, the statue and the plinth were driven over by a reversing truck. The statue was thereby heavily damaged. The image was repaired and replaced on Friday December 21, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> The use of the word "White" in order to signify something good or better in those years is peculiar considering the then active Civil Rights Movement in the United States and the fact that the Provo movement was explicitly against racism.

<sup>9</sup> The technical and theoretical justification of the White Bicycle Plan was earlier given by Luud Schimmelpenninck in *Provo* No. 2 (August 17, 1965): "We propose that the municipality buys 20,000 white bicycles a year (costs one million) to expand public transport, because these White Bikes should belong to everyone and nobody. Within a few years, the traffic problem in the center of the city would have been resolved in this way. Semi-public transport by means of taxis within the city will have to be provided with electrified engines with a maximum of 40 km."

<sup>10</sup> The Amsterdam's squat scene still does 'extreme things with bikes'. For example, the Dupa Squat at Sloterkade 134 was home to Amsterdam's Tall Bike Community. According to the 10th edition of Joe Pauker's alternative city guide to Amsterdam *Get Lost!*: "These custom-made, super-tall bikes are designed and created here for a variety of purposes, among them, jousting tournaments. That's right, jousting! The website has pics and info about other events, too, including the Bike Wars demolition derby where, with some heavy tunes playing in the background, participants ride around and smash the crap out of each other bikes until only one is still ride-able." (Pauker, 2006, 19)

<sup>11</sup> Before Provo's "White Dwellings Plan" in 1966, the first big scale occupation actions in Amsterdam were organized by students in Kattenburg in 1964, after the appearance of an article titled "Save a building" in the student magazine *Propria Cures*. The article reported about the clearing of the Kattenburg district. The houses were "declared uninhabitable", but a reporter from the magazine saw at the time how the houses that had just been abandoned by the original inhabitants were intentionally made uninhabitable by a team of municipal workers. He called this "legal vandalism" and stated that hundreds of students could instead have lived in Kattenburg for years to come. He called on students to take part in the *onverklaarbaar bewoond pandverbeuren* (the inexplicable loss of a habitable house). (Duivenvoorden, 2000)

<sup>12</sup> By 1970 Woningbureau de Kraker, Woningburo de Koevoet and de Communemerged into one, called Aktie '70 (Action '70). For comprehensive overviews of the squatting scene in Amsterdam see for example: Mamadouh, 1992; Duivenvoorden, 2000; Owens, 2009; Kadir, 2014; Kadir, 2016.

<sup>13</sup> The manuals for breaking in are still being updated and published, despite the prohibition of squatting from October 1, 2010.

<sup>14</sup> According to the (incomplete) data of Breek & De Graad from 2001, around 50 of the 92 squatter spaces from before 1985 still exist (Braak & De Graad, 2001, 135-139).

<sup>15</sup> In the period preceding the "1980-1984 golden years of squatting," that is, between 1975 and 1979 there was 50,000m<sup>2</sup> of new squatter space, while there were no evictions. In the period after the "golden years," between 1985-1989, there was 37,000m<sup>2</sup> new squatter space against 21,000m<sup>2</sup> evicted squatter space. (Breek & De Grad, 2001,47-49)

<sup>16</sup> "Grootveld, who had explained the use of blackface in his costumes as identifying himself as one of the *Zwarte Piet* (Black Pete) characters who appear in Dutch cultural mythology as the helpers and harbingers of Sinterklaas (Father Christmas/Santa Claus), encouraged his fans to paint walls around Amsterdam with slogans "Klaas komt," playing on the name Claus and the Dutch equivalent of "Santa is coming." In a move that was both playfully menacing and perhaps gently self-mocking, the royal wedding was transformed into the big event the youth were eagerly anticipating with Claus as Santa Claus who would bring this revolutionary Christmas or, as the Provos whispered it, "Klaas War." (Smart, 2012)

<sup>17</sup> The NDSM - Nederlandse Dok and Scheepsbouw Maatschappij, meaning The Dutch Dock and Ship Yard Building Cooperation, was famous for the production of the first sea ship on diesel engine in 1910, for being the biggest ship yard in the world in 1937 and for fabrication of the fastest passenger ship in 1939 and for the biggest oil tanker that would be built in the Netherlands in 1958.

<sup>18</sup> Between 1975 and 2008, the theater group Dogtroep, in differing configurations and under leaderships, made more than 250 of such site-sensitive and interdisciplinary multi-media shows and projects. The group was founded in 1975 by Warner van Wely and Paul de Leeuw out of protest against the inaccessibility of the art forms at that time. Van Wely and De Leeuw are inspired by British theater groups such as *Phantom Captain*, *Welfare State* and *John Bull Puncture Repair Kit*. The interdisciplinary work of *Dogtroep* is situation-oriented and situation-inspired. The place and the architecture of the performance often inspires the storyline, the plot, the action and the aesthetics of the show. It is often a place that is not designed as a theatre. It can be a street, a festival ground, youth centers, corridors, stairways, cafés, squares, facades and window shops. The public is part of the spectacle and no fixed place is imposed upon the public. The aesthetics of the scenery and the costumes are often characterized by raw and rough materials, inventive constructions, grotesque and colorful figures, percussion music and music produced by copper-instruments, and a lot of water and fire in the performances. All people involved in the show, regardless of their own specialization, work together on everything. Everybody is autonomous, the director points out the starting points, takes final decisions and integrates the different elements. During the shows, the actors, the musicians and the technicians are all part of the spectacle and the action focus switches between the groups. The players are also free to improvise in certain moments at their own liking.

<sup>19</sup> In 1996 a 29-min film was made about the 1994 performance *Noordwesterwals* in the NDSM-area. The movie was directed by Threes Schreurs and Boris P. Conen.

<sup>20</sup> The name *Kinetisch North* was ideated by Alice Roegholt, who runs the museum 't Schip in Amsterdam that is in and about the architecture of the Amsterdam School. 'Kinetisch' refers to the physics formula  $U(\text{tot}) = U(\text{pot}) + U(\text{kin})$ , added kinetic energy plus potential energy sum up to total energy. (De Klerk, 2018,77)

<sup>21</sup> Hito Steyerl shed in 2010 a different light on the "creative class" than Florida. Steyerl writes that it is the anarchic spirit of the creative class, the spirit that does not want to be forming any kind of class - actually the very core of the identity of the group - is the thing that is keeping it in shambles: "Free labor and rampant exploitation are the invisible dark matter that keeps the cultural sector going. (...) Contemporary art's workforce consists largely of people who, despite working constantly, do not correspond to any traditional image of labor. They stubbornly resist settling into any entity recognizable enough to be identified as a class. While the easy way out would be to classify this constituency as multitude or crowd, it might be less romantic to ask whether they are not global lump-freelancers, de-territorialized and ideologically free-floating: a reserve army of imagination communicating via Google Translate" (Steyerl, 2010). In 2017 also Richard Florida came to disillusioned realizations in his "The New Urban Crisis: How Our Cities Are Increasing Inequality, Deepening Segregation, and Failing the Middle Class - and What We Can Do About It."

<sup>22</sup> As Alan Smart describes: "Bizarrely, it was forbidden to write or speak in public the word "image," which had become the Provo's malediction applied to monuments and symbols of power they hated. At least one person, Hans Tuynman, was convicted and jailed for it when he staged a performance that involved whispering "image" to spectators." (Smart, 2012)