Humour and Irony in Dutch Post-war Fiction Film

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NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1 Soldaat van Oranje was not included because the jury had decided that no more than one title of a director could be mentioned. In the case of Verhoeven, Turks fruit was already selected.

2 In his Docupedia.nl, published as a Ketelhuis-cahier, Hans Beerekamp discusses ten fundamental types of documentary in Dutch cinema, like the rhetorical documentary, the visual essay, abstract expressionism, found footage, the ‘voice of God,’ and so on. In addition to this, the work by film historian Bert Hogenkamp has to be singled out for its thoroughness. In three volumes on the Dutch documentary film as a ‘genre,’ he covered the years between 1920-1990.

3 Henk van der Linden made many films between the years 1944 and 1985, based upon literary characters popular with young people, like Dik Trom and Pietje Bell as well as the comic strip heroes Billy Turf and the couple Sjors and Sjimmie. Karst van der Meulen made a number of fine family pictures in the 1970s and 1980s, like Peter en de vliegende autobus [Peter and the Flying Autobus] (1976), Martijn en de magiër [Martijn and the Magician] (1979), and Thomas en Senior op het spoor van Brute Berend [Thomas and Senior on the Track of Brutal Berend] (1985).

4 In particular, Spijt! (Dave Schram, 2013) has been hugely successful, winning, in addition to a great number of prizes, the European Film Young Audience Award. See Schmidt and Veenendaal for a useful overview of Dutch youth and family films.

5 As a fan of cartoonist Gummbah I yield to the temptation to quote his caption at an unremarkable photo of a man and woman sitting at a dinner table: ‘After an hour the WHORE!!-meter still shows a total zero, remarkable for a Dutch film.’ [Na een uur staat ‘HOERRR!!!-teller nog altijd stijf op nul, opmerkelijk voor een Nederlandse film.’] (de Volkskrant, 23 December 2013).
Ivo Smits and Katarzyna Cwiertka, two professors in Japanese Studies from Leiden University, edited a volume on the culture of cuteness in Japan, entitled *Hello Kitty & Gothic Lolita’s*.

Another journalistic initiative worth mentioning is a publication in English on experimental film in the Netherlands, edited by Anna Abrahams et al., but as the subject already suggests, it is not about narrative cinema. It contains a few essays and interviews with 16 filmmakers.

‘Mirror of Holland’ was not only the name of a documentary short made by Haanstra in 1950, but it was also the theme of one of the main programmes of the Netherlands Film Festival for its 30th anniversary in 2010.

The NFF has a system to check whether a film qualifies as a Dutch film. Out of the 30 possible points, a film has to score at least 14. The film is granted 4 points if the director has Dutch nationality or has been living and working in the Netherlands for at least two years; also 4 points for the main producer; 2 points if the scriptwriter meets this condition; 2 points if Dutch is the main language of the film; 1 point for the director of photography, 1 for the musical composer, 1 for the editor, etc.

In a personal communication, Hans Beerekamp suggested that genre films might also give hints of national preoccupations. This goes beyond the obvious fact that gangster films, to name one genre, like *Lek* [Leak] (Jean van de Velde, 2000), *De dominee* [The Preacher] (Gerrard Verhage, 2004), *Nachtrit* [Night Run] (Dana Nechushtan, 2008) and *De Heineken Ontvoering* [The Heineken Kidnapping] (Maarten Treurniet, 2011) are inspired by actual persons or events from the Netherlands. The point for Beerekamp is rather that these Dutch gangster films seem unaffected by (international) conventions of the genre. When *Lek* was once shown to film critics from Thailand, they did not really get that the revelation about a policeman acting as an informer for the mob was presented as a shocking dénouement. For them, as was already suggested by a numerous earlier pictures, the corruption of the police force is a given condition, not the surprising twist in a gangster movie.

*Allemaal film* was made by IDTV Docs, and broadcast by the AVRO in 2007.

Moreover, referring to the films by both Van Warmerdam and Jos Stelling, Bas Agterberg remarks that the acting style in their films is inspired by *commedia dell’arte* rather than naturalistic theatre (127).

Henk’s actions bear a great resemblance to the attempts by the tramp to lose a foundling in *The Kid* (Charles Chaplin, 1921).

Henk has taken an old man out of the park who acts as a kind of substitute grandfather.

Jewish humour, says Stephen Pollard, is usually self-depreciating and focuses upon one’s own foibles, like in the cases of Woody Allen and Jerry Seinfeld, who are ‘at times neurotic, self-obsessed, tight, obsessive and always eccentric.’

17 **De Wisselwachter** was only showing for a few weeks in Amsterdam and about three years in Rome, as Stelling related during an interview, broadcast on the website cinema.nl, 22 August 2005.

18 Noteworthy is Van der Oest’s debut feature **De nieuwe moeder** [The New Mother] (1996) which is as melancholic as witty. Juris from Riga travels with his son, Elvis, who has stopped talking since his mother’s death, to Holland in order to locate a female pen pal from the past. In voice-over we hear excerpts from the letters they wrote to each other between the early 1960s and 1972. To illustrate that the humour in the film is relatively deadpan, let me quote one scene. On his way, Juris has to find some place to eat. Outside one restaurant he sees a sign that reads ‘All dishes, 12.50 guilders,’ so he orders ‘All the dishes at once.’ The waiter names some of the dishes (Fried Rice Special, Russian-style Eggs, and so on), but Juris asks, ‘Is that all the dishes you have?’ The waiter says, ‘Is that not enough?’ and he brings them many more plates of food. Another customer remarks that times have changed. ‘In the past Eastern Europeans used to get one order of toast for two to share, and now they are eating meals that cost 150 guilders, at least.’ Then Juris realizes what he has inadvertently done, and that he needs to figure out how to leave the restaurant without paying.

19 To warn against the underestimation of play, Huizinga states that play is ‘a given magnitude, existing before culture existed itself’ (4) and that it ‘becomes the accompaniment, the complement, in fact an integral part of life in general’ (8). He adds to this that we may move in play ‘below the level of the serious, as the child does; but we can also move above it – in the realm of the beautiful and the sacred’ (19).

20 I already mentioned in the preface that if a quote is in italics, it means that the characters actually use English words, so then the quote is literal. If not in italics, it is a translation, either by me or from a subtitled version.

21 In her explanation of the key principles of ‘romantic irony,’ Lilian Furst uses this image of the clown walking the tightrope, ‘poised dangerously between explicitness and impenetrability’ (14).

22 They discuss, as Billig asserts, anecdotes and bon mots, but not jokes qua jokes. Although Joe Miller’s *Jests, or The Wits Vade-Mecum* (1739), containing many jokes about farting and copulation, was popular, the philosophers neglected the study completely (Billig, 67).

23 Of upper-class descent himself, the Earl of Shaftesbury made a distinction between well-bred and ill-bred forms of ridicule. Or, as George Campbell claimed in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1856), banter, or coarse talk/humour, is what others do, but ‘we’ do raillery, ‘a finer form of ridicule’ (qtd. in Billig, 48).
24 The idea of an ‘innocent joke’ as such seems to belie Freud’s ‘sweeping claim that there were no such things as innocent dreams or innocent lapses of memory’ (Billig, 153).

25 Of course, an innocent pun can function tendentiously in context, because the speaker’s apparently witty remark might possess some ulterior, even hidden purposes (Billig, 157).

26 In the words of Martin Sommer: ‘[E]en keurslijf aan voorgeschreven linkse standpunten.’

27 However, on reflection, there is a common denominator between De stilte rond Christine M. and Flodder. In Gorris’ film, Nelly Frijda plays the role of An, one of the suspects, whereas the part of Ma Flodder in Maas’ comedy will turn her into a national celebrity.

28 Rademakers’ De dans van de reiger is a borderline case, which I decided not to include in the end. The well-known author Hugo Claus had written the script, based upon one of his theatre plays, which he had subtitled ‘a macabre comedy in two parts.’ Although the comic aspects are not lost entirely, Rademakers had in mind to make a film with a certain international allure. Its three main actors were renowned from international productions, by among others, François Truffaut, Ingmar Bergman, and Eric Rohmer, and cameraman Sacha Vierny had shot several Alain Resnais’ films. De dans van de reiger can bear some comparison to Resnais’ ‘art’ film L’Année dernière a Marienbad [LAST YEAR IN MARIENBAD] (1961), and because of its obvious artistic ambitions, it falls outside the scope of this study. Its baroque absurdity makes De dans van de reiger too much unlike other Dutch movies and, except for the Resnais’ comparison, it rather recalls the extravaganza of some of the films by Federico Fellini. Together with Weisz’ Het gangstermeisje, also influenced by Fellini, De dans van de reiger may be a good starting point for another book on Dutch cinema, as a more ‘serious’ sequel to this one.

CHAPTER 1

1 The Polish-American film producer Samuel Goldwyn is supposed to have made similar statements: ‘If you’ve got a message, send a telegram’ and ‘Pictures are entertainment, messages should be delivered by Western Union.’

2 See the Glossary of Comedy Terms by Patrick Bromley, http://comedians.about.com/od/glossary/g/bluehumor.htm.

3 Another example of popular comedians exploiting sexual innuendo is the well-known couple Johnny & Rijk (Johnny Kraaykamp and Rijk de Gooyer), who played the main parts in Ko Koedijk’s Geen paniek [No Panic] (1973). In this film, the ex-convict Johnny is looking for clothing suitable for his job as a handyman. The
effeminate salesman asks him to visualize his kind of work so he can properly advise him. Describing his activities as a plumber who visits a woman with a ‘blockage,’ John shows that he first goes down on his knees ‘to get at her sink.’ Subsequently, he lies on his back in the clothing store, meanwhile making pulling gestures, because of ‘all the hairs and the dirt’ and finally, he says he gets mud all over himself. Another scene in GEEN PANIEK is at least as suggestive. Tante Toetje, who runs a brothel, has a telephone conversation with the American businessman Bill Silskstocking, a role played by Eddie Constantine, an actor who by that time had also worked with Jean-Luc Godard in ALPHAVILLE (1965) and Rainer Werner Fassbinder in WARNUNG VOR EINER HEILIGEN NUTTE [Beware of A HOLY WHORE] (1971). Bill has told Toetje that he is stuck in the Okura hotel and her reply, which is the more hilarious, because of her poor English: ‘What do you mean, you cannot cum? You always cum when you are in Amsterdam; you are one of the quickest cummers I know überhaupt.’

4 This joke with De Gier and his cat is repeated in the film’s successor, De RATTLERAT [THE RATTLERAT] (1987).

5 Similarly, WAT ZIEN IK?! features the utterly naive character Bob, who is from a bourgeois background. He is getting married to the ex-prostitute Nel, but he is kept unaware of her former occupation and hence does not know that the wedding party is attended by her ex-colleagues.

6 The choice for Buñuel as a figure of comparison is deliberate, for he made LE JOURNAL D’UNE FEMME DE CHAMBRE [DIARY OF A CHAMBERMAID] (1964).

7 Of all the clients, the ‘chambermaid’ will be the only one who has a second scene, at the very end of the film. Greet has just waved goodbye to Nel, the bride, and her groom and all the wedding guests, but her own place has been turned into a total mess. At that moment the bell rings and the guy climbs the stairs, asking her whether his presence is inconvenient. She is about to sigh, but when he sees the ‘fabulous disorder’ he is delighted with joy, presuming that she has done this for him. ‘Madame, am I permitted to clean up all of this?’ whereupon her face changes expression. She replies: ‘All of it’ and the joyful music sets in again. The movie ends with a ‘What are I seeing?! Dust. Dirty, filthy girl.’

8 Apparently the scriptwriter has seen IRMA LA DOUCE (Billy Wilder, 1963), in which police agent Nestor gets extremely jealous at the impotent Lord X, forgetting that he had created the type himself.

9 The point of departure for SCHATJES! was more or less autobiographical, as Van Hemert admitted (56). In his confessional book De Bruut, he is sarcastic about practically anyone in the film industry, including his father, Willy van Hemert. When watching his father approach his actors in his usual passionate manner, the son could only think that he would do it differently (17). His father had only wanted to pay for his study at the Film Academy if he were to become a television cameraman, but pig-headed as the son was, he chose scriptwriting instead (18).
Willy van Hemert’s most successful series were De kleine waarheid [Little white lie] (1970-1972), Bartje (1972-1973) and Dagboek van een herdershond [Diary of a shepherd dog] (1978-1980). He made one film only, but that happened to be the very first Dutch feature in colour, Jenny (1958), which is mentioned in chapter 4.

The words ‘the army arrives’ have to be put in perspective. Director Ruud van Hemert would have liked to have a large number of troops on the set, but due to a restricted budget, he only had a handful of soldiers in a jeep. That is filmmaking in the Netherlands, Van Hemert complained. You can only dream of the film you would have liked to make.

Some of the slasher milestones are Halloween (John Carpenter, 1978) and its many sequels, or the ‘high slasher,’ The Silence of the Lambs (Jonathan Demme, 1991); the manifestation of the devil within a female body can be seen as a reaction to the doubts that men feel about their religion, like Father Karras in The Exorcist (William Friedkin, 1973).

The plot of Flodder is reminiscent of the popular American sitcom The Beverly Hillbillies, broadcast between 1962 and 1972, about a backwoods family which goes from rags to riches when they are transplanted to the affluent Beverly Hills, after the discovery of oil on their land.

The need for booze is underscored by the fact that the dog is called ‘Whisky.’

This principle can also cover the humour of the aforementioned André van Duin, known for his madcap facial expressions, which he also used for his comic character, an ape called Jaap Aap.

In films like Animal House (John Landis, 1978), Porky’s and American Pie, the male adolescents do not aim to establish a romantic relationship but to get bodily satisfaction. The biggest fear for the high-school boys in American Pie is that they would enter college as virgins (Desser, 59).

Carroll has a problem with this amoral version of humour, and his criticism really holds water. The amoralist overlooks any notion of context, and disregards who is telling the joke and for what reason. The joke about a financially savvy rabbi told by one Jew to another Jew is not the same joke as when it is recited by a skinhead ‘with transparent malice’ (89).

Carroll makes this remark about the ‘nearly Neanderthal’ in reference to Al Bundy from the American sitcom Married with Children that aired for 11 seasons, from 1987 to 1997, and to Homer Simpson from The Simpsons, an American adult animated sitcom since 1989.

Some of the other cameo appearances are by people who exert a specific nostalgic fascination. Paul Elstak was a DJ producer whose claim to fame were the happy hardcore hits in the mid-1990s. There is a very brief appearance of the actor Antonie Kamerling in his very last role, but he is dressed as ‘Peter Kelder,’ the character he played in more than 600 episodes of the long-lasting soap Goede
Tijden, slechte tijden in the years 1990 to 1993 as well as a brief comeback in 1995.

Filmpje! should be vulgar, but, for commercial reasons, not too vulgar, so that it could still be rated for 12 years old and up. A test audience could help the makers to find a balance. De Leeuw, who played the double role of both Annie and Bob, had built himself a reputation on national television of behaving like the rascal who likes to play some ding dong ditch. He liked to shock the audience, but modestly, for the sympathy of the public should not be lost. The fame of the characters apparently sufficed as paramount compensation for the absence of a solid story, since the film fared quite well at the box office.

After Annie and Bob have been in court to settle for a divorce, she gives him two plane tickets in the hope that he will go with her, but he chooses the daughter of a gangster boss. This criminal has plans to kill Bob, for he is not his preferred son-in-law. Meanwhile, a lobster, containing cocaine, lands accidently on Annie’s head and she will be pursued by a gangster. Annie and Bob will end up at the very same sunny island.

A pun: ‘de rookworst van Oss’ sounds a bit like ‘De tovenaar van Oz’ (the Wizard of Oz).

Kuipers’ idea is confirmed by writer Arnon Grunberg who in his daily column on the front page of de Volkskrant on 6 March 2015 writes that class is the big taboo in the Netherlands. If one wants to make Holland a less segregated country, Grunberg argues, citizens have to learn how to interact with people from another class. That is to say, one has to get used to the idea that the cultural other – the Antillian, the Muslim – is not necessarily on a lower rung of the social ladder.

CHAPTER 2

Terstall had already made a comedy about a right-wing politician in the mid-1990s, in a decade preceding the rise of Pim Fortuyn. His WALHALLA was not successful, however.

This privileging of the right-wing characters has an analogy with the gangster from the early 1930s, like Little Caesar (Mervyn LeRoy, 1931), Public Enemy (William Wellman, 1931) and Scarface (Howard Hawks, 1932). Even though the criminal had to die a violent death to discourage his behaviour, it was his performance which made the films so hugely enjoyable, since the upright characters were usually quite boring.

The household at Rowanda’s place is noisy, with boys playing the PlayStation; they eat in front of the television set, even when they have guests; and their meals do not have a particular name, but are simply called ‘rice with chicken and vegetables.’ Moreover, at night clubs all black women move their body in a sexy way
and it takes little effort to persuade them to engage in a quick sexual encounter. Black men are portrayed as lustful, figuring out the best strategies to have the most female lovers simultaneously. Similarly, the white, upper-class culture of the ‘Old South’ is also portrayed in a stereotypical fashion, which to some extent parallels the banal depiction of De Bijlmer. Since all the scenes in the Old South are shown from the scornful perspective of David, the strict etiquette comes across as stiffening and silly. If he does not give in to the wishes of his parents, his father is so angry that he expels him from his home. When he takes his parents to De Bijlmer to meet with Rowanda’s family, his father acts clumsily and later complains hypocritically about not being served the expensive drinks he brought with him.

4 Kaaskop (literally: ‘cheese head’) a derisive word for Caucasian Dutch people.

5 Being bothered about time is not in the way of the Moroccans, which is also the climax of the film. Abus has a job as a train conductor, but since he was dozing off as he was having a lunch break, he and his friends miss their train.

6 George Sluizer’s psychological thriller SPOORLOOS (1988), one of the scariest movies ever made according to Stanley Kubrick, has near the end elements of the road movie, when the Frenchman who had kidnapped Saskia a couple of years before, drives her boyfriend Rex from the Netherlands to France to reveal to him what he, Raymond, had done to her.

7 The opening film of NFF 2015 was J. KESSELS (Erik de Bruyn, 2015), a road movie with, as the writer-protagonist P.F. (‘Franske’) Thomése himself admits, many ‘disruptive plot twists’. This pulp novelist makes a car trip with his favourite character, the chain smoker J. Kessels who is a lover of country music and always wears a Willem II football club shirt. Travelling in Kessels’ old Chrysler Kamikaze, they are asked to find a meatball seller, who happens to be a supporter of NAC Breda, the big rival of Willem II. This Perry with an eyepatch has run off to Sankt Pauli and in the stadium of this cult football team from Germany, they spot him amidst bare-breasted women. Writer Thomése experiences several hallucinatory scenes during a visit to the red-light district of Hamburg, mainly because he is still infatuated with a blonde girl he knew as a teenager. His main reason for making the trip is that he hopes to meet her once again, some thirty years after a traumatic event at a pinball machine. Absurd as this may sound, the film also has a subplot about a corpse in the coffin of the Chrysler (or ‘hrysler’, because the C is missing). Not all critics were positive about this film, but some who were (mildly) enthusiastic mentioned that J. KESSELS reminded them of FEAR AND LOATHING IN LAS VEGAS (Terry Gilliam, 1998).

8 When a Muslim truck driver is doing his prayers with Dunya, Desie stands behind them, slightly mocking them by reciting ‘I can feel the spirit,’ with her hands in the air.
In voor- en tegenspoed was based upon the BBC series In Sickness and In Health, which started in 1985. It was written by Johnny Speight, who also invented Till Death Do Us Part, the source of inspiration for All in the Family.

CHAPTER 3

Because of the success of Sterren stralen overal, Rutten was considered an excellent choice to make a film with the comedian Wim Sonneveld, which was meant to exploit the latter’s huge popularity. Sonneveld had created the figure of Willem Parel, an organ grinder who spoke with a heavy Amsterdam accent, for the weekly radio programme Showboat. For no less than two years, this figure had delivered 10-minute monologues which had attracted millions of listeners. In Rutten’s film Het wonderlijke leven van Willem Parel [The Wonderful Life of Willem Parel] (1955), Sonneveld plays a stage personality who mentions in an opening voice-over that he has ‘cut the knot’ (we see an axe cut a knot in a rope): Parel should disappear, for this creation has come to overshadow his own fame. He guesses that this decision will not make the world turn ‘upside down’ (we see the city topsy-turvy for a few seconds), but when he is sitting in his dressing room and throws a toy organ against the poster of Parel, he sees in the mirror that the character fades from the image. Parel has come alive and will undertake many actions for which Sonneveld will be held responsible (he has, among others, to pay for the ordering of 173 glasses of beer). Rutten’s film turns into a loose string of sketches and songs – with one classic, the so-called ‘Poen-lied’ ['Money Song,’ or rather ‘Shekels Song’] – and after Parel has returned to the poster at last, a film producer enthusiastically proposes to make a film with Sonneveld. The latter then suggests the idea to make a film about Parel, stepping down from the poster, which is greeted by the producer-in-the-film as a brilliant idea. ‘And this,’ as the voice-over says quite redundantly, ‘is the film you have seen.’ Film critics, however, were not so much taken by the actual execution of the film, and considered Het wonderlijke leven van Willem Parel as an unbalanced collection of sketches.

Thirty years later, Woody Allen was to make The Purple Rose of Cairo (1985), which has a similar starting point – a character stepping from the silver screen, forcing the actor to come into action – but Allen’s script was more cohesive.

Dittrich also favourably mentions Dood water (Gerard Rutten, 1934) and Pygmalion (Ludwig Berger, 1937).

In her analysis of Komedie om geld, Ansje van Beusekom mentions that the first part of the film features ‘mostly realistic sequences, shot on location in Amsterdam.’ In the second part, Ophüls employs ‘a subtle expressionistic approach to the modernist architecture and designs, magnifying the impact of the trappings of wealth’ (66).
The close comparison between people and animals will be a building block for another of Haanstra’s projects, the documentary *Bij de beesten af* [Instinct for Survival] (1972).

Another possible reason for Fanfare’s lack of success abroad was suggested to Blokker by an American who asked him whether everyone in Holland had ugly faces, and, as Blokker had to admit, only Andrea Domburg could be considered kind of attractive in Haanstra’s film (Hendriks, 85-86).


*Dorp aan de rivier* can also be qualified as a ‘Carl-Theodor Dreyer light,’ especially considering the scene when Van Taeke orders his children to bid farewell to their mother in her coffin, which is visually reminiscent of Dreyer’s *Ordet* [The Word] (1955).

According to Dutch standards, *Dorp aan de rivier* was a frankly daring picture, but perhaps too daring and slightly complex and fragmentary. Pressured by critics who complained that the film consisted mainly of anecdotes and lacked a tight structure, a voice-over by Deaf Cis was inserted. Reluctantly, Claus wrote this text, which he considered as a poor substitute to compensate for the removal of the scene with the farmer.

Jan Blokker himself also points at the influence of Lili Veenman, Rademakers’ assistant and his wife to be.

By the way, the official English title of the film, *That Joyous Eve*, is a translation of the beginning of the third line of the song, ‘Het heerlijk avondje ....’

Would it be possible to consider the tango scene between the main protagonist, Erik, and his friend, Alex, who has chosen the side of the German enemy in *Soldaat van Oranje* [Soldier of Orange] (Paul Verhoeven, 1977) as a visual quote from this tango in *Makers stak uw wild geraas*?

There is another couple with marital problems in the film. Leo Wiegman is a civil servant who has organized the evening to show himself off for the eyes of the local community. At one point, his wife, initially absent, arrives and he is visibly annoyed to be seen in her company. His attempts to avoid her, of course, has a counterproductive effect, and only adds embarrassment to his irritation.

‘Nooit was ik zo verliefd. Ik sprak je naam duizendmaal. (Nel, Nel, Nel). Nooit was er een ander. Je was mijn ideaal.’

Another reason for the impression of authenticity made by *Een zwoele zomervond* is that the actors often used autobiographical experiences in their performances. The play (1978-1979) which was the basis for the 1982 film was inspired
by the marital problems between actors Helmert Woudenberg and Marja Kok. The latter had been responsible for the script (Van Schayk, 138).

Some other films which are a mixture of theatrical affinity and formal cinematic means might be ZUS & ZO [LIKE THIS, LIKE THAT] (Paula van der Oest, 2001, nominated for an Academy Award as Best Foreign Language Film), inspired by Chekhov’s play Three Sisters and the debut feature of Nanouk Leopold, ÎLES FLOTANTES [French for ‘Floating Islands,’ but also the name for a dessert, meringue with warm vanilla sauce] (2001). Actors with a background in theatre, like Jacob Derwig, Halina Reijn, Sylvia Poorta, Maria Kraakman, Manja Topper, Anneke Blok and Theu Boermans, play the main parts. Both films take an ironic stance towards modern (family) relationships. ÎLES FLOTANTES ends with a formal repetition from an ironic contrast in the film’s beginning. The camera steadily pans from left to right, showing the three girlfriends tanning themselves on a solarium, with the walls in-between signifying that they are not completely comfortable with each other. In a next shot, the three are frontally staged before a mirror, discussing their love affairs and checking out who has the darkest tan.

This is a remarkable study for several reasons. Cavell was trained as a philosopher and started writing about cinema in a period when film was not taken very seriously as an object of study, certainly not for men of his academic reputation. Moreover, he did not examine so-called (European) art cinema, as scholars might be supposed to do at that time, but instead was an enthusiastic student of pictures made in the first Golden Age of Hollywood. In his opinion, these films do not just offer escapist material, but provide food for philosophical thought as well: Frank Capra can be juxtaposed with Immanuel Kant. For Cavell, ‘film exists in a state of philosophy’ (13).

‘Als men zegt dat … Rademakers een filmer van scènes is, en niet van films, dan komt dat deels omdat Rademakers zich meer interesseert in wat er voor de camera gebeurt, dan wat er met de camera gebeurt. … [H]ij schroomt niet zo’n scène wat langer te laten duren dan in het draaiboek was voorzien’ (Bernink, 29).

According to the cultural critic and psychoanalytic philosopher Slavoj Žižek, the readiness to believe in things against our rational knowledge is ideology at its purist, which according to him is best proven by the case of the animated hit film KUNG FU PANDA (Mark Osborne and John Stevenson, 2008). ‘The fat panda dreams of becoming a kung fu warrior. He is chosen by blind chance (beneath which lurks the hand of destiny, of course), to be the hero to save his city, and succeeds. But the film’s pseudo-Oriental spiritualism is constantly undermined by a cynical humour. The surprise is that this continuous making fun of itself makes it no less spiritual: the film ultimately takes the butt of its endless jokes seriously. A well-known anecdote about Niels Bohr illustrates the same idea. Surprised at seeing a horseshoe above the door of Bohr’s country house, a visiting scientist said he didn’t believe that horseshoes kept evil spirits out of the house, to which
Bohr answered: ‘Neither do I; I have it there because I was told that it works just as well if one doesn’t believe in it!’ This is how ideology functions today: nobody takes democracy or justice seriously, we are all aware that they are corrupt, but we practise them anyway because we assume they work even if we don’t believe in them’ (Žižek, ‘Berlusconi,’ 6-7).

19 Internet Movie Database (IMDb) plot summary.

20 Gooische Vrouwen (2005-2009) can be taken as a Dutch version of American television series like Sex in the City (1998-2004) and Desperate Housewives (2004-2012). The series was developed by Linda de Mol, a popular television personality, who has also had her own magazine since 2003, simply called Linda. De Mol played Cheryl, but the most beloved character among viewers was Willemijn Lodewijckx, played by Annet Malherbe, Alex van Warmerdam’s wife in real life. Malherbe left the show after two seasons, and does not feature in the film, either.

21 In both the opening and final scenes in Gooische Vrouwen 2, we see that the girlfriends have become elderly people who still want to keep up appearances.

22 Significantly, Nelly Frijda declined the offer to be cast as Martin’s Aunt Greet, for it might be too much of a replay of her role as Ma Flodder. Now Beppie Melissen plays the aunt, who surpasses Martin in vulgarity. When Cheryl has been given the booby certificate, for example, she says in public: ‘I have never had one, but I do not really need one. My breasts are still very perky. I still get compliments on a regular basis.’

23 It is quite vulgar to refer to ‘dear Kitty’ here, a phrase that is well-known in the Netherlands as the customary opening to the entries in Anne Frank’s diary.

24 She herself mentions that she is every boy’s wet dream’ after she is locked up with Max, unzips his pants and says: ‘I feel like sex at first sight.’

25 In Hartenstraat [Heart Street] (Sanne Vogel, 2014) which owes a great deal to You’ve Got Mail (Nora Ephron, 1998), Daan considers his neighbour Katje ‘narcissistic’ and annoying because of her obsession with fruit juice, almond milk and symmetry. Under a pseudonym, she wins his heart via the delightful texts she sends him via a dating site. When she makes herself known, he is angry because she killed his ‘fantasy girl’: he wanted a girl who thought Buster Keaton’s face funny and tragic at the same time. But in the meantime she has started to like Buster Keaton and, she confesses, deep down she longs for a man who has a dirty stain on his shirt as a sign of imperfection. She wins him over when she helps his daughter at a most crucial moment. He runs to her place, and then provides this warning: ‘You have to know that I sing in my sleep. Eternal Flame from the Bangles, always the same refrain.’ That, however, does not stop her. Hartenstraat is one of a series of rom-coms made in the wake of the All is … films. Other titles are, the quite successful Soof (Antoinette Beumer, 2013), Mannenharten [Men in the City] (Mark de Cloe, 2013), Smoorverliefd [Madly in Love] (Hilde van Mieghem, 2013), Toscaanse bruiloft [Toscan Wedding] (Johan Nijenhuis,
2014), and Pak van mijn hart [A Load off My Mind] (Kees van Nieuwkerk, 2014).

26 In Superman II (Richard Lester, 1980), Lois Lane also discovers Superman’s actual identity. Lester had replaced Richard Donner, the director of Superman (1978), who was fired by the producers. In 2006, Donner’s version premiered after all. The tone of this cut was more serious than Lester’s quite comical theatrical version. In Donner’s later release, Lois Lane jumps out of the window of a building, betting that Superman will show up whenever Clark Kent is around. And, of course, the Man of Steel saves her in time.

27 This quote is from the poet Robert Frost, originally, but also quoted by Ten Hooven, 11.

28 Karakter won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film, but in 1990 Van Diem had already won the Student Academy Award for his 45-minute Alaska (1989).

CHAPTER 4

1 In the case of exaggeration, something is presented as ‘bigger, greater, better or worse … beyond its normal or due proportions.’ Exaggeration can be split into two main categories: specific details might be exaggerated, such as a huge nose, or the entire frame might be rendered disproportionate (see Edwards and Graulund, 67).

2 One can also make a film about lovers of cult cinema, as Iván López Núñez did with My Life on Planet B (2012), in the vein of a B-movie naturally. This film won the MovieSquad Award, a prize from the youth jury, at the Netherlands Film Festival.

3 Andy, bloed en blond haar was actually selected for an ‘Egzotik’ evening during the Netherlands Film Festival in 2015.

4 Between Sontag’s essay from 1964 and Sedgwick’s study from 1990, shifts have unmistakably taken place in the use of the term ‘camp.’ A paramount influence was Vito Russo’s study The Celluloid Closet from 1981, in which he searched for clues and suggestions of homosexuality in films. The way two cowboys value each other’s gun in Red River (Howard Hawks, 1948) can be read as a play on sexual innuendo. The way Messala, played by Stephen Boyd, looks at the title hero in Ben-Hur (William Wyler, 1959) speaks of homoerotic desire. An ‘innocent’ viewer may recognize nothing peculiar in such scenes, focused as he may be on the progression of the storyline, but the (gay) viewer with a camp sensitivity may detect references to the ‘desire that dare not speak its name.’

5 Two of the series of Sad Movies were released in 1966. The 10-minute Rape (1966) was about a man persecuting a nun in the woods. Of the actual rape we do
not see anything, except some clothes flying through the air. Tulips only lasts for two and a half minutes. Except for the shot of a woman announcing the film, we have one shot of a vase of tulips on a credenza. The camera zooms in on the tulips, and we see a leaf fall off. Bon Appetit and Summer in the Fields are from 1967. The latter is briefly discussed in chapter 8.

6 As a heterosexual man who believes that Showgirls is really a good film, Hunter has set himself the aim ‘to “straighten out” the camp interpretation and dismiss gay fans as delinquent misreaders’ (478).

7 Ja zuster, nee zuster won the Audience Award for Best Feature at the International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival in San Francisco in 2003.

8 Actually, the young Floris uses the hippie catchphrase ‘Johnson, molenaar.’ Johnson was the US president in the 1960s, and the Dutch word ‘molenaar,’ meaning miller, sounds very much like ‘moordenaar,’ murderer. When the protesters called the president a ‘murderer,’ they risking a penalty, thus they opted for ‘molenaar.’

9 For the sake of completeness, it has to mentioned that straightforward adventure stories were considered practically impossible in 2004, the year Floris was released. Soon hereafter, film heroes who had been parodied in the vein of Floris, like Batman and James Bond, were to be re-invented by completely starting ‘anew’ so that one could take them serious again. The title of Christopher Nolan’s movie from 2005 says it all: Batman Begins; likewise Casino Royale (2006) by Martin Campbell goes back to the days when James Bond still had to become James Bond.

10 Films like Spetters and All Stars, discussed in chapter 6, are exempted from the stereotype of the feminized male but offer the commonplace of the closeted gay instead. There are some more daring treatments of gay themes in Dutch cinema, like Voor een verloren soldaat [For a Lost Soldier] (Roeland Kerbosch, 1992) and Jongens [Boys] (Mischa Kamp, 2014), but they fall outside the scope of this study about humour.

11 Deliberate camp movies from abroad such as the Australian Priscilla, Queen of the Desert (Stephen Elliott, 1994), the Canadian Les amours imaginaires [Heartbeats] (Xavier Dolan, 2010) or the films by the Spanish Pedro Almodóvar have been very successful, but were released, at least in the Netherlands, in art-house theatres, whereas all the Dutch titles mentioned, except for Ruven’s De tranen van Maria Machita, in this chapter had a run in commercial cinemas.

CHAPTER 5

1 It has become a staple within porn that the woman longingly requests the man to come, often on her breasts or in her face. Thus the visibility is clearly motivated: he ejaculates outside her because the woman wants it that way (Aydemir, 110).
A ‘scandalous’ impact can also be subject to displacement. In the early 1970s the notorious anal scene featuring the use of butter in Last Tango in Paris (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1972) was much discussed because of its sexual content. Nowadays, it can still be considered controversial, but rather because the man’s act is taken for a form of sexual abuse of the girl in the eyes of a present-day, more gender-conscious public.

Scorpio Films was a production company founded in 1965 by Pim de la Parra and Wim Verstappen, who were often referred to as ‘Pim & Wim.’ Given the limited number of Dutch films at the time, they made clear that quantity should preside over quality: it is more important that one is filming than what exactly one is shooting. Their first (very) low-budget film, made in 1966, will be discussed in chapter 8. Verstappen directed, De la Parra produced, as was also the case with Blue Movie. At other productions, they interchanged their roles. Frank & Eva, also discussed in this chapter, was directed by De la Parra and produced by Verstappen. Unexpectedly, they made a lot of money with Blue Movie, but Pim & Wim parted ways due to a financial conflict. The shooting of Verstappen’s Dakota (1974) was troublesome and had annoyed De la Parra, because it was unnecessarily costly. The love affair between female star Monique van de Ven and director of photography Jan de Bont had, among other things, led to an unworkable situation, so that the latter had to be fired. In turn, De la Parra’s deep-felt wish to shoot a picture in Surinam resulted in a project that went irresponsibly over budget, according to Verstappen. De la Parra’s Wan pipel [One People] was released in 1976, but Scorpio Films soon ceased to exist.

In 1965 Verstappen had already had a dispute with the Film Commission. A screening of Mattijn Seip’s Schermerhoorn, which Verstappen had produced, had initially been forbidden, because of a presumed violation of morality. In the film, the protagonist, played by the popular singer Ramses Shaffy, was befriended to a minor, but despite paedophilic suggestions, there were no obscene acts. Banning the film was considered awkward, however, since the film had received an official subsidy. The Minister of Culture then decided, as a compromise, that Schermerhoorn could only be shown in private screenings without selling admission tickets (Den Drijver, 75-77).

The Ministry of Culture could not be of any assistance to the Film Commission because Blue Movie had been produced with private money, without any official subsidy.

Because of its bleakness, Turks fruit has more in common with the Italian/French production Last Tango in Paris (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1972) than with the more sweet-toned American film Love Story (Arthur Hiller, 1970).

Even though Curiel knew beforehand that it would be a hell of a job to make a film with Brood, who was a regular drug user and often showed up late, he dearly wanted to make this picture, because he regarded Brood as the embodiment of
an ‘anti-authoritarian’ attitude. Since Brood lacked real acting discipline, many scenes had to be improvised on the spot. The film got an unfavourable reception, according to Curiel in a short documentary by Robbert Bianchi found among the extras of the DVD, because film critics thought of Brood as a macho who always got too much attention.

8 Brouwers gained a reputation as the character Sjef van Oekel in the anarchistic television programmes made by Wim T. Schippers, such as DE FRED HACHÉ SHOW and VAN OEKEL’S DISCOHOEK. All lines by Van Oekel were scripted, and no attempt was made to disguise the fact that he read his text aloud from a sheet of paper. In VAN OEKEL’S DISCOHOEK he was host to many musical artists, and especially the appearance of Donna Summer, singing ‘The Hostage,’ has become legendary.

9 Brood kept aloof from cinema, except for some occasional minor performances, as in ZUSJE (discussed in chapter 7) or in the documentary ROCK ‘N’ ROLL JUNKIE (Jan Eilander and Eugene van den Bos, 1994). Jean van de Velde’s WILD ROMANCE (2006), made five years after Brood’s death, focuses upon the early years of his career, from 1974 to 1979.

10 According to Van Gogh, the performance by Ariane Schluter, playing Sara, is ‘un-Dutch’ in its sensitivity, and on the commentary track of the DVD he said that he considered her achievement far superior to the social-realistic drama of Mrs. (Marieke) Heebink, main actress of the ‘ridiculous’ (Van Gogh’s words) 1000 ROSEN [1,000 ROSES] (Theu Boermans, 1994).

11 In Van Gogh’s INTERVIEW, the political journalist Pierre has to interview, to his utter frustration, the film star Katja. During the interview, which becomes a verbal battle, he tells her that she is all ‘air, sawdust and silicone’ inside. When she is on the phone, he secretly reads from her diary and asks why there is death everywhere. Katja is prepared to answer his question on condition that he tell her his deepest secret. He tapes her confession that she has cancer, and she tapes his revelation that he has staged a car accident, leading to his wife’s death. After he has phoned his newspaper with the big news and left her house, she says from her balcony that the diary belonged to her girlfriend Ellen, and she adds to this that the police are on the way to arrest him.

12 Together with the Dutch crew, Buscemi launched a 10-point manifesto on the Sarajevo film festival in 2007 as a homage to Van Gogh, containing rules such as: Any film can be made for any budget; films have to be shot digitally; the success of a film is everyone’s responsibility; the catering should always be excellent as good food improves the atmosphere and the motivation on a set.

13 In addition to Buscemi’s version of INTERVIEW, BLIND DATE was remade by Stanley Tucci, also in 2007. The last film in the ‘Triple Theo’ project was SOMEWHERE TONIGHT (Michael Di Jiacomo, 2011), based upon Van Gogh’s 06.
Icarus is a character from Greek mythology who is a symbol of hubris. In the myth, Icarus’ father, the inventor Daedalus, has constructed artificial wings made of feathers and wax. He warns Icarus not to fly too high, but his son ignores the warning and, approaching too near the sun, falls to his death when the sun’s heat melts the wax keeping the wings together.

The hilarious speedboat race between inspector Eric Visser and the diver-perpetrator through the canals in AMSTERDAMNED is hugely enjoyable. At one point, Eric’s chase is interrupted because a boat is going under the bridge at a very slow pace. The boat has a brass band on board playing the tune from FANFARE, with Bert Haanstra himself as conductor. The scene is not just an homage, but it also represents the ‘progress’ of Dutch cinema. Slow-paced provincialism has given way to fast action in the capital city. Moreover, what was incredibly popular in 1958 is now the cause of an annoying delay for the protagonist (and for us as well, since we want Eric to keep up with the suspect).

Some of the few films which have achieved to keep a balance between horror and comedy are EVIL DEAD II (Sam Raimi, 1987), THE FRIGHTENERS (Peter Jackson, 1996), SHAUN OF THE DEAD (Edgar Wright, 2004). The oxymoronic qualification of the latter film as a ‘zom-rom-com’ – a zombie romantic comedy – suggests the delicateness of the enterprise.

The fact that the sceptic girl is the first one to die holds a parallel to the convention – found in slasher films like HALLOWEEN (John Carpenter, 1978) and its self-reflexive parody SCREAM (Wes Craven, 1996) – that the usual victims of the male killer are girls/women who flaunt their sexuality. Typically, as Carol Clover has argued in her study Men, Women, and Chainsaws, the woman who is able to rescue herself, the ‘final girl,’ is often a boyish woman, not fully feminine.

More than 25 years after its release, the then influential film critic Peter van Bueren emphasized the enduring vitality of TURKS FRUIT: ‘Je ziet aan de kleding, auto’s en het straatbeeld dat de film niet gisteren is gemaakt, maar de vitaliteit blijft. … TURKS FRUIT heeft vaart en al die jonge aankomende regisseurs van nu kunnen een puntje zuigen aan de manier waarop Verhoeven het verhaal vertelt. Aards, fris, levenslustig, vlot, raak.’

CHAPTER 6

The Productiefonds voor de Nederlandse Film was founded in 1956 (see chapter 3), and it could grant subsidies to filmmakers on the basis of a (draft of the) scenario. In 1993 this Productiefonds fused with the Fonds voor de Nederlandse Film, in existence since 1983, to the Nederlands Filmfonds.

Fientje is also the name of the girl who runs a snack bar in KERMISS IN DE REGEN [FAIR IN THE RAIN] (Kees Brusse, 1962).
3 See Schoots Van Fanfare tot Spetters for an adequate analysis of the controversies surrounding the films by Van Brakel, Sluizer, Zwartjes and Verhoeven.

4 Following upon Eef’s ‘Mine will not get erect when you are looking on,’ Hans says: ‘Me neither.’ Eef: ‘What do you mean?’ Hans: ‘One has to scratch open that pimple of yours before you take a piss.’ Eef: ‘My pimple is bigger than your lame willy.’ This dialogue was the prelude to that aforementioned scene of the ‘game’ won by Hans.

5 This being part of a team is also at stake in Ventoux (Nicole van Kilsdonk, 2015), which can be called ‘All Stars on two-wheelers.’ In the summer of 1982, five adolescent boys agreed to climb Mont Ventoux, known as ‘Bald Mountain,’ although one decides to exchange his bicycle for a small van. One of them tragically dies because he takes too many risks during the descent. Thirty years later, the four remaining friends, middle-aged by now, return to the mountain to commemorate the unfortunate accident. They have changed, but the tone of jokes has not: ‘David, shave your legs, you will go faster.’

6 Another ‘comic’ scene proves to the guys that women do not understand a man’s sport like soccer. When Johnny and Hero are playing the game of who can mention the largest number of unsuccessful forward players at Feyenoord (Mike Obiku, Dave Mitchell, Clyde Best ...), Claire also gives it a try but mentions the hockey player Floris-Jan Bovelander. When the two boys laugh at her suggestion, she asks ‘What’s wrong with hockey?’ which in their opinion is further evidence that women and soccer is an unfortunate combination.

7 After they have played their 500th game, they decide to play one game a year, a so-called Swift Boys 8 memorial day on the first Sunday in April. During the end credits, however, each and every player leaves a message at Bram’s answering machine to excuse their participation.

8 Sjors & Sjimmie [George & Jimmy] is a Dutch adaptation of the American newspaper comic strip Winnie Winkle. Frans Piët’s comic strip, which began in 1938, chronicles the adventures of Sjors, a blonde boy, and Sjimmie, his thick-lipped and not so bright black friend. The strip became hugely popular, and when Piët stopped drawing the strip in 1968, the series was continued by a variety of other artists, including Jan Kruis, Jan Steeman and Robert van der Kroft.

9 The idea of the feminized gay male is also activated by Camiel himself, when his boyfriend takes a huge suitcase for a trip: ‘Joan Collins takes less luggage when she emigrates.’

10 I would like to entertain the hypothesis of a political analysis of Simon. Is it a coincidence that the year 1988 was chosen as the first phase of the friendship between Camiel and Simon? Everything seems idyllic, and they celebrate the victory of the Dutch football team, whose captain is the ‘Black Tulip’ Ruud Gullit. In that period, the idea of a happy melting pot was still vibrant. By 2002, quite a number of voices were proclaiming the multicultural society had become a fail-
ure, and as a result Netherlands had become a less tolerant country. According to such a reading, Simon’s illness can be aligned with an atmosphere of xenophobia. At the same time, such an analysis is too simplistic. For Camiel and Simon are reunited in the Fortuyn era, and their friendship becomes even more intense due to the illness. Moreover, their ‘impossible’ chemistry has an analogy in the popularity the homosexual dandy Fortuyn enjoyed with the common people who, like Simon, tend to speak their opinions frankly.

11 Marco is played by Daan Ekkel. The death at a brain tumour of his twin brother Willem in 2002 at the age of 36 inspired Terstall to make Simon.

12 During a birthday party, Anita is being interrogated by Hannie: ‘Where did you use to work?’ ‘On the Keileweg’ [before 2005 Keileweg was a well-known red light area in Rotterdam]. ‘At a company, or …?’ ‘Yeah, sort of a company. But I also acted in some movies.’ ‘Oh, lovely.’ ‘Well, it wasn’t really about love. The pay was all right. It’s all over and done with, though. I got pregnant, so they didn’t want me anymore. Because then they can’t get their fist in anymore.’

13 De Marathon was much appreciated by the public, for it won an Audience Award at the Netherlands film festival in a year when the competition was tough.

14 In turn, one might say that Wonderbroeders [Miracle Brothers] (Johan Timmers, 2014) is the ‘slimmed-down version’ of De Marathon. Like Koopal’s film, the script was by Martin van Waardenberg. This time it was about five friars in a convent who are told they have to move because their place will be turned into a wellness centre. Wonderbroeders was not received as favourably as De Marathon, for basically two reasons. First, since the lives of monks are quite slow-paced, the rhythm of the film is likewise, and consequently Wonderbroeders lacks the quick-wittedness of De Marathon. Second, and even more important, the ‘feel good’ humour in Koopal’s film was derived from the fact that the men had to perform better than one could imagine, whereas the friars in Timmers’ film are revealed to possess all-too-human vices, especially when a young sister shows up.

15 The police inspector who investigates the crime committed by Max’ boss tells him that it was an historical inevitability that the video store went bankrupt: ‘Who still rents movies at a video store? I download them. Why pay for something you can get for free online. Right?’

16 According to James MacDowell a distinctive feature of the ‘quirky’ is its tone. ‘The common mixture of comic registers means we can simultaneously … laugh at its flat treatment of melodramatic situations and still be invited to be moved by character’s misadventures. Its aesthetic can both seem self-conscious and promote an appreciation of naïveté’ (10).

17 Cloaca (Willem van de Sande Bakhuyzen, 2003), originally based upon a theatrical play written by Maria Goos, is a drama rather than a comedy, because one of the four long-time friends who all face a midlife crisis decides not to support the
quite reclusive Pieter who has gotten into the orbit of a scandal. In the end, Joep backs off because he does not want to jeopardize his political career for helping Pieter. His fear of bad press can be summed up in his cowardly phrase: ‘A homo is one thing, but an embezzling homo is another thing.’ At the same time, Joep provides the film’s best comic moments, for he keeps trotting on about all the details that annoyed him in his failed marriage. Even when he is taking a shower, he does not remain silent: ‘Sometimes I need a pump. I must have bought at least six bicycle pumps over the last 20 years. But I can never find one when I need it. What does she do with them?’ Or, when the theatre director Maarten reveals that Joep’s daughter Laura is performing in his upcoming play, Joep guesses correctly that she will appear naked. ‘Make her wear a dress,’ Joep asks in the company of the other two friends, but Maarten replies: ‘That is not possible. In my concept.’ Angry by the prospect of Laura’s nudity, Joep no longer holds back, explaining that the plays bore his friends to death: ‘We have four double espressos before we go to your shows. That’s a total of 24 espressos. And yet an hour later, Tom is napping on Pieter’s shoulder.’

CHAPTER 7

1 Let me emphasize that it can include seriousness, which means that it does not necessarily do so. A film like De zaak M.P. [The M.P. Case] (Bert Haanstra, 1960) is a farce about a young man, Kamiel, who is considered by his father-in-law, Philidoor, as only a ‘slipper hero.’ He steals the statue of Manneken Pis, the ‘first citizen’ of Brussels, and then stages the recovery of the small monument so that he is hailed as a true hero. Thus he gains his father-in-law’s respect. In the meantime, Philidoor, presuming that Dutch football supporters have stolen the statue, has a role in the disappearance of the statue of Hans Brinker to pay the Dutch their due. In turn, Kamiel is also responsible for the recovery of Hans Brinker. If this all sounds jolly, it indeed is devoid of seriousness. And unlike absurdism, it is too complacent to have any potential to disorient the viewer.

2 Stelling approached cabaret performer Freek de Jonge after he had seen his first solo show De komiek [The Comedian], but De Jonge suggested that his second show, De tragiek [The Tragedy], was more apt for an adaptation. And so they set it up, although eventually De illusionist would turn into a sequel to De tragiek.

3 De Jonge himself apparently also thought that De illusionist was his and not Stelling’s picture. This misconception resulted into a difficult shooting and editing process. This led to the hilarious situation that when De illusionist was awarded the Golden Calf, De Jonge decided to refuse the prize without consulting Stelling who, of all people, had been the initiator of what then was called De Nederlandse Filmdagen.
As Stelling said in the interview on cinema.nl: ‘Met humor pomp je er lucht in.’

His second-best achievement in the category of tragic films with comic interludes would be DUSKA (2007), about the film critic Bob who is visited by Duska, a Russian film geek he met at a film festival. Since Bob is hoping to date a cashier at a theatre, the arrival of a foreign guest with whom he cannot communicate is most inconvenient. He undertakes a number of attempts to get rid of the visitor, but time and again Duska returns to Bob’s place.

As Stelling correctly observed in the interview with cinema.nl: for him, Jim van der Woude, who played the pointsman, was not an actor performing actions; he restricted himself to filming Van der Woude’s face, his appearance.

Bozz posts an ad that promises a free coffee when you fill up your car, but gets angry when the man in the wheelchair wants to make use of the offer as well. Bozz and Boy start outbidding each other, and initially Bozz seems set to win the public’s favour. Later, it becomes very crowded at his neighbour’s place after Boy has discovered a huge billboard that offers a full tank with a ‘full service’ [een grote beurt] and a more-than-life-sized picture of Bozz’s attractive daughter, Gal.

Seunke became the director of the Jakarta International Film Festival in 2003 and is affiliated with the Film Academy in the capital of Indonesia.

Westdijk’s second film, SIBERIA (1998), which was made three years later, seems the opposite of ZUSJE, for the two male protagonists take life very lightly. Unscrupulously, they seduce female tourists, rob them after having sex with them and tear the photographs from their passports as proof of their conquests. Life is little more than a bet for them. Their hollowness is underscored by ‘hollow’ cinematography: fast cutting, high angles, slow-motion scenes, time-lapse photography, random black-and-white inserts, and a hip soundtrack by Junkie XL. Although things change when one of them becomes besotted with Lara, who claims she is from Siberia, the cinematography remains as pompous as ever. SIBERIA never becomes a true drama, nor, by the way, a true comedy – it is ‘just zip-zip,’ according to ‘groggo’ on IMDb.

Ever since OH BOY! and ZUSJE, a number of Dutch films exploring the thin line between film and real life have been released. To give a selection of titles: In FLIRT (Jaap van Eyck, 2005), Kim is about to make a documentary on extramarital affairs, although her aim is to argue that polygamy is outdated. In LEF [GUTS] (Ron Termaat, 1999), Olivier is writing a script for his friend Luc, but he is fantasizing about himself as Alain Delon in the main role, although he has to admit that he is more like Buster Keaton. In NEW KIDS TURBO (2010), producer Reinout Oerlemans has run out of money, so the New Kids are invited into the studio to tell how their film would have progressed. Then, all of a sudden, Oerlemans has money to spend after all, and the film continues where it had more or less left off. In DE BOEKVERFILMING [BASED ON THE NOVEL] (Eddy Terstall, 1999), a young aspiring director, known for an experimental film with small pigs, is assigned
to adapt a book by a Jewish writer. He has selected three dark-haired actresses as possible candidates for the lead part, and uses every opportunity to contact them. He tells one of them: ‘If you have had a fling with an actress, you can photograph her more beautifully.’ In the end, he is so severely beaten up by the former boyfriend of the girl he has chosen, that the director has to be replaced by Mike van Diem, one of the real-life filmmakers who has a cameo appearance in De boekverfilming.

11 The rehearsal scenes are especially humorous; an actor is cutting the cucumber with too much flair, according to Martin’s taste. It leads to a lengthy discussion between actor and director, and despite Martin’s ‘try less,’ the actor is simply too eager to turn it into something special. It drives Martin crazy: ‘Make him normal. The film is called Real Life for a reason.’

12 Het echte leven lasts 84 minutes, but on the DVD, there is a 57-minute version of the film by ‘Martin Zomer,’ in which all the ‘rest scenes’ have been deleted, like ‘superfluous’ rehearsals and the failed takes. Without the ‘rest scenes,’ the film looks very shallow, and thus all the seemingly irrelevant inserts constitute the strength of Westdijk’s final product. Moreover, his film won the Golden Calf for Best Direction and another for Best Montage. These Golden Calf awards were well-deserved, for the sudden transitions in (the status of) scenes near the end are arguably the best part of Het echte leven.

13 Michel Vermey who was cast as the disabled son, only played in two Flemish television series after Met grote blijdschap, which was his debut. In one of the series, he played a handicapped rocker.

14 In an earlier scene, his sister was modelling for Alfred. She then proposes to give him money so he can take Moniek to Mexico to spice up their relationship. His sister’s only request: ‘Paint my belly smaller as thanks.’

15 Rent a Friend is subtitled a ‘romantic comedy about money,’ which is an ironic inverse of the regular romantic comedy, for one of its lessons is that one should never follow the ‘cold path’ of money, but always one’s heart.

16 When his girlfriend, Moniek, suggests that no one wears sombreros in Mexico anymore, Alfred answers that it is his artistic licence.

17 Moniek stares intensely at a painting and then guesses: ‘A Mexican skiing?’ ‘No, a Mexican walking the railway tracks.’ ‘But railway tracks have sleepers.’ ‘But I hadn’t finished.’

18 Another indication of the ‘weakness’ of laughter: it is an involuntary spasm, for the muscles of one’s face ‘suddenly begin playing like a clock at midday or a jack-in-the-box’ (Hannoosh, 29)

19 The comic does not reside in the act, for then the clumsy person would also laugh himself, and he usually does not. Thus, the comic is an attribute of the laughing subject; it is a consequence of being a witness to the act (Hannoosh, 32).
Of a number of overhead shots in Suzy Q (Martin Koolhoven, 1999), the most remarkable one is near the end, when the teenager Suzy lifts her head and looks upstairs, straight into the camera, as if addressing some deity for help. There is much reason to ask for help, since there is little to enjoy in her life as the youngest of three children in a dysfunctional family. Her father feels himself a 'joker' because he is out of a job, and since he thinks his wife has stopped loving him he mistreats his one daughter because she refuses his request for tenderness. According to her mother, as she tells the oldest son, Zwier, Suzy has obviously provoked her husband. The one joy Suzy has is her meeting with – the film is set in the 1960s – a young Mick Jagger and Marianne Faithfull in their hotel room, but all family members disqualify this adventure as a silly fantasy. The worst thing is yet to happen: after Zwier's pet rat, Victor, has been caught in a mouse-trap – also shown in a shot from above – Suzy's oldest brother beheads her pet turtle and he then serves the family turtle soup. In another overhead shot, a bit later, we see Zwier lying dead in the bathtub with red-coloured water. Suzy walks outside onto her balcony and hanging over the banisters she looks upstairs. For a brief moment we think she might be addressing God, but in the next shot it is revealed that the girl of the family living above her is hanging over the banisters as well, watching Suzy, so that the overhead shot turned out to be her point-of-view shot. In another overhead shot we see that Suzy bends her head. While her facial expression is sad, then, quite ironically, the song ‘Happy Together’ by The Turtles (!) starts playing.

Originally, AANMODDERFAKKER was made as a TV movie to be broadcast in 2015, but it got a theatrical release as well. This release was slightly advanced to profit from the positive publicity the film had at the Netherlands Film Festival where it won three Golden Calf awards in October 2014, for Best Film, Best Actor, and Best Screenplay.

In the week AANMODDERFAKKER premiered, EEN VLUCHT REGENWULPEN [A FLIGHT OF RAINBIRDS] (Ate de Jong, 1981) was re-released in a restored copy, another film about a socially immature protagonist. Maarten is a 34-year-old biologist who is socially inept and too shy to talk to women. Though he wants to avoid encounters with women, he knows he has to overcome his reluctance due to a nightmare in which he hears God's voice, which tells him that if he does not sleep with a woman with the aim of procreation within seven days, he will die. The many differences notwithstanding, like the fact that Maarten at least has some professional ambitions, EEN VLUCHT REGENWULPEN can to some extent be taken as a precursor to AANMODDERFAKKER, but one in which the protagonist struggles with the sense of sin that marks religious fervour. Maarten will only succeed in losing his virginity after his mother, whom he worshipped ever since his childhood (as we gather from a series of flashbacks), has passed away, and after he has come to realize that Christianity is ‘all deceit.’ When the woman asks after coitus

NOTES
what it felt like, he answers: ‘I thought I was on the verge of dying.’ This final line in *Een vlucht regenwulpen* is ironic, for two reasons: first, even though having sex was the sole solution to escape God’s death sentence, Maarten’s experience of it made him feel that he was about to die, and, second, because an orgasm is often called the ‘little death,’ and for Maarten this association is not taken metaphorically but literally.

23 Since Tommy has the ambition to become the new floor manager, he decreases his number of smoking breaks. At the same time, he suggests removing *The Breakfast Club* (John Hughes, 1985) from the store, a ‘classic from the eighties,’ according to Thijs, which proves to the latter that Tommy has become a ‘commercial rat.’

24 The one time we see Thijs prepare a meal, he wears a pair of goggles while cutting onions.

25 NRC critic Coen van Zwol was not too enthusiastic about *Aanmodderfakker* because the film plays too self-consciously with the conventions of romantic comedies. Thus, he argues, the viewer has no anchor to identify with the protagonist. Fortunately, Thijs is too late for Lisa, for, as Van Zwol claims, one is constantly thinking: she deserves a much better guy than one who lacks sincere motivation to do practically anything.

26 The cyclical nature of Thijs’ life is also subtly hinted at via the reproduction of M.C. Escher’s lithograph print *Relativity* (1953) on the door of his bedroom in his parents’ home. The seven stairways in this spatial structure are connected so that character can walk them in an infinite loop.

**CHAPTER 8**

1 The spelling of Daalder’s first name is not an easy matter, since it changed over the years. In the beginning of his career it was ‘Renee’ (as found in the credits of his *Massacre at Central High* from 1976), though his official name seems to be ‘René.’ Now he tends to use ‘Rene,’ e.g., on his website http://projects.renedaalder.com/Biography-Contact.

2 Jan Vrijman made a short on Karel Appel in 1962; Johan van der Keuken made shorts on Lucebert in 1962 and 1967, and scripts by Campert were adapted to the screen, like *Een zondag* [A Sunday] (Van der Keuken, 1960), *Helden in een schommelstoel* [Heroes in a Rocking Chair] (1963) and *Het gangstermeisje* [The Gangsterolgirl] (1966), the latter two directed by Frans Weisz.

3 Under the pseudonym W. Limetree, Wim van der Linden was to make, together with Wim T. Schippers (as Bill Masters), one of the most absurd films in Dutch cinema history, the 12-minute short *Bon Appettt* (1967), the last in a series of four so-called *Sad Movies* (the first one had won the ‘Golden Handkerchief,’
according to the punning credits). This English-language, black-and-white film is wilfully sloppy: a bit slapstick-like, with a few unorthodox zoom shots; it has canned laughter, and the auditive track has brusque transitions, including some overly loud sounds, like bird whistling or the screeching of tyres, while the car drives slowly. Before a man enters a restaurant, he steps into dog shit. In the restaurant, he pushes some food from a plate with his coat; another man has his tie in the soup, another man’s toupee falls into the soup terrine, and a piece of meat, visibly tied to a cord, flies through the air into the cleavage of a young lady. In the restaurant, the man orders the whole menu and starts eating it with boorish sounds. ‘Hey, waiter, my plate is wet.’ ‘That is your soup, sir.’ Near the end, the man collapses while he is eating a huge dessert. When the police arrive to take care of the victim, a voice-over reads aloud the text, printed on the screen: ‘See in the next episode How Father Lost and Found His Hat.’

4 Provo was a counterculture movement, founded in 1965 in Amsterdam. Since Provo consisted of pacifists, its members did not use violence, but aimed to provoke the police by way of (ludic) humour. For example, they pretended to smoke marijuana in public, but they were really lighting up tea or herbs. When the police arrested them, they exposed the ignorance of the authorities on the subject of cannabis. Among their most famous actions was a protest against the upcoming wedding between the Crown Princess Beatrix and the German Claus von Amsberg employing pamphlets and a fake speech. On the day of the wedding some Provo members used smoke bombs to disturb the procession. For the Provos, anarchy was an inspirational source of resistance. The Provos also compiled a series of ‘White Plans’ to address problems in the city of Amsterdam, advocating changes such as replacing motorized vehicles with bikes, and they encouraged people to squat in empty buildings. Provo officially disbanded itself in May 1967.

5 Hans Tuynman was a member of Provo who had been imprisoned since 30 March 1966 for distributing pamphlets to promote a demonstration which had been banned by the mayor. He was released on 21 June 1966.

6 This quote is taken from the description of Jeff Lebowski, aka the ‘Dude,’ by Cowboy Sam, the narrator from The Big Lebowski (Joel and Ethan Coen, 1998). In this film, the quote is hilarious because the Dude is described as if he is totally in tune with the year 1991, while he seems to have stepped straight from the 1960s because of his hippie appearance and his fondness for the music of Creedence Clearwater Revival.

7 We will see that Manuel is meeting other women, too, so he apparently is only charming Ans for strategic reasons.

8 Terpstra’s film was based upon a book by Heere Heeresma. Just as the writer Heeresma was never really in the league of the big authors, the adaptations of his work also float slightly beneath the radar. His Geef die mok eens door, Jet! was the basis for Heb Medelij, Jet! (Frans Weisz, 1975); four stories from Zwaarmoedige verhalen voor bij
In Teorema (Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1968), the famous ‘intruder’ film made one year after De verloedering van de Swieps, the nameless guest not only ‘takes’ out of narcissistic pleasure (like Manuel did), but also has a ‘radical gift’ on offer for all household members. His gift of love injects their lives with new energy, Marc De Kesel claims, but once the guest has disappeared, their existence is disjointed once again. His love, once a magnificent revelation, becomes an unremitting source of torment and moral distress (De Kesel, 105).

The idea of the freebooter versus bourgeois culture is a recurrent opposition in Dutch cinema of the 1960s and 1970s. Several characters from chapter 5 could be cited as Manuel’s ‘nephews’: the bohemian artist Erik from Turks fruit, the protagonists in the films by ‘Pim and Wim,’ Herman Brood in Cha Cha, but also the vociferous outcasts in The Family (Lodewijk de Boer, 1973) or the re-use of the free-spirited writer Wessel Franken from Het gangstermeisje in Alle dagen feest [Every Day a Party] (1976), this time directed by Ate de Jong, Otto Jongerius, Paul de Lussanet and Orlow Seunke. Of all these characters, it can be said that they all bear the imprint of their times, (slightly) outdated according to present-day standards.

Bert Haanstra’s Dokter Pulder zaait papavers [Doctor Pulder Sows Poppies] (1975) can be considered to be a ‘light’ version of this imbrication between bourgeois decorum and perversity. An old study friend, Hans van Inge Liedaerd, pays Dr. Pulder a visit ‘for old time’s sake,’ but the visit is a cover so he can steal expensive medicine from Pulder’s supply. After the death of the ‘junkie,’ the decent doctor becomes intrigued by Hans’ lifestyle and gets acquainted with one of his girlfriends. To the dismay of his wife and his son, the doctor sheds his decorum and gets interested in sowing poppies, to fulfil a plan Hans never had the chance to carry out.

This part is a revised version of an article I published in Senses of Cinema 70 (2014).

There is a remarkable correspondence, Hans Beerekamp suggested to me, between the housing estate in De Noorderlingen and Zonnedael, the residential area in Flodder. They were both artificially constructed in the city of Almere to ridicule the dream of the socially engineered society.

In his latest film, Schneider vs. Bax (2015), empty landscapes are used as a starting point once again. In front of Bax’ house, there is open water with reed that has been chopped off to create the effect of a geometric pattern (Van Warmerdam, qtd. in Linssen, 6).
The marital problems aggravate after Martha has decided to completely resist the attempts at seduction by Jacob. When she is in bed, the statue of Saint Frances, miraculously, comes alive and it/he gestures to her not to eat the food her husband has brought her. Saint Frances even comes down from his pedestal to pray at Martha’s bedside.

The oxymoron ‘middle-of-the-road absurdism’ has been introduced by the Dutch cartoonist Gummbah (real name Gert-Jan van Leeuwen) in jest to describe his own (drawing) praxis as well as to qualify his theatre programme *Poelmo, slaaf van het zuiden* [*Poelmo, Slave of the South*] (2002), which he created with Hans Teeuwen and Pieter Bouwman. The category of ‘middle-of-the-road absurdism’ has to be taken with a grain of salt. I use a deliberately peculiar term here to put the idea of categorization as such into perspective. If Van Warmerdam attempts to escape (fixed) meanings quite successfully, his work of course is not to be reduced to some category.

The cinema of Andersson does not work according to the conventional principle of the eyeline match. This principle entails that we have an alternation of shots. In one shot we see a character looking, in another shot we see what the character is looking at. In Andersson’s tableau-like cinema, there are nonetheless many onlooking characters in the background of the shot, standing behind a tree, in a doorpost, or peeping through a window. They offer, so to speak, a ‘compensation’ for the lack of reverse shots.

Is the train conductor in *De Jurk* simply obsessed by women who wear this particular dress or is that a coincidence? Or is it a regular habit to harass women, regardless of the clothes they wear?

Allemaal Film, devoted to the history of Dutch cinema, was broadcast on television by the AVRO in nine episodes in 2007. It was produced by IDTV and presented by actor Jeroen Krabbé.

Van Warmerdam mentioned this anecdote in an interview with Marja Pruis.

Actually there are a few exceptions to the rule, apart from the surreal scene with the ashtrays. Each and every time internally focalized shots are presented as distorted, this distortion is clearly motivated. When the father looks at his wife through a glass of wine, we get a subjective shot on Duifje, out of focus. We get Abel’s internal focalization in the scene when his father comes to the door of Zus’ home, dressed up as a mailman ‘bringing a long parcel.’ Peeping through a small distorted glass, we see the father/mailman from a fish-eye perspective. So, when we see a shot that coincides with a character’s deformed perception, this distortion does not have a psychological cause as in the case of surrealism, but because an object, like a glass of wine, has affected the observation.

Another good example of this type of absurdism is the fourth, and best, story from *Zwaarmoedige verhalen voor bij de centrale verwarming* (1975), directed by Nouchka van Brakel – see also note 8 above. It is about a shopkeeper
in a small boat hiding under a bridge. He hears a postman above him and asks for assistance. This postman lends him his knife to cut the rope of the boat loose, but because there is iron wire woven into the rope, he ruins the knife. The postman is angry, and he wants at least 100 guilders in compensation since the knife is a heirloom. The shopkeeper refuses, for he does not want to pay for a ‘human memory.’ When the shopkeeper paddles away, the postman cycles along the water, while the wind makes his cape blow up. Since he cannot shed his persecutor, the shopkeeper proposes a deal: a sandwich and the bike for his boat. They swap places, but it turns out that the postman has let the air out of the bicycle tires. The shopkeeper is angry, but then the postman suggests a reconciliation: step into the boat, and while they both take shelter under the cape, they row towards an orange sun, which becomes bigger and bigger until the screen is completely orange.

Not only does Grimm end on a spaghetti western set, but the countryman in Kleine Teun is watching westerns on his television regularly and Schneider vs. Bax is a kind of ‘polder western.’ Moreover, Borgman is narratively positioned as a man from nowhere, without history. His identity remains as enigmatic as The Man with No Name from the spaghetti westerns made by Sergio Leone, greatly appreciated by Van Warmerdam. When he was permitted to choose five of his favourite films for screenings in EYE, The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly (Sergio Leone, 1967) was among them, in addition to Psycho, Deliverance, Un flic and The French Connection.

The really superb first half of Abel is the closest Dutch cinema got to the suffocating atmosphere found in Gerard Reve’s classic novel De Avonden [The Evenings] from 1947. This novel was actually adapted into a film by Rudolf van den Berg in 1989, so forty-two years after its publication and three years after Abel. Over the years, Reve’s De Avonden had gained quite a number of dedicated followers, for whom the idea of a new adaptation was a form of ‘sacrilège’: according to them, no filmmaker should be so bold as to visualize this beloved milestone, for its literary style and tone is inimitable. The book consists of an account of the last ten days of the year 1946 in Amsterdam, portraying the quite uneventful life of 23-year-old Frits van Egters. The novel registers his daily routines at home with his parents, his dull work in an office, a reunion at his secondary school, and some occasional visits he pays to friends. Out of boredom, Frits pesters other people by pointing out their ugly features, like the Maurits’ lack of an eye or his brother Joop’s receding hairline. These nasty remarks are clear examples of his penchant for ironic and sardonic retorts. Even though Van den Berg’s De Avonden uses wide-angle lenses in a number of dream sequences, has uncommon camera angles in a few scenes, and plays with out-of-focus shots when Frits hears about a suicide, the most memorable scenes are those in which the camera simply registers the scenery. The (dinner) scenes with his parents are particularly
outstanding, partly due to the fine performances by Thom Hoffman as Frits, Rijk de Gooyer as the father and Viviane de Muynck as the mother. Frits is irritated by, among other things, his father’s near deafness and his eating habits. When his father uses his own ‘dirty’ spoon to pour sugar into his porridge, he points out in an agitated manner that there is a specific sugar spoon, and fills his father’s cup almost to the brim. Despite his annoyance, Frits remains at his parents’ residence, perhaps out of some peculiar compassion. When his mother has erroneously bought some fruit juice instead of wine, he is irritated by her mistake, but also calls out: ‘Cranapple, cranapple, eternal God, see my mother, see her unmeasurable goodness. She thought she bought wine.… And protect him, he is my father.... The grave yawns, time buzzes.’

Van Warmerdam loves scenes with light. SCHNEIDER vs. BAX takes place on a sunny day before the evening starts. The little house in the film has a glass roof to ensure the inside is illuminated by natural light. He is fond of westerns and the genre’s preferred moment of the day is to paraphrase one of the best-known titles, ‘high noon’ (Van Warmerdam, qtd. in Linssen, 7).

In post-production, the sharpness of the blue skies in SCHNEIDER vs. BAX was made a bit grainy to avoid the appearance of nostalgia for old postcards (Linssen, 7).

This has been pointed out to me by Theodoor Steen.

Catherine Shoard used these terms to express her annoyance at the small (social) aspirations of BORGMAN.

Van Warmerdam is particularly delighted by the simple structure of classic westerns: ‘The landscape. And then a man. Just a man in the landscape. A figure in space. With a gun. Sun. A lot of light. And shadows. And then another man. Also with a gun.’ This simplicity can be contrasted with the intricate plots of thrillers: ‘One is excited while reading them, but the dénouement is often slightly disappointing. That makes reading thrillers quite tiring’ (Van Warmerdam, qtd. in Linssen, 7).

See Komrij in his reflection upon this review in the essay ‘Kooiman is mijn beste vriend’ from Papieren Tijgers.

These perverse and macabre impulses are hardly articulated in other Dutch ‘home invasion’ films which are rather ludic and melancholic like DUSKA (Jos Stelling, 2007), in which the film critic Bob does not know how to get rid of an unexpected Russian guest who has no bad intentions, but whose plan to stay over inhibits Bob’s attempts to date a cashier. MATTERHORN (Diederik Ebbing, 2013), which won the UPC Publieksprijs (UPC Audience Award) at the Rotterdam International Film Festival, is a mild-mannered comedy about a religious widower who invites a taciturn stranger into his house. This hospitality is met with suspicion by his Calvinist neighbours. It will turn out that the two are tormented souls, but their being together will have a comforting effect upon both of them. Even though
Matterhorn is stylistically close to the deadpan approach of Van Warmerdam, De ontmaagding van Eva van End [The Deflowering of Eva van End] (Michiel ten Horn, 2012) is closer to Van Warmerdam because of a slightly disturbing tone. The young teenager Eva is a typical wallflower, reminiscent of Dawn Wiener from Welcome to the Dollhouse (Todd Solondz, 1996). She is not only neglected by her peers, but also by her own parents and her two elderly brothers. The arrival of an exchange student from Germany who is zen-like, vegetarian and very attractive has an impact upon all family members. His presence makes them explore their noble side as well as their frustrations. Due to the transformative effect of his being there, the net result is that Eva will finally get noticed. Most of the time the camera is at her eye level, but in one of the last scenes every other family member is at eye level, while she brings them coffee and/or something to eat, whilst her head is cut off. This time everyone has to look up to Eva.

1 Another great example is the episode from Tarantino’s second film, Pulp Fiction (1994), when a gun goes accidentally off in a car and the head of the boy in the back seat is blown to pieces. His brains are all over the car, but instead of an emphatic response, the shooter, Vincent Vega, starts blathering about the fact that he could not help it that his gun went off because the driver was so careless as to apparently hit a tiny object on the road. The characters, and in extension of them the spectators, are more or less supposed to react to such a gruesome scene with a feeling of disgust, but in fact a laugh is closer at hand because of the super cool, and therefore incongruous, response by Vincent.

2 The opening scene of the Dutch crime thriller Lek [Leak] (Jean van de Velde, 2000) seems to be indebted to this scene from Reservoir Dogs, as the gangster boss Haveman is singing a karaoke version of André Hazes’ popular torch song ‘Kleine Jongen’ [‘Little Boy’], while a guy is being hanged.

3 The matter has never been truly solved whether the grotesque should be considered as a genre or as a stylistic feature/tradition. If it is a genre, it should be called ‘het groteske’ in Dutch; if it is a stylistic tradition, ‘de groteske.’ There seems to be a slight preference for the latter notion (Van Buuren, 24).

4 Edwards and Graulund examine the infamous horror film The Human Centipede (Tom Six, 2009), already mentioned in chapter 5. In this film an insane German doctor creates a Siamese triplet by grafting living creatures together from mouth to anus, which is a grotesque ‘disruption of basic bodily functions, namely the ability to rid the body of natural waste’ (61). Six’s depiction of the grotesque body can be read as a humorous reflection on the horror genre itself, for the ‘absurd conceit of the film is laughable and the extreme bad taste of the film is
sensational and bound to shock audiences of more sophisticated tastes’ (62).

5 Ian Kerkhof changed his name in 1999 officially to Aryan Kaganof – Kaganof being the family name of his biological father.

6 In an interview in De Wereld Draait Door, Birgit Schuurman, actress in BLACK OUT, implied that earlier Dutch action-crime-comedies still had affinity with children’s television series like BASSIE & ADRIAAN and PEPPI & KOKKI.


8 The gangsters in BLACK OUT are only equalled, if not topped, in weirdness by the drug dealer Kalpa, a minor but seminal character in PRINS [PRINCE] (Sam de Jong, 2015). Kalpa is a skinny sociopath with bleached hair and a goofy grimace. One reviewer, Steve Davis of the Austin Chronicle, compared him to the giggling killer in KISS OF DEATH (Henry Hathaway, 1947), played by Richard Widmark. On the one hand, Kalpa does not shy away from dirty work, like slaughtering pigs in his own basement, but on the other hand, he adorns himself with bling-bling and is keen on showing off with his flamboyant purple Lamborghini. By promising the teenage protagonist Ayoub a joyride in his car as well as by offering him fashionable sneakers, Kalpa is able to exert a decisive influence on the Dutch Moroccan boy in a film which looks like an extended music video. Many scenes are in slow motion and a great number of shots are frontally staged, with characters facing the camera. The electronic music score is thumping at times, although Andrea Bocelli’s ‘Con te partirò’ is included on the soundtrack as well. In one scene the camera moves in circles around Ayoub and his friends, while the rhythm is disrupted by jump cuts. Moreover, there is also a fascinating zoom in on Ayoub, which then very slowly dissolves into an unstable point-of-view shot of Ayoub on a moped. As fascinating is the scene in which Ayoub points a gun at one of his bullies, for the point-of-view shot is suddenly superimposed with a mental image of his recently deceased father: Ayoub decides to let the bullies go unharmed. PRINS has been praised for its visual bravado, which is, as sometimes noted by critics, at the expense of narrative consistency, for the story easily shifts moods, from gloomy to optimistic, from retro-aesthetics to scenes shot in fluorescent light.

9 Once called by American essayist Susan Sontag the ‘most important experimental filmmaker’ of his time, Frans Zwartjes made his most significant films, in which he explored erotics and cruelty, in the 1970s. His work was grainy, consisted of brusque edits and he often worked with performance artists, adorned with heavy make-up.

10 KYODAI MAKES THE BIG TIME ends with a static shot, slightly high angle, of no less than 8 minutes, showing a woman, Stef, on a bed, after she has heard that her former boyfriend Kyodai has died. She listens to a record of Al Green’s ‘For the Good Times,’ twice; we see her drink alcohol and weep.
If there is a precursor in Dutch cinema to this Ronnie, then the slightly cartoonish Jack from Lek could be a candidate. The main reason why Lek is not discussed in this study is that the film is, apart from its representation of gangsters Haveman and Jack, fairly serious in tone.

In the case of dramatic or tragic irony, the audience watches a drama unfold, whilst the viewers already know its destined outcome, and thus they see the characters ‘at the mercy of the plot’ (Colebrook, 14). The tragedy of Oedipus is a good example.

Whereas in dramatic and cosmic irony this ‘other meaning’ is plot or destiny, in verbal irony ‘the other meaning is either what the speaker intends or what the hearer understands’ (Colebrook, 15).

See the blog by Trevor Gilks: When Judah starts to make peace with his crime, ‘a very cohesive message starts to form: Be a phony, lie, steal, kill people, take a dump on Woody Allen’s sister.... The world is your oyster, and the only things holding you back are the arbitrary moral codes you impose upon yourself. If you think there’s a heavenly force that’s going to reward you for your good behavior, you’re a blind fool.’

Another Woody Allen film which explores this ‘irony of fate’ is MATCH POINT (2005), which starts with a voice-over by tennis coach Chris: ‘The man who said “I’d rather be lucky than good” saw deeply into life. People are afraid to face how great a part of life is dependent on luck. It’s scary to think so much is out of one’s control. There are moments in a match when the ball hits the top of the net, and for a split second, it can either go forward or fall back. With a little luck, it goes forward, and you win. Or maybe it doesn’t, and you lose.’ Chris, from humble origins, marries into the British upper class, but falls in love with Nola, the girlfriend of his brother-in-law. To prevent Nola from revealing their secret affair, he kills her in a scene which has references to Dostoevsky’s 1866 novel Crime and Punishment. He wants to make it look like a robbery, and therefore he first kills Nola’s neighbour, the old Mrs. Eastby, and steals some of her jewellery. Knowing that Nola is on her way home, he shoots Nola as if she is no more than the accidental witness to the robbery, not the intended victim. Despite the cunning plan, there is a detective who gets it absolutely right after he has had a dream, but then the luck factor does its work for Chris. A drug addict has been found murdered with a stolen ring on him that belonged to Mrs. Eastby. That way, the ball bounces forward after all.

Structurally this Peter, playing an important supporting role, is in a similar position as the retiring sheriff in the darkly comic NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN (Joel and Ethan Coen, 2007), who has some quasi-reflexive voice-overs on how to keep the peace in the old times and in the harsher present days (‘I always knew I had to be willing to die to even do this job’).
If PLAN C is a grotesque-irony about a character who suffers from ‘moments of extremis,’ Nachtrit [Nightrun] (Dana Nechushtan, 2006) is the tragic version. A cab driver grabs the opportunity to buy a scarce and expensive licence, but when the law is altered soon thereafter, it becomes a worthless piece of paper. He is now in serious trouble since he owes a number of people a great amount of money.

Carna (1969) lasted 12 minutes; De val [The Fall] (1970), inspired by a novel by Albert Camus, was close to half an hour. The third short in this period was the bizarre 34-minute Antenna (1970), bordering on blasphemy. A voice-over is rereading an apocryphal version of Genesis; in beautiful widescreen (Techniscope) shots we see how a priest makes advances at the young girl, Antenna; finally, after an intertitle reads ‘When the echo of evil had been silenced,’ Jesus Christ, played by the French actor Pierre Clémenti, is introduced, driving in a Daf, featuring a flag with the text ‘SOS Total Mental Service.’

Koolhoven’s Suzy Q has a reference to Sunlight soap as well: The jobless father sets up a grocery store at home because he has nothing to do. The mother encourages the children to please their father and playact as customers. Suzy knocks on his door and asks whether she can smell a piece of soap. He then brings her Sunlight soap, but she complains that it stinks. Her father replies: ‘But, Madame, this is an old-fashioned, delicious odour.’ Suzy, however, only wants to pay 50 cents instead of the required 90 cents.

When De blinde fotograaf has distorting shots, it is via a specific device: we see the main character in a distorting mirror or a magnifying glass enlarges one of his eyes.

Insofar De mantel der liefde was a revengeful comment upon those 1970s box-office successes which ushered in banality, it was a smart streak of irony to cast a great number of actors who had featured in these films: Ronnie Bierman was prostitute Greet and Henk Molenberg the ‘chambermaid’ in Wat zien ik?!; Hans Boskamp, playing Moses here, had a role in Turks fruit; Willeke van Ammelrooy had played main parts in, among other films, Mira and Frank en Eva. In addition to that, the roles of Jesus and of the naked baker were performed by actors who had built a reputation in children’s programmes.

A different version of ‘the irony of irony’ in De vierde man was published in Journal of Dutch Literature 4, 2 (2013).

CONCLUSION

When interviewed by Pieter Webeling, the essayist Bas Heijne told that the majority of Dutch humour is derived from the ‘anxiety that someone else feels himself superior to you, or out of the conviction that the other is utterly stupid.’ In Flod-
DER, he continues, ‘the aggression is directed at those inhabitants who are both rich and pretentious. We tend to sympathize with the Flodders for [starlike] airs are being chastised in the Netherlands. It is a raunchy form of humour which directly originates from the paintings by Breughel. Many people cannot use the term “intellectual” without the prefix pseudo- or quasi-. This is grounded in frustration: do not think that you know things better than I do. This way we constantly take each other’s measure – in order to save the other from unseemly feelings of superiority.’

One of the gaps that is being exploited is the one between ‘being a body and having a body,’ as Critchley asserts. For him, humour marks ‘the return of the physical into the metaphysical’ (43).

Zupancic adds to this: ‘Yet the comic point is that what is behind is – Surprise, surprise! – nothing but what we would expect’ (209).

The comic, which is usually ‘discovered in a spectacle or situation that remains unformulated in words ... appears to involve only two subjects because the role of joker and victim, or joker and audience, are played by the same person’ (Beeman, 46).

That the joker makes use of the third person to arouse his own laughter is according to Freud proven by the fact ‘that a person who has begun by telling a joke with a serious face afterwards joins in the other person’s laughter with a moderate laugh’ (Jokes, 156).

My personal experience with Van Warmerdam films is that they become funnier the more often one sees them, which is hardly ever the case with regular comedies. They lend themselves to ‘rewatchability,’ just as is the case with THE BIG LEBOWSKI.