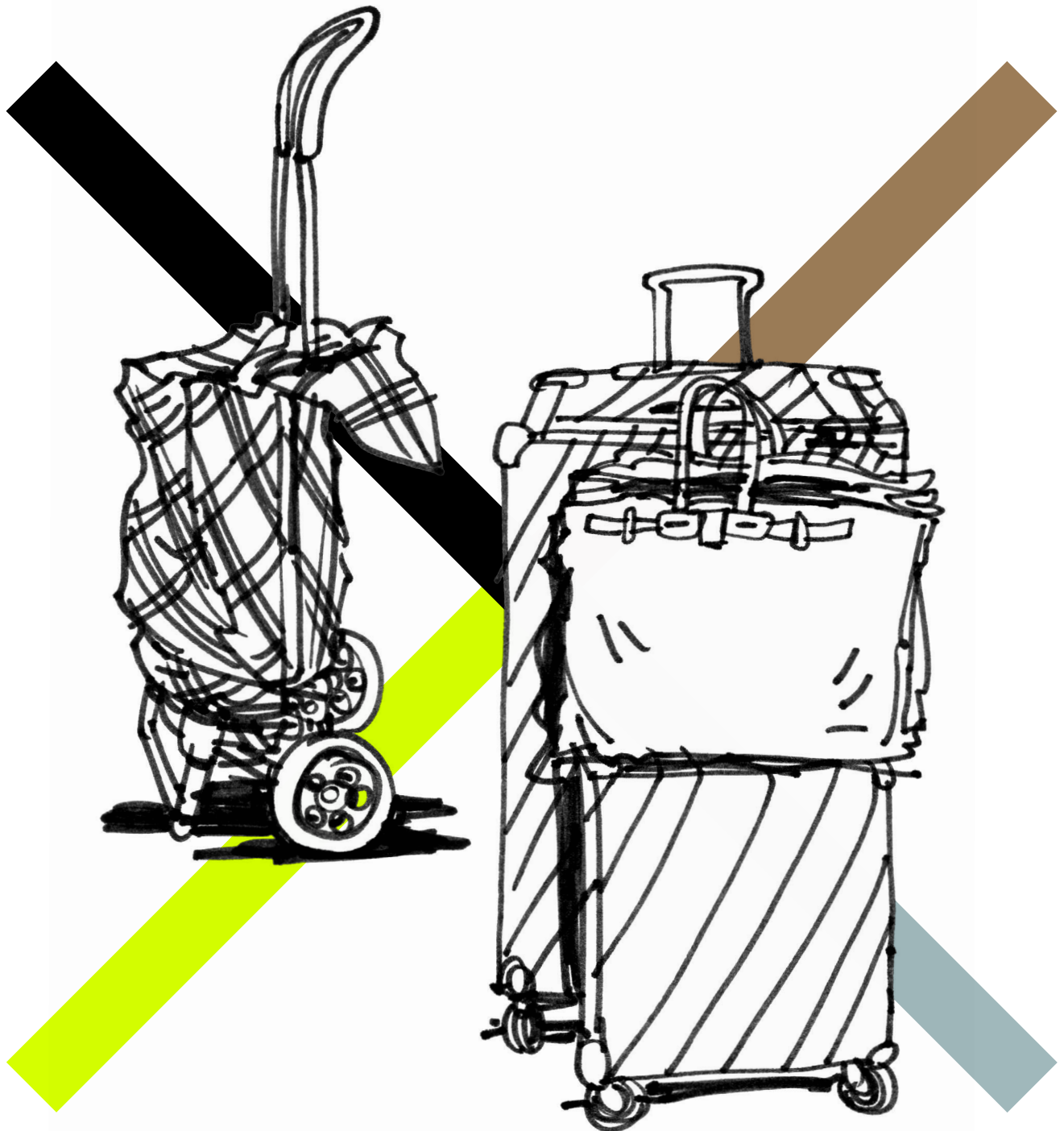


The Polyphonic Object



Billie Nuchelmans

History

Historian of architecture and urban planning. He is specialized in the urban history of Amsterdam, and interested, amongst other things, in the relationship between political movements and urban design.

Katerina Kalakidi

Museum Studies

With an academic background in history and archaeology, Kalakidi is now pursuing the MA Museum Studies at the University of Amsterdam.

Menno Reijven

Argumentation and Rhetoric

Assistant professor of argumentation and communication in the Department of Dutch Studies at the University of Amsterdam. Reijven is a discourse analyst focusing on argumentation and rhetoric in political discourse.

Emma van Bijnen

Argumentation and Rhetoric

Lecturer at the University of Amsterdam, as well as an independent researcher and writer with a doctorate in discourse and argumentation. Van Bijnen is the Research and Publications Officer at Amsterdam Museum, and the Editor-in-Chief of Amsterdam Museum Journal.

Wouter van Gent

Geography

Geographer and associate professor at the Universiteit van Amsterdam. Last year, he published his book 'Making the Middle-class City' with Willem Boterman on the gentrification of Amsterdam between the 1980s and 2010s.

Een Genrestuk

Amsterdam Museum Journal

In 'The Polyphonic Object' four analyses by scholars from different perspectives and academic fields show the layers of complexity a single object can hold. Through their (historical, museum studies, urban geographical, and argumentation/rhetorical) reconstructions, they uncover the different stories behind the painting *Genrestuk* [translation: 'A *Genre Piece*'] by Albert Blitz (1975) (Stichting Genootschap Amsterdam Museum, 1985). The painting was made in response to the 'Nieuwmarkt riots'.

Issue #2 Summer 2024



Albert Blitz (1938-2022)

Een Genrestuk, 1975

Stichting Genootschap Amsterdam Museum, 1984

From late March - early April 1975, the Nieuwmarkt neighborhood in Amsterdam (NL) witnessed evictions and the demolition of residential houses for the completion of the Central Station - Bijlmermeer subway line. This painting by Albert Blitz was bought by P. van den Berg at an auction organized by the Nieuwmarkt committee, for the benefit of the victims.

Billie Nuchelmans (historian)



Both Amsterdam mayor Ivo Samkalden and councilman Han Lammers were, throughout much of the 1970s, popular scapegoats for local activists protesting the city's urban planning policies. Samkalden, in his role as mayor, was probably an obvious choice as a focal point for negative attention. Lammers, councilman in charge of 'urban development' from 1970 to 1976, seems to have had quite a target on his back as well.

It should be no surprise then, that this painting by Albert Blitz portrays the pair as true personifications of bureaucratic evil. Both have a somewhat vacant look, and especially Lammers, who was 43 years old when Blitz painted this piece, appears quite a bit frailer and older than he actually was. Neither one of them seems to care at all about the neighborhood burning down in the background. As far as they are able to muster any active focus,

it is directed at their meal, and at the cutlery that they are grabbing at with their large, fleshy hands.

As stated, this artistic attack existed in a wider context of vitriol directed at government officials. Other instances of it could be spotted, for example, in graffiti and murals that graced the walls of the Nieuwmarkt area during the same period and that can still be seen in photographs. Some are generic threats of violence against demolition crews or city officials. Some single out people like, for example, Han Lammers. In photographs by J.M. Arsath Ro'is, taken in the late summer of 1974, we see the slogan "*Put Lammers in the ground*" written on a wall on the Zwanenburgwal, while just around the corner, in the Sint Antoniesbreestraat, passers-by were greeted by the rather morbid pun "*Hang Lammers*", next to a depiction of a gallows. A picture of the same street by Wim Ruigrok also shows a wall covered in slogans; one of them is the popular slogan *geen buizen maar huizen* [translation: '*no tubes but houses*'] referring to the demolitions needed for the construction of a subway line through the neighborhood. It is accompanied here by a second, quite concrete pledge, promising that any further work on the subway would be answered with the demolition of Lammers' own house.

In september of 1974 the AAP, or *Amsterdamse Aktie Partij* [translation: '*Amsterdam Action Party*'], which had already, during the city council elections earlier that same year, campaigned on a platform of strict personal hostility towards Lammers, decided, as far as this pledge was concerned, to put their money where their mouths were. The party organized a demonstration in front of Lammers' personal residence. Pamphlets were distributed in which the councilman was referred to as a '*municipal Führer*', his door was boarded up, and a group of demon-

strators started to tear up the pavement in front of it, before being stopped by the police.

Lammers was not the only victim of protests like this. The *Aktiegroep Nieuwmarkt-buurt* [translation: '*Action Group Nieuwmarkt Neighborhood*'] reflected, in another 1974 pamphlet, on a number of actions that it had recently carried out. Several city officials had been visited at their homes, to "*point out the error of their ways in a person-to-person conversation*". The workshop of a contractor who had taken on demolition work in the area had been "*evicted*". The home of Tjerk Westerterp, Minister of Transport and Water Management, had been covered in posters – and when Westerterp himself walked out to object to this, he also got a dab of wallpaper paste applied to his face.

As the municipality of Amsterdam, once so fiercely hated by activists, began to motivate many of its urban planning policies in phrases quite similar to those used by the protesters of the 1970s, both city officials and historians sometimes embraced a view of those protests as a disagreement that had since led to a new, widely held consensus, centered around ideas about mixed-use neighborhoods and the preservation of the existing '*urban fabric*'.¹ Housing in Amsterdam, however, has also rapidly been getting more expensive, especially in the city center, which has been substantially transformed through gentrification and a massive surge in tourism.² A growing awareness of this contradiction at the heart of the current consensus now brings a new relevance to the protests that preceded it. Any complete understanding of these protests should also include a look at the personal hostility that was very much a part of them.

One result of that might be some much-needed historical context to certain current debates about '*polarization*', but apart from contextualizing recent debates, this also

helps our understanding of the past. The aggressive or sometimes even violent hostility towards city officials forms an important part, for example, of the circumstances in which Albert Blitz painted this “*genre piece*”. That this painting is, in its own way, an attack, should already have been clear. Being aware of the highly politically charged situation; the disruptive acts of hostility taking place at the same time, and towards the very people it depicts, however, might push this interpretation a little further, and perhaps make us see this painting as an even more radical commitment.

References

- Aktiegroep Nieuwmarktbuurt. *Metroraapport van de Nieuwmarktbuurt*. 1974.
- J.M. Arsath Ro'is. *Zwanenburgwal 6-2*. 1974. Amsterdam City Archives, archieff.amsterdam/beeldbank/detail/d888b286-552a-b7fe-457c-783e8fb49086
- J.M. Arsath Ro'is. *Nieuwmarkt 25-17 (v.l.n.r.)*. 1974. Amsterdam City Archives, archieff.amsterdam/beeldbank/detail/8a6e80c7-ed8d-486d-1863-14bc507aeada
- Eric Duivenvoorden. *Een voet tussen de deur: Geschiedenis van de kraakbeweging 1964-1999*. De Arbeiderspers, 2000.
- Wim Ruigrok. *Verzet tegen de metro in de Nieuwmarktbuurt. 1974-1975*. Amsterdam City Archives, archieff.amsterdam/beeldbank/detail/e1032fe0-1974-f541-d6cf-19a7ca7263c1

Endnotes

- ¹ This, perhaps, slightly rose-tinted view on the legacy of the Nieuwmarkt protests can be seen, for example, in popular books, such as Fred Feddes' otherwise quite informative outline of the history of urban planning in Amsterdam: *A Millennium of Amsterdam: Spatial History of a Marvellous City*. (Thoth, 2012).
- ² See, for example, the most recent iteration of the International Rent Index by City, published by renting platform HousingAnywhere, in which Amsterdam is listed as the city with the highest average rents in Europe: <https://housinganywhere.com/rent-index-by-city>

Katerina Kalakidi (museum studies)



Amsterdam Museum Journal

The massive demonstration that was organized by Amsterdam residents in the spring of 1975 in opposition to the Amsterdam City Council's plan to demolish multiple buildings in the *Nieuwmarkt* district is revitalized by Albert Blitz's *Een Genrestuk* [translation: 'A Genre Piece']. This pivotal event etched its place in the annals of the city's history, becoming a cornerstone in the ongoing debates on urban development and gentrification.

Despite the outcome of the protest, the *Nieuwmarkt* case offers a multitude of historical perspectives, particularly from a social standpoint. This short analysis investigates the protest's aftermath and graphs the evolution of Amsterdam's cultural legacy over the next few years. It offers a grassroots analysis that delves into the key players and underlying motivations. By examining these experiences, we can better educate Amsterdam's present-

Issue #2 Summer 2024

day residents on how to engage with the legacy left for future generations. This bottom-up approach promises to enrich our understanding of the protest's significance and long-term effects on the city's identity.

From Resistance to Renewal:

The Rich History of the Nieuwmarktbuurt

In the wake of World War II, Amsterdam's urban tapestry accommodated a heterogeneous population comprising activists, hippies, artists, students, and other progressives. Many of them found shelter in the apartments of the Nieuwmarkt area and they immediately made their presence and involvement in the neighborhood known. In cities across Western Europe, the 1970s saw a rise in resident resistance. In Amsterdam, where resident protests have a 45-year history, the rise of the squatting movement contributed to their intensification and radicalization. Their argument was straightforward yet compelling: demolishing their homes signified the beginning of a 'Manhattanization' movement that sought to bring Amsterdam up to date for the 21st century, while also destroying centuries' worth of architectural treasures.¹ Amsterdam residents had a valuable tool at their disposal and they were passionate about and committed to the preservation of their neighborhood and city. As Justus Uitermark notes, their actions were framed within the broader narrative of 'saving the city'. When viewed from the outside, these acts were attempts by locals to preserve the physical and social fabric of their communities and the city itself. Their resolute resistance succeeded in halting the municipality's plans, a victory for which Amsterdam today is indebted to them. This victory proves that the Amsterdam squatter movement could significantly alter the housing market and the urban landscape.

The Role of Activist Groups in Shaping Society

The question of whether the residents of the Nieuwmarkt acted impulsively in their protest against the municipality's plans or if it was the result of careful planning, finds its answer in the historical context of the area. Over time, various forms of opposition to municipal plans emerged significantly, such as the *Nieuwmarkt Action Group*. Gradually, the neighborhood transformed into something akin to an autonomous zone where people took charge across various domains. In his work, Hans Pruijt emphasized the *New Social Movement*, a framework that allowed participants in the squatters' movement in Amsterdam to engage in activism without being bound by a specific agenda.² Communities were viewed by activist groups as vital hubs of well-being and as platforms for democratic action. The result was an urban conflict never seen before in recent Dutch history. The front page of the *Volkskrant* on March 25, 1975, captured the pivotal role that the media of the time played in this, leaving a lasting impression from the outset.



Image 1: Front page of the *Volkskrant* of March 25, 1975. Photograph by: Local authority Amsterdam website.

Blue Monday: The Vivid Legacy of the Nieuwmarkt Riots

After the Nieuwmarkt riots, also known as *Blauwe Maandag* [translation: 'Blue Monday'], Amsterdam was left with long-lasting damage for many years. A city renowned for its serene and beautiful canals became a battlefield, with many people being hurt, and some even seriously injured. This movement represents the epitome of organized neighborhood resistance; it served as a model that other districts in Amsterdam would follow, ultimately saving the city from the impending threat of being overtaken by enormous, soulless concrete office blocks. All things considered; the demonstrators emerged triumphant. In retrospect, all of us should be grateful that they were able to put an end to the demolition frenzy, even before the metro system was eventually introduced. The squatters' movement has been among the most influential groups in shaping Amsterdam's recent development, significantly transforming the city's housing, political, and cultural landscape (Owens 2008).

Significant changes in public opinion were brought about by the urban landscape's transformation. The struggle for the Nieuwmarkt served as a precursor to the violent squatter riots that would plague the city in the years to come. At the same time, the city of Amsterdam put heritage preservation at the top of its list of priorities. What lies ahead? How do we pay tribute to the people—some of whom are still among us—who made the decision to reshape the urban environment and redefine their role in the decision-making processes regarding projects that impact their neighborhoods?

Anti-Metro Art

Interestingly, the Nieuwmarkt metro station features "*anti-metro art*," as a commemoration of the riots and as a testament to the

importance of the fight they fought, a collage of monuments of resistance and reminders of oppression, neglected by the numerous passers-by daily (Uitermark 2009). "*Living is not a privilege but a right*" is written in big white letters on the station's floor. This reminds us of the continuous fight for equitable urban development and social justice. Reading historical materials can help with reflection, nostalgia, and inspiration. It is a challenge, though, to transform these materials into an artistic narrative with coherence that captures Amsterdam's struggle against the relentless forces of modernization and gentrification. It requires a delicate balance between preserving the past and envisioning a future that embraces progress and inclusivity while honoring the rich heritage of the city. This is where the contribution of culture comes up, in the form of an open-to-the-public art project. The anti-metro art at the Nieuwmarkt metro station serves as a living proof of Amsterdam residents' resilience against the municipal plans for the reshaping of the urban landscape.

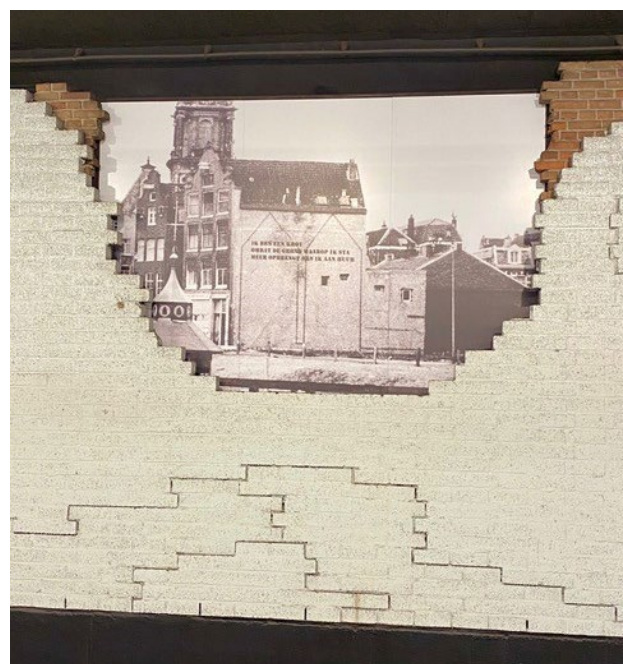


Image 2: Debris of the Nieuwmarkt neighborhood showing the before and after of the riots. Photograph by: the author.



Image 3: Quote near one of the exits of the Nieuwmarkt metro station platform [translation: "We will continue to live here"]. Photograph by: the author.

Protests and Activism in Today's World

In today's world, protests often take the form of anonymous statements on the internet, lacking the tangible collective action of earlier protests. The largely forgotten Dutch society's 1970s revolt against the demolition of urban centers serves as a poignant reminder of the role social movements play in raising issues and putting pressure on public officials to envision more positive, inclusive futures. Movements take a proactive approach to defining change-oriented paths, portraying injustice, and creating meaning (Uitermark 2004). In response to the ongoing conflict in Gaza, protests and demonstrations have recently taken place in several locations across the University of Amsterdam (UvA) campuses. The activists' and UvA delegations' ongoing communication demonstrates their dedication

and willingness to have the discussion. The result is the same, whether it is 1975 or 2024: everyone in the neighborhood is accountable for participating in the community. When people treat each other and themselves with respect, it leads to a feeling of self-worthiness and self-esteem and transforms neighborhoods into venues of political activity aimed at ensuring a fair and just city.³

In the end, a city center ought to be a vibrant social hub that represents the various communities it is home to. Amsterdam can act as a role model in this regard, thanks to its rich history and continuous efforts to promote inclusivity. History itself bears witness to the power of collective action and the enduring impact it can have on shaping the trajectory of cities and societies.

References

- Martin, Deborah G. "Place-Framing' as Place-Making: Constituting a Neighborhood for Organizing and Activism." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 93.3 (2003): 730–750. Web.
- Owens, Lynn. "From Tourists to Anti-Tourists to Tourist Attractions: The Transformation of the Amsterdam Squatters' Movement." *Social movement studies* 7.1 (2008): 43–59. Web.
- Pruijt, Hans. "The Logic of Urban Squatting." *International journal of urban and regional research* 37.1 (2013): 19–45. Web.
- Reaven, Marci. "Neighborhood Activism in Planning for New York City, 1945-1975." *Journal of urban history* 46.6 (2020): 1261–1289. Web.
- Uitermark, Justus. "An in Memoriam for the Just City of Amsterdam." *City (London, England)* 13.2–3 (2009): 347–361. Web.
- Uitermark, Justus. "Framing Urban Injustices: The Case of the Amsterdam Squatter Movement." *Space & polity* 8.2 (2004): 227–244. Web.
- Wollentz, Gustav, Marko Barišić, and Nourah Sammar. "Youth Activism and Dignity in Post-War Mostar - Envisioning a Shared Future through Heritage." *Space & polity* 23.2 (2019): 197–215. Web.

Endnotes

- ¹ For more material related to Manhattanization, see Burgers *Urban Landscapes: On Public Space in the Post-Industrial City* and Greenspan *How to manhattanize a city*.
- ² For more on this theme, see Pruijt *The Logic of Urban Squatting*.
- ³ For more on the theme of dignity, see Wollentz *Youth activism and dignity*.

Menno Reijven and Emma van Bijnen (argumentation/rhetoric)



Amsterdam Museum Journal

Visual Rhetoric in a Genre Painting

The title of the work 'Genre Painting' (*Genrestuk*) by Albert Blitz is a standard term used to describe *paintings about everyday settings of modest citizens* (e.g. Aono 2011, p. 15) by which the spectator is reminded of the difference between undesirable and correct behavior (de Vries 2005, 109). As such, a genre

piece is not idealized but ideological in nature, proposing injunctive norms. As ideology and proposed morals are important aspects of genre paintings, they are interesting to analyze from a visual rhetoric and argumentation perspective. When doing so, we discover that a few visual contrasts are being exploited by Albert Blitz that firmly place this painting in

Issue #2 Summer 2024

another genre, maybe even more so than that of a 'genre painting'...

First, is this really an everyday setting? A calm and composed dinner while flames are raging in the background? The construction of the metro line was considered catastrophic by the residents of the *Nieuwmarkt* neighborhood. There were riots and violent protests, but the neighborhood was not *literally* on fire. The raging fire (and its destructive properties) seemingly represents the neighborhood's then state, from the perspective of the locals. As such, we can consider the flaming background for the politicians' casual dinner to be a visual metaphor, in which properties of the source domain are visually projected onto the goal domain (Šorm and Steen 2018, 48). In this case: the raging fire (source domain) and the *Nieuwmarkt* (goal domain).

For the locals, this situation was certainly not their everyday; instead, they considered it an unacceptable disruption of their everyday lives. So, for whom is this an *everyday setting*? Like the painted fire, the mayor and alderman were destroying the neighborhood, and according to the locals, these politicians did not even care. The painting shows no emotional response or sign of regret; the mayor and alderman have turned their backs to the destruction and are carrying on with their dinner. Being part of a 'genrestuk', this apparently is everyday practice for these politicians.

Second, given the importance of this genre in portraying ordinary peoples' everyday lives, which are generally represented by unknown figures (see e.g. Johns 1991), it should be noted that the painting foregrounds *two prominent local labor politicians* instead. The use of formal wear such as suits points to the technocratic nature of the local politicians in charge, which contrasts with the typical modest citizen in a genre painting (Aono 2011, 15). Both the mayor and alderman were labor

politicians; people who supposedly would stand with and for 'the people'. To show them, in formal attire eating a fancy meal with wine, while a neighborhood is burning (and of which the flames were lit by them) is an *ironic* use of this genre. They are technocrats, distinct from the local people; they caused destruction, and they could not care less. Overall, the selected contrast and visual metaphor clearly conveys the artist's critical stance towards the local government, presenting the undesirable behavior by the politicians befitting the 'genre painting'.

Reconstructing Visual Argumentation

In argumentation theoretical terms, Blitz is taking a stance on the issue and presents argumentation in support (see e.g. van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004; 2016, for more on argumentation theory). The standpoint advanced by Blitz is that 'the behavior by the politicians should be negatively evaluated', which is then defended by the fact that the plans were bad ('the extension of the Amsterdam subway was a bad plan') and that the government did not even care ('the labor politicians did not care about the consequences'). These premises are both defended by the visual décor. Specifically, that the plans are bad is supported by the visual metaphor of the neighborhood on fire (the metro line has destroyed the city like a fire), while the second premise is indexed by the mayor and alderman casually eating their luxurious dinner, looking like uncaring technocrats: they are unbothered by the fire that is destroying everything they ought to protect.

In short, the painting is an explicit critique on the local government, presented by means of visual argumentation with identifiable premises. This painting represents a skilled instance of visual rhetoric; metaphors, contrasts and indexes are used to establish meaning and delineate the possible inferences

that can be drawn from the painting. The only verbal phrase 'a genre piece' does not contain any premises, although it does initiate a cascade of inferences which result in the possibility to reconstruct the argumentation.

Genre Painting or Political Cartoon?

The visual rhetorical and argumentative reconstruction suggests a mixture of a genre painting with that of an *editorial cartoon*, as Blitz clearly makes a multimodal (i.e. visual and verbal) political point by means of the tension between the visual argumentation and the verbal title. Although it indeed shows undesirable behavior and a clear ideology (de Vries 2005), befitting of the 'genre painting', the contrasts and visual metaphor point towards a rhetorical genre: *the political cartoon* (sub-genre of the editorial cartoon). Such cartoons are a known genre used to comment on political events or discourses by means of satire, caricature, or irony (see e.g., Dugalich 2018). This satirical commentary is usually done multimodally (visually and verbally) and often includes a visual metaphor (see e.g., Schilperoord and Maes 2009), as is the case in the 'Genrestuk' by Albert Blitz.

In short, a close analysis reveals how this painting is argumentative and contributes to a discussion in the public sphere. By playing with genre conventions and contrasts, a deeper message is being created. The painting has been produced as a political message: a critical reflection of the *state of affairs*. This suggests it is not a 'genre painting' in which the everyday lives of ordinary people are depicted through anonymous characters that represent larger communities (see e.g. Johns 1991), but instead something alike a political cartoon in which the behaviors of two painted (and known) politicians are being condemned by means of contrasts and metaphors.

For the research fields of rhetoric and argumentation, this painting offers some

interesting insights as well. The painting reveals there are deeper underlying structures to the rhetoric in paintings, and cultural artifacts in general. Specifically, this example presents a beautiful prototypical example clarifying the possibilities of visual rhetoric and the importance of the study of art as (possible) persuasive communication.

References

- Aono, J. (2011). *Imitation and innovation: Dutch genre painting 1680-1750 and its reception of the Age* (Doctoral dissertation, Universiteit van Amsterdam). Accessible via: UvA_Dare https://pure.uva.nl/ws/files/14946319/Thesis_ex.pdf
- Dugalich, N. M. (2018). Political cartoon as a genre of political discourse. *RUDN Journal of Language Studies, Semiotics and Semantics*, 90, 158-172.
- van Eemeren, F. H., Grootendorst, R., & Grootendorst, R. (2004). *A systematic theory of argumentation: The pragma-dialectical approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- van Eemeren, F. H., & Grootendorst, R. (2016). *Argumentation, communication, and fallacies: A pragma-dialectical perspective*. Routledge.
- Johns, E. (1991). *American genre painting: The politics of everyday life*. Yale University Press.
- Schilperoord, J., & Maes, A. (2009). Visual metaphoric conceptualization in editorial cartoons. *Multimodal metaphor*, 11, 213-240.
- Šorm, E., & Steen, G. (2018). Towards a method for visual metaphor identification. *Visual metaphor: Structure and process*, 18, 47-88.
- de Vries, L. (2005). *Verhalen uit kamer, keuken en kroeg: het Hollandse genre van de zeventiende eeuw als vertellende schilderkunst*. Amsterdam University Press.

Wouter van Gent (geographer)



Amsterdam Museum Journal

Two fancy men sit at a dinner table, grabbing their utensils and getting ready to eat. The well-dressed bald man sits straight up and looks at us warily. The other man sags in his seat, tieless and belly out. He leers hungrily as he stirs the soup. Their banquet reminds us of a still life of affluence and vanitas. Behind them, the city is burning. We see a third figure, a nurse. She notices the fire and seems to rush over to the window to close the curtains so

as not to disturb these important men. Maybe she cares for them.

Albert Blitz's *Een Genrestuk* [translation: 'a genre piece'] is a throwback to the golden age of Dutch painting, when Amsterdam's canals marked a centre of trade and power, and talented artists would create their art not for kings or churches but for a burgher society of merchants and statesmen. These affluent individuals commissioned genre art to capture

Issue #2 Summer 2024

a fraction of the everyday, often tinged with a hint of morality. Blitz did not paint his work for a bourgeois patron, but the piece was painted and auctioned off to support the *Nieuwmarkt* neighbourhood activist committee in the early spring of 1975 (Oehlen 2015).

At the time, Amsterdam was on fire, politically and socially. Like many cities in North America and Western Europe, the 1970s were a period of 'urban crisis'. As hard as it may seem today, cities were losing population to brand-new suburbs, manufacturing industries were struggling, and municipalities were scrambling for solutions to keep the city relevant. The municipality tried to turn the tide by transforming the city centre and the working-class neighbourhoods around it. Prewar housing was being destroyed to make way for modernist office buildings, infrastructure and roomy rental housing for families. The *Nieuwmarkt* neighbourhood in the city centre was planned for renewal. A broad new highway and a subway line were meant to improve connections, and to open up the poorer margins of the historic city centre for redevelopment (De Liagre Böhl 2010).

Yet, the plans proved to be a bridge too far. Residents, together with young activists and squatters, revolted against the demolishing. Amsterdam faced a housing shortage, particularly for young households flocking to the city. Why not build new housing for these new households instead of families? Riots broke out on March 24 and April 8. The 'battle for *Nieuwmarkt*' was fought with rocks and parking meters against water cannons and nightsticks. The residents barricaded streets, fortified buildings, built air bridges and set up their own communications. The violence shocked the country. Ultimately, the subway was built, but the highway was not. Also, no new metro line would be built for thirty years, and fitting social housing was constructed on top of the new metro tubes.

The subtitle of *Een Genrestuk* translates as "Mayor Dr. I. Samkalden and Alderman Han Lammers, dining against a backdrop of a burning *Nieuwmarkt* neighbourhood". It is a damning statement for these two Social Democrats who thought they were doing the right thing to save the city from squalor and gridlock. These two local leaders are small-time Nero's, unconcerned while their city burns. The work was auctioned two days before the riots broke out (Oehlen 2015), so the burning city represents the political tension that had been building up, the fiery sense of resistance and a spectre of things to come.

The *Nieuwmarkt* riots occurred during what has been labelled the 'twenty-year urban war', a period of social upheaval, protests, and disturbances that started with Provo in 1965 (Mamadouh 1992). The 1980s would see more violence between squatters and police. Yet, the social tensions would lead to a new direction in urban and housing policy in the late 1970s. Urban development would be aimed at housing residents and young newcomers in affordable and decent social rental housing (De Liagre Böhl 2010). After the dust settled in the early 1990s, the war was over, and Amsterdam had turned a new corner but was also on its way to become a middle-class city.

The young demonstrators and activists who were fighting the police and engaged in squatting, had grown up to become the 'new urban middle class'. As their bellies grew, it was their turn to sit at the table. They were now advocating for more ownership housing so they could stay in the city. Later, new policy ideas dictated that housing policies should aim to accommodate knowledge workers and creatives. Gentrification was already a policy in the 1980s to accommodate galleries, squatted housing and bars and restaurants in the historic centre. In the 2000s, the entire prewar city had to be gentrified. Amsterdam

policymakers argued that there was too much affordable housing and that 'we' should make this city more attractive for the middle class. Some planners even pointed to maps of housing prices and argued that raising prices everywhere means expanding the city. Also, the waiting lists for social rental apartments were getting a bit long. Ownership allowed the middle classes to jump the queue. Many of the sold apartments would fall into the hands of landlords who are now charging astronomic rents for the former social rental units. Gentrification became the state of things in Amsterdam (Boterman and Van Gent 2023).

Samkalden and Lammers failed to recognise that the city's demographics were already changing, and businesses were more interested in setting up their offices at the urban edge, near the ring road and suburbs. As such, they could not see what was ahead. Similarly, *Een Genrestuk*, the events in the Nieuwmarkt area and what followed also seem to be from a foreign city today. After a short period of radical city governance, the city has been gentrified after forty years. How would a genre piece look today? As the city's elders are dining, you would not see a fire in the background, but middle-class and upper-class people on busy terraces, sharing the wine and toasting their comfort. The nurse probably lives in Purmerend if she is lucky.¹

Endnotes

- 1 Pumerend is a small town just outside of Amsterdam, over the past decades a great deal of the population of Amsterdam was forced to move to places like Purmerend because they could not afford to live in the capital anymore.

References

- Boterman, W., & van Gent, W. *Making the middle-class city: The politics of gentrifying Amsterdam*. Palgrave McMillan, 2023.
- De Liagre Böhl, H. *Amsterdam op de Helling; De strijd om stadsvernieuwing*. Boom, 2010.
- Mamadouh, V. *De stad in eigen hand : provo's, kabouters en krakers als stedelijke sociale beweging*. Proefschrift, Universiteit van Amsterdam, 1992.
- Oehlen, F. "Nieuwmarktrevolte 1975". *Amsterdam Museum*, hart.amsterdam/nl/page/51860, 2015.