

Deliberate Camp

Each and every episode of the television series KREATIEF MET KURK [CREATIVE WITH CORK], directed by Pieter Kramer and broadcast on Dutch public television in the years 1993 and 1994, contained a remake of some fragment from a well-known film. The two performers Arjan Ederveen and Tosca Niterink imitated segments from a huge variety of titles: the silent film THE SHEIK with Rudolph Valentino; the Julie Andrews vehicle MARY POPPINS; HÖSTSONATEN [AUTUMN SONATA] by Ingmar Bergman; BLUE VELVET by David Lynch. Though the majority of remakes was no more than mere mimicry of a fragment (albeit displaying a keen eye for the smallest of details), the humour resided in the fact that Ederveen performed as Rudolph Valentino in a movie scene with flicker effects in one week, as Ingrid Bergman with a phoney Swedish accent the next week and as an hysterical Dennis Hopper in the week thereafter. The outlandish effect of such persiflages is that there seems to be an Ederveen – or a Niterink – behind every great performance in film history. You happen to be watching Michael Douglas and Sharon Stone in Verhoeven's BASIC INSTINCT (1992), but suddenly, a thought crosses your mind: Could this be Ederveen and Niterink in another disguise? Such an anti-immersive hypothesis, if perhaps only for a brief moment, is the potential short circuit produced by their remakes.

At other times Ederveen and Niterink deliberately added a comic element to the remade scene, as when the melancholic mouth harmonica sounds in ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST (Sergio Leone, 1968) give way to the happy tune of *De Vogeltjesdans* [Little Bird Dance] by the Dutch band De Electronica's. They could also mildly overdo some aspect, like the acting, or, as was the case with their version of FANFARE, they could slightly exaggerate the spoken accent and the intonation of words. The team of KREATIEF MET KURK made some adjustments to the story in their 5-minute remake

of Haanstra's classic, but the makers carefully reproduced both the 'original' black-and-white visuals and the style of filming. A character named Van Punteren had fallen into the water while playing the tuba. Because of this unfortunate fall he is a bit late for rehearsal. When he takes his position in the band and starts to blow, his tuba produces water rather than notes, to everybody's amusement. Finally, Van Punteren laughs so heartily that his chair tumbles over, which once again provokes an outburst of laughter.

Since KREATIEF MET KURK was a television programme with humorous sketches bordering on parody, the context of such a fragment like the one from FANFARE turns the remake into a persiflage. In the case of a persiflage, irony is used to emphasize a specific feature, usually via mimicry: the vain is exposed in its vanity; the trivial in its pettiness; the ugly in its ugliness. Though the difference from the original may seem minimal or even negligible, the imitation has the aim of mocking. As a consequence, the viewing attitude towards such a scene has shifted considerably: even though one can still watch it as just a remake, a (great) number of viewers will recognize the fragment as deliberately silly. This effect in KREATIEF MET KURK's version of FANFARE is also achieved thanks to aural means because the diction of the characters is even more archaic than in the original film and the sound is slightly more tinny. The deviation from the (style of the) original is only minimal, but the way the fragment is embedded into a programme like KREATIEF MET KURK, broadcast by the VPRO which, in general, has a leftist 'intellectual' audience, creates an ironic detachment, for roaring with laughter at such an incident, as Van Punteren does, is an uncommon reaction for a VPRO public. If a detached attitude was optional in the case of Haanstra's FANFARE, this attitude has become the most viable one in the remake of it. Moreover, the effect, if not the amusing surplus value of such a persiflage is that if one reviews Haanstra's film, one can only see it through the lens of the remake by Ederveen and Niterink. To paraphrase the purport of the well-known short story by Jorge Luis Borges, 'Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*', which takes the form of a literary critical piece about a fictional 20th-century French writer who rewrote Cervantes' *Don Quixote*: after KREATIEF MET KURK, one starts to see FANFARE as if it were a film made by Pieter Kramer. If this effect is brought about, the spectator will come to regard Haanstra's source text as dated, or, if he already did consider the film as outmoded, the persiflage will further emphasize this. Since the tone of Kramer's remake is not bickering, the viewer can still garner sympathy towards the source text, but the type of humour is definitely presented as corny and hilarious.

The working of the imitations in KREATIEF MET KURK ties in with the principles of so-called 'camp,' which conforms to a protocol based upon

reading between the lines. If we return to the key text on the term, the well-known ‘Notes on “Camp”’ by Susan Sontag, we can see that she mentions a series of conditions to qualify a text as possibly camp. According to her, camp is ‘something of a private code’ (275). The viewer should be able to recognize in the text/film a ‘love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration’ (275).¹ By just imitating (the style of) an old classic in the context of a television programme which is known by its target audience of (left-wing) intellectuals for its ironic stance, the ‘original’ carefree nature of the film is reread as excessively silly. It should not be overlooked that not every viewer is equipped with an antenna for camp, and in their eyes, the remake will be much more stupid than the source. Or a viewer can disqualify the ironic imitation, because he is still ‘genuinely’ fond of the humour of *FANFARE* – and of André van Duin, *FLODDER*, *FILMPJE!* A text/film is never inherently camp, but it requires a willing reader/viewer to interpret it as such. In this chapter I will indicate to what extent camp has evolved into a familiar strategy in Dutch cinema.

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A FAGGOT’S FAIRY TALE: *THEO & THEA EN DE ONTMASKERING VAN HET TENENKAASIMPERIUM*

It is a common mistake to conflate the terms camp and cult, but in his article “‘Trashing’ the Academy,’ Jeffrey Sconce made a valuable distinction. He identified cult (or paracinema, as he prefers to call it, for good reasons), with an ‘aesthetic of vocal confrontation’ (374). Those who love exploitation movies have a tendency to express their preferences out loud. Wilfully disregarding the existing film canon (featuring Orson Welles, Ingmar Bergman, Andrei Tarkovsky, and the like), they want to be acknowledged as the guardians of neglected films that despite their ludicrous content and style should be valued as masterpieces.² The best examples are the film events, presented by the Belgian Jan Verheyen (aka Max Rockatansky) and the Dutch Jan Doense (aka Mr. Horror), under the name *DE NACHT VAN DE WANSMAAK* [*THE NIGHT OF BAD TASTE*]. The aim of such events is to present the spectators with the dredges from the bottom of the cesspool of cinema. They consider the Dutch horror film *INTENSIVE CARE* (Dorna van Rouveroy, 1991) as one of the ‘pearls,’ which has been selected for the so-called ‘Hall of Shame.’ In particular, the question posed by Amy, a role played by Nada van Nie, who only featured in two films, to her boyfriend Peter, played by the then-popular Flemish singer Koen Wauters, whether he wants a Band-Aid when he is bleeding like a stuck pig has become a classic line of cluelessness.

Film Institute EYE in Amsterdam organizes once a month on a Friday

evening a so-called Cinema Egzotik. The double bill is dedicated to films whose quality, according to film aficionados Martin Koolhoven and Ronald Simons, is too little recognized by critics and scholars. This is often the case with genre films – (spaghetti) westerns, crime films, horror, science fiction are particularly popular. In Cinema Egzotik, action movie director Walter Hill, horror filmmaker John Carpenter, and giallo specialist Mario Bava are put upon a pedestal, for the simple reason that they are unduly neglected. The aim is to balance the score with those directors whose names are already secured within film history (Alfred Hitchcock, Stanley Kubrick, Yasujiro Ozu). To underscore the cult cinephilia, which accords with the idea of ‘vocal confrontation,’ for each and every screening film posters are being designed. Cinema Egzotik often takes an auteurist perspective: frequently a film is selected based upon the director’s (or scriptwriter’s) entire body of work. An advantageous criterion for selection can be that the film at hand is an ‘anomaly’ within the filmmaker’s oeuvre. If I were to propose some Dutch ‘egzotik’ films, I would settle for *DE INBREKER* [THE BURGLAR] (Frans Weisz, 1972), *BECAUSE OF THE CATS* (Fons Rademakers, 1973), *NAAKT OVER DE SCHUTTING* [NAKED OVER THE FENCE] (Frans Weisz, 1973) – for the mere reason that it features a very young Sylvia Kristel as a ravishing pop singer and Adèle Bloemendaal – *ANDY, BLOED EN BLOND HAAR* [ANDY, BLOOD AND BLOND HAIR] (Frank Wiering, 1979), about an obnoxious adolescent from Hengelo who maltreats several people in Amsterdam,³ the occult horror of *DE JOHNSONS* [THE JOHNSON’S] (Rudolf van den Berg, 1992), and my personal favourite, *WILDSCHUT* [STRONGHOLD] (Bobby Eerhart, 1985), an underrated tough gangster thriller with a chilling performance by Hidde Maas. A comic note is provided by the bulky local policeman, a not too smart ‘cowboy,’ who seems to have stepped right out of the American television series *THE DUKES OF HAZZARD*, broadcast between 1979 and 1985.

Whereas cult adopts the strategy to loudly advertise one’s preferences, camp follows a completely different agenda. Camp is an ‘aesthetic of ironic colonization and cohabitation’ (Sconce ‘Trashing,’ 374). The pleasures and benefits of camp are not proclaimed oppositionally, but adjacent to the mainstream and to the established film canon. According to Richard Dyer in his article ‘It’s Being So Camp as Keeps Us Going,’ originally published in 1977, homosexuals have developed the quality to read secret codes between the lines due to their position within society. In contrast to the cult lovers who want to distinguish themselves as cinephiles with a deliberately odd taste, homosexuals prefer to adapt themselves to all kinds of social circles. They like to be part of the crowd in order not to reveal their sexual identity. In the words of Dyer who speaks about homosexuals in the form of ‘we’:

Because we had to hide what we really felt (gayness) for so much of the time, we had to master the façade of whatever social set-up we found ourselves in – we couldn't afford to stand out in any way, for it might give the game away about our gayness. So we have developed an eye and an ear for surfaces, appearances, forms: style. (Dyer 'It's Being,' 59)

Dyer indicates that homosexuals usually opt for run-of-the-mill storylines than for utterly extravagant material as a tactic. However, in the way the style of a book or film is excessive, the homosexual reader/viewer recognizes something of a private code that he shares with a minority of fellow homosexuals. Writing her pioneering 'Notes on "Camp"' in 1964, Sontag had noted no more than a 'peculiar affinity' between camp and homosexual taste. Moreover, she had a definite preference for what she called 'naïve' camp, for '[p]robably, intending to be campy is always harmful' (282). She uses the qualification *naïve* for texts which despite their earnestness, fail by mistake. This failure is usually only acknowledged in the course of time and should not be pursued as an effect in advance. It is unpredictable what or who becomes campy. Merely aging does not suffice, but becoming outmoded 'provides the necessary detachment – or arouses the necessary sympathy' (285). It helps, she says, when an important theme is presented in a too trivial work of art. This might have given rise to shaking one's head or, worse, indignation at the time, but years or decades later, 'when we become less involved' in it, we can 'enjoy, instead of be frustrated by, the failure of the attempt' (285). The label of *naïve camp* can practically be applied to almost any text or any behaviour, as long as it is not too conscious of its own nature. For Sontag, *TRouble in Paradise* (Ernst Lubitsch, 1932) and *The Maltese Falcon* (John Huston, 1941) are 'effortless' in tone, whereas *All About Eve* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1950) wants so badly to be campy that it is constantly 'losing the beat' (282).

Encouraged by scholars like Dyer and Jack Babuscio, camp has been increasingly appropriated from the 1970s onwards as a means of expression for homosexuality. Camp has evolved in a reflexive tactics of homosexuals who take the liberty to present themselves as aristocrats of dubious taste, with a prerogative to be fond of musicals choreographed by Busby Berkeley, films featuring Judy Garland, and a tendency to adore royal families. Homosexuals, albeit not all homosexuals, are supposed to have a special sensibility for double entendres.⁴

Due to the appropriation of the term camp for a gay audience, the nature of camp has shifted from *naïve* to *deliberate*. In the context of Dutch cinema, the situation is somewhat different, for it does not have a version of *naïve camp* – but if it did, it would be seen in *JENNY* (Willy van Hemert, 1958), the first Dutch film in colour. *JENNY* is about an 18-year-old girl who is a mem-

ber of a women's eight rowing team and who is made pregnant by a handsome art dealer, Ed. Though a bit stale, the film has, probably unwittingly, some visual undertones from a Douglas Sirk melodrama, with its inserts of colourful flowers, deep red (Jenny's coat), the mirror shots in the dressing room of Jenny's father playing the role of Henry IV from Pirandello's play, and above all the ravishing Teddy Schaank in her role as Mrs. Gonzalez, who seems to have stepped out of Sirk's *ALL THAT HEAVEN ALLOWS* (1955). The way she delivers a line to Ed, the man she fancies, is worthy of a (naive) camp etiquette: 'You could be Mexican ... so dark-skinned, exotic ... that wonderful line around your mouth.'

An early example of deliberate camp (one that nearly dates to the first use of the term and predates the writings of Dyer and Babuscio), a film not even en vogue to indicate a homosexual sensibility, might be the third in a series of four *SAD MOVIES*, entitled *SUMMER IN THE FIELDS* (Wim T. Schippers and Wim van der Linden, 1967). We see rather lavish shots in CinemaScope of cows, of a farmer on his tractor, shown in fetishizing close-ups, digging up potatoes. While the farmer removes sweat from his face with a huge, red handkerchief, we get an imaginary balloon, clarifying that he longs for a cup of coffee. Meanwhile his wife is in the kitchen, in a setting which seems straight from *THE SOUND OF MUSIC* (Robert Wise, 1965), putting his meal into a basket. We follow her on her trip to the fields, whereas her husband is awaiting her arrival. A bit abrasive, he asks her why it took so long, but then he drinks his coffee, and the couple, proudly standing next to the tractor, start singing an overtly gay song about their mutual love, wondering whether people can be more happy than they are now that it is '*summer in the fields*.' At the same time, some inserts show cows peeing and pooping, actions that are emphasized by the sounds of huge farts on the soundtrack that accompany the song. As the man finishes his coffee, the song stops right away, and he says to his wife: '*Well, that was mighty good.*' It is not without a certain irony that a voice-over at the end of this short, which seems the polar opposite of the series of *SAD MOVIES* it belongs to, announces that the farmer continues with '*faith, hope, and charity, contributing his share to the happiness and welfare of his family, his country and all mankind.*'¹⁵

If there are, apart from these exceptions, hardly any candidates for the label of camp before the late 1980s, one could say that Dutch cinema went overboard since then. Starting with *THEO & THEA EN DE ONTMASKERING VAN HET TENENKAASIMPERIUM* (Pieter Kramer, 1989), there are some cases which can best be termed as 'deliberate camp to a superlative degree.' Actually, the film's title is too silly to translate, but it would run something like: *THEO & THEA AND THE UNVEILING OF THE TOE CHEESE EMPIRE*. The film had the advantage that it could capitalize on the popularity of a television

series, named after the two main characters Theo and Thea. This series ran from 1985 to 1989 and while it was officially aimed at children, it became particularly successful among students. **THEO & THEA** owed this effect to some extent to the indefinable age of the two protagonists. On the one hand, the pair introduced themselves as young children with fake gigantic front teeth and thick glasses. On the other hand, they were played by grown-up actors who addressed in their programme adult themes like emancipation, homosexuality or sexual harassment. They could permit themselves to discuss these themes in a frank manner, full of sexual innuendo, since they could always pretend to be just children, curious to know about the birds and the bees. Their guise as kids worked as the perfect pretext to present controversial subjects as if one is ignorant. To any joke with connotations of sex or smut they started to laugh out loud in a childlike manner. The humour of **THEO & THEA** can only be described in terms of contradiction: both sharp-witted and extremely cheesy. Moreover, while postmodernism was a buzz word at the time in academic circles, thanks to seminal works by Brian McHale, Linda Hutcheon and Fredric Jameson, their 1989 film extensively practices eclecticism, the most prominent of postmodern devices, constantly (visually) quoting from a range of sources.

In the beginning of the film, the camera goes inside a fake woman's body, passes some clumsily constructed intestines, and ends up at the uterus. We can recognize Theo and Thea in their 'embryo suits,' glasses on their noses and a crown upon their heads. While the camera floats inside the artificial body, they announce that they are about to play all the parts in the fairy-tale *Snow White*, but a famous Dutchman is cast as the handsome Prince. 'We will not yet reveal his name,' Thea says, 'but it is Gerard Joling.' There is a transition to Theo and Thea, this time in the guise of a royal couple, woken up by the alarm clock. The camera pans to the left, showing the interior of the bedroom. As the door to the balcony opens to a dazzling white screen, we read the beginning credits: indeed, Theo and Thea play all the parts ('except the one of the handsome Prince'). Queen Marianne has balloons for boobs, and her wig is made of huge piles of toilet paper. The king's wig is made of an enormous series of toilet rolls. While the scenes are sepia-coloured, his face appears white because of an abundant use of powder. He speaks a very affected kind of Dutch laced with French terms, introducing himself as 'Edouard van Oranje-Nasi' – a mangling of the official name Nassau to 'nasi,' which is an Indonesian fried rice dish. He says that he is a keen amateur archaeologist, who digs up old pots (*potten*) from prehistory. The queen retorts in a jovial tone: 'But I am not an old pot, or am I?,' which is a verbal pun on the fact that the Dutch word *pot* can also mean 'dyke.'

When the sketch of the king and the queen is soon hereafter interrupted

because a female usher at the museum thinks they have no permission to 'finger' the Venetian glass, the film turns into a sheer hodgepodge of styles, genres, and formats. We get 'behind the scenes' material with museum personnel who are eager to look straight into the camera; a black-and-white report including corny voice-over commentary is inserted as a persiflage of the bygone tradition of cinema news items (here called *Polykroon Journaal* instead of *Polygoon Journaal*); we see the deliberately clumsy shooting of the childbirth scene in the room containing 'modern art,' because that one offers the most 'sterile' environment, which is a funny way to recommend the presumed 'lifelessness' of modern art as hygienic. Immediately, thereafter the scene turns into a sex farce, when the doctor (Theo) shows up to give Queen Marianne a 'relaxing massage' as a remedy against the loudly exclaimed contractions. When he touches her balloons (or '*bombanellas*,' as he calls them) and kisses the queen, she says in a mock excited fashion: 'Oh, doctor, you always turn something medical into something so intimate.'

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And this is only a prelude to the actual story of the film, which concerns an attempt to adapt *Snow White*. Before they can make a head start, they have to find a new actor for the role of the 'handsome prince,' for Gerard Joling – a popular gay crooner, a bit Liberace-style – has called off his participation. To illustrate the disappointment of Theo and Thea, they have pushed the camera away. While it is lying on the ground, it shows the scenery from a skewed angle. One of the ushers then suggests approaching the well-known operetta star Marco Bakker. Dressed as the two female musicians Bea (Theo) and Ans (Thea), who improvise a jazz version of the famous lullaby 'Slaap, kindje, slaap' [Sleep, Child, Sleep], they immediately attract Marco's attention, for he is completely under the spell of Bea. While Ans/Thea is in love with him, Marco says he can only kiss a big woman who stands firm on her feet, which is then followed by a close-up of Theo's shoes with no high heels. It has become obvious by now that the film has become a parody of Billy Wilder's *SOME LIKE IT HOT* (1959). Since Marco has to sing in Austria, he asks them to shoot the film over there, and seven extras, among whom are the museum personnel, join them, singing the silly singalong 'ik heb mijn potje met vet al op de tafel gezet' [I've already put my pot of fat on the table]. The song ends in a visual rip-off of Robert Wise's *THE SOUND OF MUSIC* (1965) – the characters on the green hills, while the camera is moving higher and higher into the air.

At some point in the film, Ans/Thea has hidden herself on a toilet out of despair, because Marco neglects her entirely. She is shown with a wide-angle lens turning the toilet into a claustrophobic space. At the same time, Bea/Theo flees into the very same ladies' bathroom, to escape Marco, who persists in his attempts to seduce her. We see their feet from under the toilet door, and Ans is so disgusted by it that we then see her face framed through the toilet

seat, before she starts vomiting. In a subsequent scene, Marco is driving a car and proposes to Bea. He/she thereupon says: 'Marco, do you like surprises?' In the next shot we see the car stopping on the road and Bea being kicked out of it. Bea/Theo then returns to the ladies' bathroom, and takes Ans' head out of the toilet, which is once again framed through the upstanding toilet seat. Bea tells her that the fairy tale is over, but as soon as he says this he realizes that Marco has taken the dog Trudy to the castle of the power-crazy Brigitta Berger. Going after him to get Trudy brings them straight back into a dark fairy tale, about a wicked witch who asks a fluorescent screen: '*Computy, computy, who is the greatest beauty?*' She plans to create so-called Empire Cheese – containing, among others, her toenails – that will enable her to rule the world. After they both ruin Brigitta's experiment and free Trudy, they continue the shooting of *Snow White*. The wicked witch takes her revenge, by showing up on set in the guise of an old woman who does not sell apples, but cheese. Theo and Thea actually seem dead, but because the coffin accidentally falls on the ground, they cough up the piece of poisoned cheese they had swallowed by accident. Alive again, they remember that Brigitta told them that she was about to go to a place in which all the shit in the world gathers. Reading in a newspaper about a meeting of world leaders in Geneva, they head off for Switzerland. Their guess proves to be right: while Brigitta is delivering a speech to the hypnotized world leaders present, they catapult a piece of cheese that was originally stuck in one of their throats in her open mouth. They take over the microphone and Theo shouts: 'Childish innocence always conquers!' They then ask the leaders to pull down their trousers, and the latter do so obediently. If they want to punish the wicked Brigitta, Marco intervenes and warns them not to misuse power. They turn her into a good person, and transformed on the spot, Marco kisses Brigitta as his wife to be. Theo and Thea are invited for a cup of tea at Queen Beatrix' residence to thank them for their rescue operation.

As can be derived from this description, the film is downright outrageous, which is acknowledged by the characters themselves. 'We are now in the midst of it.' 'In the midst of what?' 'In the story with a bizarre twist.' Such silliness divides the audience between those who find it exhilarating and those who detest it. Though the only three IMDb user reviews cannot be considered representative, there is a striking common denominator: the two Dutch reviewers already point out that if you are not Dutch and if you are too young to know about the television series, this film will probably not be your cup of tea. The American reviewer confirms that he indeed was completely baffled by this film and even the subtitles did not help him get the joke. Being Dutch, however, is no guarantee that one will appreciate this film, as can be concluded from a glance at the responses at moviemeter.nl. There are perhaps as many fans as there are people who disqualify the film as 'infantile' or as 'faggot's humour.'

The film can be termed ‘faggot’s stuff’ insofar as one characteristic of camp is that it does not take anything seriously. This attitude has a drawback, because life is, as Dyer contends, not ‘a bed of roses for gay men,’ but many homosexuals do not (always want to) adhere to a political agenda, because they think politics is too dull and heavy-handed. Hence, they develop the tendency to react in an inversely proportional manner to serious issues by turning everything into ‘a witticism or a joke’ (Dyer ‘It’s Being,’ 50). Theo and Thea do so by showing themselves to be obsessed with bodily functions to a superlative degree in a cheesy manner that tends to foreground artifice. There is not even an attempt made to create convincing costumes or believable decor. The dressing-up of Theo in the role of Bea is far removed from seductive femininity: it is a sheer parody of the idea of womanliness as a masquerade. Moreover, it is very obvious that Brigitta’s castle is a cardboard set piece. Even though there might be sloppy art direction in cult films, it is often a matter of technical incapacity and/or low budget; here it is being flaunted as a deliberate choice.

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After they ended their Theo and Thea characters, the two actors Arjan Ederveen and Tosca Niterink cooperated for the aforementioned KREATIEF MET KURK. As a running thread, there was each and every week an episode in which they made a persiflage of a so-called Teleac course about ‘how to make things from cardboard.’ Ederveen and Niterink were overdoing the silliness of this craft course by using cork as a ‘basic material,’ clichéd expressions like ‘always cut away from yourself’ when working with a box cutter and many sexually insinuating remarks by anchor woman Ellen which were time and again misunderstood by the clumsy handyman Peter.

In addition to this persiflage of a craft course, there was a variety of sketches. Most famous, or rather notorious, was the sketch in which a female doctor presented, in an apparently serious tone, a new method to remove intestinal polyps. Then a very small and bearded dwarf is shown who, his pointed cap forward, tries to enter the patient’s anus. While we get close-ups of very hairy buttocks, the dwarf tells the man to relax. Once inside, the dwarf starts singing, on his way to cut down the polyp with an axe. At least as hilarious as this sketch was the infamous item on the preparations for the ‘Gay Games in Twello.’ Instead of the official Olympic sport pole-vaulting, there will be a competition of men throwing their wrist bags in three categories – which is in Dutch a pun: instead of *polsstokhoogspringen*, it is now called *polstashoogwerpen*. A stereotypical leather queen with a horseshoe moustache and fashionable spectacles explains that he chooses to compete in the middle-weight class, for, as he says, he has no affinity with the effeminate types who participate in the light-weight category. There are also the heavy-weight contestants, who happen to throw beauty cases, but since that is more fun to watch, he does not like to compete at that level, either. We see him practice and with some gracious moves, he

throws his bag high in the air. Then his female co-organizer wants to give it a try. She has some of the stereotypical characteristics of a dyke, with her short haircut, thick glasses and an angry look, but, most importantly, she has an abundant bunch of (artificial) hair, actually made of wool, under her armpits, and she is apparently not wearing a bra, because her huge breasts wiggle while she runs up and throws the bag. Her cast is totally out of control and the bag has vanished. ‘Go look for it,’ the man says, to which she retorts in a snappy tone: ‘Do it yourself. You are wearing a pair of leather trousers.’ In a later scene the man comes out of some thorny bushes with a bag in his hand: ‘All well and good, but this happens to be my bag for the competition.’

The representation of the gay man and the lesbian in this sketch could reek of homophobic sentiment. The woman, in particular, is depicted as a diehard and *old skool* feminist who refuses to give in to any demand from the fashion industry: as we can gather from the man’s facial expression, she is not even using underarm deodorant. Owing to the context of the television programme, however, it is better to regard the sketch under the banner of ‘deliberate camp.’ Ederveen and Niterink, homosexuals themselves, are so bent on turning everything into a witticism that they do not shy away from poking fun at the agenda of politically oriented gays.

In order to emphasize the importance of context in cases like these, Dyer claims that camp can only possess a subversive potential on condition that it is enjoyed by homosexuals. The cutting edge of camp, Dyer argues, depends upon its identification with the gay experience. If homosexual men sing the praise of John Wayne’s virility, a tone of parody is immediately built into the tough performance. The enthusiasm for the masculine image of Wayne goes hand in hand with a certain mocking distance, with the awareness that this image is deliberately manufactured. Well-known is the example of the Village People, a disco group from New York City that had its heyday in the late 1970s. The group consisted of six members in the guise of a police officer, a construction worker, an Indian, a cowboy, a biker, and a soldier. Instead of just wearing regular costumes that befitted their roles, they ironically exaggerated certain signifiers that characterized their clothes. The way they dressed up in their fancy, often leather attire, was a clear showcase of masculinity. And as Jacques Lacan stated in 1958, virile display always seems a bit feminine (85). As soon as marks of masculinity gain too much emphasis, the man’s attitude provokes the effects of femininity.

The subversive effect of this paradox gets lost the moment straight men take over the enjoyment of virile display, Dyer argues. The ironic outlook still indicates a distance from an image of machismo, but at the same time it allows straight men with a ‘certain wishful affection’ for the macho type to linger on it (Dyer ‘It’s Being,’ 60). Apparently rejecting the style of virility,

straights appropriating camp parasite upon a secret pleasure that this style may endure, after all. Whereas homosexuals predominantly play at being a man, the straight version of camp risks holding on to an implicit desire to be such a tough guy.

Despite Dyer's attempt to draw a line between the homosexual enjoyment of camp and its straight appropriation, it is fairly difficult to make a valid distinction between them. Is it more common for heterosexual guys to enjoy blood-spattered movies, kung-fu pictures or films in which the enormously big breasts of a woman are literally used as 'deadly weapons'? And is it more common for homosexual men to enjoy Audrey Hepburn vehicles, Douglas Sirk melodramas or a film like Paul Verhoeven's *SHOWGIRLS* (1995)? Gay males are, as I.Q. Hunter notes, especially delighted by the imitation of Busby Berkeley dance routines in *SHOWGIRLS*, hilarious lines like 'I've a problem with pussy' and 'You ARE a whore, darlin!', and on top of all that, the female protagonist mispronounces fashion designer Versace as 'Ver-saze' (477-78). It is perhaps understandable that homosexual men have appropriated a film like *SHOWGIRLS*, but at the same time, there is not something inherently gay about these pictures, but it is rather a matter of address and reading protocol.⁶ The fans of cult movies derive pleasure from sheer amazement about their poor quality and ask themselves: What kind of debased creature could possibly be the right audience for this terribly bad spectacle? Camp, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has observed in her *Epistemology of the Closet*, involves a gayer angle of view and the key question to be posed is a 'what if': 'What if the right audience for this were exactly me?' (Sedgwick, 156) In case that a gay person considers him- or herself the appropriate addressee of a specific film, one can, says Sedgwick, truly speak of camp.

DEMY REVISITED: DE TRANEN VAN MARIA MACHITA

Is *DE TRANEN VAN MARIA MACHITA* [THE TEARS OF MARIA MACHITA] (1991), the 43-minute-long film Paul Ruven made for his graduation at the Film Academy, such a typical case of camp? There are many striking ingredients: practically every line in the film is sung, as was also the case in *LES PARAPLUIES DE CHERBOURG* [THE UMBRELLAS OF CHERBOURG] (Jacques Demy, 1964); its narrative core is also partly inspired by this film: a woman is sad that her boyfriend has to fight a war in his native country, in this case Turkey, but, despite its short time span, *DE TRANEN VAN MARIA MACHITA* has much more melodramatic moments than Demy's film. After Maria has quit her job, she hears that her pilot father's plane has crashed. While her mother is singing about the devastating news on a stage, she all of a sudden collapses and dies as well.

As the eldest child, Maria becomes head of the household, gets a new job at a shoe store and falls in love with one of the customers, a lookalike of her father, actually played by the same actor, Jacques Herb. He is so fully absorbed in writing a song that he neglects Maria. Then, we learn, why he did not pay attention to her – he sneaks away from the marital bed, back to the gay bar where he is greeted in a mock-enthusiastic manner: ‘What’s it like? A lady in the stack?’ When his old lover neglects him, the film immediately shifts its tone with a depressing song. In a corridor with Francis Bacon reproductions, Elbert, ‘sad and abandoned by all,’ shows up in one of them, singing: ‘Paintings of my whole life pass by in frames.’ He pours gasoline over himself, but when a female child approaches him, he seems to make up his mind and sings to her: ‘Never play with fire,’ but at the very moment someone throws his cigar away, and Elbert catches fire. After Elbert’s cremation, Maria’s Turkish lover returns, but only for a while, since duty calls once again. She is so desperate that their love will bleed to death that she puts a mixing machine into his stomach. After she has been sentenced to prison, Maria’s final song is in church, asking God for forgiveness to soften the pain she feels. Nonetheless, the film ends on an optimistic note, for surrounded by white-clad monks she sings she is ‘on the brink of starting afresh.’

In her article ‘Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess,’ Linda Williams claims that, in addition to horror (fear-jerker) and pornography (the jerk-off), melodrama (tearjerker) is a body genre marked by excess. Since it is inappropriate in a melodrama to settle conflicts by means of direct, forceful action, the story is often embellished with syrupy stylistic features. The characters operate within kitschy decor and are carefully framed behind windows or among mirrors in order to signify mental obstacles. Both the extradiegetic music, often slightly sentimental, and the theatrical way of acting function to compensate for the repression of (female) desires (Verstraten, 192-93). If colours are used, they are usually bright and extravagant, to draw attention to the role of outward display in the provincial environment the characters inhabit. Though (forceful) action is minimal and an explicit manifestation of desires is held back, Williams observes that melodramas are caught in the grip of intense sensation and a form of ecstasy. Visually, the body can show signs of ‘uncontrollable convulsion or spasm,’ whereas an aural excess expresses itself in ‘sobs of anguish’ (Williams ‘Film Bodies,’ 4).

In *DE TRANEN VAN MARIA MACHITA*, all the elements of a melodrama are presented in such a compressed manner that intense sensation or emotions cannot evolve. The film is, so to speak, overdoing its usual ‘excess’: the story goes from one heartbreak scene to a merry one, to and fro, without any preambles. The too quick pace of emotional scenes wilfully prevents identification with the fate of the characters. Though Ruven’s film uses melodrama as a

model, the usual effect of this genre is hollowed out. By downplaying any emotional attachment as an effect, the viewer will consider the excessive series of tragic and joyful events with ironic detachment, which offers an ideal pretext for all kinds of jokes, both aurally and visually. To start with, the fact that practically all lines are sung enables the scriptwriters to include clichéd phrases, which happen to be inherent about torch songs, but would sound awkward if spoken in dialogue. When the Turkish soldier says that he fights for patriotic reasons, Maria sings: 'I love you, Love / I iron your shirts, love your flirts / Don't go away / Don't seek death, embrace me, sit on my lap.'

In an early scene when they are worried about Maria's mother, she all of a sudden rings her daughter – a dedicated connection, no mobile phone. She sings about her husband who, while performing his duty as a pilot, has died. The mother still holds the phone against her ear as Maria enters the room. When the mother turns around and sees her daughter, she drops the earphone with a surprised look. Simultaneously, she sings: 'Long live communication / long live the telephone,' which at first seems ironic because she had not noticed that her daughter was no longer on the receiving end: communication had already dropped dead, since no one was listening to her words any more. The song then continues: 'Since Dad's cremation that bloody thing makes me cringe and groan.' The phrase 'long live the telephone' then takes another meaning, of dramatic irony, for a subsequent scene shows that the air base called her husband for a test ride which proved fatal to him in the end. Had he not taken up the phone during his leave, the accident might not have befallen him.

One other great joke concerns Elbert's furious attempt to compose a song on the piano for Maria. Surrounded by Maria and her younger siblings, he succeeds in producing only two words: 'Turbulent waves ...,' which Elbert repeats multiple times. He is so absorbed in his work that he disregards Maria's ways to draw his attention with a heart-shaped cake and with sexy lingerie. When in bed, he finally bends over Maria, who is waiting for a tender kiss, but just before their lips meet, he sings: 'Turbulent waves / clouds and winds.' It soon becomes clear why he prefers music over love-making, for, to cite the lines which are sung in the gay bar, being with 'a lady in the stack' is odd for someone who used to be the 'biggest member' in the gay community. When Elbert is to be cremated in a later scene, suddenly his coffin opens up, and both melody and lyrics are complete now, with lines like: 'Storm on the coast / Seas so grim / Nothing worries me / I trust in Him ... If I ever strand / He'll throw me a rod / I am in his Hands / Skipper with God.' As long as he was alive Elbert was struggling with the composition, but upon death, this morbid joke teaches us, he can finish his song, with references to Him/God, fluently. In the final shot of the film, we get a glimpse of the 'hereafter.' His coffin is like a rowboat at sea without any speed, but suddenly the Turkish soldier turns up who was killed

with the mixer. He puts the mixer into the water, pushes the button and off the two men go, full speed ahead. This way an ordinary object from the kitchen is first used as a deadly weapon, and second as a very practical tool: the mixer is transformed into an outboard motor.

DE TRANEN VAN MARIA MACHITA can be labelled as deliberate camp insofar as it is inspired by melodramatic and musical elements. Its song about the gay bar only reinforces the deliberate nature. At the same time, the film has some ‘gory’ scenes, like a factory boss, a Hitler lookalike who squeezes a cute little chicken with a bare hand, and the Turkish soldier who starts to puke blood when a rotating mixer is pushed into his stomach. Since such scenes rather belong to a cultish ‘bad taste,’ Ruven’s graduation film is not easy to classify: deliberate camp in the vein of Kramer’s film, but also with some touches of cult taste. Similarly, the output of Ruven could be considered as unclassifiable, if not erratic. He made minimal movies and experimental films, like HOW TO SURVIVE A BROKEN HEART (1991), SAHARA SANDWICH (1991), or SUR PLACE (1996), with Katerina Golubeva as the main actress, shot in the vein of a Chantal Akerman film. He also made films aimed at a large audience, such as FILMPJE! (discussed in chapter 1), the crime comedy GANGSTERBOYS (2010), or the derided Wendy van Dijk vehicle USHI MUST MARRY (2013) as well as the bombed DE OVERGAVE [THE SURRENDER] (2014).

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DOUBLE ENTENDRES: JA ZUSTER, NEE ZUSTER

Ruven has made a huge variety of types of films and his DE TRANEN VAN MARIA MACHITA was a one-time attempt to be ‘creative with camp.’ By contrast, a Pieter Kramer film is much more consistent in outlook and his signature is easily recognizable. LANG & GELUKKIG [HAPPILY EVER AFTER] (2010) is vintage Kramer: cardboard sets, a number of drag queens, such as the two ‘ugly’ step-sisters Paris and Hilton, a homosexual prince and a bad wolf in the guise of a tough rock star. It is delivered in an excessively amateurish fashion in order to avoid any misunderstanding that this is a parodic take on fairy tales. Less hysterical, and therefore more of a family film, is his JA ZUSTER, NEE ZUSTER [YES NURSE, NO NURSE] (2002). The film is inspired by a popular and so-called ‘legendary’ television series, made between 1966 and 1968, which consisted of 20 episodes in total. Many of them are no longer available in archives, only a single episode as well as 15 of the 59 songs have been preserved, since these songs were shot on celluloid. At the time, television was a relatively new medium that was supposed to offer amusement for the entire family, for there were only two channels. Since viewers should not take offence at programmes, their content is in general quite mild, fit for all ages.

JA ZUSTER, NEE ZUSTER was centred around a so-called resthouse, in which sister Klivia lived together with Jet, Bertus, Bobbie, and the Engineer. Soon Gerrit, after a failed attempt at burglary, also becomes one of the inhabitants. Gerrit's grandpa joins them from episode 5 onwards. Their landlord is living next door and calls the residence a 'resthouse full of hoo-ha.' This neighbour, Barend Boordevol, is a grumpy old man who time and again invades their home to complain about insignificant matters. The series was written by Annie M.G. Schmidt, who had a huge reputation as an author of children's books, with a distinct preference for self-willed and idiosyncratic kids. Her work is slightly rebellious, but seldom if ever venomous. It is a bit teasing, but never scorching, which is clear from the songs. Some of the texts were just witty and nonsensical, like 'Uncle Willem's cat has gone travelling, gone travelling, gone travelling.' Other song texts suggest burlesque puns, like in the case when only the first syllable is given before the name of the plant is mentioned in its entirety, 'fuch, fuch, fuchsia' (in Dutch to be pronounced as 'fuck, fuck, fucksia'). Most important perhaps is that Schmidt's texts are interwoven with controversial subjects, albeit in a most implicit way. She does not recoil from ridiculing a small-minded moral. In her children's books she presents the perspective of a maladjusted character, like the constantly filthy girl Floddertje. She attempts to create sympathy for the kid who deviates from the norm, so that the oddball comes across as kind-hearted. A good example is the song sung by sister Klivia, 'I Change,' in the very first episode. It is about the sister's desire to transform herself with a wig into one of the Beatles as soon as everybody is off to bed. 'Yeah yeah / I feel different / completely different / yeah yeah! ... Different than normal / Yeah, I feel different than normal.' Initially, it seems to be an ode to a group of long-haired trash, but it is quickly replaced by different roles, such as a pretty school mistress and a wicked fairy. The 'yeah yeah's' vanish from the number in favour of a 'yes yes' and an 'ay ay.' Being 'different than normal' would have been a firm political statement in the tumultuous decade of the 1960s, but it remains toothless because in the end, it is no more than a free-floating dress-up game.

In case the lyrics are too burlesque or too flippant, its potentially controversial nature is neutralized by the insertion of a few corny lines or overwhelmed by polished arrangements. This nature cannot always be contained entirely, as is best illustrated by the song 'The boys of the travel association,' from the very last episode. The lyrics address the holiday trips in bygone days of Barend Boordevol with an old acquaintance from the association. 'The whole bunch on a trip to the Lorelei. With Marinus and Matthijs to the Lorelei. With Evert and with Vic. With Robbie and with Dick. We had so much fun with Johan and Boudeijn.' Apparently Albert Mol, who sang the number with Dick Swidde, seems to have said that it is wonderfully impossible what Mrs. Schmidt had

come up with (Visser, 9). On the one hand, it was just a song about boys on a trip together, but on the other hand the openly gay Mol recognized its subtle double meaning and its allusion to cruising as well as homosexual bonds.

The film version of *JA ZUSTER, NEE ZUSTER* is not a gay picture, but offers ample signs to support a homosexual viewing attitude. Like in his other productions, director Kramer displays a taste for extravagance. The gaudy art direction, which shows among others in the excessively colourful setting of a carefree village, elevates *JA ZUSTER, NEE ZUSTER* to the level of deliberate camp. At the start of the film, Jet and Gerrit have a duet, singing 'Together with you under the umbrella' in a choreography reminiscent of Demy's aforementioned *LES PARAPLUIES DE CHERBOURG* while men in suits with fancy briefcases perform a graceful dance act in the background. If the song about the Travel Association is already double-edged, in the film the number is preceded by a scene in which neighbour Boordevol proudly shows a valuable clock, which he keeps in a safe, to the burglar Gerrit. Sister Klivia interrupts their encounter because she knows how sensitive Gerrit is to all that glitters. Thereupon the neighbour says he regrets her intervention, since he meets 'so few young men who know how to appreciate a great carillon.' The original Dutch term 'klokken spel' for carillon is a euphemism for the male sexual organ, and thus this term, specifically added in the film, is meant to reinforce the homosexual allusions.⁷ The 'legacy' of such camp interventions shows itself in the difference between the television series *FLORIS* and its cinematic adaptation 35 years later.

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THE DETOUR OF POSTMODERN IRONY: *FLORIS*

According to those viewers who adhere to the idea of camp as a strategy of 'aesthetic colonization,' the charm of camp gets spoiled as soon as the irony becomes too obvious. Subtlety is recommended because then only the minority among the audience which has a gay sensibility will consider it as camp. My point is not to make a plea for such subtle irony for this subtlety is hardly present in Dutch cinema. Rather, I aim to articulate via the case of *FLORIS* that deliberate camp was used as a mediating strategy: its makers realized that a film adaptation in the 21st century had to be 'reloaded' to prevent the risk of naivety. As a television series, broadcast in 1969, *FLORIS* consisted of the adventures of a medieval knight, assisted by a fakir. Rutger Hauer played the knight, Paul Verhoeven directed and Gerard Soeteman wrote the screenplay of the action-packed episodes, targeted at a youth audience. When the format was adapted into a film in 2004, Soeteman, who this time was involved as co-scenarist, opted for an entirely different tone.

168 | In the opening scene of *FLORIS* (Jean van de Velde, 2004), the title hero is dressed up as a nun in a theatrical play. His father is among the audience, but has fallen asleep. He wakes up in time to see the ‘nun’ deliver an attacker a death blow with a sword. After the performance, Floris’ parents are looking for their son backstage. Someone recognizes the father as the well-known knight Floris van Rozemond, which visibly pleases him. Then the parents see their son with a blonde-haired wig and while the mother emphasizes the delighted response of the audience, the father tells him that the fight looked awful. In a laughing tone he says that the cutting off of the head was faked. ‘You wield such a sword differently! You slant it, or it’d take three blows.’ Annoyed, the son replies that they fight without killing, for his generation, he explains while removing his silicon breasts, prefers the hippie catchphrase ‘make love, not war’ over actual battle.⁸ Hurt in his pride, the father then refers to the late grandfather who ‘was the first to bear the name Floris.’ We then see some black-and-white excerpts from the original television series from 1969 with the title hero riding horseback. ‘A defender of freedom, a knight to a tee,’ the father calls his forebear, while we see the black-and-white Floris enter a castle. The grandfather’s last words were addressed at his son: ‘Now, you are Floris ... Floris!’ The young Floris, however, dismisses the references to his well-known grandfather as no more than a trip down memory lane. In a paraphrase of a Bob Dylan song from the sixties, the young actor says that ‘the times are a-changin’,’ which is followed by the son’s statement: ‘Things were black and white, then.’ While the original series was in black and white, indeed, this statement has to be associated with ‘black and white’ as used in figurative speech: the past world was divided in overtly simplistic oppositions, but now things have become much more complex. This laconic reaction angers the father who finally takes up one of the silicon breasts, and says that the one thing he regrets is to have named his only child Floris instead of Tit-us.

This opening scene suggests that the youngest Floris is not a ‘natural-born killer’ despite his descent and that comedy will preside over serious action. The grandson’s oblique references to phrases used by the protest generation of the 1960s turn him into a youngster with pacifist sympathies. Moreover, he plays the role of a transvestite as if to emphasize the distance from the male posturing of his forebears who derive their identity from authentic battles. In the 1960s, early years in the history of television, it was still possible to make a straightforward adventure story about a medieval knight, but in the 21st century such a story has become outdated, even for a family film. In order to avoid the pitfall of naivety in an era of post-Quentin Tarantino cinema, it has become a mark of hipness to dwell in postmodern irony. The only way to present a Robin Hood-like adventure, is to do it on the condition that one first has acknowledged that one knows how silly such a type of story actually

has become. Mediated by such an ‘ironic’ warning, one can continue to show a series of spectacular fights after all, although we have to take these action scenes with a grain of salt.

Averse to violence, the young Floris, the grandson, will get caught up in violent conflicts by accident. He becomes a valiant knight, but willy-nilly. To emphasize the irony of an ‘accidental hero,’ the action is presented everything but seriously, as a brief summary of the bizarre plot of *FLORIS* will illuminate. Two rivalling parties compete over the possession of a so-called Holy Nail, for this relic is supposed to be a harbinger of luck. This Nail is first hidden in the ass of a horse and later in cheese by father Floris. Since this cheese is part of the enemy’s Christmas bonus packets, Floris wants to win his father’s respect by getting the Nail in return. As befits the peculiar plot, the film consists of slapstick action and fights which are played for laughter. Just consider the moment when father Floris is about to be slain, but the movement of his opponent is arrested because the sword is too big for his aching back. Or the moment when Floris escapes from the castle tower by having the Nail transform the long yellow dress of his sidekick Pi into a parachute. By such means, the original adventure tale is transformed into a not too serious action movie, injected with a campy tone.

FLORIS was not greeted by critics as a great film, and that is perfectly understandable. If the film has some merit nonetheless, it is that it illustrates how an ironic prologue is required as a frame in order to make an adventure story in a time when adventure stories were considered to be practically impossible.⁹ To the detriment of the film, one might say, however, that this necessary detour of irony has been too obvious. The original adventure tale has been transformed into a not too serious action movie, injected with a tone of (too) deliberate camp. An important feature of the old-fashioned adventure film is that the spectator can be naively immersed in its story. In *FLORIS*, the tone is so campy-comical that this possibility is entirely lost. At best, it might provoke laughter; at worst, it leads to a reaction of indifference.

JA ZUSTER, NEE ZUSTER worked much better than *FLORIS* in this regard, because Kramer’s film both pays homage to the ‘original’ television series and simultaneously takes an ironic distance from it. The film achieves this two-sidedness because it takes the nostalgic reverence in earnest while nonetheless the tongue-in-cheek irony is not to be missed for any viewer with a sensitivity for camp. Whereas JA ZUSTER, NEE ZUSTER walks the tightrope between nostalgia and camp, in most subsequent pictures the scales tip in favour of the latter. Even in Kramer’s later films, the irony has become (too) obvious: *ELLIS IN GLAMOURLAND* (2004), with, among others, Joan Collins teaching a course (‘How to Marry a Millionaire’) and *LANG & GELUKKIG*, featuring the ugly sisters Paris and Hilton. If there is a film which can match the achievement of JA

ZUSTER, NEE ZUSTER, then DIK TROM [CHUBBY DRUMS] (Arne Toonen, 2010) comes closest. The film is inspired by the famous classic book series, written by C. Joh. Kieviet, from the late 19th century, but in Toonen's modern interpretation the boy's (innocent) pranks and the jokes on his name – 'I am Chubby,' 'So I see' – have been embedded in a satire on an obsession with healthy food and slim bodies. Dik originally comes from a town which holds as a motto: 'A healthy mind in a round body!', but moves to a place where people consume only vegetables, soup and juice. At the end of the film, however, each inhabitant of Dunhoven starts eating his father's delicious hotdogs with all the trimmings. The ultimate 'lesson' of Toonen's DIK TROM that enjoying life equals eating calorie-rich food has as its subtext: 'it is better to be a happy outsider than an unhappy conformist.' This lesson is brought with extravagant gusto in the common visual language of camp with artificial sets, colourful characters and overdone acting. The strategy of camp works in this film, because it chimes with the nostalgic sentiments associated with the Dik Trom character, which simply beg for an ironic perspective. Unlike the adventure tale to whose 'essence' camp is in fact alien, camp can be made congruent to the nostalgia of DIK TROM, whose titular hero is regularly described in the books with the words 'he is an exceptional boy, sure he is,' which from the perspective of camp can be used to various purposes.

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GAY PRIDE: CHEZ NOUS

Under the influence of this tendency of deliberate camp in Dutch cinema to update classic books and television series, a second strategy can be detected. Characters with a clear camp sensibility seem to have become a staple feature in recent romantic comedies and feel-good movies. They feature openly gay male actors as over-the-top characters in minor roles. In ALLES IS LIEFDE, Marc-Marie Huijbregts is cast in the 'over the top' role of a male salesman, Rudolf van Hoogstraten Bosch, which caters to an audience well-versed in the codes of camp. In a high-pitched voice he tells Prince Valentijn that he considers him the 'best sack runner' of the royal family during Queen's Day and that his Black Pete stockings are 'marvellous.' When the prince in his guise as Black Pete is asked to skip, he does so, but Rudolf would consider it wonderful if he could show a 'bit more *joie de vivre*.' In GOOISCHE VROUWEN, as I explained in chapter 3, the well-to-do characters themselves are so exaggerated – like the vulgar singer Martin Morero or the New Age-type Roelien Grootheeze – that an ironic perspective upon them is already quite self-evident. For those viewers who might possibly miss the irony, the outrageous character of the gay fashion stylist Yari hammers the point home: actor Alex Klaasen has the most ravish-

ing clothes, the most wondrous haircuts and wigs, and colourful hats. Being fashionable is his second nature, as becomes clear when he advises – in the television series – his girlfriend Cheryl to sell a kidney rather than give up her Hermès bag. In MATTERHORN (Diederik Ebbing, 2013), Klaasen sings the ‘gay classic’ *par excellence*, Shirley Bassey’s ‘This Is My Life.’ HARTENSTRAAT (Sanne Vogel, 2014) also has a number of gay male characters, but these are played by actors who are cast against type. Egbert-Jan Weeber and Jan Kooijman usually play heterosexual leads who are popular among (young) women, but in this film Weeber is Rein, who runs a coffee bar with his boyfriend Jacob. After he has seen the handsome Wesley pass by, he proposes to his friend that they should spice up their relationship. After a lengthy introduction, Rein says ‘Let’s go on Grindr ...,’ while Jacob speaks aloud at the very same moment, to indicate that he got Rein’s point: ‘Let’s get a puppy.’ But Grindr, an app designed to help gays (or bi or curious guys) to find hook-ups, it will be.

In these Dutch films, male homosexual characters are immediately recognizable as gay.¹⁰ They are stereotypically feminized, suggesting that a homosexual man is ‘a woman’s soul enclosed in a man’s body.’ As Ernst van Alphen hypothesizes, this means that ‘first we have a gendered identity, next, in its wake, a sexual orientation’ (‘Introduction,’ 3). Because the man is actually a woman (in terms of gender), ‘she,’ logically, desires a man. Considering that the object-choice of the feminized gay is in fact conventional, a drag queen – a man dolled up as a woman – is not an anomaly. Against that background, the tagline of CHEZ NOUS [AT OUR PLACE] (Tim Oliehoek, 2013), featuring Klaasen as drag queen, makes sense: ‘Normal friends, abnormal plan.’ In order to prevent the gay bar Chez Nous from being sold at a bankruptcy auction, a group of regular visitors concocts a complicated plan to steal a very expensive necklace, property of the Sultan of Mongul, from a museum during the annual Gay Parade, early August, in Amsterdam. Locomotion of the action is Bertie, a drag queen who excels in performing numbers originally sung by Anita Meyer, and who cherishes the fantasy that he, abandoned by his parents, but adopted by the owner of the bar, is actually her child. In a voice-over we hear him say that when he was little he clung to the idea that Meyer would come to get him when her career was finished. After a silence, while we see his face reflected in the dressing room mirror: ‘Right. She’s still singing.’ The heist is the central action of the film, executed with references to such blockbusters as SPEED (Jan de Bont, 1994) by running surveillance images in a loop, and above all to MISSION IMPOSSIBLE (Brian de Palma, 1996), but, as Bertie already says preceding the opening credits, while he is hanging from the ceiling on a cable, he is ‘not Tom fucking Cruise.’ A gay film like CHEZ NOUS has, of course, the usual jokes such as ‘let’s put our shoulder pads to the wheel’ (Bertie), ‘the only thing [in life] I need is you guys ... okay, may be a wig and an old piano’ (Bertie), or to

illustrate the lesson that life has its misfortunes: 'Even a pink cloud sheds rain sometimes' (Rachid).

From a camp perspective, the biggest asset of the film, however, is the fact that the two most important male heterosexuals are put in a position – to ensure that the heist will succeed – to act as if they are gay. Gijs is an artist, a bit over the hill by now, who participates at the Gay Parade in a small boat, dressed up as a leather queen. When his wife Hettie sees him totally by accident, he shouts that 'it's not what you think. ... I love you and everything about you. Your boobs, your bum.' He cannot convince his wife, who yells at him, surrounded by a huge audience: 'Just admit your gay. Don't deny it,' to which a woman next to her adds: 'Well, seems quite obvious to me.' In a later scene, after Hettie has hit her husband's presumed boyfriend in the face, she understands that she was mistaken and that he in fact was involved in a crime – for charity, that is.

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The other heterosexual character who is forced to play a gay role is Bertie's long-lost biological father Helmer, who has been sentenced to prison for a couple of years for burglary. Upon seeing him for the first time, but ignorant of the fact that he is his father, Bertie sits on Helmer's lap while performing an Anita Meyer song in drag. Initially, the son is reluctant to make up with his father, who has never been around, but the impending closure of the bar makes him change his mind. Helmer helps him to enter the museum from the roof, but when the father gets impatient, he says, in a slip of the tongue: 'Hurry, stupid fag.' Bertie demands that he be pulled up, which causes a serious delay of the whole heist. Back on the roof, he gives his father a lecture on this slip, which actually is quite serious, but given the situation quite hilarious: 'Do you know how hurtful that is? And it just slips out? What do you think Gay Pride is all about? ... About the things that just "slip out." The father thereupon decides to go down himself, hoping that his son will have the strength to hold his weight. Since there is a risk that Helmer has been seen by a surveillance guard, he escapes in the possession of the necklace. Some think that he has disappeared for good, leaving them penniless, but Bertie is about the only one who has confidence that his father will not abandon him a second time. Helmer returns indeed, in the guise of a lady to fool possible observers, after having sold the necklace for cash. Bertie greets him matter-of-factly, and after Helmer has donned his hat, glasses and wig, he makes a remark, characteristic of a pansy: 'Oh, your taste is so gauche.' To celebrate the re-opening of *Chez Nous*, Bertie performs once more, while the real Anita Meyer comes on stage to sing 'Idaho' in duet. He is dressed most extravagantly, in a dress with shoulders as huge colourful balloons, as if to suggest the lesson of 'deliberate camp' that a true gay man 'naturally' outdoes any heterosexual man when it comes to masquerades.

THE RISK OF MERE WITTICISM

According to Fredric Jameson, the aesthetics of postmodernism is characterized by *pastiche*, a term he uses to refer to a patchwork of motifs, elements and styles. In the vein of postmodern *pastiche*, the deliberate camp films that have been analyzed here are steeped in the practice of *eclecticism*, for they borrow influences from a variety of sources. Jameson is critical of *pastiche*, because he considers it little more than a ‘neutral practice of mimicry’ and a recycling of ‘dead styles’ (17-18). The films discussed in this chapter have a surplus value nonetheless. The many tongue-in-cheek references to gender bending, political slogans, and television programmes in the updated version of *FLORIS* served the purpose of hammering home the point that one cannot make a good old-fashioned adventure story these days, except by flaunting its anachronism. All these references illustrate that ‘yes, we makers, we know it is quite outdated to make a knight’s story, but since we have amply clarified the silliness of the enterprise, we think it justified to present you an adventure after all, though, dear viewer, you do not have to take it very seriously.’ And thus Van der Velde’s *FLORIS* is not about a ‘natural-born’ hero – that was once – but about a guy who initially masqueraded as a woman in a theatrical play and suddenly finds himself in the position that he has to perform the role of hero. On the one hand, one might say that a film which painstakingly excuses its existence, cannot be a very strong film and *FLORIS* is not a great picture, indeed, because the fun predominates over the serious battle throughout. On the other hand, the production of *FLORIS* is of great interest, because it is clear proof that deliberate camp abounds in Dutch cinema.

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In his influential study on postmodernism Jameson is annoyed by *pastiche*, because this practice is ‘deprived of any satirical impulse.’ Postmodernists texts are devoid of any historical sense, because history gets lost within the aesthetics of quotations. Jameson’s succinct formulation runs like this: *pastiche* is blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs (17). Well this is true of these deliberately camp Dutch pictures. The hodgepodge of stylistic references in the films in this chapter is so bright and colourful that the issue of homosexuality is presented as ‘unbearably light.’ Sets are artificial, the acting is overdone, the emotions are at best a mimicry of deep-felt emotions. Let me refer to a brief sketch from the television programme *THEO & THEA* from 1988, which, I repeat, was aimed at children originally. In the sketch they played prehistorical troglodytes, waiting for their ‘spontaneous and photogenic’ son to arrive home. Upon *Huubje*’s return, he confesses that he is homosexual. The parents react with excessive grief: ‘What did we do wrong?’ *Huubje* – played by, of all people, *Huub Stapel*, the ‘original’ *Johnnie Flodder* – responds to their dismay that he is glad to be a homo-

sexual, and the mother immediately realizes her son's courage: 'He is right, because by coming out of the closet, he can be himself.' The father then also understands that the son's confession is a reason for joy: 'I wish all my children were homosexual,' and the three of them start dancing. First, the parents are in deep grief, because they blame themselves; the next moment they are exhilarated because they see the 'problem' from the son's perspective, and the 'problem' has in a split second evaporated into thin air.

Such a swift shift in moods is symptomatic of the deliberate camp in Dutch cinema: attitudes are easily donned or replaced, just as easy as one puts on a new jacket or changes a pair of trousers. To paraphrase Dyer once more, everything in these deliberate camp films is turned into a 'witticism or a joke.' In favour of these films, it should be mentioned that they simply benefit from the relative luxury that it is possible in a Dutch context to make such cheerful, gay-friendly pictures for a general public, which is (or was?) a sign of a relative tolerance towards homosexuality. The choice can be paraphrased as: 'All too often homosexuality is presented in an atmosphere of doom and misery – see *AMERICAN BEAUTY* (Sam Mendes, 1999) and *BROKE-BACK MOUNTAIN* (Ang Lee, 2005) – so let us grab the chance to celebrate it abundantly while it can.'¹¹

In the case of camp, reading protocols are of paramount importance for the viewer has to recognize subtexts. In distinction from naive camp, deliberate camp is, as Sontag postulated, very conscious of its own nature (282-83). The next chapter will highlight some films which are not really covered by the labels of cult or camp, but their humorous effects are adjacent to them. I will examine films which were highly conscious of their nature when they were made, but this nature has changed considerably, due to the progress of time: once provocative and vanguard, now comically anachronistic and rearguard.

