1 July 1863, is the date of the belated abolition of slavery in what was then the Dutch colony of Surinam. On 1 July 2002, the national monument for the commemoration of slavery was inaugurated in the Oosterpark in Amsterdam. The figurative monument by the Surinamese sculptor Edwin de Vries is earnest and inoffensive, but it became a prop or trigger occasioning symptomatic debates and events. The protocol chosen for the ceremony backfired, as the monument was fenced off to protect the assembled dignitaries, including Queen Beatrix. While representatives of the Surinamese and Antillean communities were present, outside the fences many more members of these communities were getting frustrated by being excluded, with protests and unruly scenes as a result.1

The rightwing populism that has dominated Dutch politics in the twenty-first century routinely tends to oppose ‘the elite’ to ‘the people’, and such a scene would have been a perfect foil for the likes of Pim Fortuyn and Geert Wilders were it not for the fact that these were not their people—not their version of ‘the people’. As a kind of return of the repressed, the descendants of African slaves unmask monolithic constructions of a homogenous volk as ideological lies. Another controversy, in 2005, pitted Surinamese and Antillean protesters directly against a prominent representative of the new populism: Rita Verdonk, then minister for immigration, was supposed to attend the annual 1 July commemoration at the memorial. A former Prison Director turned politician for the market-liberal VVD, Verdonk is one of those most responsible for proliferating ethnically homogenous, oneiric images of ‘Dutchness.’2 She actively used her post on immigration to position herself as a right-wing populist and as Pim Fortuyn’s rightful heir. (This dubious honour would ultimately go to her erstwhile VVD colleague Geert Wilders; whereas Verdonk’s newly founded party Trots op Nederland—‘Proud to be Dutch’—fizzled out, Wilders’ PVV—Freedom Party—became a force to be reckoned with.) The social-democratic mayor of Amsterdam, Job Cohen, publicly assured Verdonk that she would be welcome at the ceremony, but Surinamese and Antillean organisations staged a noisy protest and prevented Verdonk from laying down a wreath.3 Such events foreground the problematic relation between the modern State as political-administrative apparatus and the multitude it polices.
This much is true of the populist opposition between 'the elite' and 'the people': in the modern state, with its complex and diversified functions, the apparatus of government has to be administered by experts who can translate political and economical abstractions into policies that affect the concrete stuff of daily life, including the daily lives of those people that are excluded from policy making. They become 'the real people', the 'common people'. Such a division is as aesthetic as it is political: whereas the elites are seen as agents of abstraction that are alienated from 'their roots' and indulge in the perverse and cerebral pleasures of modern art, the actual volk is seen as grounded and expressing itself in more authentic forms such as volksmuziek. In this respect contemporary populism is indebted to German Romanticism, which in the early nineteenth century idealised the specific qualities of German Volks in particular in opposition to abstract and universalistic French Enlightenment thinking and Napoleonic imperialism. Via the late-nineteenth century volksch movement to Nazism, this romantic-reactionary

notion of the "Volk" became ever more closely allied with modern biological racism. After the Second World War, the notion of "das Volk" (German) or "het volk" (Dutch) was to some extent rid of these ideological connotations, but the tendency to define 'the people' in homogenous and exclusionary terms persisted. In Holland, the populism that emerged around 2002 regularly pitted het volk against 'the elite', and the Volks' enemies included Muslims as well as 'multicultural' intellectuals, and immigrants as well as politicians that had lost touch with 'the people'.

In 2004, the death of the Dutch volkszanger André Hazes, a chubby working class man famous for writing his lyrics with the aid of a rhyming dictionary, sparked what almost amounted to a form of national mourning, with a funeral service being held in the Amsterdam Arena football stadium. The 'people' assembled in the stadium, however, did not represent the multi-ethnic reality of Dutch society in the early-twenty-first century, and Hazes' rather surprising popularity can at least partly be ascribed to nostalgia for a "more simple" age, before mass emigration and the move of the Jordaanzen (Amsterdam's dockyards) to suburbs and new towns such as Almere, replaced in the inner city by an eclectic mix of newcomers. In an age marked by Pim Fortuyn, Hazes became the representation of authentic Dutchness.

Gayatri Spivak has recalled the double meaning of the term "representation" as "proxies and portrait". In German, we are dealing with Vertretung ("political representation") on the one hand and Darstellung ("depiction") on the other. Hazes' stadium service was broadcast live on Dutch TV as a Darstellung of a beloved entertainer and man of the people being commemorated, but in the process Hazes also became a strange kind of quasi-political Volksvertreter, to use the German term for "parliamentarian", or "volkswegenwoordiger" in Dutch—a truer representative of the people than mere elected politicians. One of his hits had been a badly worded hymn to the national football team—another entity that blurs the two forms of representation.

In death, his body became a strange stand-in for the body political: a decaying natural body whose authenticity was sealed by death.

Modern art constitutes a series of interventions in representation. In deconstructing the conventions of depiction, artists problematised the politics of representation in more than one sense. In the following I will analyse two
Piet Zwart and Anton de Kom

Piet Zwart's original cover design for the 1934 anti-colonial book *Wij slaven van Suriname* (“We Slaves of Suriname”) by Anton de Kom shows the revolutionary author's face, looking brooding and seen slightly from above, emphasising his shiny forehead as a centre of reflection in more ways than one. De Kom's photographic portrait has been integrated in a composite picture, a photomontage that largely consists of much smaller photos of Surinamese men and women, from which De Kom's face seems to rise, to grow. In contrast to the others, De Kom's face has been severed from his body, emerging from the black multitude as if a concentration of pure intellect and willpower. In the end, the book cover simply showed Zwart's portrait of De Kom, rather than the much more ambitious montage.  

The Surinamese writer and activist Anton de Kom lived in Holland for a number of years around 1930. He was active in Links Richten, the group of “worker-writers” that published the eponymous journal—in which Zwart was also involved, albeit much more marginally than his peer, photographer-typographer Paul Schuitema. In 1932, an excerpt from *Wij Slaven van Suriname* (with an invocation of Lenin that would be missing from the book version) was pre-published in Links Richten's “Negro Issue”, which also included a Dutch translation of Langston Hughes' poem “Good Morning Revolution”. A commission Zwart received from the progressive publisher Contact, his design reflects the politicisation of the historical avant-garde and the formation of proletarian groups of writers and photographers—with the participation of avant-garde 'professionals', but aimed at turning workers into cultural producers that would oppose counter-narratives and counter-images to bourgeois media misrepresentations.

In the avant-garde photo-typography of the 1920s and 1930s, images of masses play complex and at times contradictory roles. In Soviet photomontage, the mass functions as a visible manifestation and condensation of the working class, of the revolutionary proletariat. At times, as in a Klucis montage but also one made by the German John Heartfield, a large hand or fist is “filled” in by crowds of people with raised hands or fists. Klucis also made a montage of Stalin's large portrait surrounded by a mass of workers, while an EI Lissitzky photomontage posthumously superimposes Lenin's face on a mass, pushing the identification between mass/class and leader to its spectral apogee. Meanwhile, magazine covers and posters in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany also showed Hitler surrounded by the masses or Mussolini's giant head towering over his body—a body constituted by a swarm of Lilliputians. For Hobbie, writing in the age of Absolutism, the state was a bulwark against chaos and nature; if left to his natural state, man was a
wild beast without rhyme or reason. The state and its laws, which inspire fear, civilise man and turn human bioness into a society. Bredekamp argues that early-twentieth century totalitarian versions of the “Leviathan” motif did away with the intrinsic tension in the Hobbesian version: the dialectic of state and populace was cancelled in favour of an identity of leader and people, or leader and class, with the leader representing the people not in the manner of representational democracy, but through populist representations that posit him as being both distinct from and identical with the body of the people.13 The old distinction between the King’s body natural and the body politic of the state, which was essential in the creation of the modern Western conception of the state as being something other than a ruler’s private property, has been sublated.14 The body natural of Lenin, Stalin, Hitler or Mussolini becomes the body politic incarnate.

Links Richten’s co-founder Jef Last helped De Kom to conceptualise slavery as a form of capitalist exploitation and anti-colonial struggle as class struggle, pushing for a more overt communist message in Wij Slaven; attacking the capitalist countries on the issues of colonialism and racism was an integral part of the Soviet Union and the Comintern’s propaganda strategy.15 While the final book clearly reflects a political maturity gained through his association with Last and Links Richten, De Kom removed the more doctrinaire passages when readying the book for publication—including the invocation of Lenin in the fragment published in Links Richten.16 Piet Zwart’s design for De Kom’s book proposes a counter-model to the neo-Leviathans produced in the Soviet Union and the fascist countries. Zwart shows De Kom’s face not as subsuming or towering over a mass, but in a complex and heterogeneous relationship with the people—a ‘people’ that is in fact a violent montage created by Dutch colonial policy. In Wij slaven, De Kom analyses how the primly protestant

Dutch had denied the humanity of black Africans, turning them into Hobbesian animals that had to be beaten into submission by their human (white) owners.17 This ideology enabled colonial capitalism with its plantations, and the transfer of wealth to the ‘motherland’. Going beyond an abstract analysis of colonial capitalism, however, De Kom gracefully takes the Dutch to task for their being hypocritical merchants who clung on to slavery as long as possible.18

In fact, as De Kom notes, the abolition of slavery in 1863 did not mean “freedom” for the majority of the former slaves and their descendants as much as it created a new form of economic serfdom: contract labour under conditions that were unilaterally dictated.19 In noting that the Dutch colonial rulers used the migration of poor Indonesian farmers to Surinam to lower the wages, De Kom touches on divisions in Surinamese society that continue to this day—arguing that the Indonesians desire to better their situation should not be held against them, and that an independent Surinam in control of its own resources should be able to accommodate all these people.20 Surinamese society, then, is a social montage, in which the former slaves have to coexist with other elements.
When Aimé Césaire showed Léopold Senghor a new translation of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, he exhorted the future Senegalese leader to "listen to Hegel": "to arrive at the Universal, one must immerse oneself in the Particular!" De Kom immersed himself in the particular that is Surinam to challenge the false universality of European civilisation, which was built on hypocrisy: at one point he asks his Dutch readers to remember the female slave labour that had gotten the wood from which the Mauritshuis was built in Holland. The Mauritshuis in The Hague, built by the Dutch statesman and colonialist Maurits van Nassau, is now a museum; as if taking cues from De Kom, Wendeleen van Oldenborgh in her 2006 video project *Maurits Script* staged a conversation on Dutch Colonialism, using a number of historical sources, in this very building.

De Kom refuses to treat "the Surinamese people" as homogenous; while there is a Surinamese identity, it is far from seamless. Although Zwart's montage does not do full justice to the ethnic diversity of Surinamese society, probably due to the constraints under which he had to work, Zwart nevertheless sabotaged the totalitarian version of the Leviathan motif. He did this by decreasing the difference in size between the large figure and the "mass", by turning the latter into a group of recognisable individuals, mostly looking straight into the camera, and by his treatment of the leader's face: this is neither superimposed on "the people" so as to mould them into form, nor towering over them. Zwart de- and recomposes the Leviathan motif to suggest the need for different social assemblages, or for working with, and on, existing social assemblages. The avant-garde critical conception of representation in order to produce new relations between people, and between people and things.

As usual, when taking a close look things become more complex: as one art historian put it, in the work of Zwart and Schuitena "apparently conflicting political practices are reconciled through a belief in rational technology." On the one hand, there is their work as graphic designers for corporations and, in Zwart's case, for the state-owned post, telegraph and phone service, PTT, which was an integral part of the Dutch colonial empire; on the other hand, in associating themselves with groups such as Links Richten, Schuitena and Zwart advocated the transformation of workers, who in relation to culture and media had so far only been consumers, into active producers. Giving voice to subaltern groups such as black people was part of the same programme, as Link Richten demonstrated with its "Negro Issue". In some manner, Schuitena and Zwart may have considered all their work as part of a project of modernisation, as de- and recomposition, that would ultimately have to result in different social structures and productive relations.

Fast-forward to the summer of 2009, when colonialism in its old form had become a semi-repressed memory, and when Holland had become largely post-industrial but far from post-capitalist. It was then that the cover and Anton de Kom's text from the "Negernummer" issue showed up, in photocopied form, in Thomas Hirschhorn's Blijmer Sinoza Festival, announcing an "Anton de Kom Debate" held as part of the festival. The festival took place in Amsterdam's Blijmermeer district, home to a large Surinamese community. Frequently referencing the historical avant-garde and its montage aesthetic, Hirschhorn created a ramshackle festival architecture that made the montage principle literal in the architecture while setting the stage for the social montage that dominated the festival: on the same day one might see local children reenact classic pieces of performance art or listen to an Antonio Negri lecture.

The project can of course be criticised on a number of levels, but it was highly successful as a montage of socially and ethnically divergent groups. If one may well be suspicious of a big-name white artist and white theorists setting up camp in a largely black neighbourhood, threatening to reduce the locals to exotic extras, the complex and shifting reality of this summer-long social montage was far more complex—as articulated, for instance, by local resident Sammy Monsels in one of a series of interviews with different festival participants conducted afterwards by Claire Bishop. A problematic piece in the best sense of the term, it countered...
Zwarte Piet is our culture!

The Bijlmer is a focal point in the rising protest against the phenomenon of Zwarte Piet. In Holland, the feast of Saint Nicholas is celebrated on the evening of 5 December, but this celebration is preceded by a week-long residence of Sinterklaas and his black servants in the country. After the official arrival of Sinterklaas and his Zwarte Pieten by boat from Spain in mid-November, the country is swamped with Zwarte Piet iconography. This imagery is a version of the visual cliché of the Moor that had developed during the long history of European colonialism, and turned into a mainstay of nineteenth/twentieth century visual culture.

There is, in fact, a mass of near-identical Zwarte Pieten ("Black Petes") who accompany Sinterklaas, played by white people in blackface. With curly black hair, red lips and golden earrings, and wearing colourful costumes, the Black Petes are stereotypes that by and large would no longer be acceptable in the public space of other European countries. It clearly is necessary to re-imagine this figure, but in the age of Pim Fortuyn and Geert Wilders "Black Pete" has been turned into an essential element of Dutch identity.

As Annette Krauss and Petra Bauer found out when they developed their project Read the Masks, Tradition Is Not Given as part of the Van Abbe Museum's 2008 exhibition Becoming Dutch, to question Zwarte Piet is to risk the wrath of the Dutch people. Bauer and Kraus' project was attacked vigorously, especially in online media, as a sinister attack on the exhibition, the artists showed banners and placards intended for a protest march in the centre of Eindhoven. The feedback was so threatening that the march, planned by Kraus and Bauer in conjunction with anti-racist and left-wing groups, was cancelled. Though Zwarte Piet has come under annually increasing pressure since Read the Masks, the project has also been 'credited' with making the Dutch defend this part of their childhood all the more fanatically.

Perhaps the project was a failure in that it allowed certain media to present it as being the project of "two foreign artists" (Krauss has being living in Holland for years, but that doesn't count) and an elitist museum, rather than as a project involving multiple partners including Dutch-Surinamese activists and intellectual. However, it is highly probable that more emphasis on the latter would have been effortlessly incorporated in the hate campaign, sustaining...
the myth of a monolithic national culture under attack from a sinister coalition of outsiders.

From the start, Read the Masks had an ambiguous status, as the artists consciously sought to problematise the distinction between an artistic performance and a political protest, and as they involved groups with agendas that were not identical. The shitstorm first started, in fact, when the left-wing group Doorbraak unambiguously announced this as a museum-backed protest against Zwart Piet. Soon the artists were showered by abusive emails and even phone calls on their private numbers; after a few days, the ire appeared to shift to the museum, which decided to cancel the protest.24 Ultimately, questions were asked in parliament. Bauer and Krauss staged discussions at the Van Abbe Museum, involving a number of Dutch and Dutch-Surinamese as well as Antillean artists, activists and intellectuals; material from these discussions was incorporated into a film that was purchased by the museum.25 While the project was clearly collaborative and a form of social montage from the start, involving a variety of groups and individuals, it developed an unexpected dynamic as thousands of people started co-performing, venting populist rage.

Online, a lot of commentators sought to appropriate what they perceive as an excessive multicultural tolerance for the particularities of other cultures, while denying that the look of Zwart Piet might have anything to do with race:

This is part of our culture. Just like marrying an eight year old child is part of other people's culture. Tell me, which one of those is worse? By the way, the Petes are black as soot. SOOT from the chimney through which they come!

Ridiculous! This is Dutch culture. Is this no longer allowed? We excel at idealising other cultures and neglecting our own. Zwart Piet has nothing to do with discrimination. People who claim this are often those who discriminate other peoples the most!

25 The film is also online at http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/0000151567. The version purchased by the museum is known as an installation with Dutch words and a blackface replacing a section of the skull. Zwart Piet remains.

Let's keep our culture and holidays with everything that goes with it, without being dominated by other countries and changes in life-style in Holland. The Dutch are being put under pressure by other cultures as it is. So let's keep our holidays and the Black Pete.

Holland is now so tolerant that the Dutch are tolerating themselves out of the country. People, wake up. After all, Sinterklaas is a Dutch tradition. How is it possible that a couple of foreigners manage to pull off something like this, a protest against our own heritage?

Protest against Black Pete did not start with Read the Masks; a variety of Dutch-Surinamese and Antillean activists had been challenging the tradition for years. Bauer and Krauss included a timeline of these actions—and some of their protagonists, such as theatre director Felix de Rooij—in the film in which Read the Masks ultimately resulted. Later, in 2011, the poet Quinsky Garra was beaten and arrested for wearing a T-shirt with the phrase "Black Pete Is Racism" at a Sinterklaas parade. By keeping up the pressure, protesters seem to be gradually creating more awareness of the problematic nature of this tradition—though each new contestation also produced the same angry reflexes. Zwart Piet seems to have been turned into an essential element of Dutch Culture well before the rise of the new populism after 2000. In 1969, the far from politically progressive writer Wilhem Frederik Hermans noted with bemusement that Dutch people in the Antilles clung with quasi-religious fervour to Zwart Piet, apparently instrumentalising the Sinterklaas feast to put the local black people 'in their place'. Unsurprisingly, this bred resentment.26 Meanwhile, in Holland an artist and activist who was Hermans' polar opposite performed his own problematical appropriation of Zwart Piet: Robert Jasper Grootveld, whom Hermans would mock in his book title Klaas kwam niet ("Klaas didn't come") constructed his own private mythology around the figures of Sinterklaas and Zwart Piet.

One of the central figures of the Provo movement, which challenged the conformist status quo of Dutch post-
war society in the years 1965–1967, Grootveld waged war on tobacco and addiction. Having witnessed an evening of events and happenings organised by Wolf Vostell at Galerie Monet in 1962, Grootveld appropriated the new theatrical idiom to stage absurd rituals in public space, constructed a personal mythology in an inimitable (and virtually untranslatable) discourse.34 A self-proclaimed exhibitionist, Grootveld engineered the confluence of the avant-garde and the mass media early on, becoming a celebrity self-performer—although his mid-1960s happenings generated a kind of publicity that was not easily normalised. A central feature of Grootveld's private mythology was his semi-secular saint, Saint Nicholas or Sinterklaas—Klaas for short.35 “Klaas must come”, Grootveld maintained prophetically. While Grootveld was markedly naïve concerning the connotations of the Zwarte Piet figure, when he put on blackface during happenings, the result was rather different from the established Piet stereotype, upsetting coded representations of blackness rather than mimicking them. In this respect, Grootveld's performing of Piet might be seen as an incentive for a badly needed reimagining of the figure.

Grootveld's mytheme of the coming of Klaas was given an economic slant in the Klaasbank, a semi-fictional bank whose motto was that “Klaas Must Pay Some Day”.36 Grootveld absorbed Constant's idealistic take on the abolition of work through automation, which was the basis for the artist's New Babylon project, but linked it to an analysis of financial collapse, the Great Depression, and inflation (a phenomenon he witnessed firsthand during a trip to Italy in 1966, when the idea for the Klaasbank was born). He therefore proposed a bank that would allow the continuing production and consumption of goods once unemployment was the dominant form of life, a bank with a new kind of currency.37 A crucial point of reference for Provo as well as Constant was Johan Huizinga's notion of the “homo ludens”; (society was to become ‘ludic’, ‘played’). In his Aesthetic Theory, on which he worked intermittently through the upheavals of the late-1960s, Adorno criticised Huizinga's Homo Ludens for failing to acknowledge that the repetitive element in play is an after-image of unfree labour.38 Provo too involuntarily presented afterimages of bondage. Taunting ‘cheques’ over 1,000 or 2,000 guilders made out by the Klaasbank to Provo's opponent, Amsterdam mayor Van Hall, contained clichéd drawings of Sinterklaas' black assistant Zwarte Piet: an unfortunate symptom of Dutch society's unwillingness to see the colonial implications of this still popular blackface tradition.39 And yet, the presence of this distorted afterimage of colonialism and slavery, these sources of much Dutch wealth, is oddly fitting on the chock of this hypothetical post-Fordist funny-money bank.

Migration from Surinam to Holland swelled in the late-1960s and early-1970s. By then the ‘motherland’ was itself experiencing the crisis of European industrial capitalism, leading to increased unemployment among the white as well as the new black working class.40 Members of the growing Surinamese community in Holland were often seen as

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32. Merk, W.K. De boemelen van de boemelen (The boomerangs of the boomerangs), De Boemel, 1968, p. 10. (Noting that “it is right that these exist at all in the circumstances where they are used, that the idea is being kept in order to save these numbers”.)


35. See the Dichters en Dichtsters (1992) text about the phenomenon of ‘Klaas’ in which Klaas was presented as a black role-model and a new class of workers, De Klaasbank, 2009, p. ii-3.

36. As with Van den Berghs, addiction and its remedies (as a central role in Grootveld's work) are presented as a way of removing the chief element in smoking. Grootveld secured the back-up of two of the main figures in the forces of control and addiction (demonstrated through the imagery of the figure of Klaas as well as many people as possible as hanged in his collection of tickets, giving people back in collecting the money back in ‘‘cheques’’ and back in the block.

37. For in the experience at transmission can be mixed in the recollections of the ‘‘cheques’’ and the accumulation of the ‘‘cheques’’. Antipode, 22(3): 270–293.

38. For in the experience at transmission can be mixed in the recollections of the ‘‘cheques’’ and the accumulation of the ‘‘cheques’'. Antipode, 22(3): 270–293.

39. See the Dichters en Dichtsters (1992) text about the phenomenon of ‘Klaas’ in which Klaas was presented as a black role-model and a new class of workers, De Klaasbank, 2009, p. ii-3.

40. Members of the growing Surinamese community in Holland were often seen as...
welfare scroungers, and in 1974 a novelty hit by the obscure ensemble Henk en de Stainless Steel Band titled *Wij willen WW* (“We want Unemployment Benefit”) milked the Surinamese pronunciation of the “W” in portraying Surinamese as living off Dutch welfare in the Bijmer—though at the end of the song this is presented as payback for slavery, for being forced to produce Holland’s wealth in the first place.

Starting in the 1930s, in writings grounded much more substantially in Marxism than De Kom’s, intellectuals such as CLR James have foregrounded the role of slaves and colonised peoples—a non-Western proletariat whose...

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41 Historical role had been obscured by a focus on the industrial working class in Europe and the United States.

42 In fact, as Susan Buck-Morss has stressed recently, colonial plantations were as much part of modern industrial capitalism as European factories; they were factories.

43 Black Pete, with all the forced jolliness and playfulness that the white people playing and representing him give to his persona, went from one type of plantation to another, from one form of labour to another: from the factory of slavery to that of entertainment. As performed black stereotype, Zwarte Piet seems to be ripe for reappraisal by black Netherlanders and others; he demands to be taken beyond representation. This requires alliances, assemblages, that representations such as *Alleen maar nette mensen* work to prevent.

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**Epilogue**

Projects such as *Read the Masks* or the *Bijlmer Spinoza Festival* may have certain more or less concrete aims (to question the representation known as “Zwarte Piet”, to create a “social” work of art in the Bijlmer), but they also present a fundamental challenge to reductive ideologies of culture, which have taken hold across much of Europe, and certainly in Holland. From the Fortuyn years to the Wilders era, a discourse on national identity and on “Dutchness” has gathered pace. For years, the Print Room of the Rijksmuseum (the temple to Dutch art and culture par excellence) has been supplementing its holdings of seventeenth century graphic art with contemporary etchings of obscure local artists who are seen as continuing some quintessentially Dutch tradition of craftsmanship and realism. Even among those that are too urban to follow this course, essentialising takes on the “Dutchness” of Dutch art are still big business.

There is in fact a substantial pedigree for such essentialising visions; Dutch art history has long been in the vanguard of reaction. For decades, art historians and museum directors have clung on to (or re-excavated) outmoded conceptions of volkstheologie continuity in a nation’s art across the centuries. At the Stedelijk Museum in the 1950s, Director Willem Sandberg and Deputy Director...
Hans Jaffé constructed oniric continuities in which direct lines led from Saenredam and Vermeer to De Stijl, and from Hal's Rembrandt to Cobra. What was a reflection of or concession to post-war conservatism with these partisans of modernism became a veritable ideological agenda with Rudolf Fuchs, starting in the late-1970s: as Director successively of the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, the Gemeentemuseum Den Haag and the Stedelijk, Fuchs engaged in essentialising cultural differences by positing apparently completely incompatible “Nordic”, “Middle-European” and “Latin” traditions. Like his predecessors, he constructed teleological narratives of Dutch art in which Jan Dibbets became Saenredam's and Mondrian's "genealogical friend", and Karel Appel Rembrandt's. A stern letter sent by Hans Haacke to Fuchs in 1980, in which the artist made a well-argued case against Fuchs' recycling of tropes from nineteenth and early twentieth century cultural nationalism, invoking the disasters of twentieth century German history, obviously had very little effect. Today the Rijksmuseum, whose director has praised Pieter Fortuyt for having offered a “good solution”, is more than ever dedicated to showing the apparent continuity of Dutch Culture from the Middle Ages to the Present.47

The craving for strong leaders in contemporary politics, which gives rise to would-be saviours such as Fortuyt or Wilders, serves to disguise the fact that power is increasingly headless. In the 1930s, in response to Fascism and Stalinism, Georges Bataille developed the notion of the "Acéphale", the "headless being", to oppose various types of hierarchic Führerkult, in which one leader is supposed to be the head of a society.48 Bataille's Acéphale can also be seen as a counter-image to Hobbes's Leviathan, and most specifically its "personified" totalitarian versions. Today, however, power often appears as acéphalic, multinational, no longer bound by Hobbes's nation state.49

The revelations about the NSA's widespread surveillance of phone and Internet communication, and the American response, show the other side of contemporary power—leading to confusing online discussions, in which one commenter sardonically characterises Barack Obama as "our sovereign Peace-Keeper, our Leviathan and Protector in chief", while another argues that "[corporations] and military now use government as window dressing to legitimise their criminal activities under their private laws, outside of public law".50

While Obama's responsibility for continuing and even intensifying impeachment-worthy policies from the Bush era should not be brushed aside, the very fact of such continuities shows the extent to which the state has been reduced to an "intelligence" apparatus-cum-war-machine for which the old term "military-industrial complex" is barely sufficient—a machine that roams data, rigs elections and sends drones. The large-scale privatisation of the war in Iraq was in a sense a return to the dawn of European capitalism in the seventeenth century, when the slave trade was privately run and Dutch colonies such as Surinam started out as private enterprises—which were later absorbed into the fully formed nation state.

Today, the way in which the City of London instrumentalises many offshore "tax havens" that are former British colonies or countries on the fringes of the old Empire effectively constitutes a "Second Empire", as Ronen Palan puts it.51 With the Netherlands Antilles, there is also a small-scale Dutch version of this financial colonialism, which uses the remains of the colonial empire in order to funnel capital in the service of elites that are attacking the aspects of the nation state that hinder them while exploiting those that can be made to serve their purpose.52 Global capitalism needs the vestiges of the nation state and of colonial empires even while doing away with their more cumbersome aspects of modern social policy and even democracy.

Meanwhile, a certain breed of cultural bureaucrat continues to spout rhetoric that prevents any serious consideration of the role of culture in our neo-colonial present and its frequent violent forms of accumulation and expropriation. Recently, the Director of the Gemeentemuseum Den Haag stated that museums could play a vital role in "integrating" immigrants: once they see visual evidence of...
Holland having been a “global empire” in the past, they will respect and even love “us”. The museum, then, as propagandist for a shaken Leviathan, funnelling fresh meat into the decaying body politic.

But the ongoing chain reaction of de- and recomposition cannot so easily be halted. The more interesting forms of aesthetic practice contest such neonationalism both by articulating the antinomies within the instable montage that is the nation state, and by maintaining a global perspective that criticises the headless globalisation of capital as “insufficiently universal”. Such practices are enmeshed in contradictions as much as Piet Zwart was. If anything, they invite and exacerbate contradictions in a society that is intent on fabricating a seamless culture.