



Magic Tree

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Robert Jasper Grootveld

Amsterdam Magic Center: A Provo Fable

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1965: *Ugge, Ugge, Ugge*

Earlier that spring the witch-doctor priest, lost in the ecstasy of his rituals, had set fire to the temple. It had burned to the ground but it hardly mattered. His followers had become too many and, in any case, it had not been the Magic Center. This place with the statue was THE PLACE. The statue had begun as a false idol of evil deception but the ritual had purified it and made it the very center of the magic center. More than that, he had seen in a dream, he told the assembled crowd: people would come here from all over the world. The whole city was the Magic Center. "Amsterdam is the Magic Center!"

It was now high summer and Jasper Grootveld was in prime form. Everyone was out or at least all the kids: the *nozems*, the mods, the *blousons noirs*, the students and the teddy boys, the street toughs and the curious passersby. They laughed and cheered and egged him on with the magic *ugge, ugge, ugge* chant that sounded like smoker's cough. This was something! This was a real happening! This was so much better than nothing.

The loss of the Anti-Smoking temple had doubtless been a blow, to Jasper's ego if nothing else. The undercover police officers sent to monitor his antics had had to save him from the fire. He seems to have taken it in stride however, thanking them and calling them his friends and collaborators in an event that turned out even more spectacular than planned. If he'd been embarrassed by the incident, he didn't show it. At least it hadn't stopped him from moving the whole show here, to Spui Square, and setting up in front of this insipid statue. Decked out in his regalia of shredded rags with his face smeared in black paint, Jasper didn't look like the sort of person to embarrass easily. That was the game, anyway, to turn one thing into another. That was how the magic worked. If a storefront can turn into a temple with the right magic words, then having it then turn into a smoldering ruin may be unfortunate but shouldn't be much of a surprise. Nonetheless, it was a regrettable accident. Burning things down wasn't Jasper's style. Consuming fire was something for the black magic. Jasper's white magic was more interested in smoke and, in a larger sense, mirrors.

Jasper had become an expert in making things into other things. First he had turned marijuana into "Medicinal African Herbs" that he sold from a small shop. That was easy enough to do. He just called it that and it that and that's what it was. A better trick was turning dog food into marijuana. For this he had to put in a call to his police "collaborators" informing on himself and his friends with wild stories about huge quantities of the mysterious contraband. The police would then inform the press that they were about to make a major bust and invite them to come cover the action. A spectacular raid would be staged and carefully made packages of "marijuana" would be seized, and analyzed only to find that, when subjected to the not-magic of science, the magic would dissolve and the marijuana would turn back into dog food. The press would then complete the magic trick by printing the headline "Marijuana is Dog Food". These however were just games and Jasper called them that: "the Marijuana Game".

A more serious project was his struggle against the other, more powerful magicians who could also turn one thing into another or create magic signs and illusions to control and enslave people. These "hidden persuaders" (as Vance Packard called them in one of Jasper's favorite books) had filled the city with images of cars and washing machines and cigarettes and soft drinks all of which all added up to a magic dream world that everyone was supposed to work to make real.

Jasper was unconvinced, or perhaps jealous of their power, and tried to reverse the magic signs with marks of his own. On the cigarette ads he wrote *Kanker*. Cigarettes were cancer and symbolic of a whole regimen

of addiction and subjection to the Nicolords, the zombie priests of the consumer culture. Other ads promising warm weather, exotic adventures and *handgeld* to those willing to join the colonial army Jasper corrected in red: *Bloedgeld!*

The older people seemed not to agree. When they were young they had struggled to rid the country of the black magic. That had been about blood and soil and things staying what they were. That had wanted to keep track of different kinds of people and keep them from mixing or changing or losing their identity. The black magic had kept the knowledge of the black sun hidden from the people and had created its magic objects, its schwarzgerat, in secret and hurled them into the darkness of space.

This other magic that was about gold and the sea and everyone moving and mixing and changing seemed to be the white magic that the old people knew. When they had no land, hadn't they conjured Amsterdam out of the sea? Hadn't their people smashed the old statues and painted the temples white? Hadn't they taken to the roads to clear up the question of whether wine could become blood and blood could be tied to the land? Or was it that they had shouldered their muskets for the goddess Fortuna who had shown them a surefire method for turning lead into gold? In any case, they had certainly taken to the sea and brought Fortuna's gospel to the world. They had founded new Amsterdams and brought back delicious things from across the world to pile high on their tables. So what if the skull and the spider had ended up in the banquet as well? They could factor that in as depreciation or shrinkage and take it as an admonition to drink up while you can. Why make a big deal of it? What buffoonery was a death's head on a stiff collar to people who had invented insurance! So what if the magic bounty now came back from across the sea on other ships and under new names? This could be the golden future to rival the golden past.

Jasper was not satisfied. For all his tricks and illusions he wanted a real banquet instead of just a picture of one. The *nozemes* and the *blussons noires* agreed. The mods were bored and up for anything. The students had some ideas. The teds and the toughs were, as ever, looking for trouble. So things started to happen at the magic center. One more-or-less important (depending on whom you ask) thing that happened was that Roel van Duyn the anarchist appeared and began passing out pamphlets and talking about revolution. Jasper had been too busy with his rituals to notice this going on but people told him about it later. "Was there going to be a magic revolution?" they wanted to know.

Jasper's father had been an anarchist, so he knew enough about this to know it was not magic. Jasper's father and his comrades, in fact, had been workers who wanted to work without being magic and, in this, were a small part of a big idea that a world without magic might be better and might somehow be coming. These partisans of the not-magic dealt in real, solid things that obstinately stayed as they were despite their efforts. The revolutionists were perpetually frustrated. "What is to be done?" they asked, "What is to be done?"

Jasper wasn't especially worried about this world-without-magic ever actually materializing. What did worry him was that anarchists sometimes liked to throw real bombs which, unlike magic smoke-bombs, were absolutely useless for his purposes. Also that they hated, with a tedious, unnuanced passion, Jasper's collaborators, the police, who were also not-magic but were at least useful.

Jasper decided to meet with Roel and see what could be done. When they did meet Jasper saw that the young anarchist was an agreeable and enthusiastic fellow who wore serious, clunky glasses like a Cuban revolutionary. Jasper could tell that Roel wanted very badly for something really important to happen and also that he was, for the most part, making up his anarchism as he went along. This was a good sign. Perhaps it could be turned into a magic word instead of a not-magic problem.

"You can't fight the police," Jasper told Roel, "they will kill you or lock you up and that will be boring. Everyone knows how that works and everyone is tired of it. You need to pick something and turn it into a magic symbol. Like I did with smoking."

Roel thought about it, "what should I pick?"

"How about cars?" Jasper suggested.

"Yes! That's a good one!" Roel agreed. Cars were already some of the most magical objects in the city. Cars had some of the black magic in them. They ran on the black blood of the earth, the crushed bones of ancient forests, and required that the earth be fought for and held. They had also been much beloved by the practitioners of the black magic, who imagined motorized "lightning war" blitzing across the world in a whirlwind of blood and steel and speed without velocity. Cars certainly still had that violence. They crowded the small streets of Amsterdam, barging pedestrians and bicycles out of the way and taking up the space where happenings used to happen. Cars, however, were also white magic; they moved around and moved people around and, what is more,

they seemed to suggest a whole new world of motion and freedom that crackled with the magic of the future. A tribe of architects had been busily making pictures of his new world and loudly proclaiming them as the answer to the not-magic question of “what is to be done?” The architects were trying to offer a choice to people who didn’t want the world to change between a new architecture of order and a new world of rupture and upheaval. The choice, they said, could be architecture or revolution and people who were afraid of revolution liked that idea a lot.

The only problem was that these pictures weren’t, for the most part, magic. They were more about really tearing down old things and really making new things. They meant that people first had to figure out what the one best way for things to be was before they built anything, and then had to build it and make try to make it stay good. As reasonable as it sounded, it ended up being a lot harder than just letting everything be magically changeable.



Witte Fietsenplan happening, photograph by Cor Jaring

Provo

Roel began writing about cars and the world picture that came with them. Instead of just watching as they had done with Jasper, people started joining the group. Everyone who joined made a magic plan to change something and make a happening happen. The happenings disturbed the orderly patterns of the not-magic world and provoked a response from its keepers. The group called themselves “Provo” and, having taken white as their color, called their plans “white plans”. The white plans picked an object and turned it into a magic symbol that had power to change things, if only a little bit or for a little while. The provos painted bicycles white and left them around the city unlocked for everyone to use. “What if this were the world,” the bicycles asked. “Free bikes and free streets instead of private cars and parking and traffic?”

The police helped out. They confiscated all the bikes because they didn’t belong to anyone anymore and things had to belong to someone or be stolen. Then the provos got to ask for them back and suggest that if anyone was “stealing” it was the police. This caused a scuffle that led to a riot, which made for good pictures that, when they were exhibited made another, bigger riot happen. Part of the magic seemed to be that it was able to make ideas appear both very good and totally impossible all at the same time.

After the success of the white bicycles, all sorts of things were found that could be made into white magic symbols. White chickens turned into a magic sign for a new kind of police officer and, by implication, a new kind of government. A “white housing plan” magically changed useless old buildings into houses for people to live in, simply by imagining different ways of living in the city. As more people became provos and more plans were made, the projects moved beyond Jasper’s struggle for control of the white magic, into the world of politics which, at that point, was thought of mostly as a struggle between the black magic and the not-magic. The provos soon discovered that there was already a lot of white magic at work in the political world and that it was just as important as not-magic planning in making collective happenings happen for everyone.

For example, the princess, whose name is Beatrix and who is now the queen, was planning to marry a German count, and preparations were being made for a big happening to take place in the magic center. The provos thought it was absurd that something as not-magical as the government would try to make a happening happen, and they were especially suspicious of the black magic that clung to the whole idea of

kings and queens. To make matters worse, the queen's new husband had been caught up in the black magic when he was young and they could still see the darkness in him. Luckily his name was Claus and, for Jasper, this was close enough to *Klaas* (Santa Claus) to turn the whole thing into Christmas. "Klaas is coming," the provos wrote all over the city, and, as one should be when Santa Claus is on his way, they were very good and very quiet. The police didn't like this. They were concerned that holiday plans were being made without them and this made them very nervous. The nervous police made everyone else nervous, or annoyed, and a lot of the magic began to drain out of the wedding. It began to feel like something from a war. Could it be that *Klaas* would bring with him a *klasse* war?

What actually happened was nothing so not-magical as a real war. After scaring the police with wild, whispered stories of what they might do, the provos were able to put a bomb under the royal wedding carriage. It wasn't a "real bomb" but it was a real smoke bomb and it made a really big cloud of white smoke. Poof! The princess and her new husband and the carriage disappeared. Television cameras were broadcasting the wedding all over the world so everyone everywhere, or at least everyone who cared about these things, saw a magic image of the disappearing princess. Everyone held their breath for a moment. Then the smoke cleared and the carriage reappeared and they saw that the princess was still there. The happening, however, had changed completely. The provos, who knew what to expect, slipped away safely but the nervous police reacted in the most not-magical way possible and attacked the people who had come to see the wedding. The magic television images that followed the white cloud were all black: charging horses, clubs, boots, helmets, people running and falling, blood and fear. If you were one of the people who got clubbed that day it must have felt like a real war but it was, in fact, a magic one in which the white magic and the black magic fought with pictures for control of the real world.

Nothing, of course, was decided in this contest. The provos did, however, attract a lot of attention to themselves. Also, the police remained nervous and angry and they stopped being as much fun to collaborate with. The provos, for their part, began to increasingly mix magic and not-magic or, at least, to use magic to make things happen in the not-magic world. In other words things were becoming more and more "real" for the provos. The images they had made on the television magically appeared in the living rooms of the old people, who began to take notice. Many of them were horrified or frightened and the more black-tinged "yellow" presses encouraged this. They conjured up images of a fearsome "white menace" and screamed the "the provos are attacking!" Others of the old people were interested. This did look like fun. Also, the provos reminded

them of the daring, magic pirates they had been before the black magic had come and taught them to be careful and appreciate small comforts. Perhaps the kids were on to something.

Other attention came from a group of cranky, hard-drinking French intellectuals called the Situationists who were very concerned that the real world was somehow being eclipsed by the world of magic images. The Situationists didn't believe in magic so, when they found out that the provos were relatively unsophisticated about the workings of not-magic things, they decided they were "spontaneous" and without plans or leaders. This they liked, in part because they hoped that their happenings would turn into part of the great event that would really change the real world but also because it meant that they could say whatever they wanted about the provos and that was handy too. One thing they liked most about the Provos was that they cursed things like the statue in Spui Square by calling them "image". It was never clear, however, whether they agreed on what else there was of interest in the world besides images or on that all-important question of "what is to be done" about the situation.

Jasper's prophetic dream started to come true. People from all over the Netherlands and all over the world began to gravitate to the magic center in hopes of getting involved in the happenings, and others realized that they could make plans where they were and perform their own magic. New provo groups sprang up all over: Rotterdam, the Hague, Maastricht in the south, anywhere where there were bored young people with vivid imaginations. In Amsterdam a new statue in a new place was chosen as the center of the magic center. In the south of the city, near a big park called the Forest Park, there was a monument to a man named van Heutsz who was called the Pacificator. He'd earned his title far across the sea in a place called Aceh by turning the white magic of gold and ships into the black magic of blood and land. As his title suggests, the Pacificator had spilled great quantities of blood to make people stay still and be quiet. The younger provos hated the whole idea of pacification and, hoping to fight the black magic with their white magic, turned the Pacificator into their new spot. He was painted white, daubed with the "image" curse and became the center for people to meet and express their distaste for other black, bloody happenings going on overseas.

More and more people began to gather around the magic center. New arrivals camped in the Forest Park or claimed a spot for themselves in empty buildings or on boats. They came to realize that magic images needed real things to bring them into the world, so they set up printing shops and organized magazines. People who had been hooligans, and

hangers-around became printers and editors. Happenings began to happen all the time and began to add up to more than just parties or games. Roel was beside himself with excitement. Could this be it? Was the magic revolution coming? Jasper continued staging his rituals and was pleased that everyone was coming to the magic center but seemed to become increasingly skeptical.

Jasper feared that what was coming was trouble and he was not wrong. The hope was that it would not be just trouble but something good as well. The police became more and more overwhelmed by the crowds and more and more forceful in dealing with them. Having magic tricks played on them had been confusing and embarrassing, but these new happenings were mostly not-magic and that meant that they could swing their clubs and snap their handcuffs to their hearts' content. People were arrested for writing, or even saying, "image" and for many other things that were completely innocent in the real world but had come to have magic power.

As provos found a place for themselves amongst the tribes of the not-magic world, some became politicians and ran for office. Others wanted to be part of radical political groups outside the government. The communists did not like them because they had long ago decided that no good could come from magic and, besides, they were trying to get a car and an apartment for everyone and the provos were making this difficult. A lot of workers, however, had begun to not like the communists because they seemed as if they had given up not only on magic but also on the revolution and that this had turned them into one more voice telling them to say still and be quiet.

One hot June day the construction workers were angry that their union bosses had negotiated reduction in their benefits and suddenly decided that they could be pacificated no longer. As they walked away from their work all over the city the provos joined them, or maybe they joined the provos. Apart from the students like Roel, the provos were, after all, mostly just workers who didn't work or who wanted to work magic instead of do real work. In any case, the "wildcat" strike became a big wild happening. It went fairly well until someone died. When the dust cleared it was realized that the man had simply gotten too hot and too excited and had a heart attack, but in the heat of the moment the rumor spread that he had been killed. When they got this news the provos attacked the newspaper offices and the workers attacked their union office and the whole city erupted into chaos. The police called for help from the army and, for the first time since the black magic had been driven away, armored cars appeared on the streets and the blackness stepped out into daylight.

The fighting was loud and messy and cars suffered horribly with many of their number burned. People, however, seemed to come out fairly well, all things considered. There were lots of arrests and plenty of clubbing but nobody seemed to really have the stomach to kill each other. It was almost as if everyone realized that the important fight was taking place in the magic world over what things were to mean rather than what they would be. The government also realized that it was not as afraid of the provos as it was of itself. Nobody, or at least nobody who mattered, wanted to see the blackness come back or worse, to discover that they themselves had come to rely on the black magic to get their work done. The provos were invited to meet and to talk with the city officials and were offered a role in the political process. The clumsy, club-swinging police commissioner was fired and a new mayor was found who seemed a bit more sympathetic to magic. Much to Roel's frustration, a handsome young provo named Bernard de Vries was elected to the city council and pictures were made of him and his beautiful girlfriend meeting the mayor and his wife. The smoky, wild magic of Jasper's rituals seemed to have drained out of provo. The question came back once more, "what is to be done?"



provos deface statue of Joannes Benedictus van Heutsz
photograph by Cor Jaring

Well Grubbed Old Mole

In the south of the Netherlands, almost as far as you can get from Amsterdam in such a small country, lived (and still does live) a man named Hans Mol, who was very like a mole in that he had sensitive whiskers and was clever and quiet and industrious. Jasper and the other provos had given him some ideas about magic, and he and his friends had turned them into a “light laboratory” that did magic science experiments. Also, there in the south was the place where a new organization of the not-magic forces had been formed to keep the non-communist part of Europe safely and comfortably pacificated. The Mole had grubbed carefully and discovered that one of the commanders of this supposedly not-magic organization had, in fact, been deeply involved in the spread of the black magic and done much more bloody and horrible work for it than poor Klaas who was actually turning out to be not such a bad guy. The Mole had proven his courage by appearing, magically disguised as a reporter, at a press conference held by the organization and handing this commander a printed “warning” denouncing him as black sorcerer and suggesting that he return home and open a candy shop for children so that some sweetness might come into the world from his otherwise bitter life. He had then magically walked out of the room before any of the forces assembled could escape the charm that had been put on them and seize him.

Jasper and the others knew they needed some courage and cleverness and asked the Mole for help. He invited them to get out of the city and come have a meeting in the south. A castle was found that could be used for the weekend and the provos who had, against their better judgment, become leaders assembled there and discussed what to do. Could they return to white magic and continue their struggle there? Or should they try to bring magic to the not-magic world? Were they magically changing into something else themselves after having done it to other things and people?

Others appeared at the meeting. French intellectuals sent representatives from Strasbourg with a pamphlet that sought to demystify everyday life and expose the impoverished reality beneath the magic images. Someone else, whom no one will name, came from the country from which the blackness had emanated when it engulfed the Netherlands and spoke suggesting that they go further. If they had used the techniques of white magic to struggle within white magic and turn it towards making a new world, and were beginning to do the same with not-magic, why not try it with the black magic too? He called for real bombs to replace smoke bombs so that they could blast the blackness out of its hiding places. He wanted to provoke not only collaboration

from the police but blood and fire that would break open the real world and force it to change.

The Mole knew that this had to be the end and so did the others. They told the black magician to leave and voted to perform the final magic trick of making Provo disappear. Meanwhile, back in Amsterdam, a real bomb did appear but it was only used to blow up the statue of the Pacificator. If a smoke bomb could magically make a real person disappear perhaps it was fair that a real bomb could make a false image vanish. The white magic had long contained a yearning to destroy icons. Nonetheless it sealed the provos’ resolve and a final happening was organized in the Forest Park, where it was announced that Provo was over and that everyone was free to find magic on their own. Those who wanted a revolution were disappointed. Roel was sad and the French intellectuals hurled scorn at the provos for not “going further.”

Provo would not go further, though. The people in the Forest Park seemed to understand. They looked around and saw each other and decided that maybe all they needed to know about magic was that peace and love were good and war and hate were bad and that maybe love really is all you need. As the provos faded back into the crowd, this idea continued to grow and Amsterdam became more and more the magic center or, at least, a magic center. It would be nice to say that this is where the story ends and that everyone lived happily ever after: in love, in the Forest Park, with the white magic moving among them like the holy ghost of Provo. This, however, wouldn’t be true and no amount of magic can make it so.



Bijlmermeer under construction, 1969



Eventstructure Research Group, *Corprocinema*

The Freeway and the Free State

The people in the park went on to have bigger and bigger happenings that were all about love but, even as they staged these “love-ins”, the question of “what is to be done” still weighed on the minds of the builders of the not-magic world. In this case it was framed as “what is to be done when winter comes and all these hippies need a warm place to sleep” and then quickly led to “what is to be done with them when the dope wears off and they fall out of love and need to find a job”. However you made your architecture-or-revolution choices and whether or not the love would last beyond the “summer of love”, autumn was on its way and with it came the choice posed by some British architects who had begun to work some magic: “architecture or rain.”

The architects once again came forward with proposals. These were not only not-magic, they had also lost a lot of their glittering futuristic glamour. This, however, was fine with the leaders of the not-magic world. They were now less afraid that change would happen and more concerned that nobody would be able to pull anything off at all. As the love-ins filled the Forest Park work was begun on a huge complex of very modern housing blocks scattered amongst trees and gardens just outside of Amsterdam. These were to have their own train stop and a little downtown of their own for shopping and strolling and all the

modern amenities that the cramped and disorderly old city wouldn’t allow. Cars of course would be an important part of this so lots of parking spaces were built in big garages. The architects very diligently thought of everything that good Dutch people with good jobs would need to have happy, normal lives in the new towers. To connect the new housing with the old city and to connect Amsterdam with the rest of the world, a bold new plan was made for an old neighborhood called, ironically, the “New Market.” This plan called for the clearing away of the old city and replacing it with subways and freeways and tall buildings and all the other things that people would need to be happy and normal in the bigger, better future.

As these architectural plans were taking shape, and the people in the Forest Park were wallowing in blissful oblivion, the French intellectuals tried to make their own magic revolution and failed. However passionate and flamboyant a face they put on it, they really seemed unable to work the magic that changes one thing into another. When they had finally stopped critiquing the provos and others like them and were able to precipitate their own big event, they collapsed. Once they had cut through the illusions they so hated and run up against the real, not-magic world and its burning question of “what is to be done?” they found they had little to say. This, no doubt, proved frustrating and embarrassing and left the Situationists fighting amongst themselves and finally declaring, more or less, that the whole situation was in fact impossible. Or at least this is what the architects wanted to take as a conclusion. For many of them this seemed like a perfect excuse to declare that there was, in fact, no revolution and that the only choice for the future was architecture! Not only that but they gleefully proclaimed that architecture could be a magic image too, but only a magic image of itself and that everyone was going to have to get used to it.

The people of the magic center were not convinced of this and, to be fair, neither were the architects working on the big new projects. People began to be kicked out of the old New Market neighborhood and preparations to demolish it (and the haunted empty space left where the forces of blackness had made a neighborhood full of people disappear) were begun. The people from the Forest Park decided there were some things that they could not love and that this was one of them. They remembered that they had wanted a magic city where they could change things for themselves and make them as they wanted, not a new, not-magic city where everything happened the same as before except faster. This time the old people agreed. Even if they wanted a car, they realized that they would miss the old buildings and the look of the old streets, if not their wildness.

“What is to be done?” they asked. The question had come to sound almost rhetorical. Except this time there were provos among them and they had an answer.

“Make a plan!” they said.

“Write a script!”

“Print it. We’ll perform it.”

“Pick something small... like these houses. Change them into magic signs.”

“Then turn the signs into a game. Something more fun than the monopoly game that the clever, hidden persuaders are playing behind the not-magic, not-so-hidden ones”

So they made, in the old neighborhood, a “free state”, with an imaginary government with an imaginary “housing bureau” that helped everyone who wanted a house to move back into one. They found, however, that everything was different in the buildings when they returned. People lived all together and came and went much more easily. They didn’t own the buildings but nobody else really did either anymore so they felt free to fix them and modify them as they liked. They planted gardens in the empty spaces where things had been torn down. They built domes and inflatable dragons and let them take over the streets. They played longer games and made happenings into ongoing parts of life instead of momentary events. Work was shared, knowledge was exchanged, and magazines and a newspaper for the new free state were published. They also made plans and built communications networks to defend the neighborhood and to resist its being knocked down. This time when the bulldozers arrived they were stopped. At the first sign of one people called a list of their neighbors, who each had a list of their own to call until a crowd was assembled and bricks and firebombs were raining down from the roofs. The police came and then the army. Tanks appeared in the streets once again but even these were stopped. This time it was the architects who scared themselves. They realized that however good their plans were, the reality they had been planning for had changed and disappeared. More than this, they saw things were going to keep changing and that maybe, no big, not-magic plans were going to work in a magic city. The project stopped and the architects began to try to find better ways of doing things. Some of them joined up with other architects who were trying to use the failure in France as an excuse to avoid both the question of “architecture or revolution” and “architecture or rain” altogether. Others decided that the only way to make architecture magic was to put it to work for the hidden persuaders and let them fill it with magic power. The ones who did the best, however, found ways to disappear into the crowd as the provos had done and magically changed themselves into other kinds of people who could work between the magic world and the not-magic one.



Gerhard Richter, *Beerigung*,

City Magic for the Magic City

The people of the imaginary country now saw the power of magic tricks and the making of plans with magic symbols. They found ways to make up new tricks and to teach them to each other so that they would all know how to magically change the city. It was a good thing they did because the city, and the world, began to change on its own in a number of ways both magic and not-magic. All the plans made for Amsterdam to be a city of workers and sailors ended up being useless when bigger, better, “super harbors” appeared nearby. Also the not-magic world changed. The black magicians who had been turned out of the provo meeting returned home and tried to work their magic tricks with real bombs. They didn’t understand however that while the white magic brings light and clarity (however false) and makes pictures and symbols that people can see and read, the blackness carries with it a fog of obscurity and confusion that swallows everything. When they summoned the blackness it came for them but rather than being able to control it or defeat it, they were consumed by it. In the end they became magic pictures themselves and, in fact, when they died, a brilliant white magician from their country made real pictures of these magic pictures that are the closest anyone has come to being able to see the blackness.

Some good, however, came of this tragedy, and a lot of other painful experiments with black magic. Just as medicine can often be made from poison, the blackness was made to yield some useful tricks.

People remembered that there were things they needed besides love, things like good ways to fight each other and maybe hate each other, but with magic so that real change could come of it instead of just not-magic misery. Some people came to see the value of protecting dark parts of themselves and their worlds and of defending obscurity and unknowability from the white light that would bleach every thing and make it dissolve and change. Nobody, or at least nobody who mattered, wanted to return to sorting people out by their identities but it also came to be realized that people should not always be made to submit to the free flowing flux and infinite connection of the white magic networks. Islands were sought in this brisk stream and obstructions to the flow devised. Some of these blockages were the work of a Black Block that emerged as something of a dark mirror of Provo and fought to make free states and open spaces in the magic city.

These ideas diffused into the magic of the magic center and became an important anecdote that kept the white magic from completely taking over the not-magic world and organizing it entirely around gold (or its newer, better replacement: magic, invisible gold) and change and magic signs. It is possible that the two kinds of magic need each other to stay alive and the not-magic world needs them both, if only to keep things loud and messy. What is certain is that, despite the rancor with which the plan for the New Market was rejected, Jasper was happy to see the other plans for the enormous housing blocks moving forward. By the time it was finished the city had changed and the world had changed and with them the requirements for life being normal and happy. The people who came to live in the towers were not the old people of the old Amsterdam but new people from the New Amsterdams that had been built wherever the magic ships had gone in search of gold. Now, as the ships returned and the empire at last began to disappear, new, different people came to the magic center and, magically, they changed it even as it changed them. Not having cars they decided that the parking garages could be markets, new scripts of work and family were staged in the apartments and new struggles and troubles were played out alongside the old ones in the city. Nonetheless, Jasper was happy. He had always performed his rituals for an audience and made sure that people saw, and documented, and took part in his happenings. When the magically changing tower blocks were completed, however, he made one last happening all by himself. Rather than taking the train, or a car, or even his bicycle he walked the whole way from the center of the magic center to the new tower-blocks where they stood on the outer edge. He went to extend the magic to include these new people from all over the world. "Welcome to the Magic Center, welcome to Amsterdam!"

Prolog

Once again it would be nice to end here but, once again, it's not so easy. It's not so much a problem of there only being happy endings in fables like this. It's more that there are only endings at all in fables. Jasper is now gone and the city is largely calm. Ironically the new tower blocks are now seen as old in many quarters and many people want to tear them down. Amsterdam is more magic than ever. In fact, now almost every one, even the government, wants to make the magic happen. Magic signs and pictures are produced at a fantastic rate, networks are connected and reconnected and brilliant magicians work hard thinking up new meanings for things and giving them new identities. It's still noisy but it's much less acrimonious. The ritual chanting and crash of riots has been replaced with a buzz. Branding, identity, media – this is how the buzz is created, this is where the magic happens.