

MERCEDES AZPILICUETA

Onze Roeping, on Joyful Militancy









One of the first courses I took as a first-year History student at the University of Amsterdam was an introduction to the history of Amsterdam. I can remember visiting the Royal Palace on Dam Square with my fellow students and learning what makes it such a unique building. I also learned why Rembrandt's masterpiece *The Conspiracy of the Batavians under Claudius Civilis* never came to be hung in the former City Hall. The history of the Jordaan was also included. Naturally I learned that the Jordaan was a typical working-class neighbourhood with many artisans and small businesses and where living conditions in the 19th and early 20th centuries were particularly bad. I learned of the various working-class riots that took place there. I just don't remember any mention of the importance of women in the Potato Riots. This only became clear to me while re-exploring the Jordaan when ROZENSTRAAT — a rose is a rose is a rose opened its doors. The programming was to include space for projects with a link to the Jordaan, the neighbourhood in which ROZENSTRAAT is located.

I read that the eight-day Potato Riots, which left fourteen dead and more than a hundred wounded, were led by women. It was an uprising in which women stood side by side to defy policemen and soldiers, looting food supplies in order to provide food for their families. Who were these women who rebelled? How did they come to play a leading role? Was this an exceptional event for the 20th century, or were such events more frequent than we think? While reading up on it, these questions came to my mind. It seemed like an interesting topic for a R Project: a new type of art project that ROZENSTRAAT began in 2019, whereby an artist could conduct extensive research on a topic related to Amsterdam and whose outcome would be presented in public space.

It was clear to me and my colleagues that none other than Mercedes Azpilicueta could shape this project better. In her layered works, she brings together characters and groups of people from the past and present, and blends the big picture of an event with seemingly irrelevant details. Mercedes has a particular eye for feminist and queer angles through which new perspectives emerge, and she continues to demonstrate that historical processes or events are more layered than they initially appear. Fortunately, Mercedes was enthusiastic, and

with her signature style, she soon came up with the idea of connecting the Potato Riots with examples of contemporary feminist struggles. The project was thus taken to the next level, laying the foundation for *Onze Roeping, on Joyful Militancy*.

Onze Roeping, on Joyful Militancy takes the form of a performative walk through the public space of the Jordaan. It rehearses, reiterates and reinforces the intimacy and support experienced by women within the Potato Riots and similar uprisings and protests. It reflects on such questions seen through the lens of contemporary feminist struggles: what forms of affection were at the heart of the riot, when we see that tenderness and vulnerability went hand in hand with militancy? What changes to household economy have occurred since then, and what role did public spaces play in this? From this starting point, the walk takes us through a succession of embodied material (infra)structures of the Jordaan, such as the disappearing corridors, barricades and bridges, and home-made household items like aprons and tote bags. Woven together in *Onze Roeping, on Joyful Militancy*, the walk brings to life hidden places and secret relationships within the architecture and history of the Jordaan. With this project, Mercedes has managed to masterfully connect the archetypal Dutch symbol of the potato with identity, solidarity, caring and feminism.

This publication is a continuation of *Onze Roeping, on Joyful Militancy*; it contains the documentation of the performative walks and includes essays written by Anik Fournier and Mieke Krijger. These essays paint a perfect picture of the project, its historical background and Mercedes Azpilicueta's practice. *Onze Roeping, on Joyful Militancy* is first and foremost Mercedes Azpilicueta's project, however, it would never have become the project it is today without their commitment, help and above all wonderful energy. Thank you Angeliki, Toni, Antonella, Marina, Anik, Mieke, Laura, Dasha and Konstantin! And a big thank you to Mercedes; it was a continuous joy to work with you!

Sjoerd Kloosterhuis

MERCEDES AZPILICUETA: ONZE ROEPING, ON JOYFUL MILITANCY

Anik Fournier

It's October 2021. I am standing in Mercedes Azpilicueta's installation *Potatoes, Riots, and Other Imaginaries*, her contribution to this year's Prix de Rome at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. For the past several months I have been following Azpilicueta's research into the 'Potato Uprising' that took place during a food shortage in the Jordaan in 1917. Her research and umbrella project *Onze Roeping, on Joyful Militancy* was initiated with the invitation by Sjoerd Kloosterhuis, curator at ROZENSTRAAT — a rose is a rose is a rose in 2019. This art space is located in the heart of where the uprising took place and Kloosterhuis, who is a historian, has been eager to connect with and activate this local historical event, especially with the often-overlooked role that the working women of the neighborhood played in it. Who better to unearth this perspective than Azpilicueta, whose work has continually engaged the backsides of history to create a stage to forefront women figures that have made a difference in their historical moments and who continue to inspire in the present.



Mercedes Azpilicueta. *Potatoes, Riots, and Other Imaginaries*, 2021.
Prix de Rome — Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam Photo: Daniel Nicolas

In the space of the museum, I encounter a stunning materialization of this research process, in the form of a monumental Jacquard tapestry standing in the center of the room like a scroll, unfolding a dense scenography of images, sounds, texts, and objects. My eyes immediately begin to follow the weave of fragmented narratives, one stitched into the other: a black and white archival photograph of women out in the streets in a line wearing aprons and holding baskets, perhaps at a food bank; a screenshot of a phone text message conversation in Spanish; a swarm of protestors out in the street carrying green flags; an eel swerving above a photograph of two young women, one of whom is drawing a symbol of the female pictogram on the other's cheek. This woman also wears a green scarf, the symbol of the Ni Una Menos social movement in Argentina, in which Azpilicueta has played an active role since 2015. Like with the Potato Uprising, Ni Una Menos was initially a relatively small group of women protesting, in this case against femicide in Buenos Aires, that became a spark for a much larger movement that now encompasses a network of offspring throughout South America. The word, *Loesifirs* [matches] appears low down in white handwriting, causing me to step back a few paces and move around into a curve of the tapestry. Suspended there and throughout the space are white fantastical objects that speak of domestic use such as woven planters and aprons with pockets, and also street wear, like fanny packs, bonnets and caps. While I take in the lively archival collage of imagery in this portion of the tapestry, I begin to tune into the sounds that can be heard throughout the space: the sound of zippers, footsteps in a staircase, whispered gossip; a woman laughing, the familiar sounds of an incoming text message, a rhythmic reworking of Dutch words that also appear throughout the tapestry, *loesifirs, appie, boezelaar, plankiehobbels*; and the repeated whispered sentence *somos las nietas de todas las brujas que nunca pudieron quemar* [we are the granddaughters of all the witches who could never be burned].

My eye focuses-in on a photographic image I recognize from the research I have also been doing, knowing I would eventually write this text meant to accompany a series of performances that the artist will orchestrate on site in the Jordaan during the first week of July 2022. These performances are the outcome of Azpilicueta's commission for ROZENSTRAAT — a rose is a rose is a rose, and will mark the dates of the Potato Uprising that took place in the Jordaan neighborhood over 100 years ago. The black and white photograph depicts what I now know to be a *gang* [a passage], an architectural feature that used to be woven throughout the built environment of the neighborhood. The *gangen* functioned as a connecting device to houses set back from the streets, and also as a social space, where work and life, private and public, mothers, kids and neighbors lived, together. The black and white image sucks me in like a wormhole, one that brings me (back) to another world and simultaneously enacts a slippage (back) into the present.

It's April 2022, I am once again at the Stedelijk, sitting on the floor leaning against the wall in the *Potatoes, Riots and Other Imaginaries* installation, listening to a public talk about the project by Azpilicueta, Kloosterhuis and Mieke Krijger, a researcher, historian and curator at the Jordaan Museum. Mercedes has had a baby since my first visit, and while she talks, her partner walks around with the little one strapped to his front, keeping him entertained.

I had attended a guided tour of the *Gangenproject* that Krijger gave in the Jordaan the summer before, July 2021, as a first entrance point into the local history that Azpilicueta's commission was opening up to me. Today it is not the *gangen* but the bridges that Krijger keeps coming back to as a crucial material infrastructure that enables an image of the Jordaan at the moment of the uprising in 1917 to come into view.

At the turn of the twentieth century the Jordaan was a densely overpopulated, rundown, working class neighborhood. A series of drawbridges over canals literally separated the Jordaan from the adjoining upperclass neighborhoods. This created a certain seclusion in which the Jordaan developed as a community in and of itself, with its own dialect, social structures and culture. *Ons Huis in de Jordaan*, a memoir written by C. P. Van Asperen van der Velde in 1934, creates a vivid picture of the Jordaan and *Jordanezen* people the author came to know during the thirty years she worked in Ons Huis [Our House], which according to Krijger was one of the first community centers in Europe. The community center was located at Rozenstraat 12, just up the street from the current location of ROZENSTRAAT — a rose is a rose is a rose. The posh hotel that now inhabits the same building has kept the name Ons Huis, a poignant indication of who claims this neighborhood as home today.

What emerges through the many stories Van Asperen van der Velde recounts is the harsh daily reality of a community consisting of large families stacked one on top of the other in what we would consider to be unlivable conditions. The men either worked on boats and were gone for days, or worked in factories and often came home late, drunk. The women were largely left to care for their children with the little means at their disposal.¹ And yet, there was no lack of joviality, strength, solidarity and creativity in this. Van Asperen van der Velde gives voice to the many protagonists in her stories, quoting their dialect phonetically, which allows for the rough yet witty nature of the Jordaan denizens to be heard as one reads. The many narratives paint a vivid picture of the animated sociality of the neighborhood, where life and work spill out onto the streets and where there is little, if any, delineation between the public and the private. Women spent afternoons chatting away while peeling potatoes and shrimps in the *gangen*. I remember Krijger affirming as much in her tour, telling of how on

rainy days they could be found with their aprons peeling away inside the local movie theater or in the entrance of a church. Van Asperen van der Velde accounts speak of the great ingenuity of these women in sharing and circulating resources such as clothes for the children and most importantly, in keeping their large families fed. While the material infrastructures and conditions failed, the women had formed what Azpilicueta refers to as 'a network of care', one that she has literally mapped throughout her research and installation piece.

The matriarchal nature of the Jordaan was already an integral part of the neighborhood's fabric as early as the eighteenth century. In September of 2021 while doing research at ATRIA, I came across an article about the *lollepotten*, a term used in the local dialect in the second half of the eighteenth century for women engaged in sexual relations with other women. Sexual relations between women, according to the author, were quite common and acknowledged due to the tight-knit community, lack of men and no privacy in the Jordaan at the time.²



Mercedes Azpilicueta, *Potatoes, Riots, and Other Imaginaries*, 2021, detail.
Prix de Rome — Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam Photo: Daniel Nicolas

By 1917, the matriarchal community of the Jordaan still held and extended across generations. Coming back to the image of the bridge as material infrastructure, I now posit the bridge as metaphor for transition, a stage of becoming something else. I bring this image in to articulate how women's work and life in the Jordaan at the turn of the century was undergoing a shift. While the primary occupation of the older generation was to tend to the family and earn money by working across the bridges cleaning the houses of the wealthy, a younger generation of women, the *fabriek meisjes* [factory girls], were now earning wages in factories, primarily in the textile industry.³ Work and labour therefore meant something very different in practice for different women living in the Jordaan. In the midst of this transition, one could not yet identify a unified class consciousness. What is clear is that the women of the Jordaan experienced a strong sense of sociality and solidarity across

1 C. P. Van Asperen van der Velde, *Ons Huis in de Jordaan: Jordaan Herinneringen van C. P. Van Asperen van der Velde*, Bussum: C. A. van Dishoek, 1937, p. 36.

2 Jeanette Nijboer, 'Lollepottensubcultuur in de Jordaan: Everard's speurtocht in de gangen van een volkbuurt', *Uit de kast: Lesbisch Archief Amsterdam*, no. 2, April 1995, pp. 12-14.

3 Van Asperen van der Velde, *op. cit.* pp. 80-86.

their relations to work, mostly through what remained for all a life under constant duress.

If I have spent time to describe the material living conditions in the Jordaan at the turn of the century, it is in keeping with how philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler reminds us of the crucial dependency we all have on material infrastructures for a livable life and how that vulnerability to our material conditions is also the grounds for a force of resistance to erupt when those material structures fail us.⁴ This is indeed what happened in the summer of 1917 for women of the Jordaan.

A QUESTION OF REPRESENTATION

It is July 1917, the first world war had been going on for four years and the Netherlands, which remained a neutral country, was nevertheless feeling the effects. The Dutch government spent much of its resources keeping its troops securing the borders, troops that needed to be fed. The Netherlands also continued to supply food to other countries such as England and Germany throughout these years. This meant there was a widespread food shortage within the country and the lower classes had to queue at food banks that were meant to provide for a more equal distribution. During the summer of 1917, the rations were meager and often inedible, the weight ratio being met by filling half the bag with rotten potatoes and dirt. The women of the Jordaan were amongst the hardest hit and were struggling desperately to feed their families. Particularly hard to swallow was their awareness of a black market that continued to supply the upper classes living over the bridges with edible vegetables. So, when they heard there was a barge full of potatoes docked on the Jordaan side of the Prinsengracht destined for the troops at the border, they did not hesitate to act.

Oral accounts speak of a group of women charging the boat with determination, filling their baskets and aprons, which they now used as carrier bags, with all the potatoes that could fit and encouraged others to follow. The boat was empty of its goods within minutes.⁵ The action did not stop there. A group of these women then went on to the city hall, demanding to speak with the mayor. A few were allowed in to meet with a municipal official, and when they spoke of their incapacity to feed their families with the sacks of rotten potatoes being handed out at the food banks, the official answered "if you cook them, they are ok" [*Als je ze kookt, zijn ze wel goed*]. To which one of them replied, "Raw, I have never ate them!" [*Rauw heb ik ze nog nooit gegeten!*].⁶

4 Judith Butler, 'Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance', in Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti and Leticia Sabsay (ed.), *Vulnerability in Resistance*, Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2016.

5 Mieke Krijger, 'Het Aardappeloproer in 1917', available at <https://www.economischzelfstandig.nl/assets/uploads/Week22-17-Aardappeloproer-1917-2juni17.pdf> (last accessed on 12 June 2022).

6 Anne Petterson, 'Aardappelnoed: Amsterdamse arbeiders en het socialisme Vjdens het Aardappeloproer van 1917', thesis, Leiden: University of Leiden, 2008, p. 22.

These acts by the women of the Jordaan were the spark that ignited one of the most explosive social uprisings in early twentieth century Dutch history. How this came to be is explained to a great extent by what historian Anne Petterson identifies in her article *Aardappelnoed: Amsterdamse arbeiders en het socialisme tijdens het Aardappeloproer*, as the politicization of the uprising by socialist parties and factions at the time. This politicization resulted in major workers strikes by men, the plundering of vegetable shops and storage houses throughout the Jordaan, and protests in the streets of Amsterdam by thousands of people. Eventually the army was called in, and after some violent clashes, ten deaths and hundreds wounded, though the radical socialists did not get the revolution they were hoping for, the women of the Jordaan did secure ratios of edible potatoes for the remainder of the war.⁷



Women from the Jordaan in the streets of the Rietlanden, 1917.
Photo: Nationaal Archief/Collectie Spaarnestad/Het Leven/
Photografer unknown.

What Azpilicueta's *Potatoes, Riots and Other Imaginaries* project brings to light are questions of representation, questions about who was to be seen as responsible for this uprising, and questions about what the representation of an uprising or resistance should look like. The images of the Jordaan working women from this uprising that are woven into the tapestry are, simply put, amazing. The strong solidarity amongst them is felt and even heard when looking at these images now. In one photo, ten women are seen side-by-side, each holding a bundle of potatoes in their dirty white aprons, high-up, triumphantly for the camera and all eyes to see. They are all smiling. An elderly-woman dressed in black stands at the far left, looking over at them, her right hand raised high. A gesture of victory? Of pure joy? Her name was Kee Spek and she was known throughout the neighborhood as the *dansenkater*, a word inscribed in large black letters in the tapestry.

Knowing this, the gesture is easily read as accompanying dancing feet. And yet what makes this image and others of the Jordaan women during the uprising so compelling, are precisely the elements that were devalued in their own historical moment.

As Petterson points out in her article, even the socialist parties and offshoots who sought to capitalize on the social upheaval set in motion by the actions of these working women did not use any of these images in reports on the uprising in the socialist newspapers. In fact, they tended to downplay the role the women had played due to what was deemed unruly behavior that lacked political form and organization. For example, while the SDP [Social Democratic Party] newspaper, *The Tribune*, spoke of the courage of the women, it also noted that they were not taken seriously at the town hall, where the mayor Josephus Jitta did not show the respect of taking his pipe out of his mouth while talking to them.⁸ The article goes on to say that the women gave up too easily and that they now needed the support of men to continue their fight. Similarly, their plundering of vegetable stores in the Jordaan was all but reprimanded by David Wijnkoop, the leader of the SDP, who, speaking to the women from the elevated position of a lamppost, told them that they should go home and focus on convincing their husbands to strike, and that “if someone took vegetables, this would benefit nothing to our class.” [*Of iemand hier groenten wegneemt, dat baat onze klasse niets.*]⁹ In the founding document of the Revolutionary-Socialist Women's Union published several months after the uprising in the fall of 1917, the radical socialist women's association [radical-socialistische vrouwenorganisaties] expressed the desire to give political form to the “raw instincts for resistance” [*instinctmatig verzet*] the working women had demonstrated.¹⁰



Amsterdam City Archives, The Archive of the Police, entry number 5225, inventory number 4707, scan number 00729000005.

8 Petterson, *op. cit.* p. 26.
 9 Petterson, *op. cit.* p. 27.
 10 Petterson, *op. cit.* p. 27.

Most telling is how the uprising needed a hero, and for this the anarchist paper *De Vrije Socialist* [The Free Socialist], had postcards made and distributed. Under the heading “The Hunger Uprising in Amsterdam” [*De Hongeropstand in Amsterdam*] was a portrait of J.C. Alders, the train mechanic who in solidarity with the workers was credited with bringing the unrest to an end. He had refused to let a train carrying military troops into Amsterdam Central Station, keeping them stalled and cooped-up in the train outside the city. Petterson argues that the choice of this image by the leftist paper supports what historian Eric Hobsbawm identifies as a shift in socialist and revolutionary iconography from the eighteenth pre-industrial, to the nineteenth post-industrial societies. It is worth recapping Hobsbawm's argument here, as it enables to further pinpoint what is so affective in the archival images of the Jordaan women protesting, the images that are brought to the fore throughout Azpilicueta's installation.



Eugène Delacroix, *Liberté Guidant le Peuple*, 1830.

Hobsbawm takes Eugène Delacroix's painting *Liberty Guiding the People* (1830) [*Liberté Guidant le Peuple*] as an instance of pre-industrial socialist and revolutionary iconography in which the figure of a woman became a trope. Hobsbawm argues that in this exemplary case, the interpretation “is not in doubt”, and goes on to say, “Liberty was seen not as an allegorical figure, but as a real woman (inspired no doubt by the heroic Marie Deschamps, whose feats suggested the picture). She was seen as a woman of the people, belonging to the people, at ease among the people.”¹¹ He argues that along-side the transition of democratic-plebeian revolutions of the nineteenth century to the proletarian and socialist movements of the twentieth century was a masculinization of imagery. At this moment, the figure of the male worker came to dominate imagery of the labour and socialist movements.¹²

11 Eric Hobsbawm, ‘Man and Woman in Socialist Iconography’, *History Workshop*, no. 6, Autumn 1978, p. 122.

12 Hobsbawm, *op. cit.* p. 124.



Women behind a boom barrier in the Rietlanden, 1917. Photo: Nationaal Archief/Collectie Spaarnestad/Het Leven/. Photographer unknown.

And yet, the comparison of Delacroix's painting together with an archival image woven into Azpilicueta's tapestry, offers a critical perspective into Hobsbawm's argument. In this image, there is a mass of women behind a boom barrier. On this side of the barrier, the side that opens onto the viewer, a woman stands in her white apron amongst four officers, one of which smiles directly at the camera. In Azpilicueta's work, this woman is highlighted in a cone of yellow from head to toe, as if she was a beam of light. From many witness accounts, we can identify her as *mevrouw* Van Stek-Punt. This was the same woman, who on the first day of the uprising, had retorted to the municipal official that she was not in the habit of eating raw potatoes. She is the same woman who on July 2 in the Czaar Peterstraat, stood between a group of protesting women and soldiers, one of which recalled that when they pulled out their rifles, Van Stek-Punt undid her top to reveal her bare chest and yelled "soldiers, shoot, but we must have food for our children." [*Soldaat, schiet, maar vreten motten we hebben voor onze kinderen.*]¹³

According to an oral account by Van Stek-Punt's daughter about the moment captured in this image, the women had rushed over to the Rietlanden on the Eastern docks of Amsterdam when they heard that there were carts filled with potatoes on the other side of the train tracks. The officers realized they could block the women by bringing the boom barrier down. When *mevrouw* Van Stek-Punt made her way out in front of the barrier, an officer said that they would have to take her off to be locked up. She retorted in her rough *Jordaanse* humor, "you will not be able to hold me, because as fat as I am, I won't fit in a bed there" [*Jullie houden me toch niet vast, want zo dik als ik ben, een bed daar pas ik niet in.*]¹⁴

What is clear when we compare this image of Van Stek-Punt at the barrier, with Delacroix's painting of *Liberty on the Barricade*, is that Hobsbawm's claim that Liberty was without doubt a "real woman" is laughable, at best. Even if she is intended to represent a real historical figure, this representation, as the title suggests, doubles up for something far more abstract: a democratic ideal of liberty, liberty of the people. In what reality would a real woman show up to fight at the barricade dressed in Roman robes, bare chested? *Mevrouw* van Stek-Punt, on the other hand, is a person in flesh and bone, standing there defiantly in her domestic working clothes as a direct reference to the demands of her body, and bodies like hers: the right to food, the bare conditions for life.

In *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, Butler's analysis of what bodies perform and communicate when they assemble in public in contemporary social movements, uses the term indexicality to characterize the relation between the public appearance of the bodies and their demands. It is worth citing her at length on this:

After all, there is an indexical force of the body that arrives with other bodies in a zone visible to media coverage: it is this body, and these bodies, that require employment, shelter, health care, and food, as well as a sense of a future that is not the future of unpayable debt; it is this body, or these bodies, or bodies like this body or these bodies, that live the condition of an imperiled livelihood, decimated infrastructure, accelerating precarity.¹⁵

J O Y F U L R E S I S T A N C E

I remember when in March 2022, Azpilicueta mentioned, almost in passing during a public conversation about her work, that she remained committed to 'representation'. The comment struck me as a simple, yet bold thing to say; but what exactly did she mean with it? I have since come to form an understanding, less of what representation means to Azpilicueta, and more precisely, of how representation functions in her work. What became clear also is that the very reasons the images of the Jordaan women were dismissed by many in their own historical context as not worthy of standing in as representative of the Potato Uprising, are precisely the same features that connect strongly with Azpilicueta's use of representation and why they resonate so strongly within her overall installation and body of work.

¹³ Mieke Krijger, 'Het Boezelaarsuproer', Verduyn, *Gettuigen van een generatie*, p. 33.

¹⁴ Petterson, *op. cit.* p. 24.

¹⁵ Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015, p. 10.

Returning to the portrait of J.C. Alders used by *De Vrije Socialist*, which is nowhere to be found in Azpilicueta's installation, and looking at it beside the image of the ten women holding their snatched potatoes in their aprons, is most telling in this regard. In the postcard, under the heading 'The Hongeropstand in Amsterdam', Alders stands in his uniform with an emotionless facial expression, his eyes looking off to the left. He is leaning on a prop against a white background, devices used for a staged, long exposure shot in the studio. The caption under the portrait reads: The brave signalman J.C Alders [*De kranige seinwachter J.C Alders*]. Here is the image of a composed individual, who is presented as having acted alone, and in solidarity with the workers protesting out in the streets beyond the frame of this image. These elements all contrast completely with the image of the ten women: they are out in the street, they are immersed in the material environment that has directly led to their actions. In this moment they are on a high, as they have collectively risen above their material conditions, if only for a moment. Looking at the image we can hear their joy and triumphant gestures, and feel the affect resonate across their bodies, interlaced one into the other.

What emerges in this comparison are two very different representations of collective uprising, one in which an autonomous figure has the agency to act upon his immediate context while simultaneously being separate from it, hence, acting, but not acted upon; while in the other, we see bodies exposed to unlivable conditions, a vulnerability that has given them the force to act. This second image follows the logic of Judith Butler's proposition that vulnerability is always an integral part of resistance and that the body in this model "is less an entity than a relation," in the sense that part of what a body is, despite its clear boundaries is "its dependency on other bodies and networks of support."¹⁶



Mercedes Azpilicueta, *Potatoes, Riots, and Other Imaginaries*, 2021, detail. Prix de Rome — Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. Photo: Daniel Nicolas

It is this representation of the body, as relational, interconnected with other bodies, both social and material, that is operative everywhere throughout Azpilicueta's work. Representation here is not about fixed boundaries delineating clear, autonomous entities. In her work, representation operates through densities of interwoven images and stories, individual and collective, in which layers of space and time touch. As one moves around *Potatoes, Riots and Other Imaginaries*, the gaze zooms-in on an image and then slips to another, or to an object and the materials it is made of, connecting these to the sounds that resonate throughout the room, connecting mechanical sewing machines to images of factory girls, to potatoes, to the two women preparing to join a Ni Una Menos protest in Buenos Aires (women who are in fact Azpilicueta's sisters), to the *Dansenkater*, to the image of a text message conveying the pure joy and victory felt with the legalisation of abortion in Argentina on December 30, 2020. Indeed, the artist's aesthetic is often characterized as Baroque, where the visitor's body finds itself immersed in an abundance of imagery, colours, and textures, generating an excess of feeling that criss-crosses the various elements in the space, and where inside and outside, frontside and backside are not dividing, but rather connective surfaces, less immediately legible than felt. The relational is already present in the plethora of selected archival and contemporary images, allowing them to readily connect across historical contexts and geographic locations. What resonates between them is the affect that is generated when bodies gather, care for one another, share political struggles and dreams, and become a mobilizing force.

During a conversation organized at ROZENSTRAAT — a rose is a rose is a rose between Azpilicueta, Kloosterhuis and me in May 2022, the artist spoke of how she experienced this relational force in her participation in the Ni Una Menos movement. In Argentina, it is the failing social, legal and healthcare infrastructures, which have denied women a safe life free of domestic violence. It is this as well as access to legal forms of abortion, that mobilized them into the streets in the past several years. The experience of participating in this movement has been transformative for Azpilicueta on a personal level and allowed her to immediately connect to the history of the Potato Uprising. In her work, it is less the eventfulness of the protest that is foregrounded than the everyday realities that underscore them. In this way, she zooms in on individuals and the micro, the seemingly unthreatening, such as how gossip, or women's chat, circulates through a network of spaces including hairdressers, bakeries, and sidewalks, gaining momentum and eventually leading to collective mobilization. Whereas the women of the Jordaan's domestic aprons served as their tools for sabotage, Azpilicueta spoke of the daily objects such as cell phones, water bottles, and caps that are crucial tools for self-care as protestors march out into the streets.

¹⁶ Judith Butler, 'Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance', *op. cit.*, pp. 75-76.

It is the first week of July 2022, and now it is the streets of the Jordaan that become a stage, once again, for bodies to gather. For the performative walk, *Onze Roeping, on Joyful Militancy*, a small group of women re-perform gestures, acts, words, and stories in order to re-activate the Potato Uprising that occurred during the same week of July over one hundred years ago. Noteworthy is how when I speak to both Dutch and non-Dutch residents of Amsterdam about this project, very few have heard of the uprising of 1917, and literally no one has been aware of the role the women of the Jordaan played in it. What is activated then is less a collective memory than a forgotten part of history. The performing bodies take on their relational role, bridging the gap between the past and the present. The garment's they wear, designed by Darsha Golova, are apron-like. Their solid bold colors and cut allow them to become tools and props as the performers navigate the textures of the urban space. Performance theorist Rebecca Schneider has characterized historical re-enactments as sedimented acts that are not only instances of reperformance, but also, of "re-gesture, re-affect, re-sensation"¹⁷ for the performing bodies and for those who encounter them as they pass by. What is potentially transmitted is most likely less immediately legible by these 'witnessing' bodies, than felt. In this way, the performing bodies knot a temporal tangle, in which their activation of a forgotten history within the realm of the daily, opens-up onto the extra-daily, something in excess. Indeed, performance theorist Shannon Jackson speaks of the power of performance to jump scale whereby, in her words, "the expansiveness of an aesthetic imagination and social imagination converge, one that juxtaposes large and small, now and then, the possible and the impossible."¹⁸

Consequently, Azpilicueta's *Onze Roeping, on Joyful Militancy* exceeds the activation of a historical event. What the work performs through its multiple materializations, is a mapping and channeling of collective solidarity across time and space. What is foregrounded is not only something that has been lost over time, but also, the presentation of rich social and historical material that stirs something in us, and from which we can cull inspiration and modes of being in the present. I remember seeing this cartography in the form of a mind map when I visited Azpilicueta's studio in the summer of 2021. Archival and contemporary images were clustered across one of the artist's studio walls. In big black letters between them, I read and carefully wrote down in my notebook 'Networks of Care'. This was amidst the pandemic, between two lock-downs here in Amsterdam. As The Care Collective formulated so eloquently in their *The Care Manifesto: The Politics of Interdependence*, if there is one thing that became blatantly evident during the pandemic, it is that, "a systemic level of banality permeates our everyday carelessness."¹⁹

This banality of carelessness is operative at all levels of society, structuring our states, politics, economics, infrastructures and communities. This has come to be, The Care Collective maintains, through a pathologizing of care as dependency. The ideal neoliberal citizen is an autonomous, entrepreneurial, resilient and self-sufficient figure. Such an image fails to recognize interdependency as part of our human condition. What if, they ask, a capacious notion of care became the organizing principle of life? By capacious they mean *caring for*, in terms of hands-on care; *caring about*, meaning our emotional attachment to others; and *caring with*, how we mobilize politically to change the world we live in. This would mean recognizing and embracing our relational, interdependent nature, and this is what is everywhere resonant in *Onze Roeping, on Joyful Militancy*. Here we have a cartography that maps radical practices of care from the past and present, from here and from elsewhere. Hence, what is foregrounded in Azpilicueta's work are images of care in practice that model other ways of being, of sharing material resources, of mixing life and work, and cooperative living. Joy is felt when the "what if" is seen and felt as already part of the fabric of life, when the impossible converges, if only for a moment, with the possible.

17 Rebecca Schneider, *Performance Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*, New York: Routledge, 2011, p. 6.

18 Shannon Jackson, 'Choreographing Infrastructure', in Anik Fournier (ed.), *Social*

Movement Through the Lens of Performance and Performativity, Amsterdam: If I Can't Dance I Don't Want To Be Part Of Your Revolution, 2021, p. 30.

19 The Care Collective, *The Care Manifesto: The Politics of Interdependence*, London: Verso, 2020, p. 5.

Scan the QR code to read Mieke Krijger's text *Het Boezelaarsoproer* (in Dutch):



COLOPHON

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Onze Roeping, on Joyful Militancy

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