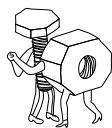


and on Sundays we celebrate Friday  
*en op zondag vieren we Vrijdag*  
*y los domingos festejamos a Viernes*

Dick Verdult

Van Abbemuseum  
Eindhoven 2011

English translations of the Dutch and Spanish  
texts in the exhibition catalogue.



My hardcore junk period  
and derailed poetry period,  
My period of interactivity and  
the one when others build my things,  
when I believe in re-screwing language and curiosity,  
My period of Baroque conceptualism,  
anecdotal imagery, and the period  
of kicking against my full cupboards with friends  
and working with whatever falls out  
All intertwingle.

# Dick Verdult: The Good, The Bad and the Cumbia

Carlos Amoraes

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*En cada hueso de mi existir  
en toda carne  
en el cabello en el pelo  
tengo mas cemento  
tengo mas cemento  
en mis entrañas  
y en el hígado tambien  
y en los pulmones, corazón.<sup>1</sup>*

How to translate this into Dutch and not make it sound like spitting?

I'll start with four myths about travelers:

The first one is about the Swiss Arthur Cravan, a Dadaist, who – after taking a well-known odyssey through the art of Europe's avant-garde at the beginning of the 20th century, and thus escaping the First World War – leaves for America, before running aground in poverty with his wife, Mina Loy, in Pochutla, Mexico. They make plans to depart from there to Buenos Aires but lack the money to pay for both fares. So, they decide that she should take a passenger ship, while he follows in a sailboat, alone. Cravan never makes it to Argentina, disappearing without a trace, possibly sunk by a storm. The second myth is about the conceptual artist Bas Jan Ader, who in 1975, in a solitary attempt to cross the Atlantic Ocean from the United States to Europe, disappears at some point during the navigation. The impact of his disappearance still reverberates in the Dutch art scene. I'm not going to cite his entire story here, but it is enough to say that since his death, each generation has produced a new version of the artist.

The third is about Luca Prodan, son of a wealthy family, who is sent to Buenos Aires from Italy, as the story goes, in an attempt to stop his addiction to heroin. He didn't just bring his vice and continue with it in Argentina, he also brought the music and punk clothing that was at its height in Europe and set up a band called Sumo. That band turned out to be the most influential ever in the country, to the point that twenty-four years after his death, he is still mentioned and missed, even though most people never met him.

The fourth myth is about Dick Verdult, from the Netherlands, who sets foot in Buenos Aires, leaving his family behind, and becomes transformed into Dick El Demasiado. He has his mind clearly set as he recalls the sweetness of Cumbia and knows that, now, his opportunity has come.

In Cumbia's case, it, too, has travelled to Argentina, as part of the cultural heritage of Peruvians, Bolivians and Paraguayans. From the transistors (manufactured

perhaps by Philips), Cumbia spread through the *villas* (slums) until it became the music of Argentina's poorest citizens. It's a different Cumbia, more urban, with cheap synthesizers and harsh lyrics. Dick El Demasiado starts his route through the continent as a bouncing echo in the mountains.

About Luca Prodan, he writes:

The first time they mentioned him to me, it was in Barcelona, when an Argentinean woman listened to my CD. I went to search him on internet, and right there, in a good interview (he was very cultivated), Luca Prodan says that he was influenced by the Dutch Provos(!), who as you may know, preceded May '68 in Paris. It was an ingenious movement of anarchic rebelliousness in Holland, in the 60's. It is the cradle of what Holland was for a long time: a country with progressive and supposedly rational characteristics, which suggests a respect for human rights, among other things. I have an idea of what he is, was and lived through in Argentina. I am not very touched by his music, though. What I do is almost the opposite, but with the same concentration and nerve ...

Luca Prodan didn't make Cumbia. And what is Cumbia, anyway?

It was at a concert in Amsterdam – though I had previously heard him in Mexico and Argentina – when I fully understood the strangeness that entails Dick Verdult's vision: a Dutchman with a southern accent who sings in Spanish in his own country, to an audience that does not understand him but nevertheless clumsily shakes its shoulders. He didn't go back to his country with a trunk full of treasures after a long trip around Latin America, but instead, when he gets back, he is carrying the problems of an immigrant whose language is understood by no one, and he does it carrying Cumbia. Don't misunderstand me, though, because he's far from being a Latino: he's at least twice as tall as a Bolivian woman with a hat and whiter than the Stedelijk Museum.

I admit that I felt pleasure when I sensed that his fellow countrymen didn't understand the meaning of the songs. I imagine they think that the songs are about the juice of a tropical life, when they are very much closer to the dry howl of the *Llanero*. His music and his lyrics first made sense in Argentina, later in the rest of Latin America; fortunately, they will never make sense in his native country. He is born a foreigner. It isn't coincidental that his father worked for Philips and that his family moved twenty times in twenty years during his

childhood and teenage years. He was born transnational, so if he's not understood in his country, screw them; they should beware of their feet or his songs will flatten their steps.

However, Cumbia is more than just words. The truth is, and now I dare to tell you a lie, it's neither poetry nor a music style. Cumbia is, in the language of the twisting hips of slaves, the most direct way to let the one in front of you know you have a knife stuck in the ground. What you do when you dance Cumbia is to love softly. So, as a child, he fell in love with the music that only the maids in his house listened to. Cumbia is the secret language of the virgins. To dance it, you don't move to the left or to the right, but back and forth, back and forth.

Cumbia is the name of a young maid who has just arrived in the city, directly from her town of birth, her brothers, mother and father. She's a short, slim girl, with straight hair and a slight gap in her front teeth. She is alone almost the whole week, because she and the friend she went with can barely meet at the southeast corner of the park, only on Sundays, where they gather with the boys, new friends, to flirt, dance, forget about ill-mannered children, touch their bodies softly, closely feel a cock, and sniff the greasy smell of brilliantine, sperm, and combed back curly hair.

Cumbia is the name of a one-eyed snake that waves between her legs. It is the smile that shows up, trusts and gives itself, until the silence starts again, faded again is the week, as if the days were a starting train that speeds up gradually. Cumbia is the antidote to the workweek, the boss, the employer, the chiefs. The Madam, the Mister or the Misses do not listen to Cumbia, perhaps they can stand it just as they stand the sound of the pressure cooker, shhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh ... Cumbia is a bean between your teeth that jumps out in between concepts and that no one is able to catch. It is the worker's music.

Cumbia, Cumbia, Cumbia!

He lived the fragmentation of the leftist party and its doctrines during his youth at the Vincennes University: the communists, the Maoists, the Trotskyists, the anarchists – all fighting against each other. So, he is phobic of revolutionary dogmatism and knows, as almost all of us now know, what it is about, but he is far from surrendering. Of the mysteries of Argentina, he would like to know where that anarchism has gone to, what it got hooked up with, because the military pulverized it. Nevertheless, sometimes he gives a show at the Argentine Libertarian Federation ... By leaving, he turns his back on Holland, hates people that seek consolidation in power and prevail. Kicks an empty can. Holland has changed radically in the last two decades: spaces and opportunities have been taken away from people who share his mentality.

The anarchist spirit of the youth movements of the 70's and 80's has been roughly eradicated; it is easier now to just be a fascist and stay at home in comfort. Artistic thought has been bureaucratized and dissidence re-

duced to the cool historic referent of a white cube. Even though a violent third-world paradise is undoubtedly uncomfortable, he leaves for it because it still is a home, poor though it is, that gives asylum to his anarchist bones. He maintains a desire to do things, and he invents the Lunatic Cumbia and the Experimental Cumbia Festival. So many years of prosperity have passed in Holland since the Second World War that material poverty has been replaced by mental poverty. But still, he, from abroad, tries to see the beauty of Holland's population – a people whose budget has been cut. In Argentina, instead, since the crisis in 2001, everything is done without a penny but with enthusiasm.

Matters being that way, we can say that he went to live in a violent, looted paradise. We are referring to a vast portion of land that fascinated the Nazi fugitives because there they were free to exist and even become part of the government. In Latin America, stories are told of Indians who have been swept away in the name of civilization; of removed teeth, crushed feet; of countries that join forces to fuck up the most prosperous neighbor. These are stories that we know from beyond reading, since they have been told to us by the victims, witnesses, friends, or people kicked out of countries for being intellectuals or for being their children – or even by their executioners, as recently happened to me in Guatemala.

About his travels around Latin America, he writes to me: ... I got in touch through Facebook with the Guatemalan world, the DJs, to probe the field, and I was astonished! That is, you would only see people in white shirts with tall drinks in their hands, in nightclubs and houses with a pool. There was no way to get to see a dirty street or a wall on their webs. From there, I took out a woman from Facebook that always had the same smile (the same!) in about a hundred pictures. I downloaded all of them. I made a small video with that, with the smile always in the same position: many are her nights spent in exactly the same way in Guatemala City ...

If Cumbia were an apocalyptic club, he would use it to smash the idiots up there who are turning his country into a piece of shit. Dick Verdult, one-man orchestra, distorts Cumbia mercilessly. But let's not get confused: when I write about Dick Verdult or Dick El Demasiado, it is and is not the same. I'm not writing about a musician. Nor is it necessary to think that I'm referring to a musical style because I have written so much about what Cumbia is. Here we have to understand that we are not talking about an artistic attitude related to the world as if it were a compendium of specific popular musical genres to be dissected for use in meta-speeches. No. Since Dick Verdult is not a musician, he has not been appropriating things himself. If anything, he has allowed himself to be influenced firstly by his memories and later by his findings. What he has done

is more: he has accomplished the transformation of his vital experiences throughout the world into a universe of caustic, sensitive, even tender, images, coarsely assembled as a collage.

Later he writes to me:

... That series, the "Pasajero" drawings (*Dibujos Pasajeros*), is the one I started on the plane, to fight against the videos they show. I made these drawings that, on the one hand, unconsciously reflect what I'm seeing, appreciating or suffering and, on the other, include the thinking that next to me there is a passenger, 30 cm away, trying not to see what I'm drawing! That side is the treasure! (I can already see your smile) ...

To me, a visual artist, what touches me about the way Dick Verdult approaches his work is the particular relationship with the world that surrounds him, without the mediation of a discourse based on art history. In this sense, his *light* project of a video collage with the smile of the boring Guatemalan is also an exemplary moment to me, in which he focuses his attention on that detail that gives meaning to the existence of a single person but that, to me, metaphorizes the violence in a society subjected to the military super-ego. When he makes these collages or draws small terrible scenes on the airplane's folding table, while thinking about the person next to him who is trying not to look, his works function with the other through immediate contact, starting from the private: they are momentary breaks with our moral consciousness. The works have not been produced for either galleries or museums – in fact, they have only been shown in "Art Institutions" a few times – but they exist to lighten up our daily life with a healthy dose of anarchist humor.

Finally, after reading a first draft of this text, he writes:

... Just a detail about the text, Carlos. Among all the writers, you are the most related to the visual arts field. The "catalogue" is obviously for that world. I will have very good texts – kind, too – but about my "plastic" side, not much, Ha, Ha ... If you see any opportunity to make that side appear in the text, even if it's mentioned in one detail or whatever, it would be good. If not, with so many idiots amongst us, people will keep thinking: "Look, a musician, and they gave him eight rooms in a museum!"

I can understand his concern, because the contemporary art world is very rough and competitive, and the audience is usually harsh, thinking everything is owed them. But to be honest, when I write, what excites me the most is to do it about things that are outside the extremely self-referential field of contemporary art; it is the outside world that I'm interested in referring to, at least as a metaphor to explain what one is doing as an artist. In this way, we, the artists, have always searched

outside, to represent the simple and the complex sides of life: simple as a house in a landscape, complex as the ideology we are attached to.

I consider this is what Dick Verdult does enviably well, and not just in his plastic work, but also in his movies, on the radio, in the music and in the songs he writes and sings. He, as an artist who has worked at a complex level among different disciplines during the last decade, has had the luck to be able to develop outside the institutions, which gives him the opportunity to have a different point of view, from a unique position, rooted in his former experience in the underground radio broadcasting of the 80's, which was, in turn, inherited from the absurd, intelligent provocation of the artists related to Fluxus, such as Willem De Ridder and Wim T. Schippers. As such, in this historic period of time spanning three decades of artwork, Dick Verdult is, paradoxically, a naïve artist according to the discourse of the contemporary art world – because he doesn't give a damn – but also a man who has lived his fifty years intensively, producing works that help us understand, without prejudice, the cultural mutations of today – understand, for example, that before internet there was an extensive use of mail service and cassette tapes in art; that not everything has to be understood according to its commercial value; and that there are other kinds of exchanges among people.

I am probably not exaggerating when I suggest that you see his art oeuvre with the same estrangement with which we listen to his songs. If you don't understand them, ask yourself if you might not be missing something; if they have not been conceived in a language that is foreign to you; if the images, be it songs or plastic works, might not be diverse approaches to a similar way of being in the world, without mannerisms. Dick Verdult, with his anarchic way of processing the culture he gathers during his travels in and beyond his homeland, is one of the very few frankly anti-academic artists who still survive. Take care of this man. There are not many artists like him left. Don't let him get lost on the high seas.

Mexico City  
June 28, 2011

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1 Fragment of the song "Tengo Mas Cemento" by Dick El Demasiado, included in the CD "Pero Peinamos Gratis", Tomenota Records 2004.

# Automatic Art

Wim Langenhoff

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What is it that happens in the arts domain? Artists operate in a conceptual domain, in which they have complete freedom (to follow and break rules) and can thus make new connections or test limits. Much more interesting are those artists, and Dick Verdult is among them, who do this in many different domains, who operate in a variety of fields, while also managing to instill a measure of irony (which is always a sign that you have truly mastered a particular domain in terms of co-opting it).

The ability to operate in multiple domains requires a certain frame of mind ("charity" in the philosophy of Donald Davidson). This amounts to a belief that:

- There is not *the* truth but truth;
- Things should not be pre-judged according to a set of rules;
- Ideas can always be translated from one domain to another;
- Reducing things to a single palette would be – and is – duller than a doorknob.

Lastly, and because more and more is being asked of art: it is possible in the field of art, in particular, to play around with concepts for little cost and without much risk. This differs from the situation in other domains that also attract lots of players who claim to have a monopoly on truth. Then there are bound to be casualties.

## Art Grants a Perspective on Myself, Others and the World

When I started working as a solid-state chemist in Professor Rathenau's group, I assumed he would give me the leeway to pursue my own activities as an artist of mixed methods, means, messages and meanings (Richard Kostelanetz, *Mixed Means Performances*, 1968). It was not until later that I discovered that this was not necessarily so automatic and that he adhered to the theory that people who practiced professionally in more than one discipline or domain were more productive in both disciplines than those who only mastered one discipline.

To prove his theory, he had commissioned a comparative study, in which the inferior results of, primarily Japanese, researchers could be attributed to the fact that they preferred to work in only one field. I had always been the opposite: even as a young boy, I had built all of the models in the book *The Young Electrician* (R.F. Yates, 1949), while also playing accordion and winning drawing and theology prizes.<sup>1</sup> The first time I met Dick, then, with his divergent outlook, I felt the thrill of recognition, especially since he changes viewpoints so naturally and with due irony.<sup>2</sup>

## Art and Creativity and Why Possessing Two or More Native Languages Is So Valuable

The arts are all about creativity – the art of, in a given conceptual space:

- Creating new relationships without following the rules;
- Exploring boundaries;
- Creating relationships to other conceptual spaces (that may overlap).<sup>3</sup>

Art is first and foremost a quintessential game of concepts: "Creativity, it has been said, consists largely of re-arranging what we know in order to find out what we do not know." (George Kneller) Creativity, then, is a practice in which new relationships are made within a particular dynamic, and vaguely defined, conceptual space. (You could imagine it as a cloud.)

We don't have ideas ...

The idealists would have us believe that an idea comes to us from above, out of the Platonic blue, as used to be the case with such concepts as "grace." Depth psychology, on the other hand, would have ideas rising up through the capillaries, as it were, from the depths of our soul or some repressed memory. Naturalists discover, for example, the laws of nature all around us because they already believe in their existence. Realists of the empirical school, as well as instrumentalists or, in a pinch, constructive empiricists, believe that what we are doing when we are creative amounts to nothing more than ascribing meaning to phenomena that previously had no, or another, meaning.

... We make ideas.

In other words, creativity is not some secretive, mysterious phenomenon or exceptional, elevated agency of our consciousness or brain, as Descartes, Kant, German idealists and modern neuropsychologists would have us believe. It is a practical act. The underlying idea is this: We subject explanations and subject matter to a selection process. Whichever meanings work survive. That process of variation and selection works best – be it in a society, organization or field – under democratic conditions (i.e., free of control). This can be represented schematically as follows:

I >> The other >> Domain

There is a constant, mutually dependent, interaction between the individual manipulating the domain and a field of "experts" (to whom he also belongs) who acknowledge and validate the new hypotheses. Creativity thus results from the interaction between:

- A domain of symbolic rules;

- An individual or small group who introduce something new to it; and
- A field made up of people who recognize and appreciate this.<sup>4</sup>

It is probably abundantly clear that it took some time before the IBW and Dick received that level of recognition and appreciation. Dick – that enormous generator of new meanings – was often too much for even the field of experts to grasp: Dick El Demasiado (Dick the Excessive).

It is best to think of a domain as a cloud filled with interconnected concepts<sup>5</sup> or as a family or a game.<sup>6</sup> What exactly is going on when we are creating art? In the field of painting, for instance, people talk about composition, color, brushstrokes, lines, subject matter and so forth. Then along comes an entirely new combination in the domain, like *Mona Lisa with a Pipe* (1887) by Eugène Bataille (whose pseudonym was Sapeck). A nice example of pushing the boundaries of a domain can be found in the seven monochromes by Alphonse Allais from 1897, with titles like: *Some Pimps, Still in the Prime of Life*, *Lying on Their Stomachs in the Grass*, *Drinking Absinth* (green monochrome), *Round of Drunks in the Fog* (light brown monochrome), *Manipulation of Ocher by Jaundiced Cuckolds* (yellow monochrome), *Astonishment of Young Recruits Seeing for the First Time Your Azure Expanse, O Mediterranean!* (blue monochrome), *Tomato Harvest by Apoplectic Cardinals on the Shore of the Red Sea* (Aurora Borealis Effect) (red monochrome)<sup>7</sup>, *First Communion of Chlorotic Young Girls in Snowy Weather* (white monochrome with hint of pink). Another in this series of non-depictions is the black monochrome titled *Negroes Fighting in a Cellar at Night* and, in the musical domain, we have a score for *Funeral March for the Last Rites of a Deaf Man*. And a good example of appropriating concepts from another domain and creating entirely new combinations with them is El Lissitzky's *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge*, which cubism elaborated on for years and in which modern graphic design found its point of reference.

### **Dick Verdult, Radical Cultural Anthropologist by Birth**

That final tradition (appropriating concepts from another domain) is what we see happening in Dick's work. Because he has incorporated more than two language games (native languages, cultures) – or, rather, incarnates them – combining, contrasting, etcetera concepts from one culture with those of another is second nature to him: it is automatic. There are two relevant points here: he knows, as self-evident, and shows us that concepts are “translatable,” not with a dictionary by his side (like those computer translators), but as a “tacit knower” of multiple cultures. He knows that translations<sup>8</sup> can be much more radical than starting from scratch. Dick assumes – has no reason to suspect otherwise – that what others say and believe about themselves, the world, and other people is largely true. How else could they have

survived until now?<sup>9</sup> This position – often criticized as being too relativistic – is what we call the “principle of charity.”<sup>10</sup>

Of course, if you have naturally and cheerfully grown up in different cultures and have more than one native language, then such a position is automatic. For Dick Verdult (and others fluent in more than one language game), it was immediately clear that there was much to be found in those conceptual clouds but no “essence”<sup>11</sup> (which retentive conservatives always so eagerly seek but which inevitably slips through their fingers like sand at the first hint of a question). “Old-fashioned metaphysicians or old-fashioned philosophers of mind would query the value of the whole approach.” Nowadays, attempts are made to bring them up to speed along continental (i.e., European, primarily French and German) philosophical lines, but we have neither the space nor the time to get into that here.<sup>12</sup>

Mastering a language game means that you know the rules and can also shrug them off. You can speak with irony. That, in itself, is not without risk. But what if you shine your ironic light on several signs at once? Dick's work evokes uncertainty for much of the public. And this is understandable: it can be disconcerting to not only lose your grasp of heaven, but also realize that the solid ground under your feet is slowly but surely sinking away. Some solace: for those in need of reassurance, we always have Hegel. According to him, every culture is a rehearsal for the coming regularization. To him, it all boils down to a sort of redefinition. And that is what many people want: to find the one size that fits all, dictionary in hand.

It is, of course, hardly that simple in practice; schizophrenia can lash out in full force. It is best for the time-being, then, to leave it to artists to play this game with and without rules. Dick's solution is not one-size-fits-all but made-to-order, and only connoisseurs will recognize the original material and relish it.

### **Epilogue**

Good-bye Danto and Goodman<sup>13</sup>

These days, experts are everywhere, not just in museums where a Brillo box can be transfigured or even transubstantiated into art through the auspices of museum directors, curators, culture historians, critics or other intermediaries. The disillusionment occurs outside the walls, where the heathens put that box of soap pads neatly back on the supermarket shelves. And it is out there that the great need for “otherness” remains. This is precisely where Dick demonstrates how, in his travels through the clouds, he has filled his suitcase with concepts that seem, at first glance, totally unrelated. It is a perfect productive activity for a contemporary artist. And he does it enthusiastically and fearlessly, thanks to his life experiences, but also with the requisite distance

and irony. It would be the greatest disaster if the high priests and believers of the museum world and beyond were to color it with their brush.

And since art these days must also be useful, I offer proof from two recent articles that Dick's most certainly is. The first testifies to the usefulness of the general. (See article by Eli Dresner)<sup>14</sup> But since, in addition to being merely useful, you must also demonstrate economic benefits (otherwise it would still be useless) – and in Eindhoven there is the added demand that everything contribute to the Brainport madness – I submit a recent publication from Harvard Business School<sup>15</sup> that brings us back to Professor Rathenau and his theory. And that puts him in the league of connoisseurs.

Eindhoven  
July 2011

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1 I used religion, for that matter, as a valid excuse for aspects of my behavior that my mother would not tolerate. The notion of predestination and God's omniscience were supremely suited to this. Despite the fact that I could thus easily win any argument, I would naturally and deservedly receive a cuff on the ears from her. At that time, corporal punishment was normal and perfectly legal.

2 For some people, of course, all those viewpoints can be frightening: they derive more benefit from a single viewpoint. But, as an artist, that is not much use to you.

3 My approach to discussing concepts here can best be understood through the sequence of ideas in: W.V. Quine, *Two Dogmas of Empiricism: From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press, 1953); followed by his student Donald Davidson, *On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme* (*Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, XLVII, 11, 20); and then also Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method* (London, New Left Books, 1975), because even the free, joyful anarchism from the early days of *The New Electric* merits a reasonable explanation.

4 For a topical discussion of the "I-We" social structure, see for example: Michael James DeMoor, *Brandom and Hegel on Objectivity, Subjectivity and Sociality: A Tune Beyond Us, Yet Ourselves* (dissertation defended on Monday, 4 July 2011).

5 For a discussion on "What is a Concept," see E. Margolis, R. Samuels & S. Stich (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Cognitive Science* (Oxford University Press, Ch. 13, "The Scope of the Conceptual"); or Eric Margolis and Stephen Laurence, "Concepts," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2011 Edition, Edward N. Zalta, ed.), URL <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/concepts/>; or, for the true devotee: <http://philpapers.org/browse/concepts>.

6 It would be a good idea, in any event, to re-read Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* before reading this essay (and certainly afterward, if only for the gratification of the "Ah ha" moments).

7 Danto, who in my view Wittgenstein misreads, offers the conceptually amusing prospect of six canvases indistinguishable from

one another "perceptually" but still six different referents: One, he says, might be a "painting of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea, by Soren Kierkegaard"; another, also by a Dane, might be titled *Kierkegaard's Mood*; another, "a clever bit of *Moscow Landscape*" is titled *Red Square*; another, with the same title, is a "minimalist exemplar of geometrical art"; and so on until we come to "a surface painted, though not grounded, in red lead, a mere artifact I [Danto] exhibit as something whose philosophical interest consists solely in the fact that it is not a work of art and [whose] only art-historical interest is the fact that we are considering it at all: it is just a thing, with paint on it." (Arthur C. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace. A Philosophy of Art*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1981, p. 1-2.) (This is, in fact, the way the book begins.)

8 Quine's discussion in *Word and Object* (first published in 1960). "Radical translation" is intended by Quine as an idealization of the project of translation that will exhibit that project in its purest form. Normally, the task of the translator is aided by prior linguistic knowledge either of the actual language to be translated or of some related language. Quine envisages a case in which translation of a language must proceed without any prior linguistic knowledge and solely on the basis of the observed behavior of the speakers of the language in conjunction with observation of the basic perceptual stimulations that give rise to that behavior. Davidson has a broader conception of the behavioral evidence available than does Quine (he allows that we may, for instance, identify speakers as having the attitude of "holding true" with respect to sentences) and, in addition, rejects the Quinean insistence on a special role being given to simple perceptual stimulations. Moreover, since Davidson's interest is more properly semantic than Quine's (Quine sees radical translation as part of a primarily epistemological inquiry), while Davidson also views a theory of translation alone as insufficient to ensure understanding of the language it translates (the translation may be into a language we do not understand), so the notion of "translation" is replaced in the Davidsonian account with that of "interpretation." Radical interpretation is a matter of interpreting the linguistic behavior of a speaker "from scratch" and so without reliance on any prior knowledge either of the speaker's beliefs or the meanings of the speaker's utterances.

9 The Argentinians have historically made life particularly difficult for themselves, especially in terms of politics, but continue to survive, which proves that there is more to life than politics.

10 The principle of charity has been the subject of heated philosophical debate during the past several decades. The principle in question is not concerned with ethics (although it may have some ethical consequences). Rather, it states a hypothetical condition for linguistic interpretation. Roughly put, it says that interpretation must be charitable, in the sense of imputing to the utterances and beliefs of the person being interpreted contents that are largely both rational and true – rational and true, that is, by the lights of the interpreter. The basic problem that radical interpretation must address is that one cannot assign meanings to a speaker's utterances without knowing what the speaker believes, while one cannot identify beliefs without knowing what the speaker's utterances mean. It seems that we must provide both a theory of belief and a theory of meaning at one and the same time. Davidson claims that the way to achieve this is



through the application of the so-called principle of charity (Davidson has also referred to it as the “principle of rational accommodation”), a version of which is also to be found in Quine. In Davidson's work, this principle, which admits various formulations and cannot be rendered in any completely precise form, often appears in terms of the injunction to optimize agreement between ourselves and those we interpret; that is, it counsels us to interpret speakers as holding true beliefs. See Quine, W. V. (1960), *Word and Object*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press; Davidson, D. (1984a), “Radical Translation,” in: D. Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (pp. 125-139), Oxford, UK, Clarendon Press; and Davidson, D. (1984c), “Truth and Meaning,” in: D. Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (pp. 17-36), Oxford, UK, Clarendon Press.

- 11 *The beauty of a cloud is that you can fly right through it, suitcase and all.*
- 12 *For a more “continental” approach, see e.g. J. van Brakel, *De-essentialising Across the Board. No Need to Speak the Same Language; and also what Joseph Margolis does in Pragmatism without Foundations, a good-natured attempt to draw in Heidegger, Gadamer, Habermas and Derrida. Maybe it is some form of charity? Davidson would wonder in that crowd, “What am I doing here?”* D. Davidson, *Truth, Language, and History*, Oxford University Press, 2005. *The Third Man* (1992), a revised version of the catalogue essay for the Robert Morris exhibition held 27 Aug – 8 Oct at the Frank Martin Gallery, Muhlenberg College. During his stay in Europe, Davidson told an interviewer that he thought he could rewrite *Sein und Zeit* on a single page of paper.*
- 13 Joseph Margolis, “Farewell to Danto and Goodman,” in: *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, October 1, 1998.
- 14 Eli Dresner, “The Principle of Charity and Intercultural Communication,” in: *International Journal of Communication*, 5, 2011, 969-1932-/20110969, Tel Aviv University.
- 15 Roy Y.J. Chua, “Innovating at the World's Crossroads: How Multicultural Networks Promote Creativity,” working paper 11-085. Running Head: *Multicultural Networks and Creativity*.

# The Buzz of Laughter

Harry van Boxtel

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I am stone cold, but the ice soldier in me – who braves the everyday out of pure survival – melts instantaneously whenever I hear someone mention Dick Verdult's name. The sun bursts forth and the real me pops out from hibernation. It is a resurrection accompanied by cocks crowing. Not morning roosters, mind you, but true cocks of rebellion, as it were, whose rousing calls give you goosebumps of joy.

Once the name has fallen, I become giddy with anticipation for what is to come. The curtain rises: I go quiet, awaiting beauty, enjoyment, emotional release – and compassion, too, compassion for humankind. As I wait for what is to come, Dick pops into my head – “Hello ...” – with his inquisitive, and rapt, expression, which barely conceals his bemusement. A friend up-close; an artist – nailed to the wall – at a distance.

The fact that I know him personally has nothing to do with it and is completely irrelevant with regard to his work. It does, however, help me view his work from a different angle. I will have often gotten wind of things ahead of time, but that invariably makes my astonishment all the greater. I could have never imagined what it is that eventually gets shown. And that is why Dick is the artist on the wall. As close a friend as he is, he lives in another orbit as an artist.

Dick belongs to the world of the Incoherents, the Hydropathes, the Fumistes; he belongs at the party that was Paris in the late 19th century. Art was *lived* then, and laughed. It was celebrated amongst friends, not revered.

... Take Alphonse Allais, who far prefigured Yves Klein's monochromes and even exhibited ready-made monochromes, who wrote like an angel ...

... Sapeck (Eugène Bataille), who had already thought of having Mona Lisa smoke a pipe long before Duchamp's seed was sown ...

... Jules Lévy, with his shows of “drawings made by people who don't know how to draw” ...

... Coquelin Cadet, the actor, master of the monologue and fumiste in heart and soul ...

... André Gill and Emil Cohl, the caricaturists and best friends, Cohl even being a professional stamp collector ...

... And here comes Alfred Jarry to join the fray, his head and hands painted green – nobody even does a double take! So, he heads homeward, to wash up and produce that gaunt head of his that made everyone take notice ...

Prefigurations of Dadaism? Not at all: it was the true Dadaism. And Dick's work possesses the same kind of absolute originality, the kind of originality related

to *creation*, to creating something apparently out of nothing, out of whatever is at hand, and ultimately, out of the quirks of humankind that present themselves ...

Humor is the driving force here, and it is the crystallization point for a *human* art. Here, we laugh; we do not worship. And that laughter shakes up the order we have engineered around us and cling to so tightly, the order under which business is taken care of and that rules our lives.

When we are in the buzz of laughter, we hold the duplicity and folly of that world up to the light and find it wanting, even if just for a moment, for as long as it lasts, until the darkness settles in again. Laughter generates space, offers freedom and makes one human. When I laugh, I appear to myself ... I see myself and look me in the eye ... random human being that I am, under all that self-importance ... I see through myself and laugh in my face ... I stand like Christ before the people ... I am kicked, beaten, taunted and spit on by the scourge of laughter; I have seen into every corner in the room and am sentenced to perdition, mortal that I am ... Laughter is self-torture; it exposes the insignificance of one's own existence ...

There is a video for sale at the better gas stations with the title *One People, One Nation, Wan Smaak* (Trans. — The final phrase is Dutch for “bad taste,” “wan” being a pun on “one”). One of the scenes shows a performance by Nana Mouskouri, part of a giant birthday celebration for Frits Philips. We see Nana, and we hear her, with some rocking backup singers ... “Don't worry, there will be sunshine ...” and we see that large outdoor crowd there in Eindhoven. It took me a while before I realized why Nana was there, in Dick's film, but then I spotted him – amongst the backup singers, with his G-Force friends ...

I was astonished and a guffaw resounded through my thoughts. Then I took in the overall scene ...

... I saw one Frits Philips, sitting in the front row and dressed in his best suit, slumping down after a good meal, with his shoelaces untied. He's had Eindhoven hanging around his neck his whole life, and now he can just enjoy what he really likes ... Nana, his favorite star ...

... And I saw Nana, who, in turn, was being celebrated as an artist. She stands there proudly, a true descendant of the glory of Ancient Greece, of the greatest pinnacle of what the Western world has ever achieved ... the art, wisdom and science from the 7th to more or less 3rd

century B.C ... We still live off of it, and in fact, not long after this, Nana would become the minister of culture for Greece and, after that, even a representative in the European Parliament ...

So, you have Frits sitting there, and you have Nana standing there. And Dick and G-Force are crowning the moment with harmonies and unsophisticated dance moves. They sing their lines full of conviction and devotion, without a hint of ridicule. And there you have man in all his humanity, with his lightbulbs and his glasses and the whole bloody circus that goes along with that. Global success. How glorious. The people are genuinely having a good time. I am overcome with compassion. Ecce homo – as close as you will ever get to it.

Another gem from my collection is a newspaper clipping with a story about something that happened during the swine fever outbreak of 1999. Angry, derisive farmers have flocked to the community house in Venhorst for a panel discussion on some pig-related projects created by six artists, where Dick is clearly having his feet put to the fire. The discussion leader, Councilman Biemans, who at the time had nothing to do with pigs himself, but instead – true visionary that he was – made his living with cucumbers, simply could not understand that someone who called themselves an artist was unable to create a reasonable representation of a pig's head: "And here we've supported the man for a good twenty years with subsidies and everything else ...!" Dick's words, about how his personal standards for what constitutes a pig were of a different nature than theirs, went uncomprehended and failed to calm down the room. It was a huge disgrace ... and why shouldn't we get those subsidies ...

Then I see Dick's work before me ... a spinnaker shaped like a giant pig's head ... A small little boat, with a full-blown head, calmly drifting along the narrow little waterways of a Brabant engulfed by swine fever ... The wind that fills the pig ... And Dick, who lets out the sails ... And under its gaze, far off on land, a farmer, leaning on his shovel, sees his own pigs before him, put down by the state one by one ...

Breda, 2011

# Trash, Fiction and Dance

Chucky Garcia

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"Nicholas Neanderthal, I presume?" ... "No" ... "Maybe Taras Bulba?" ... "No" ... "Franco, my general?" ... "No" ... "Could it be Harold Marley, the grandfather?" ... "No" ... "Dick El Demasiado?" ... "Yes, him!"

No one is as too much as Dick is, with his two microphones at hand and his popular distortion. This is a short history about his adventures across the most exaggerated country in the world.

Colombia holds several international titles but has never won the World Cup. It has the second most beautiful national anthem in the world, or so they say. It is also one of its most violent countries – 15,912 homicides registered in 2010 – and the second-largest exporter of flowers behind the Netherlands. But there is one realm in which no one dares to dispute the country's superiority, its first place, its absolute reign and that is that of disproportion: the realm of popular distortion! An innate exaggeration is a part of everyday life: a liquor shop next to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting point; motorcycles equipped with sound systems the size of Jamaica; doves arrested by the police; public restrooms with signs that read "Piss \$ 500 pesos; Poop \$ 1,000"; a sex shop that doubles as a seafood restaurant; a man called Game Over Beethoven Mosquera and another called Brucelee Betoven Herrera Torres. The list of unusual situations is endless and more graphic than anyone can imagine. And it includes Dick El Demasiado.

On his third visit to Colombia (the third out of four between 2006 and 2009), Dick El Demasiado presented his fifth album, *Mi Tú* (Tomenota Records, 2008), in an English-style manor in Bogotá, a house with a unique past: it was a family mansion in the 30's, a school in the 90's, an orphanage in 2000 and finally a concert hall and gallery called La Residencia. Dick El Demasiado and his Facultad de la Distorsión Popular (Faculty of Popular Distortion) were its first guests, and the CD launch concert for *Mi Tú* was memorable for both its cumbia and the scissors (while Dick played the cowbell, two neighborhood hairdressers were cutting spectators' hair).

"I have always been fascinated by barbershops, where you find Delilah with her scissors and Samson at her mercy, with a bib around his neck for the hair," said Dick at that time. "Hairdressers talk to you and mesmerize you with their sub-actual conversation (football, family, talcum powder, shampoo), and meanwhile they cut your hair. When they are done, they say to you 'Look!' and you see yourself in the mirror as a chick crushed for First Communion." During this lunatic cumbia concert and

free barbershop, people could reserve a place at a vanity table, which was on stage, and two kind hairdressers would cut their hair, with love and ... at no charge! "We have to get the scissors to dance to the beat of humanity, despite the distortion."

That time in Bogotá, Dick El Demasiado also exhibited "Now I Know," a series of maps of indigenous Colombia marked as "recognized" with a plastic stamp; he read the most classic title from *Distorsión Popular*, *The Slow but Incessant Degradation of Lunatic Cumbias*, by Ariel Goldsinger; and he also held an edition of his eloquent experimental cumbia festival, the "Festicumex Anti-Pochongo," filled with bands that had a one-day expiration date, like Licuadora Duncan (Duncan Blender), El Pachi-meteorología Boy, La Rueda de las Llamadas (The Wheel of Calls), and La Orquesta Niños con Prioridad (The Priority Children Orchestra).

During the first Colombian Festicumex, the film *Doctor, It Hurts Here – in the Culture* was projected, a film that earned him the championship for film incompetence on many fronts. It featured, in one single scene, five black people dressed as doctors complaining in front of the camera about the furniture at the hospital where they work. To demonstrate how everything around them was going wrong, they showed a small operating table that happened to be a *marímbula*, a musical instrument of African origin used in some autonomous black towns of Colombia, the world's richest mine of cumbia.

Dick El Demasiado is the Andrés Landero whose cumbias make the audience wonder "But, what is this?" yet need no answer. In addition to his presentation at La Residencia in Bogotá, he carried trash, fiction and danceable lies to two other national cities, Salgar and Cali, becoming one of the main attractions at one of the most famous performance festivals. There he shared the line-up with the Mexican Silverio, another character with a repertoire for Latin America's bizarre B-series dancehalls. Both played at a flour mill that looked like a Spaghetti Western with an Ennio Morricone score, where Dick shamelessly displayed his barrio electronica, his saturation and the most extended discography of fanzine folklore that has ever existed, far removed from the large displays of merchandising, hyperventilated expectations, sunglasses, name-brand sport shoes and ultra-nuisance DJs.

His thing is non-electoral hysteria, like Santa Claus without Coca-Cola, songs to delight the Boredoms' mothers-in-law: the search for sensuality in a machine destiny.

A year later, in 2009, Dick El Demasiado returned to Bogotá after playing in Argentina and Chile and before traveling to Japan for several months to present a kind of "greatest hits" album called *Sus Cumbias Lunáticas y Experimentales*, released by Utakata Records. The CD included a booklet of insubordinate graphics and collages, showing scenes from his now classic vision of the ever-distorted popular culture that is everywhere: a barber in boxing stance at Punta Arenas, Chile; the Holy Virgin of Aerial Bread ("Flight AC290, January 12, 1998. The bread served had the miraculous shape of a turbine on the outside and a cloud on the inside. The passengers were a slice of ham in the sandwich, comfortable and at peace with their fate."); or a sound amplifier made of empty Fanta bottles – ideas that are brilliant for their bizarre and exaggerated, innocent and ironic, qualities.

In the apartment where he stayed in Bogotá, Dick El Demasiado assembled a collection of drawings ranging from the toxic chicken served on airlines to a romantic scene between Sergeant Garcia and Manu Chao, in which they appear together, pants down, playing a drum with their cocks. "Please note that the Japanese later wrote in a review 'If Manu Chao is missionary, Dick El Demasiado is doggy style standing up,'" Dick recalls.

The fact that Dick El Demasiado brought dance frenzy to Colombia is redundant ten times over. He did it for the first time in 2006 in Bogotá, when he encouraged the launching of a magazine called "Tropicalgoth Magazine". That same year, he went to the city of Medellín to participate in Medelink, a digital culture festival. There you could find him comfortable as a little pig in the mud, with his skeleton suit and his many ill-fated European ingredients, deforming the cumbia in the land of Discos Fuentes (the record label that releases the music of the masters of cumbia, who have been too intimidating), singing stories from right there and from many other places, too, with the edge of someone who has kindly been kicked by the random boot of humanity. He kept going down the stairs of language like Regan MacNeil in *The Exorcist*, creating rhythms that have as much of Colombia in them as they do of Africa, Panama, and Argentina and butchering the sacred cow of World Music in his ghetto butcher style.

"The local music provides strength to identity when shopping mall music crushes us daily," said Dick El Demasiado before returning to Holland. "Cumbia is an ideal helmet: it is mandatory to wear it when listening to CNN voices and all those other realities imposed on us."

Bogotá  
May 2011

# Popular Distortion: The Art of Dick Verdult

Bruno Galindo

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The poetry of the misunderstanding. The beauty of brutality. The uncomfortable greatness of the twisted.

Our man turns "high culture" – to which he is attached by birth (Eindhoven, the Netherlands, 1954) – precarious and dignifies with multifaceted intelligence that "poor world" where he has put down false roots and to which he keeps returning, like an amphibian that has spent too much time out of water.

The raw and the poetic. Comfort and reality. The conflict that favors discovery.

The artist – who has a formal education in film and visual arts from the University of Vincennes, Paris – lives inside a Hispanic-European-Latin American scalene triangle (Calanda – Eindhoven – Buenos Aires). The work can take any one of many forms (drawing, collage, installation ...) that this founder of the IBW group (1991) finds suitable, clashing constantly in the space between Popular Culture (which is located by a staggered European vision in dangerous places: "there, where they kill you for five dollars") and the culture that is popular (which is dreamed by "los olvidados" as being in a beautiful kingdom, with an inexhaustible source of money, resources and splendor). Any creator flourishes in a conflict. This is his.

The polarities between which the artist moves. The violent sense of humor. Distortion.

The mission is to pulverize clichés while enriching them. The game is to clarify and deceive at the same time; manipulation is a matter of survival. Verdult recognizes the codes and uses them without asking for permission, embracing a sense of humor that is sometimes violent and absurd and at other times simply misguiding. It is always appropriate to add details to make them less discernible. Master of collage, he founds his style at the crossings where popular imagery – clandestine personal ads seeking a good time, a providential African clairvoyant's claims, the announcement of a party through a pair of big speakers – meets fascinating misunderstandings deliberately introduced: there is always something that should be elsewhere. No, not something but someone. Is it him? Is it you?

The twisted prism. The charming discomfort. The overlapping of sur/real layers.

Thus, art for the poor? Not necessarily for them, but surely from there. Do not forget the history of his musical character: the internationally renowned Dick El Demasiado was born through the embrace (in the psychedelic and experimental sense) of the rude, killer – but no less charming for that – cumbia, which emerged from the modest Argentinian slums. Life, in any case, is to be found in the world. And particularly in that place we call Latin America, a continent going slowly and happily forward and where – ah, what a loss! – handmade signs are being replaced by laser prints against the clock. For him, it is very important not to check the (lack of) proper spelling. Once intervention has occurred, it becomes hard to establish the difference between what is his own and what is alien: an unmistakable sign of the most original appropriation; the mark of a genuinely altered brain.

A Rabelaisian sight. A panoptic perspective. And a claim for the stolen fridges.

Check out that diorama conceived two decades ago called *The Panoptic Perspective Turns and Turns*, a work that exposed some of the statutes that he would develop in forthcoming years: Buñuel, harakiri, burlesque, Sun-Ra ... It is clear: this man bites, as can be confirmed in works of such intelligence as the surfboard spiked with long spines (*Fuck you Dolphins*). His good taste is undeniable when he chooses the Defoe-esque Friday character over Robinson Crusoe. He builds a wooden outboard motor reminiscent of Brancusi and also recreates a model of the Casa Rosada (Presidential Palace in Argentina). And he wants us to remember that during the military dictatorship in that country, the paramilitaries used to add insult to injury by stealing their victims' refrigerators: Is there any greater sign of vile-ness? Hence the heading in which we can read: "And give us back the refrigerators!"

Madrid  
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