Criminal, Cosmopolitan, Commodified

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Edited by Gemma Blok and Jan Oosterholt

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How Rotterdam's Interwar Amusement Street, the Schiedamsedijk, Became a Safe Mirror Image of Itself

Vincent Baptist

Abstract
This chapter develops a layered analysis of the Schiedamsedijk, Rotterdam's interwar amusement street. It links the street's split socio-cultural character to that of port cities in general, and investigates this along the lines of a similar divide in perceptions of safety and security. Based on an historical bird's-eye view of the pleasure area, the Schiedamsedijk's criminal and cosmopolitan sides are discussed. Both of these maritime urban traits were neutralised when the Schiedamsedijk reinvented itself as a domestic tourist attraction in the late 1930s. Through visual sources, interchanges are foregrounded between contrasting internal and external perspectives on safety, which ultimately help to nuance and reframe the stereotypical characters and ambiguous nature traditionally ascribed to this historical environment of pleasure culture.

Keywords: cosmopolitanism, interwar period, pleasure, port city, Rotterdam, safety

Introduction

Sometime during the interwar period, the famous Austrian-Czech journalist Egon Kisch visited the port city of Rotterdam, the Netherlands. A short, vivid account of his impressions is published alongside other reports of his globetrotting activities in a 1927 volume.[1] Kisch specifically writes about

1 Egon Erwin Kisch, 'Auf der Reeperbahn von Rotterdam', in *Wagnisse in aller Welt* (Berlin: Universum-Bücherei für alle, 1927), 61–69.

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the Schiedamsedijk, a long, central street that predominantly catered to the flux of sailors setting foot ashore during that time. In describing this maritime amusement area, the reporter compares it to another well-known epicentre for seafarers, Hamburg's Reeperbahn, thereby for instance noting that more German is ostensibly being spoken on this Rotterdam street.[2] It is but one of Kisch's observations testifying to the Schiedamsedijk's apparent world-famous status at the time. Similar recognitions are also bestowed on the street in more local sources. In *Rotterdammers over Rotterdam*, an early post-Second World War collection of texts commemorating various parts of the old city that disappeared or changed, one contributor asserts that the Schiedamsedijk used to be the most famous street to foreigners in the country, alongside the Kalverstraat, Amsterdam's main shopping street.[3]

It is all the more surprising, then, that contemporary history books on Rotterdam devote such scant attention to the Schiedamsedijk. The introduction to the edited volume *Interbellum Rotterdam* mentions how the street could be regarded as the southernmost part of a dense network of urban entertainment facilities running across the city centre.[4] The book as a whole ends up only mentioning the Schiedamsedijk in passing, however, thus creating the impression that it may not have been entirely in step with more modern(ist) cultural areas that defined Rotterdam's image and development during the 1920s–30s. On the other hand, other standard works on the port city's history relate the Schiedamsedijk to the Zandstraatbuurt and Katendrecht districts, based on the relocation of prostitution activities in the city throughout the first half of the twentieth century.[5] These different characterisations of the Schiedamsedijk, fluctuating between decency and deviance, have arguably ensured that local historiography on the street and its surroundings have lagged behind somewhat in comparison to that of former counterparts.

This chapter develops a layered analysis of the Schiedamsedijk during the interwar period. Conceptually, it links the street's split socio-cultural

2 Kisch, 'Auf der Reeperbahn von Rotterdam', 68.

3 H.A. Meerum Terwogt, 'De Schiedamschedijk', in *Rotterdammers over Rotterdam: Herinneringen aan een verdwenen stad*, ed. Ch.A. Cocheret, W.F. Lichtenauer, and Jacob Mees, 2nd ed. (Rotterdam: W.L. & J. Brusse's Uitgeversmaatschappij, 1947), 173.

4 Marlite Halbertsma and Patricia van Ulzen, 'Op het hoekje van de Zwanensteeg', in *Interbellum Rotterdam: Kunst en cultuur 1918–1940*, ed. Marlite Halbertsma and Patricia van Ulzen (Rotterdam: NAi Uitgevers, 2001), 18.

5 Paul van de Laar, *Stad van formaat: Geschiedenis van Rotterdam in de negentiende en twintigste eeuw* (Zwolle: Waanders Uitgevers, 2000), 294; Floris Paalman, *Cinematic Rotterdam: The Times and Tides of a Modern City* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2011), 499.

character to that of port cities in general and investigates this split along the lines of a similar divide in perceptions of safety and security. Based on an historical bird's eye view of the pleasure area, by means of archival and photographic material, the Schiedamsedijk's criminal and cosmopolitan sides are subsequently discussed. I argue that both of these maritime urban traits were neutralised when the Schiedamsedijk briefly reinvented itself as a domestic tourist attraction in the late 1930s, right before it was nearly entirely destroyed, together with the rest of Rotterdam's city centre, during a war bombing in 1940. Predominantly informed by visual sources, the overarching analysis foregrounds interchanges between contrasting internal and external perspectives on safety, which ultimately help to nuance and reframe the stereotypical characters and ambiguous nature traditionally ascribed to the Schiedamsedijk's historical environment of pleasure culture.

Pleasure, Safety and the Dual Character of Port Cities

Before the interwar years, the Schiedamsedijk was already buzzing with activity. The street's profile in the early twentieth century was indebted to traditional sailortown culture, which by then was already slowly declining,[6] but nevertheless ensured a clear connection between the Schiedamsedijk and the Zandstraatbuurt and Katendrecht neighbourhoods. This also becomes apparent through turn-of-the-century depictions of these areas. Some remaining drawings of the Schiedamsedijk's sailor pubs are easily interchangeable with those of the Zandstraatbuurt.[7] Furthermore, a couple of shady drawings of dance scenes that appear in a local history book on the Schiedamsedijk originally stem from a 1930 column series on Katendrecht published in the socialist newspaper *Voorwaarts*.[8] The book assigns the drawings to the wrong neighbourhood, but this could easily go unnoticed: the drawings' subject matter, namely sailors' so-called 'passaging' or

6 Graeme J. Milne, *People, Place and Power on the Nineteenth-Century Waterfront: Sailortown* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 213–14; Valerie Burton, 'Boundaries and Identities in the Nineteenth-Century English Port: Sailortown Narratives and Urban Space', in *Identities in Space: Contested Terrains in the Western City since 1850*, ed. Simon Gunn and Robert J. Morris (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 139.

7 Vincent Baptist, 'Of Hedonism and Heterotopia: Pathways for Researching Legacies of Entertainment Culture in Port Cities', *PORTUSplus* 9 (2020): 4, 8.

8 Herman Romer, *Passagieren op 'De Dijk': De Schiedamsedijk in Oud-Rotterdam* (Zaltbommel: Europese Bibliotheek, 1983), 50, 55, 82; 'Met het schetsboek naar Katendrecht', *Voorwaarts*, 5 February–8 March 1930.

temporary frequenting of bars and dance establishments, historically applies to common activities in both the Schiedamsedijk and Katendrecht. Closely connected to the waterfronts, these and similar areas in other port cities have regularly been framed as 'places of otherness'.[9] Nevertheless, certain distinctions between such neighbourhoods can still be established, not least on the basis of racial otherness,[10] as Kisch also mentions in his Rotterdam report. He observes how Chinese migrant labourers in Katendrecht live clearly segregated on the southern riverside, as they are nowhere to be seen on the Schiedamsedijk, despite the latter's international street image.[11]

The 'otherness' attributed to the Schiedamsedijk and other sailor districts should not merely be understood in spatial and ethnic terms, but also in terms of the ambiguous pleasure practices that unfolded there. A caption in *Voorwaarts*' Katendrecht column for instance notes how sailors and their accompanying girls of pleasure dance with much more heartiness and *joie de vivre* than is the case in more distinguished establishments across the city, but nevertheless concludes that this particular enjoyment does have its dark side.[12]

This comment can partially be linked to views on public dancing as a morally degenerate practice of modern culture that dominated Dutch socio-political contexts at the time.[13] In addition, the comment alludes to the poverty, crime and exploitation that form the likely flipside of the amusements on offer in these specific maritime neighbourhoods. This flipside points to the need to distinguish among different types of pleasure culture, or at least between those amusement spheres deviating from dominant norms within urban historical environments. New conceptual designations are currently used for this, such as 'pleasurescapes', which hold both the potential to encompass general landscapes of public entertainment and to delineate pleasure districts in more specific contexts, like port cities.[14]

9 Paul van de Laar, 'Bremen, Liverpool, Marseille and Rotterdam: Port Cities, Migration and the Transformation of Urban Space in the Long Nineteenth Century', *Journal of Migration History* 2 (2016): 277; Brad Beaven, 'Foreign Sailors and Working-Class Communities: Race, Crime, and Moral Panics in London's Sailortown, 1880–1914', in *Migrants and the Making of the Urban-Maritime World: Agency and Mobility in Port Cities, c. 1570–1940*, ed. Christina Reimann and Martin Öhman (London: Routledge, 2021), 88–89.

10 Milne, *People, Place and Power*, 214.

11 Kisch, 'Auf der Reeperbahn von Rotterdam', 67–68.

12 'Met het schetsboek naar Katendrecht (X)', *Voorwaarts*, 17 February 1930.

13 Harm Kaal, 'Religion, Politics, and Modern Culture in Interwar Amsterdam', *Journal of Urban History* 37, no. 6 (2011): 905–6.

14 Lisa Kosok, 'Pleasurescapes on the Edge: Performing Modernity on Urban Waterfronts (1880–1960)', *Journal of Urban History* 48, no. 6 (2022): 1199–210; Paul van de Laar and Vincent Baptist, 'Pleasurescapes', *Bloomsbury History: Theory & Method* (2022).

Recent studies that have investigated pleasure districts do so in relation to the rise of modern metropolises from the nineteenth to the start of the twentieth century.[15] These rather classic approaches do not suffice to capture amusement areas that did not entirely embody the progressive urban standards of their times. The urban pleasure culture under scrutiny in the Schiedamsedijk case, then, is not necessarily a hegemonic one, but rather has a distinct shadow to it.

Given these considerations about investigating entertainment and amusement within particular maritime urban locales, discussing what type of pleasure is involved becomes important. Such an exploration easily brings a philosophical undertone with it. Lisa Shapiro contemplates whether there are 'many kinds of pleasures' or rather only one type that can 'differ in degree or intensity' when felt by people.[16] This invokes older ethical ideas of utilitarianism, and while Shapiro is less interested in circling around the common notion of pleasure as a motivator for action, she does point to its normative dimension by stating that 'many of our pleasures invite questions […] about whether we *ought* to feel those pleasures, about whether our reasons [for it] are good ones'.[17] This aspect usefully links back to the previously described sailor drawings, and general safety concerns about maritime pleasure areas. The aforementioned newspaper caption arguably casts a judgement on what in the end is perceived as a scene of unsafe hedonism. It is an outsider's perspective, however, and can potentially be countered by views from within this particular environment. Such views could also break through stereotypes that traditionally haunt maritime culture, as closer investigations of the Schiedamsedijk will show, and which further unravel the divergences between safety as perceived from inside and outside these amusement neighbourhoods.

Eddo Evink's philosophical contribution in this volume distinguishes a long-standing split in perceptions of safety, juxtaposing safety as nurtured through community support and trust with a more top-down-oriented, surveillance-based notion that transforms safety into security.[18] The pre-

15 Tobias Becker, 'Das Vergnügungsviertel: Heterotopischer Raum in den Metropolen der Jahrhundertwende', in *Die tausend Freuden der Metropole: Vergnügungskultur um 1900*, ed. Tobias Becker, Anna Littmann, and Johanna Niedbalski (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2011), 137–49; Rohan McWilliam, *London's West End: Creating the Pleasure District, 1800–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 1–5.

16 Lisa Shapiro, 'What Is Pleasure?', *LA+ Interdisciplinary Journal of Landscape Architecture* 2 (2015): 6–8.

17 Shapiro, 'What Is Pleasure?', 6 (emphasis in original).

18 See Chapter 1 by Eddo Evink in this volume.

sented analysis of the Schiedamsedijk discerns several echoes of this divide, as the street historically boasted an attractively unbridled amusement offer targeted to a predominantly maritime populace, but the street was also held under scrutiny by municipal authorities in order to keep its supposedly unruly character in check. Danger and social exuberance originally went hand in hand in such an area, then, which can be extrapolated to a more general duality ascribed to port cities. Criminality and cosmopolitanism form reciprocal sides of port cities' image and identity, Alice Mah contends.[19] Driven by a visual distinction between the colours blue and black, of sea and city respectively,[20] Mah's statement is appealing, but nevertheless runs the risk of imposing an all-too-rigid dichotomy on port cities that would not account for all spatial and socio-cultural developments they have undergone throughout history. Bearing this in mind, the Schiedamsedijk's quotidian character and the different perceptions of safety related to it will now be explored in order to ultimately shed light on the street's life phase right before the Second World War, when its traditional cultural contradictions and societal concerns were dismantled with an eye on much-needed economic prosperity.

Professional Profile and Portraits of Rotterdam's Interwar Amusement Street

Digging into the Schiedamsedijk's everyday character means getting a grip on the street's daily activities, sceneries and surroundings. This connects with recent scholarship and research efforts in urban history that put a new emphasis on studying common, quotidian phenomena and aspects of human life as they have always unfolded in cities, and that thereby often incorporate additional intentions of countering dominant historical narratives.[21] In this context, the 'street', seemingly overlooked in its role of most ubiquitous urban entity, is especially foregrounded as the crucial site for investigations. Developments in and increasing use of GIS-related mapping techniques, together with the mass digitisation and extraction of archival material, currently fuel scholars' attempts to recreate, or at least

19 Alice Mah, *Port Cities and Global Legacies: Urban Identity, Waterfront Work, and Radicalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 27.

20 Mah, *Port Cities*, 27–30.

21 Leif Jerram, *Streetlife: The Untold History of Europe's Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3–5; Danielle van den Heuvel, 'Gender in the Streets of the Premodern City', *Journal of Urban History* 45, no. 4 (2018): 694.

better approach, the density and complexity of the urban past.[22] These significantly broadened means and ambitions have given spatial history endeavours an extra, narrative-driven impulse over the past decade. In this respect, the term 'deep mapping' has been coined to envision a variety of map forms that potentially aggregate as much data on a particular place as possible, in attempts to let outcomes approximate the 'inseparable [...] contours and rhythms of everyday life' within a given locality.[23] The underlying drive for spatial storytelling is not necessarily new, but the intended multidisciplinary, collaborative and open-ended nature of deep mapping requires a different, substantial scale of research operations. This cannot be achieved within the confines of this separate case study. However, with the acknowledgement that deep maps are best attuned to 'a subtle and multilayered view of a small area of the earth',[24] I keep these underlying intentions in mind when building up the historical case of the Schiedamsedijk.

This starts with a map, as 'an integral part of [the research dynamic, from which] the initial spatial distribution obtained [immediately] suggests follow-up questions'.[25] Archival address books, consisting of directories that link professional designations to addresses and inhabitants, form valuable sources to produce spatial work profiles of historical places.[26] Professional establishments of the Schiedamsedijk and its adjacent backstreets can be mapped for 1927, for instance, the year when Kisch's impressions were published and which also serves as an approximate midpoint of the time period under investigation here. A 1938 map from the Rotterdam City Archives, one of the few containing discernible house numbers, is used to visualise the results.[27]

22 Isabella di Lenardo and Frédéric Kaplan, 'Venice Time Machine: Recreating the Density of the Past', paper presented at Digital Humanities Conference, Sydney, 2015; Isabella di Lenardo et al., 'Repopulating Paris: Massive Extraction of 4 Million Addresses from City Directories between 1839 and 1922', paper presented at Digital Humanities Conference, Utrecht, 2019.

23 David J. Bodenhamer, John Corrigan, and Trevor M. Harris, eds., *Deep Maps and Spatial Narratives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 3.

24 David J. Bodenhamer, 'Chasing Bakhtin's Ghost: From Historical GIS to Deep Mapping', in *The Routledge Companion to Spatial History*, ed. Ian Gregory, Don Debats, and Don Lafreniere (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 536.

25 Richard Rodger and Susanne Rau, 'Thinking Spatially: New Horizons for Urban History', *Urban History* 47, no. 3 (2020): 374–75.

26 Di Lenardo et al., 'Repopulating Paris'.

27 The difference between the year of the sample data and the map does not create any further research implications, as no evidence was found that house numbers on the Schiedamsedijk changed in the intermediate period.

Figure 5.1 Professional profile of the Schiedamsedijk (1927). Source of map excerpt and address book data, respectively: Rotterdam City Archives, signature number: 40110-Z10, https://hdl.handle.net/21.12133/96CD44BCC38C4D1293732457E05751CE; and Rotterdam City Archives, signature number: 3023-71, https://hdl.handle.net/21.12133/B36188373D854599ADBA49A1C68A10A0.

This overview confirms past descriptions that the Schiedamsedijk presented itself as a virtually uninterrupted chain of drinking establishments, interspersed with a handful of bigger dance venues and lodging facilities for sailors. The map also directs the attention to the many narrow alleys connecting to the main street, however. While some streets are predominantly oriented towards retail or manufacturing activities linked to the nearby docksides, substantial data is missing for many others in the address books, thus casting doubt on what unfolded in the back ends of the Schiedamsedijk.

The spatial discrepancy unveiled on the map potentially links back to the previously described socio-cultural duality of port cities, and the aligned split in safety perceptions. While a police station was located very closely to the Schiedamsedijk in the first half of the twentieth century,[28] no meaningful sources remain that could form an additional data layer for the previous map, based on past crime incidents and arrests, for instance. Therefore, further traces of the Schiedamsedijk, its back alleys and their interrelations need to be sought through a different type of source material. Here, I turn to photographs of the street, motivated by the influence that new, modern modes of visual representation exerted on the image construction of Rotterdam, and other cities, during the interwar period.[29] While the Rotterdam City Archives hold a limited number of (mostly) non-digitised and copyrighted photographs related to the Schiedamsedijk, historical portraits of the street and its direct

28 This was the police station in the Grote Pauwensteeg, whose officers also used to patrol the old Zandstraatbuurt.

29 See Paalman, *Cinematic Rotterdam*, 37–204.

surroundings are almost exclusively brought together and made accessible in three local books on the Schiedamsedijk.[30] Apparently mostly originating from personal collections, the relevant photographs in these books add up to over a hundred in total. Browsing through this sample of visual material, certain subsets of pictures become immediately apparent on the basis of similar types of depicted scenes. Several photographs show on the one hand the area's rather desolate alleys, and on the other its cheerful street facades, both spread across various years. In addition, a group of distinctly festive scenes originating from domestic tourism activities organised in Rotterdam during the mid-1930s stands out as well. These different visual subgroups form strong leads from which to further explore the respective criminal, cosmopolitan and commodified layers of the Schiedamsedijk, as well as the conflicting perspectives on safety that potentially come with it.

The Criminal Schiedamsedijk

A selection of the historical photographs illuminates the obscure character of the numerous alleys around the Schiedamsedijk. Figure 5.2 captures a calm scene in one of these alleys, but the photograph's original caption asserts that the alley used to house many prostitutes.[31]

Stylistically, it is far removed from a separate collection of photographs on Rotterdam's early twentieth-century slums by Dutch artist George Breitner. While not unique in an international context at the time, Breitner's hasty composition in many of his pictures emphasises the alleys' claustrophobic feeling, and the contrasts between light and darkness suggest that viewers are witnessing places that they would otherwise only rarely notice.[32] In this sense, the use of photography seems particularly linked to the uncovering of unsafe and unlawful spaces. This approach is also explicitly taken up in the remarkable 1925 publication *De Rotterdamsche roofholen en hun bevolking* ('Rotterdam's Robber Dens and Its Population'), a booklet that gathers reflections of a journalist from the previously mentioned *Voorwaarts* newspaper

30 These books are Romer, *Passagieren op 'De Dijk'*; Herman Romer, *Het Leuvekwartier van weleer: Leuvehaven, Vismarkt en Schiedamsedijk voor 1940* (Zaltbommel: Europese Bibliotheek, 2000); and Peter Troost, *De meisies van de Schiedamsedijk* (Rhoon: Peter Troost (self-published), 2008).

31 Romer, *Passagieren op 'De Dijk'*, 40.

32 Hans Rooseboom, 'Breitner in Rotterdam: "Een vuile stad met een heele boel sleeperswagens"', in *Breitner in Rotterdam: Fotograaf van een verdwenen stad*, ed. Aad Gordijn, Paul van de Laar, and Hans Rooseboom (Bussum: Uitgeverij THOTH, 2001), 13–14.

Figure 5.2 Photograph of the Zevenhuissteeg with the Schiedamsedijk in the background, presumably in 1937, by J.F.H. Roovers. Source: Romer, *Passagieren op 'De Dijk'*, 40 / H.A. Voet.

regarding prostitution and other vice-ridden areas throughout the city centre. Through photographs, the writer tries to leave as little to the reader's imagination as possible, frequently emphasising the camera's usefulness to capture those men and women that make up Rotterdam's underbelly.[33]

In line with the newspaper's general strategy at the time, namely to provide popular and even sensationalist news through plenty of images, the *Voorwaarts* publication utilises photography in a rather accusatory manner. Nevertheless, the booklet also establishes nuances between various inner-city streets and neighbourhoods where illicit practices are commonplace. The

33 Herman van Dijkhuizen, *De Rotterdamsche roofholen en hun bevolking*, 6th ed. (Rotterdam: Voorwaarts, 1925), 58, among others.

booklet's content goes beyond that of a mere historical curiosity, and the text is therefore still referenced in research today to illustrate the diversified prostitution practices of Rotterdam's past.[34] The Schiedamsedijk even ends up in one of the port city's more favourable prostitution segments, according to the journalist, as many women working as prostitutes on this street did so in agreement with barkeepers to whose premises they would lure customers, in order to also motivate said customers to buy lots of drinks.[35] This semi-independence was different from other prostitution strata existing in Rotterdam, namely that of confined brothels or clandestine housewives,[36] although one can still assume that the latter type also populated the Schiedamsedijk's backstreets. While these alleys can easily be stereotyped as prostitution quarters and areas of vice, especially when looking at their photographs in retrospect, much of the work of local girls of pleasure thus happened more safely and openly—under the main street lights, so to speak. Or, as Kisch puts it: 'Women make the pavement' on the Schiedamsedijk.[37]

While coming to terms with the fact that prostitution activities around the Schiedamsedijk, and in Rotterdam as a whole, were more varied than one initially might expect,[38] the presence of another population group in the background of the Schiedamsedijk should not be forgotten. Children also roamed around in the sailor street's surroundings, as Figure 5.2 and other alley photographs show. Together with famous youth novels such as *Boefje* (1903) by Rotterdam-based journalist M.J. Brusse, which was successfully adapted for theatre and cinema in later decades, these cultural sources have firmly ingrained the image of poor rascal children, engaging in petty crimes despite being honest and genuine at heart, in the public memory of industrial urban environments. In early twentieth-century Rotterdam, children, especially those who were from the working class, were specifically singled out by the municipal police as needing extra attention and pedagogical monitoring.[39] After all, the port city not only hosted potential breeding grounds for criminality through industrial activities, but also

34 Marion Pluskota, 'Prostitution in the Netherlands: Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague', in *Trafficking in Women 1924–1926: The Paul Kinsie Reports for the League of Nations*, vol. 2, ed. Jean-Michel Chaumont, Magaly Rodríguez García, and Paul Servais (Geneva: United Nations Publications, 2017), 155–56.

35 Van Dijkhuizen, *De Rotterdamsche roofholen*, 55.

36 Henk Visscher, 'De gestijfde illusie? De prostituees van een luxueus Rotterdams bordeel', *Holland Historisch Tijdschrift* 32, no. 5 (2000): 246–49.

37 Kisch, 'Auf der Reeperbahn von Rotterdam', 64 (author's translation).

38 Pluskota, 'Prostitution in the Netherlands', 156.

39 Guus Meershoek, *De geschiedenis van de Nederlandse politie: De Gemeentepolitie in een veranderende samenleving* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2007), 131–32.

through modern culture that was considered a particular moral threat to urban youth at the time.[40]

Children also prominently feature in one of Rotterdam's most significant 'city symphonies', *De steeg* ('The Alley') (1932) directed by Jan Koelinga, who is believed to have been the photographer that contributed to the previously discussed *Voorwaarts* publication.[41] Although located in another slum of the port city, this short, poetic film could just as well have been shot around the corner of the Schiedamsedijk. The film initially juxtaposes the rapid, incessant traffic of a busy street with the tranquil atmosphere found inside an adjacent alley. The camera spends some time observing a large group of children playing around in the presence of some older inhabitants. This close-knit community falls silent, however, when a police officer appears at the alley's entrance. The jovial scenery comes to a halt, looks are exchanged between the two opposing parties, but after some hesitation, the officer continues on his way along the main road. Knowing that a strongly educative and mediating role was laid out for Rotterdam's police force in the early twentieth century,[42] the scene appears less frightening or tense than one would expect. The observing police officer and the socialising alley residents do not disrupt each other in the end. Yet, these few shots of *De steeg* ultimately still exemplify the fragile line between safety and security, and, as previously mentioned, insider and outsider views on these matters, which historically marked the socio-cultural backbone of an ambiguous environment like the Schiedamsedijk.

The Cosmopolitan Schiedamsedijk

As briefly mentioned, prostitutes' connections with bars to better persuade sailors—and let them spend extra money on alcohol—serves as an indication that stereotypical images of maritime men have become increasingly untenable. Scholars have started to draw more attention to the exploitation that seafarers frequently underwent themselves during stays ashore, in order to subsequently ask for more balanced and nuanced social characterisations in maritime (urban) historiography.[43] However, exactly because of the perceived

40 Meershoek, *De geschiedenis van de Nederlandse politie*, 132; Kaal, 'Religion, Politics, and Modern Culture', 904–5.

41 Ivo Blom, 'Koelinga's *De steeg*: Palimpsest and Parallax Historiography', in *The City Symphony Phenomenon: Cinema, Art, and Urban Modernity between the Wars*, ed. Steven Jacobs, Anthony Kinik, and Eva Hielscher (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 122.

42 Meershoek, *De geschiedenis van de Nederlandse politie*, 132–33.

43 Milne, *People, Place and Power*, 66, 74–76; Robert Lee, 'The Seafarers' Urban World: A Critical Review', *International Journal of Maritime History* 25, no. 1 (2013): 54–56; Beaven, 'Foreign Sailors

'otherness' of sailor districts, it is not easy to draw the line between what seems plausible or customary and what appears exaggerated, especially regarding the pleasures that people pursued there. Hedonistic behaviour may quite well be attuned to maritime culture and the inherent nature of port cities,[44] where sailors and other people would go ashore, after long and monotonous journeys, for often uncertain periods of time. In his study on sailortowns, Graeme Milne states how, historically, '[a seafarer's] transience had a faster turnover than other patterns of seasonal work, adding to the urgency of his spending and consumption, and of his exploitation'.[45]

Short-term satisfactions and gains, and the threats to safety that come with it, were presumably fostered in an amusement area like the Schiedamsedijk. Wary of this realisation, the *Voorwaarts* booklet dramatically describes the Schiedamsedijk as 'the maelstrom to the abyss',[46] warning that anyone who indulges in its pleasures is lost for good.[47] Linking back to the normative dimension of pleasure, Shapiro states that 'there is something about pleasure that can gain control over us', leading people astray by letting them neglect other, perhaps less pleasurable, duties.[48] In other words, excessive pleasures can cause some sort of experiential short-sightedness. In terms of safety conflicts, as incited in an amusement area like the Schiedamsedijk, this becomes a crucial characteristic, as the instantaneousness of hedonistic tendencies contrasts with more responsible time frames. In this regard, it has been noted that safety can be linked to a certain sense of time, whereby the more governance-driven notion of security is especially connected to more long-term, future-oriented horizons.[49]

Another potential collision between safety and security imposes itself in the context of sailor districts, one that is not time-related but instead space-related, namely the coming together of global influences to construct a cosmopolitan setting. At least, that is the impression emanating from one of the most substantial types of photographs in the Schiedamsedijk's local history books: the portrayal of bar facades, often with smiling personnel or clientele posing in front (Fig. 5.3).

The Schiedamsedijk's international presentation was widely noted at the time, especially through bar names referencing many cities and other maritime locations across the world. In addition, inscriptions can be

and Working-Class Communities', 88–90.

44 Baptist, 'Of Hedonism and Heterotopia', 9–10.

45 Milne, *People, Place and Power*, 66.

46 Van Dijkhuizen, *De Rotterdamsche roofholen*, 55.

47 Van Dijkhuizen, *De Rotterdamsche roofholen*, 62.

48 Shapiro, 'What Is Pleasure?', 8.

49 Beatrice de Graaf, 'De historisering van veiligheid: Introductie', *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 125, no. 3 (2012): 308–9.

Figure 5.3 Photograph of The Black Diamond Bar on the Schiedamsedijk, presumably during the 1930s (exact date and creator unknown). Source: Romer, *Passagieren op 'De Dijk'*, 57; Troost, *De meisies van de Schiedamsedijk*, 65.

discerned on bars' front windows in some pictures, indicating that certain languages other than Dutch were default inside establishments. Commentators at the time linked the global street signs to a genuine amalgamation of international visitors on the Schiedamsedijk.[50] Cosmopolitanism appears as another intrinsic character trait of sailor districts, but similar to hedonism, it can be problematised and regarded from different perspectives that potentially subvert the romantic and safe nature often attached to it.[51] Foreign language inscriptions on bar windows may have functioned as welcoming invitations, but just as well as explicit markers of segregation and underlying ethnic conflicts that bring additional concerns with it for local security forces.

In the context of Mediterranean and former Ottoman port cities, where West and East have traditionally met, the topic of cosmopolitanism has been much debated and subjected to more differential uses. Ulrike Freitag has, for instance, proposed to place cosmopolitanism alongside 'conviviality', with the latter term aiming to 'direct the gaze at the everyday interactions of people in specific social contexts, initially regardless of their origin, and thus de facto often including

50 Kisch, 'Auf der Reeperbahn von Rotterdam', 63; 'In het hart van de havenstad: Waar de zeeman zich ontspannen kan', *V.V.V.-week Rotterdam*, 5–15 September 1935.

51 Milne, *People, Place and Power*, 67–71.

those of diverse affiliation'.[52] This notion fits the Schiedamsedijk's environment rather well, where an accumulation of small, separate bars catered to different nationalities, as the photographic material indicates. In addition, another mismatch exists between the exemplary 'convivial' scene in Figure 5.3 and the characterisation of cosmopolitanism. Certain elitist,[53] as well as metropolitan,[54] tendencies underlying cosmopolitanism would arguably find their quintessential representation in pictures of glossy entertainment hall interiors, of which only a few can be found in the Schiedamsedijk's collected photographs, rather than in the more ubiquitous authentic exteriors of sailor bars.

The Commodified Schiedamsedijk

The Schiedamsedijk did house a handful of significant dance venues, as also identified on the previous archival map. With names like Cosmopoliet or Alcazar, these places wore their cosmopolitan aspirations on their sleeves. These establishments also tried to modernise their ambitions and appeal throughout the interwar period, by advertising themselves differently for instance,[55] but also by programming novel practices of jazz music and carrying out interior and exterior renovations.[56] After the Second World War, some people even held these venues accountable for initially brushing away the Schiedamsedijk's rawer edges.[57] This process did not necessarily unfold in a straightforward manner, however, as the Schiedamsedijk's main dance venues still paled in comparison with more upscale ones located in Rotterdam's inner city during the 1920s–30s.[58] This impression is also drawn from a local tourist guide on Rotterdam published in 1930: the listed categories of bars and dance clubs, but also cinemas, restaurants and hotels, mostly comprise addresses around the central Hofplein square, Coolsingel boulevard and Hoogstraat shopping street.[59] Schiedamsedijk addresses are

52 Ulrike Freitag, '"Cosmopolitanism" and "Conviviality"? Some Conceptual Considerations Concerning the Late Ottoman Empire', *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 17, no. 4 (2013): 386.

53 Freitag, '"Cosmopolitanism"', 380.

54 Becker, 'Das Vergnügungsviertel', 156–58.

55 André van der Velden, 'Het Hofplein en de illusie van een wereldstad', in *Interbellum Rotterdam: Kunst en cultuur 1918–1940*, ed. Marlite Halbertsma and Patricia van Ulzen (Rotterdam: NAi Uitgevers, 2001), 111.

56 Hans Zirkzee, *Jazz in Rotterdam: De geschiedenis van een grotestadscultuur* (Eindhoven: DATO, 2015), 139–41.

57 Meerum Terwogt, 'De Schiedamschedijk', 174–75; P.N. Kalkman, 'De Schiedamsedijk voorheen en thans: Volledige verandering van karakter', *De Maasstad*, March, 1956, 53.

58 Van der Velden, 'Het Hofplein', 110–11.

59 *Gids voor Rotterdam* (Rotterdam: VVV Rotterdam, 1930), 28–35.

noticeably absent from the booklet. This situation drastically changed within a couple of years, however. As all local history books on the Schiedamsedijk strongly emphasise, the street found itself the centre of attention during annual touristic festivity weeks organised between 1934 and 1938.

The cause fuelling this transformation should be sought on a global level. The Great Depression that ushered in the 1930s became easily visible in the port city of Rotterdam through decreasing shipping activities, and thus also an absence of sailors on the streets.[60] The lack of maritime workers roaming about their destined amusement neighbourhood points to a crucial aspect that is easily foregone in all the emphasis placed on the 'otherness' of this environment: sailors were vital economic actors for the continued existence of waterfront areas. '[Their] wages injected large sums suddenly into the sailortown economy, on a scale that had no real parallels elsewhere in the poorer [city] districts', Milne asserts.[61] They therefore did not simply complicate social safety when pursuing pleasure in sailor districts, but simultaneously also supported local economic security. Linked to the phenomenon of a worldwide crisis, their disappearance from the streets enhanced public awareness in Rotterdam of the previously rather unsung economic importance of maritime pleasure districts and their populace. A special newspaper published on the occasion of the 1935 city festivities devoted a full-page article on the Schiedamsedijk, passionately appealing for people to not give up on the street but rather help it through its hardships, much in the same way as it had helped boost the port city's prosperity in earlier years.[62]

Organised by the Rotterdam branch of the *Vereeniging voor Vreemdelingenverkeer* (VVV), a national organisation for the stimulation of local and regional tourism that still exists today, the festivity weeks of the mid-1930s reached across the entire city. Nevertheless, the Schiedamsedijk ended up as its unofficial epicentre, due to its attractively 'picturesque',[63] or 'typical',[64] peculiarity, as VVV news bulletins asserted. The way in which local establishments gave substance to the street's newfound touristic attraction and further diversified its amusement offer at a time when it was most needed, was truly something to behold, according to the local history books. Photographs of the Schiedamsedijk during the VVV weeks show a street embellished with flags and facades.

60 Paul van de Laar and Koos Hage, *Brandgrens Rotterdam 1930–2010* (Bussum: Uitgeverij THOTH, 2010), 39.

61 Milne, *People, Place and Power*, 66.

62 'In het hart van de havenstad'.

63 '"Vermakelijkheden" van Rotterdam', *De Rotterdamsche V.V.V.-week*, 1934.

64 'Zie de stad en zie de Maas', *De eenige officieele V.V.V. courant*, 4–15 September 1935, 12.

Figure 5.4 Photograph taken from inside the Prinsendam ship replica, overlooking the Schiedamsedijk during the 1935 VVV festivity week. Source: Romer, *Het Leuvekwartier van weleer*, 100 / Rotterdam City Archives, signature number: 2002-1588, https://hdl.handle.net/21.12133/CAC1F5049E814FCA8FBAD05F74BD61C0.

In addition, the area showcased various decors related to international trade and transportation. This showcasing was most obvious in 1935, when the Schiedamsedijk directly portrayed the theme of shipping by placing multiple ship models across the neighbourhood, seemingly signalling that employment and prosperity would soon return.[65]

Figure 5.4 shows the view from inside the café terrace of the largest ship replica onto the Schiedamsedijk. The view creates an effective mirror image, in which a copied nautical artefact and the amusement street that built its reputation around it stare back at one another. In this respect, the scenery is reminiscent of the visual interplay dominating another famous Rotterdam 'city symphony', *Hoogstraat* (1929) by Andor von Barsy, a Hungarian filmmaker and photographer who helped shape Rotterdam's city image in significant ways during the interwar period.[66] This short film depicts Rotterdam's eponymous shopping street, and focuses on its underlying consumerist logics by playfully

65 Van de Laar and Hage, *Brandgrens Rotterdam 1930–2010*, 28.

66 See Paalman, *Cinematic Rotterdam*, 130–65.

juxtaposing various merchandise displayed behind shop windows with similar commodities worn or carried by passers-by. What, then, is commodified and displayed on the Schiedamsedijk during the VVV weeks? The answer is maritime culture itself, transformed into a safer version for the local society's economic benefit, and thus necessarily less ambiguous and conflicting due to its lack of international sailors, who acted as a social pivot of the amusement street's stereotypically criminal and cosmopolitan character traits.

Conclusion

This chapter's multilayered analysis of Rotterdam's Schiedamsedijk was initially driven by a spatial reconstruction of the area's layout. While seemingly straightforward, the reconstructed map of the street immediately gave rise to various safety concerns over this historical environment. On the surface, the Schiedamsedijk easily presents itself as an area that both generates and attracts crime and unsafety,[67] through its traditional concentration of entertainment facilities and large numbers of people looking for a night of, potentially rough and rowdy, pleasure. Its proximity to the waterfront, the port city's edges,[68] additionally lends the many alleys surrounding the bars and dance clubs an illicit character. Such cultural perceptions of unsafety and vice can easily be projected on archival photographs of the neighbourhood, but the analytical power and depth of these historical traces also runs the other way around. As this chapter has showcased, surviving visual material of the Schiedamsedijk lends itself to juxtapose internal and external perspectives on safety, thereby questioning the maritime amusement area's foundational impressions and scrutinising underexposed historical character changes.

Right before the Second World War started and Rotterdam's city centre was heavily bombed, the Schiedamsedijk's position and attraction within the port city already altered fundamentally. The amusement street's character and functioning did not simply adhere anymore to the traditional socio-cultural duality of port cities, nor to explicit oppositions between internally perceived safety and externally demanded security. While Mah's aforementioned distinction between the black and blue of port cities helps to examine the Schiedamsedijk's respective criminal and cosmopolitan layers throughout the interwar period, visual historical material on the street and its surroundings complicates these character traits in various ways when interpreted through

67 Patricia Brantingham and Paul Brantingham, 'Criminality of Place: Crime Generators and Crime Attractors', *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research* 3, no. 3 (1995): 7–8.
68 Brantingham and Brantingham, 'Criminality of Place', 12–13.

the theme of safety. In this regard, stereotyped figures of sailors, prostitutes and street kids are recontextualised within the maritime urban environment that they populated, and more nuanced negotiations are revealed when it comes to past safety and policing concerns of notorious pleasure culture.

After the war, the Schiedamsedijk was resurrected, and its largely open view to the inland Leuvehaven port, where Rotterdam's Maritime Museum also became housed, nowadays ensures a clear link to the street's seafaring past.[69] Ultimately, however, the contemporary reinstalment of maritime elements in the local urban environment is fundamentally different from the direct link between culture and consumption laid out during the Schiedamsedijk's final interwar phase, which first and foremost sprang from locally supported hopes of economic survival and security. In contrast, the maritime quarter that can currently be found near the Schiedamsedijk may well be subject to 'the modern conceit that cities are not about consumption, and every effort is made to divert us from this realisation through aligning consumption to cultural activities'.[70] Had Egon Kisch revisited the Schiedamsedijk during the 1930s, he would have found a festive street where, through an unabashedly commodified display of maritime culture, opposing perceptions of safety were reconciled more than ever before.

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69 Baptist, 'Of Hedonism and Heterotopia', 3.

70 Ray Laurence, 'Bread and Circuses: Urbanism and Pleasure in Ancient Rome', *LA+ Interdisciplinary Journal of Landscape Architecture* 2 (2015): 27.

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