

Maaïke Lauwaert &
Francien van Westrenen (eds.)

Facing Value

Radical
perspectives
from the arts

Valiz

1. Be unproductive

2. Hesitate and question

3. Share

4. Improvise

5. Invite and participate

6. Embrace the void

7. Play!

8. Support

9. Unite

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Improvis

4.



BEROEP: Bakker
 MATERIAAL: oud brood
 TOEPASSING: het stikken van paal

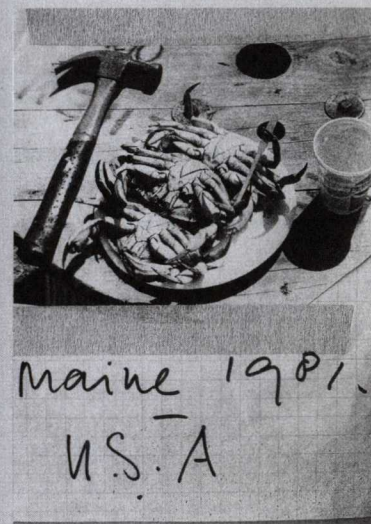
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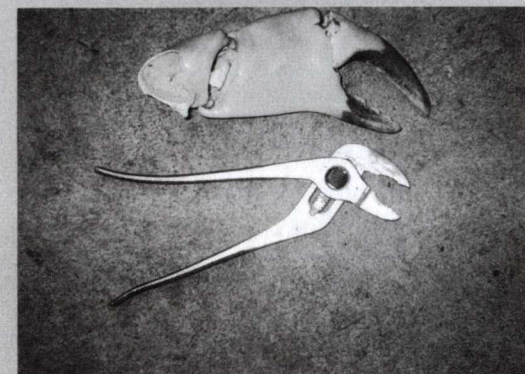
4.7.2004 gebarentaal. Materiaal: overboord
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Krijn Giezen, *Mail Order*, 2004

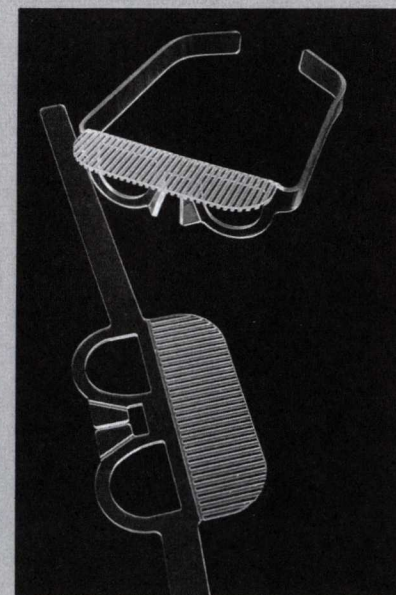
Krijn Giezen, *Mail Order*, 2004



maine 1981.
 U.S.A



3.5.1981 te gebruiken voor het kraken van
 kreeft en krab. Wordt geleverd met
 kook- en consumptie voorschrift.



2.7.2002 uit lexaplaat gezaagde bril met
 zonneklep. Op maat gebogen.

Krijn Giezen, *Mail Order*, 2004



Syeus Mottel, Charas: *The Improbable Dome Builders*, 1973

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Dutch artist Krijn Giezen (1939–2011) was a man of the coast. He was born in the Dutch seaside village of Noordwijk aan Zee, and lived and worked in seclusion in a Spartan castle on the coast of Normandy. His art grew out of a very outspoken attitude towards the world, characterized by a strong commitment to nature and human activity. His artistic practice did not only result in tangible products, but could equally consist of setting a mentality change in motion. The scale of his work ranged from very small to enormous, from a fish grill to a watchtower, from a mail order catalogue from which his products could be bought to the visualization of the Haagse Beek in The Hague.¹

The anarchistic humour of Fluxus, with its emphasis on play and self-devised rules, formed the basis of many of Giezen's actions and objects. In his work he linked the robustness of nature with the inventiveness of farmers, fishermen and craftsmen. Recipes, instructions, wear and tear were noted by him and incorporated in visual documentation. Nostalgia was not his driving force, but he longed to preserve and revive the usefulness and the essence of nature and human activity. Alex de Vries aptly phrased it as follows, in 2007:

* SPORTS PAPER IDEAS!

Giezen is a beachcomber of our human existence. He collects what we think we need to discard, and assigns a new value to it. Everything we want to put into the ground, he brings back out. The possibilities of reuse that he shows are simple and can be directly applied. In that sense, they are so ingenious that none other than Krijn Giezen could have imagined them. It is a

4 IMPROVISE

matter of not thinking the issue through too far: stop at the most obvious and give that a metaphorical form. Each work of Krijn Giezen thereby becomes an observation post from which to take a fresh look at our lives.²

An important component of Giezen's work was the everyday usability of the work itself. Many objects that he made, conceived, and designed were for sale via mail order, so that people could use them at home: a ring that you could draw with, a bench you could sit on or use to slice a ham, or a small oven to smoke fish in. A horse blanket could be ordered for 450 guilders, with your horse's name written on it.

Giezen also documented ways in which people overcame practical, everyday problems with unusual materials in a series of photographs: the inventiveness of the butcher or handyman in solving small problems with whatever was at hand.³ Artist and photographer Richard Wentworth also documented these solutions in the 1970s and 1980s in his famous series *making do and getting by*.⁴ What stands out in these works by both Giezen and Wentworth is that they find value, beauty and poetics in human resourcefulness and improvisation. It is not only useful, funny and smart, it is indeed very valuable to be able to see potential in waste, leftovers and unusual combinations.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau tracks and identifies practices and tactics of what he calls *faire avec* or making do. Consumers, television watchers, walkers,

p. 206 top

pp. 293 (b),
294 (t)

pp. 93-103

readers, cooks are all involved in a host of 'jester fools the king'-tactics that De Certeau catalogues: manipulation, the composition of an anti-discipline that runs counter to what we are expected to do, appropriation and re-appropriation of objects, so-called poaching, *bricolage* and the *perruque* mentioned earlier.⁵

These activities are 'hidden and scattered over areas defined and occupied by systems of production'. Systems that, De Certeau stresses, leave less and less 'place for consumers to indicate what they make or do with products of these systems'.⁶ Nevertheless, 'there are countless ways of "making do" and in these tactics of making do, "work and leisure flow together, repeat and reinforce each other"'.⁷ Instead of considering consumers as passive recipients, De Certeau labels them 'unrecognized producers, poets of their own affairs, trailblazers in the jungle of functionalist rationality'.⁸

CONSIDER THE
PRODUCTION OF
CONSUMERISM FOR
THE INDIVIDUAL

In the book *Adhocism: The Case for Improvisation*, from 1972, Charles Jencks and Nathan Silver break a lance for what they call the art of living *ad hoc*. By this they mean: 'tackling problems at once, using the materials at hand, rather than waiting for the perfect moment or "proper" approach'.⁹ Living *ad hoc* starts with small daily improvisations such as using bottles for candleholders. But adhocism goes further because it bypasses the usual delays caused by specialization and bureaucratic and hierarchical organizations. Thus this strategy of making-do, improvisation and self-sufficiency undermines approved methods and established results in various domains: from daily life to architecture, from urban planning to political revolutions.¹⁰

pp. 233-241

This mentality was also at the core of the work and thinking of R. Buckminster Fuller, the American architect, systems theorist, designer and inventor most famous for his Spaceship Earth manual, his concepts ephemeralization—where we do ‘more and more with less and less until eventually you can do everything with nothing’¹¹—and the widely known geodesic dome.

We find this ‘do more with less’-mentality still very much alive in the many examples of contemporary making-do found on websites like www.thereifixedit.com.¹² On this blog people post their inexpensive, handmade and funny solutions to various problems. De Certeau already wrote in 1980 that current production systems left less and less room for making-do and improvisation. This has only worsened with a design, production and consumption cycle aimed not at repairing but at throwing away and buying anew.¹³ The numerous ‘there I fixed it’ blogs or books like *Low Cost Design* by Daniele Pario Perra¹⁴ or *Public Phenomena* by Temporary Services¹⁵ contain, however, countless examples of contrarian and unruly solutions.¹⁶

What appears at first glance to be merely funny, and sometimes maybe useful, becomes very valuable as a form of concrete activism in which one goes against the consumerist grain and refuses to be a passive consumer participating in an ever more rapid cycle of production and consumption.¹⁷ We see the same mechanism at work in many an artist’s practice and when it comes to everyone else who fixes a leaking faucet with a bit of duct tape rather than buy a new one. It seems almost too simple to be true,

pp. 289,
254–284

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pp. 142 (t),
208, 214–215

pp. 293 (t, l),
294 (b)

p. 295 (b)

p. 142 (b)

but concrete improvisation with materials at hand is a form of small-time activism.

Needless to say, when it comes to art, the mechanism is less straightforward and hence more complex to write about and understand. It is almost a form of alchemy that we witness, in the case of art: found objects are turned into art, a process in which not only the monetary value takes a leap but especially, most importantly and magically, the aura of an object changes. Going through the hands of someone who pays these found, trivial, ready-made objects attention, spends time thinking about them and wondering what they could become, seeing their future and possible uses; that is where aura is created, added or found.

And this is of course the true magic of value. We can create it. We might not always understand how and why, but we too are in charge of what has value and why. See the value of improvisation when tackling problems, of using what is at hand, of doing more and more with less until eventually you can do everything with nothing.

1 See also: www.stroom.nl/krijngiezen/maillorder/maillorder1.html.

2 www.galleries.nl/motivatie.asp?idnr=37012&gastnr=1&sessionti=466706703.

3 www.stroom.nl/gfx/uploads/IMG_9961web.jpg.

4 <http://visualarts.britishcouncil.org/collection/portfolios/making-do-and-getting-by>.

5 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), pp. xii, xiii, xv, 25, 165, 174, 205.

6 Ibid., p. xii.

7 Ibid., p. 29.

8 Ibid., p. 34.

9 Charles Jencks and Nathan Silver, *Adhocism: The Case for Improvisation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1972).

10 In management sciences, both improvisation and play, two propositions for value creation in this book, are also recognized for their potential. Playful

organizations are one result, another is embracing, as NASA does, the tinkering of devoted hobbyists in finding solutions to very complex problems.

11 Richard Buckminster Fuller, *Nine Chains to the Moon* (New York: Anchor Books, 1973), pp. 252–59.

12 See: <http://failblog.cheezburger.com/thereifixedit>.

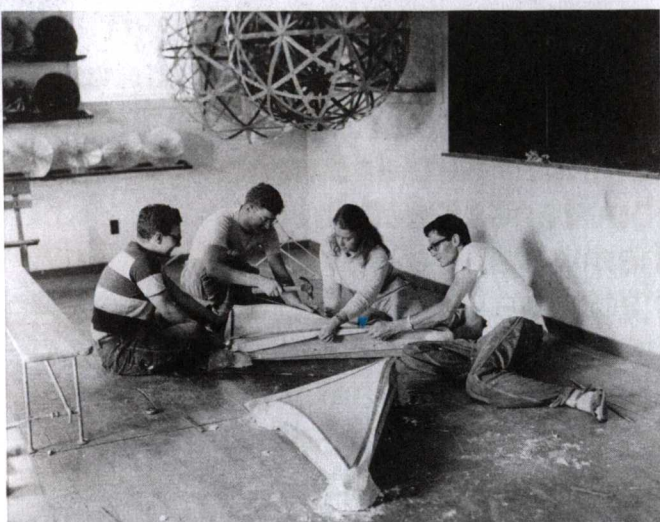
13 It was Victor Papanek who publicly advocated against bad design in *Design for the Real World: Human Ecology and Social Change* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971).

14 www.lowcostdesign.org/.

15 www.temporaryservices.org/pub_phenom_archive.html.

16 This strategy was explored in the exhibition ‘There, I Fixed It’ that took place in 2011 at Stroom Den Haag.

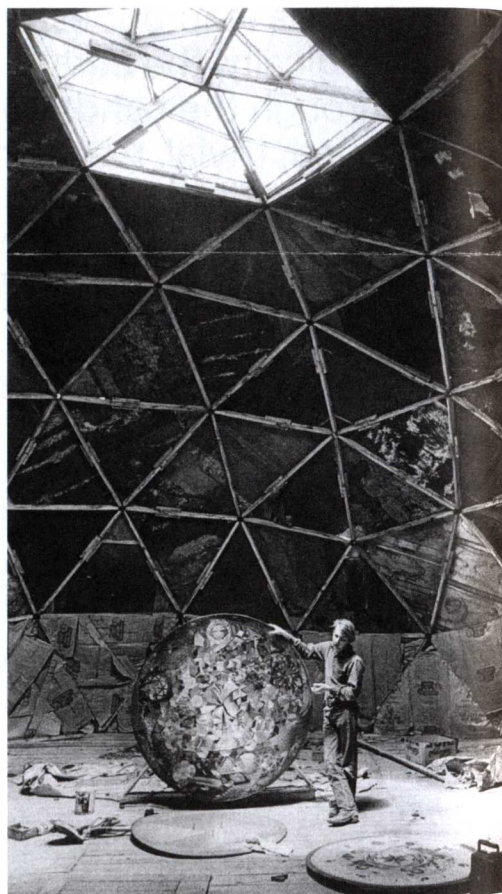
17 Robert and Edward Skidelsky, *How Much Is Enough: The Love of Money and the Case for the Good Life* (London: Allen Lane, 2012).



Buckminster Fuller's architecture class, Summer Institute, Black Mountain College, 1949. Note on the back of the photo states: 'Architecture, construction of molds for precast forms for domes.' Left to right: unidentified student, Eugene Godfrey, Mary Jo Slick, unidentified student



Elaine de Kooning working on the Venetian Blind Strip Dome (also known as the Supine Dome) which was created as part of Buckminster Fuller's architecture class, Summer Session in the Arts, 1948



Clard Svenson of Drop City stands inside a half-finished geodesic dome that eventually will become a theater for psychedelics, 1967



Buckminster Fuller's geodesic dome at Black Mountain College, 1948