

### **Meditation 3**

#### **Of the Position and Function of Art in the Future**

*Art is a luxury. Such a viewpoint can only come into existence in a society that is becoming completely business-like, or in other words, becoming inhuman.*

(Lucebert)

Classical orchestras are being threatened with discontinuation. Frans Bauer is proclaimed the nation's best singer. The CD market collapses. Classical music is being used to scare junks away from the Dutch railway stations. Graduate jazz musicians support themselves by playing background music and 70's disco hits in commercial orchestras. Music as high-school subject is still not being taken seriously. Idols. The Eurovision Song Festival.

Is the (serious) musical scene in the Netherlands doing so badly? And what can this possibly mean for the future? SCP employees Andries van den Broek and Jos de Haan point out in 2000 that the increase of the level of education in the Netherlands has not resulted in greater cultural participation. In fact, despite the increase in culture-educational stimuli, the interest shown by the 15-30 year olds is declining. According to the authors, these trends can be attributed principally to competition provided by other forms of leisure activities.<sup>1</sup>

Van den Broek and de Haan distinguish between five societal functions performed by the arts: a legitimizing (art affirms religious or secular powers), a critical (art is in opposition to religion and ideologies), a social (art provides social and cultural capital), an esthetic (art appropriates the role of religion and stimulates a refined taste) and an emancipatory (art places existing norms and values in perspective). Their conclusion is that "in the context of a democratic constitutional state, one can speak of a loss of certain societal functions performed by culture, namely in the areas of legitimization and critique. Within the prosperity ethos, the social and aesthetic functions are exposed to increasing competition while at the same time the emancipatory function is being undermined or questioned by the relativistic climate."

A sober view. The entertainment industry appears as victor, triumphing over a more spiritual or postmaterial way of life. The commercial 'middle-of-the-road'-culture eclipses cultural and intellectual counter-movements. Humans degenerate into a standard-less 'Homo zappings'.

Nevertheless, van den Broek and de Haan succeed in sketching, against the background of the current situation, a possible future scenario in which art and 'high culture' can stand up to a revaluation. (Alongside this scenario, they describe a marginalizing development in which art loses out to other forms of leisure activities and a consolidating scenario in which 'high' and 'low' culture remain in existence alongside each other, 'high' culture however losing its privileged position). Freed from the most and the largest material

---

<sup>1</sup> Broek, A. van den & Haan, J. de; *Cultuur tussen competentie en competitie [Culture Between Competence and Competition]*. Amsterdam/Den Haag, 2000.

concerns, humans will experience a greater need for deepening and refinement, a need which art can fill. Amateur art flourishes. There is a fruitful cross-fertilization between Western and non-Western arts. ICT functions as an 'appetizer' for visits to art institutes. Artists and public embark together on voyages of discovery. Art is not a luxury but a necessity, an essential for living.

Can a conservatory do otherwise than cling to this most rose-colored projection of the future? Or can and must a conservatory make sure that the art it champions is brought, as regards financial, intellectual and emotional respects, within the reach of a large percent of the population, and in so doing reduce the chance of the marginalizing scenario?

Within this framework, a reconsideration of the function, role and position of art (music) is in order. To what extent can art still actually fulfil its critical or emancipatory functions? Fantasy and creativity are probably still actually able to interrogate the existing thought patterns and engraved norms and values. One might think of art as a so-called 'countersite', within which all the positions to be found and collected in a culture can be turned around and perverted (in a less polemic sense: a multiplication of reflection).<sup>2</sup> One can also think of Gilles Deleuze's 'minorities'. Not a minority in opposition to a majority, but powers that offer resistance: those incalculable constituencies which cannot be governed by code, rule or law. This is something else than emancipation; the (micropolitical) power of minorities does not lie in their power to become a majority, but in their unpredictable manipulations operations and influence on existing models. Art as the 'radical other' in which that 'radical other' must not be seen as in opposition to 'the canny' or 'the same'; 'the radical other' is found as it were *between* 'the same' and 'the other'.

Questions which then arise are: which heterotopical role can art fulfill in our future Western culture? To what extent can art be regarded as a minority or as in some way or another bringing us in contact with a minority? And which role can and will professional art education play in developing these functions of art even further?

---

<sup>2</sup> French philosopher Michel Foucault terms this 'heterotopics'.