

The future of cultural activities*

A.J. van der Staay Mass culture emancipated itself from every endeavour to control it and today it found an ally in technology and its organization in the market. While efforts were made by the public sector to control or lead the masses away from new technological gadgets, the market produced entertainment that made the individual relatively independent of official culture and in a way more culturally mobile. The coalition between technology - gramophone records, movies, video, walkman, copying-machine - and the market has grave implications for those who want to educate the masses.

Recent developments

I would like to take you quickly and with giant steps through some recent developments. Then I will dwell somewhat more leisurely on the evaluation of cultural activities in this century. Finally, I will try to point out a few issues, which may influence our thinking about cultural activities in the present decennium, and perhaps even later.

Contrary to my habits, I will stick to Dutch data. The main reason being that I have come to believe that, whereas in western Europe some regional differences persist, and some north/south cultural lags remain, culturally Europe is developing along the same general lines. This can be argued from the convergence of basic belief systems, such as the growing disbelief in hell, but also from political attitudes, along the right/left spectrum, which basically seem to follow comparable patterns. Also, in behaviour national differences seem to become less

prominent in capitalist and democratic societies in Europe. Therefore, as a *pars pro toto*, national statistics are no longer irrelevant for European self reflection. It would certainly have been much less relevant, though possible, to compare developments in The Netherlands with other national developments in Europe in the thirties, or even in the fifties of this century. Nowadays it is not unreasonable to assume that changes in the cultural life of one country also occur in other European countries. There is another reason for using national data. We tend to know developments in The Netherlands quite well. This is not so much the result of excellent statistics. The Netherlands has not had an national population count since 1971, and the last attempt ran into difficulties because of mistrust about privacy. We will not have another one in the foreseeable future. Neither does the positive data situation exist because the administration is very reliable in providing

statistics. It is mainly the result of a very intense tradition of research by sociologists and economists into Dutch society and culture and its developments. The Planning Bureau of which I am the director is one of the successful concentrations of this effort.

For the Social and Cultural Planning Bureau an important tool to trace developments, though not the only one, is the *time budget survey*. This instrument makes it possible to analyze in some detail the way people in The Netherlands spend their day and their week. Every quarter of an hour of individual behaviour is accounted for. In this way it has been possible to pinpoint even minute shifts in working time or leisure. Such as the time people spend washing dishes. Or whether male persons are increasing their dishwashing and female dishwashers are profiting from this or not. There are of course shadow zones in our glittering image. We do not know when or how long people make love on the time budget basis, though one might here rely on other research. In short, because of the relatively simple tool of the time budget survey among a sample of the Dutch population, and by repeatedly using it, we can draw a fair picture of the changes that have come over our unruly, yet placid citizens in the last thirty years.

I will mainly rely on the synthesis which earned one of my collaborators his doctors degree, so I may as well give him his due: Wim Knulst did most of the research. He summarizes as follows changes that have occurred between 1955-1985:

- The total number of hours freely available over the week rose by over 30%.
- As was to be expected time spent with electronic media like television and video rose with 250%. Time used for exclusive, and one may assume attentive, listening to radio and recordings decreased by 75%.
- People spent 40% less time reading. The loss

was mainly in reading books and newspapers, because the reading of magazines was up 40%. Of course young people changed from reading to viewing more drastically than their elders.

- Time spent on visits to places of entertainment is up by 90%. This increase however did not come from the cinema or traditional cultural or sporting events, which suffered a sharp decrease. More time was spent on eating out.

It is interesting that notwithstanding these considerable changes the ratio of leisure time spent at home compared to time spent outside the home has basically remained unchanged. After thirty years of change in activities people still tend to spend 40% of their leisure time outside the home. However, the repertory of activities has increased and changed significantly.

Some leisure time activities away from home increased such as active participation in sports and the ensuing sociability. A majority of the population takes longer and more frequent holidays: two or three times a year and mainly spent abroad. More time is spent on recreation trips to see sites, monuments and museums. Going to the cinema and sporting events declined, as did going to some traditional cultural events, which lost half their attendance.

At home television became the dominant leisure time activity. Every month 1% of the population attends a traditional classical concert. However, broadcasted classical concerts reach 40% of the population. The same applies to other forms of high culture. More time was spent on do-it-yourself and hobbies. Listening to radio-broadcast and social visiting declined.

Free, that is to say, unfilled leisure time decreased. Leisure in general became burdened

with endless activities and investment. Leisure produced a stress both on the time budget and on the household budget.

So the people of The Netherlands can be seen as tourists or as sportsmen and less as theatre or musical audiences. This type of culture, they enjoy at home. They try to combine activities, which may make for a hectic, somewhat superficial form of leisure time behaviour. They seem to concentrate less on one single activity.

A tremendous increase in leisure time and in investment possibilities have not resulted in a comparable boost for traditional high culture. Some people in the sixties were expecting such a boost. As Marx did long ago. The increase in level of education did not have a marked result either. More people were enjoying new things like television and video, and were more actively doing more things themselves, especially sports and hobbies. Heavy users of traditional culture tended to deplore this new pattern as superficial, democratic consumerism, and mass-culture.

A last observation on the attendance to the theatre, exhibitions, sports events, the cinema and so on. The high attendance of the past should be viewed against a lack of alternatives to spend leisure time differently. When alternatives arise, people divide their attention and desert or reduce the traditional forms of entertainment. So the attendance to traditional events was not so much halved by dwindling interest, but by interesting alternatives. As alternatives become more available in eastern Europe, a severe drop in cultural attendance may be predicted.

If we take a step back, other interesting aspects are revealed. Leisure time is only part of the picture. If one roughly defines three other strategic clusters of activities in the life of the

ordinary citizen, apart from leisure, one would speak of an educational cluster, a work cluster and a cluster of homework activities.

Let us quickly sketch the outline of changes. Work is becoming restricted to the period between the ages of 20 and 50. Fewer people are working before 20 and after 50 years of age. The work cluster involves about 45% of the population with a mean working time of 30 hours a week. Part time work is increasing. The shift from work to study brings more leisure time for young people. On the other hand much of this free time is lost in travel and household duties. No important increase is seen in permanent education.

Caring for the household in an individualizing society is a burden for every one especially between the age of 20 and 50. It is losing its specialized character, mainly discharged by women. More people are combining study, work with household activities. People specialized in one of these fields are now no longer in the majority. The combination of chores with work and or study rises steadily and is concentrated again among people between 20 and 50. We described the way they use their leisure time as very active. One must admit that the period between 20 and 50 seems to be active in other aspects too. The people that spend more than 60 hours a week in some form of non-leisure time activity are mostly higher educated people, and among these especially the professional woman.

By the way: the amount of time spent on household chores has not diminished in the last decades. One may assume that the intensive investment in technical household appliances helped people in spending less time on the household. This gain has wholly been eliminated by the reduction of scale of the household. The smaller household lays a burden on the individual member. Also the time spent

per member of small households on mobility is larger than that of big households, so proving the importance of economics of scale.

If one tries to sum up the shifts apparent in the empirical data, one would arrive at something like this. The age factor is becoming more important in our society. People between 20 and 50 carry out a heavy timeschedule, in combining work, study and household duties and have an active leisure time. Soon afterwards, leisure time dominates, in a general pattern that may continue another 20 years. Leisure comes with the years, and activities range over a wider repertory than before. In the competition for their share of leisure time cultural activities have stabilized at a lower level, with a shift to the home.

Cultural activities, this century

If we take yet another step backwards, we can try to survey not only The Netherlands, in the last quarter of the century, but Europe and this century as a whole. This *macroscopic view* would no longer include households but basic structures and developments in European culture. This view is more abstract by its nature.

It might be of help to divide this century in three periods: pre-modern, modern and post-modern. The pre-modern period which might have started around 1870 could have finished in 1920. The modern one would run from 1920 to 1970. If we take leaps of fifty years, the post-modern period would run from 1970 to 2030. This is just a device to make us realize that cultural developments are continuous, but that the dominant issues seem to change. The century could have been the theatre for three somewhat different plays, of which we see the second half, a full play, and the first half. Thornton has used this somewhat fanciful division to describe the

lifestyles of the 17th, 18th and 19th century. He uses a fifty year cycle, to characterize the overall change in style of architecture and interior decoration, and I find this interesting. If there is any link between changes in culture and lifestyles, it will become visible in interior decoration and architecture, which is Thornton's field of study.

the pre-modern period

Elsewhere I have used greater detail, but one could try to characterize the three periods in the following way. The pre-modern period was one of considerable uncertainty, in which excessive fears of change and great hopes mingled in an explosive mixture. In political life utopia and stark conservatism collided. In culture in all fields the twentieth century was seen as the great modern deliverance of the past. As the poet Apollinaire expressed his *Zeitgeist*: 'à la fin nous sommes las de ce monde ancien'. Nowadays we have a tendency to say 'à la fin nous sommes las de ce monde moderne'. The middle period was different, it was the period in which the hopes and fears of the pre-modern period were tested. Central to modernism and its endeavour were terms as technology, a break with the past, planning, the future, hope.

Let us see now, in the most general of terms what really was the outcome of all this, at least in western Europe, and perhaps in the rest of Europe as well. One can best begin where in Europe fear and hope seemed most in agreement: the fear of the masses and the fear of mass-culture. Socialists, Catholics, Protestants, civilized aristocrats and bourgeois seemed in agreement there: it could not be left to chance how the masses would think and feel. They should be guided, taken in hand, controlled. Education, the media, youth movements, state run or not, would prevent the

collapse of civilisation. After the second world war, still in my modern period, in 1970 UNESCO developed a grand design for cultural policy, which already had different accents. But it still cherished the idea that culture should be brought to the masses and that this basically should be the responsibility of the public sector. In the post-modern period one no longer feels so assured.

But what happened was quite distinct from what the whole of our establishment in cultural affairs wanted during most of this century. Mass-culture emancipated itself from every endeavour to control it, and today it seems to have won its battles, if not its war. It found an ally in technology, and its organization in the market. While extraordinary efforts were made by the public sector to control or guide or cajole the masses away from new technological gadgets, and market produced entertainment, the revolution in culture that changed the face of European culture happened elsewhere. It has names as gramophone record, movies, television, video, walkman, car, the tape-recorder and copying-machine, all these relatively cheap and accessible technological gadgets that made the individual relatively independent of official culture and in a way more culturally mobile.

This of course is well known, though not widely accepted. My compatriot De Swaan recently summarized this view. He drew the conclusion that an international system of culture, based on a coalition between technology and the market, was the most important cultural aspect of our century. Because this system found its first expression in the US, many people in Europe still tend to make this into a takeover bid by American culture. I disagree. It is a takeover bid of the masses, who callously ignore the protests of the establishment. This international system of cultural production

and distribution is basically modern, but it is not what most of the modernists wanted. This has grave implications for those that want to educate the masses, that dream to bring good reading to television-viewing kids. They have failed.

modernism

I hope you will also consider the second important revolution, that of modernism. A modern composer, Peter Schat, recently said to me: the modernist does not consider his style as another period in art history. He thinks modernism is there to stay forever. Though this idea still lingers on, it has become less convincing since the seventies. Indeed, I would say, this is the present feeling, that modernism proved to be mortal after all.

But why is this so important, this question of modernism? Because in high culture, not mass-culture, modernism struggled to be the dominant cultural creed in the middle of this century. In the west, at least in architecture the modern international style even succeeded in this ambition. The reception in the west of small signs, like the book *From Bauhaus to Our House*, or the books by Charles Jencks or Lyotard and many other post-modernists, proves that this dominance is challenged, and, in my opinion, mortally wounded. Modernism was sometimes excluded from political utopias, because of its own revolutionary attitude. But it had some traits in common with the utopian forms of political agitation. It wanted to change the world. It believed in the future. It disregarded the past. It allied itself with technology and science. It believed as well in the *tabula rasa* as in the superior creative artist. Le Corbusier is an excellent example of a modernist. The modernist avant-garde was not followed by the masses. Mass-culture, though it destroyed local and regional traditional culture in the masses, followed more *traditional models*.

Mass-culture remained narrative. It went on about love and death, beauty and power, cowboys and pirates, criminals and doctors, kings and jokers.

The attack of the modernists on culture had the profound effect of dividing the cultural establishment against itself, while alienating the masses. The last category had already, in the west, where they could choose, turned their backs on the cultural establishment. This was aggravated by the high demands that modernist culture made on its audience.

the post-modern era

The cultural establishment had a dream, which was to bring culture to the masses. I do not mean people wanting to control, but rather wanting to guide, to educate, to open up new vistas. Many of the best minds and most generous natures of this century dedicated their life to it, from Gorki to Malraux. As the post-modern era dawned these cultural missionaries had to cope with a double lack of interest for their work. Within the cultural establishment the genuine conviction of a culturally united front had been destroyed by the attacks of the modernists. If the cultural educator wanted to impart traditional culture he was criticized. If he wanted to introduce modernist culture, he had to cope with its severe limits, its distinctive tendency to make itself rare, so to say. On the other hand the masses were not showing much interest, because they already were provided for by the market and by technology. Many times they were better versed in that subject than their would-be educators. In this quandary the real result, at least in Western Europe after the social democratic revolution, the welfare state was the only, and last hope. The idealist of the establishment who wanted to share his cultural interests with the masses, walked into the open

and sympathetic arms of that great embracer: bureaucracy.

One cannot understand this post-modern quandary of the cultural educator or the cultural administrator without taking into account yet another factor: democracy. Though Europe claims to have invented democracy, it has certainly not guaranteed its invention a safe reception. But through all the convulsions of this century, and with the help of that very continuous democracy across the Atlantic, democracy as a political system has gained ground. Especially after the second world war in western Europe cultural policy had to take into account not its own wishes but the wishes of the masses, the citizens of democracy.

In these democratic societies it is difficult to go against the wishes of owners of cars and videorecorders and their heralds: the popular newspapers. And if one does, widespread disobedience may be the result. The problem is fundamental: one cannot educate the voters against their wishes. They have to be convinced. This feeling of democratic culture comes as a shock to those that come from traditional, from absolutist, from antidemocratic societies. I have many times, when receiving dissident intellectuals and artists from the east witnessed the culture shock caused by democratic culture. They invariably described the situation as decadent, anarchic, vulgar. To use just these words. Once in the west their pessimism about the future of culture only increased, as was the case with Gunther Kunert or Solshenitzin. They eye with suspicion cultural politicians in democratic societies, accusing them of wobbly knees or curved backbones in fending for their cultural mission. I think they are wrong. Post-modern, internationalized culture in a democratic society is probably there to stay, and the question is what cultural policy may mean in

that context. Here I turn to the last part of my reflections.

Further issues

It follows from my analysis that any cultural policy today would have to cope with the various legacies of this century. This legacy would involve such issues as the problem of modernism and its attack on continuity in culture. The problem of the role of the public sector in culture. The problem of the role of culture in democracy. And the role of cultural policy in an international system of cultural production and distribution. I have no special knowledge of the future, and here one enters completely the field of opinions. I will give you my opinions for what they are worth.

the first issue: the past

It is not an issue that at first sight would much interest the voters, and only partly interests the cultural establishment, it is the issue of discontinuity and continuity in culture. I feel here that attitudes are shifting. Twenty years ago it would have been natural to legitimize cultural policy with the tern cultural innovation. Indeed I think this is basic to the present meeting. Yet my government has just announced giving financial priority to the cultural heritage. What if cultural innovation today would be quite different and lie with safeguarding the past? What, if the most important task of policy towards the environment, which is safeguarding the existing diversity of species and ecosystems and energy resources, would also be the most important task for culture? What if the classical continuity of European culture, its diversity, its non-dogmatic tradition, the richness of its past became the first priority for cultural policy. The idea of sustainable development, put forward by the Brundtland commission could have relevance for cultural

policy: that this generation should not leave the world to the next generations with a reduced repertory of cultural models to learn and live from. Sustainable development would imply that cultural and natural boundaries should be set to economic development.

the second issue: closing the gap between high culture and mass-culture

It looks different in this light. If continuity of culture should be pursued as a priority by cultural policy, the distance with the culture of the masses would be narrowed down. The masses have not wholly turned away from culture. Actually they are better served by the electronic media than ever before. We saw the rather steady level of participation in more traditional cultural activities in the Netherlands. Nothing attracts cultural tourism so much as historical cities, sites, monuments, landmarks. The defence of churches in Bucharest against demolition has counterparts all over the world. The real problem there is the relative inattention of the cultural elite towards the true sentiments of the ordinary citizen.

third issue: public service

Cultural policy in a democratic society runs counter to the sentiments of most cultural leaders. As individuals they are meritocratic. As a group they are keen to distinguish themselves. As an interest group they are heavily dependent on the state. One should not underestimate the lack of sympathy of the normal museum staff for the normal visitor. Our societies, west or east do not have a long tradition of democracy. Even in my country, which would consider itself an old democracy but in which general suffrage only came in 1922, even this country still hears debates between staff and educators in for instance natural history museums.

A small example, may be added which always strikes me when in Paris. I suppose one of the great achievements of the socialist regime is the renovation of the Louvre and especially the improvement of its entrance. Chapeau. But before this innovation it was much more easy to enter the Louvre than today, as thousands of shivering visitors experience during long and wasted hours. Is waiting in queues improving cultural citizenship? Is it not disregard for the public?

fourth issue: centrality of the market

The failure of the cultural utopia and of the state planning of cultural life, and the efficiency of the market in providing what culture people would like to have, creates problems for cultural policy and its legitimacy. We tended to think of cultural policy as the true enclave of culture and to look at the market place as peripheral to cultural policy. Now the *inverse model* reigns or starts to reign. The market of culture is central, and cultural policy will have to come in, where the market fails. The idea of merit goods regains prominence. The present discussion about a cultural policy for the common market countries will have to achieve just this: to set out guidelines for correcting economic policy and the cultural market from cultural points of view. So *simple principles* like cultural continuity, cultural diversity (and why not quality) will have to be central to the formal extension of the mandate of the European Commission to cultural affairs. By a quirk of history the model of the European community, which started from a common market will be a compromise, made possible by the crisis of cultural policy.

fifth issue: subsidiarity

This issue is linked with the discussion about a common European cultural policy center in Brussels. Democracy is dead if it is only democracy at the centre. Democracy can only

live if democratic ways are introduced at many levels of society. Indeed I see most important cultural policy issues not presenting themselves at a central level, but at the local level. In my country as in other countries this is linked with the whole question of the role of the town in the future of European society.

Much of European culture is expressed in the shape of the town. Its ideals formed the shape of local public buildings. Culture is part of local memory. Today the town is, on the level of the behaviour of its citizens, severely eroded, by traffic, mobility, anonymity and so on. It would be in line with my general scepticism towards utopia, to warn about the difficulty of safeguarding the European idea of the town as a cultural space and as a structure for cultural policy. Yet I am pleasantly struck by the relative resistance of the European tradition here. Nowhere perhaps has this basic role of the town in cultural policy been more structurally guaranteed than in Germany. The *Kulturhoheit der Gemeinde* and the general principle of *subsidiarity* might be the best model to copy in designing a future European cultural policy at the fourth level of abstraction, that of Brussels.

sixth issue: inclusiveness

Few issues seem to be clearer than the issue of immigration. The creation of a European underclass is underway, as Dahrendorf recently reaffirmed. And he added that this was not so much an economic or a social problem, as a *moral problem*. Can we have democracy when certain rights and duties are not applied to the immigrant population? Does this not also apply to cultural policy, however reduced its role might be in the future? It should take into account the cultural situation and rights and duties of the immigrant population. It should also extend to them our basic values and forms of culture.

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seventh issue: cultural citizenship

This brings me to my last issue. It is clear that I see European democracy as a reality, for better or for worse, also in the cultural field. We have in this respect come to resemble the Americans. But somehow, the idea that citizenship of a democracy is not just a political thing, but a cultural program, a shared belief, does not seem to bind us together. We have a democracy without democratic ideals. These ideals, coming from the classical European traditions, and renovated by the antidespotic discussions of the 18th century, were central to the Jeffersonian inspiration of American democracy. When the founding fathers of the United States turned to Jefferson to phrase the Declaration of Independence he inserted into it not just a political program but a humanist ferment. His recognition of inalienable individual rights did not stop at life, and at liberty. Already his merit would have been enough. He had the genius to add a third right: *the pursuit of happiness*. This phrase is the basis of cultural democracy.

I once had the chance of citing that phrase in Washington. I am happy now to be able to say it in Moscow.

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Bibliografische gegevens

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