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# Arts & culture memberships as contemporary gatekeepers of cultural goods: selection and symbolic production practices

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## **Abstract**

Research on arts participation has shown convincingly how consumption patterns have developed from Bourdieusian class-based distinction (Bourdieu, 1984) to omnivorousness as a marker of boundaries (Peterson, 1992). As such, despite postmodern claims of individualisation, class or educational level-based forms of distinction have been continuously reforming and remain omnipresent in many Western societies.

The above appears however somewhat contradictory to other literature who mark this period by a 'decline of the snob' and a broadened landscape of cultural objects and practices. As a result, some scholars argue that a combination of these two phenomena is possible, and identified it as a paradox of democracy and distinction (Johnston & Bauman, 2007) It appears that, by using a framework of authenticity, it is possible to signal democratisation, while these discourses in turn can be deployed for distinctive practices.

This paper addresses the characteristics and selection practices of Dutch arts and culture memberships (*cultuur-abonnementen*). Some of these cultural organisations are exemplary of the paradox mentioned above. On the one hand, these memberships suggest a democratisation trend: economically accessible culture for everyone. On the other hand, their role as gatekeeper forces them to include specific, and thus exclude other forms of culture. Moreover, they attribute symbolic capital to the selected objects and practices.

Through analysis of each organisation and conduction of qualitative in-depth interviews, findings suggest that that when organisations emphasize their role as gatekeeper, (offering the consumer the best selection from the economy of plenty) the more distinctive their practices. When memberships accentuate economic advantages, they appear more egalitarian.

**Keywords:** arts & culture memberships, cultural gatekeeping, symbolic production, authenticity, paradox of openness and distinction,

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pre-face</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1. ACCESS ECONOMY AND THE CONTEMPORARY GATEKEEPER</b>	<b>8</b>
1.1. Access based consumption	8
1.2. The gatekeeper	11
1.2.1 The origin of the gatekeeper	11
1.2.2 Arts & culture memberships: contemporary gatekeepers of cultural products	12
1.3. Influencers of taste, or memberships' impact on symbolic capital	14
<b>2.TASTE</b>	<b>17</b>
2.1.1 Field-theory, Capital, Habitus	17
2.1.2 Cultural capital Class-Culture Homology	18
2.1.3 Class tastes and aesthetics	19
2.2. Critique on Distinction: the Cultural Omnivore	21
2.3. The paradox of openness and distinction	22
2.4. Authenticity	23
2.4.1 Origins of Western relationship with authenticity	23
2.4.2. Contemporary definition of the Authentic	24
2.5 Authenticity and contemporary distinction practices	25
2.5.1 Boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate culture	25
2.5.2. Aesthetic Disposition	26
2.5.3 Disinterestedness of producers	27
<b>3. METHODS</b>	<b>28</b>
3.1.1 Method	28
3.1.2 Sampling	29
3.1.3 Data reliability and validity	29
3.2 Process	30
3.3 Organisations	32
<b>4. RESULTS: ARTS &amp; CULTURE MEMBERSHIPS AS CONTEMPORARY GATEKEEPERS</b>	<b>35</b>
4.1 Chain of actions from product to consumer	35
<b>5. RESULTS: EMBODIMENT OF GATEKEEPER-ROLE</b>	<b>39</b>
5.1 Go forth and enrich thyself with culture!	39
5.2 Adventures and tension area's	41
5.2.1 Established products versus experimental products	41
5.2.2 Stakeholders and expectations from stakeholders	42
5.2.3 Emphasis on offer, or focus on consumer?	43
5.2.4 We are all your friends - Creating a community	44
<b>6. RESULTS: ARTS &amp; CULTURE MEMBERSHIPS IN SOCIETAL CONTEXT</b>	<b>47</b>
6.1 Medium, offer, framing and distinction practices	47
6.1.1 Traditional medium, young audiences	48
6.1.2. Traditional & new art-forms: artistic engaged audiences	53
6.1.3 Traditional & new art-forms, cultural products: all audiences	59
<b>Conclusion &amp; Discussion</b>	<b>63</b>
1. Discussion	63
2. Answering the research question	64
3. Limitations of the study	66
4. Suggestions for further research:	67
<b>References</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Appendix 1.0: Introduction of interview</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>Appendix 2.0: Interview Scheme</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>Appendix 3.0: Overview of respondents and additional information on each organisation</b>	<b>76</b>

## **Pre-face**

Before you commit to this thesis I would like to make a few comments on a lighter note. I especially like to use this section to thank some people. First of all I'm incredibly grateful for all the organisations that I could include as cases for my research: Cineville, Cinetree, Entrée, WeArePublic, Rotterdampas, DasMagazin, CJP, SubbaCultcha and Museumkaart. My thoughts go out particularly to all the respondents that I could interview: Emma, Thomas, Micha, Basje, Madelein, Suus, Walter, Mirjam and Andreea. It's incredibly nice that you made time to speak to a random student who was going to ask you everything about the (sometimes literal) ins and outs of your workplace. You gave me very interesting insights on practices of Dutch arts & culture memberships. Your anecdotes were not just valuable for me in the form of data for my thesis, but also as stories which I found genuinely very interesting. Marlise and Imre, I'm really happy that you took chocolate as form of payment for checking this thesis on spelling errors and Dungleish. And many thanks to Pauwke, your insightful comments were very helpful for keeping me at a sane distance from the research.

## Introduction

With the phrase “There is an economy of cultural goods, but it has a specific logic” (1984, p.1), Bourdieu starts his influential piece of literature called *Distinction*. According to him it is the responsibility of the sociologist to unravel these structures. And that is also what is attempted in *this* thesis: study the specific logic – or at least *a* specific logic – in a certain type of economy of a certain type of cultural good. This thesis researches “*How arts & culture memberships function as contemporary gatekeepers of cultural objects and how they differ as mediator of arts and culture*”. It looks at the manifestation and practices of nine Dutch-based arts & culture memberships (‘cultuur-abonnementen’), from a *sociological* and *interpretative* perspective. Through study of literature and semi-structured interviews with members of these organisations this thesis analyses how they can be positioned in the field of arts and culture, but also in a wider societal context. The specific choice to study arts & culture memberships might appear arbitrary, and a consequential and correct response to this introduction would therefore be to wonder why this topic peaked my interest. I will explain this by naming three arguments, that will also demonstrate the academic and societal relevance of this study. Additionally, they offer the general train-of-thought and outline of this study, while highlighting which sub-topics will need to be explored in order to answer the research question.

The first reason why arts & culture memberships form relevant objects of study, is because they are substantial agents in the field of arts and culture. The arts & culture memberships considered in this thesis are Museumkaart, CJP, Cineville, Cinetree, SubbaCultcha, DasMagazin, WeArePublic, Rotterdampas and Entree. These are all organisations that allow consumers free or discounted access to various (cultural) experiences in exchange for a monthly or yearly fee. Museumkaart (‘Museumcard’) for example, allows card-holders to enter over 400 museums for a yearly subscription fee of 55 euros. The organization has over 1,2 million subscribers, which is quite an impressive amount when taking into account that the Netherlands has about 17 millions inhabitants. But also the CJP (‘Culture Youngster Pas’), a service that allows teenagers to enjoy culture for a discounted price, almost counts a million card-holders. The wide-spread reach of these organisations makes them a worthy object of study in itself. Current academic research does not include any hands-on investigation on these organisations from the perspective of their mediator-role, despite being widely used in the Dutch landscape of arts and culture.

The second aspect that makes arts & culture memberships a worthy object of study, is that they embody a variety of different trending and relevant societal ideas. They form excellent objects to study from the perspective of the access-economy. Various scholars have noticed a shift from a property-focused economy of ownership towards an experience-based ‘access-economy’ (Rifkin, 2000; Bardy & Eckhardt, 2012). Access economy entails an economic model where *access* forms the core motive for consumption. Consequential effects that derive from the economy of access, are that people are paying for an *interaction with* instead of *ownership over* an object (Rifkin,

2000). It also puts an increasingly important role on the mediators, or so-called gatekeepers; the agents responsible for making the selection between the original offer and that what is to be presented to the consumer. These just-mentioned characteristics are embodied by arts & culture memberships. Their responsibility as gatekeepers or selectors makes them thus an interesting object of study. Although access as consumption mode has been present in the non-profit sector for quite a while, it is currently appearing more and more in the market-sector as well (Bardy & Eckhardt, 2012). For-profit examples that are often quoted as part of the access-economy are music-streaming service Spotify, media-services as Netflix or the taxi-on-demand-service Uber. This shift from non-profit to for-profit is a phenomenon that is also present at arts & culture memberships. Compared to Museumcard and CJP these memberships are perhaps still small-scale, but with contributors varying in amount from 3000 up to 22.000, they nevertheless play a substantial part in the arts and culture scene. A spotlight on the modus operandi of these organisations allows us to make some considerations on their practices as mediators. The first chapter of this thesis explores concepts like the access-economy and gatekeeperism, and sketches a theoretical outline to what extent arts & culture memberships could be considered as contemporary gatekeepers of cultural goods.

A third reason why arts & culture memberships form valuable objects of study is that these study objects allow us to take a sociological perspective on cultural valorisation and symbolic production practices. Consumption patterns seem to have developed from Bourdieusian class-based distinction (Bourdieu, 1984) to omnivorousness as a marker of boundaries (Peterson, 1992). These changes have been explained by a shift in dominant ideologies that signal a democratising attitude towards an inclusive culture. Critical consideration however shows that a broadened field of legitimate culture should not lead to the deduction that distinction practices no longer take place. Among other interpretations, some scholars argue that we can currently detect something entitled as 'paradox of openness and distinction'. This entails an attitude towards arts and culture that simultaneously signals democratic and distinctive discourses, usually justified through a construct of authenticity. These more abstract conceptions that focus on ideologies, values and opinions towards arts and culture, can be studied through memberships as well, by studying how these organisations position themselves as mediators of arts and culture. All of them are guided by ideas on cultural selection and validation of culture. Simultaneously they function as institutions with cultural authority, which affect the symbolic production in the field of arts and culture. The second chapter of this thesis explores theories on culture consumption and class-distinction through expressions of taste. It forms a theoretical framework that helps to determine how these organisations can be placed in a sociological perspective in the field of arts and culture.

The theoretical perspectives mentioned above will be further explored in the last part of this thesis. It contains an analysis of interviews with employees that each work at a different arts & culture membership. As these organisations have not yet been considered as 'cultural

gatekeepers' in current academic literature, this thesis offers instrumental information about processes of selection, policy-making and marketing at these organisations. It aims to answer how they function as contemporary gatekeepers of cultural goods. First it looks at these processes from a practical perspective, by providing a step-by-step introduction as to how selection takes place. Secondly it describes these developments from a more social perspective, by highlighting important values and tension fields that all enforce their influence on the manifestation of these organisations. These more subjective beliefs, also help to consider the way these organisations can be interpreted from a societal perspective. This is explored in the third part of the analysis.

This thesis aims to contribute to the current academic and societal body of knowledge on multiple levels. Firstly it will offer factual insights on arts & culture memberships and their practices. These organisations have a far reach over the country as a whole, but have not yet been studied from an academic perspective as such. This thesis includes informative texts on their manifestation. Secondly it aims to contribute to the currently trending debates on mediators, gatekeepers and the access-economy in the cultural scene. The digital revolution has had major consequences on the way we consume, produce and participate in arts and culture. The research zooms in on one of these agents as mediators, and looks at which values and tension areas they experience in their practices. Lastly, it offers insights on current symbolic production practices and possible modes of contemporary distinction. The manifestation of arts & culture memberships bring to light current ideologies on arts and culture, and their sometimes paradoxical structures. This thesis looks how they can be placed in the fields of arts and culture, but also considers what this could entail for the embeddedness of these organisations in a larger societal context.

## 1. ACCESS ECONOMY AND THE CONTEMPORARY GATEKEEPER

In order to study how arts & culture memberships function as contemporary gatekeeper, it is valuable to look at dominant theories and concepts that relate to this topic. This helps to create a framework of knowledge that permits the reader to place the studied topic into a socio-cultural context that reaches further than the presented cases. Arts & culture memberships are cultural organisations that function as mediator between art-object and consumer. In this manner, they embody a link which contributes to the production of culture (Becker, 1982). This chapter highlights relevant literature that applies to arts & culture memberships' role in the *production* of culture.

First it describes how a considerable amount of cultural offerings can be classified as part of the access-economy: an economic model where access to a plenitude of experiences forms the base for economic stimuli. Arts & culture memberships could be considered as materialisations of access-based economy. The second part discusses the crucial and influential role of the gatekeeper in this economic model. It highlights which implications the gatekeeper has on consumption practices in the cultural scene and how these agents fulfil a function in the production of cultural goods. Memberships play an important role as gatekeeper, as they make a selection of cultural products that they will consequently present in their offer. These gatekeeping practices and their consequences are explored in the last part of this chapter.

### 1.1. Access based consumption

Different observers have described how a considerable part of society is developing in an economic model that can be classified as the Access-Economy (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Rifkin, 2000). Access-based consumption can be defined as “transactions that may be market mediated in which no transfer of ownership takes place. The consumer is acquiring consumption time with the item, and, in market-mediated cases of access, is willing to pay a price premium for use of that object” (2012, Bardhi & Eckhardt, p. 881). Ownership has played a dominant and idealised role in Western consumer society, characterised by discourses that signal independence, freedom and security (Ronald, 2008; Snare, 1972). But various changes, most of them of technological nature, pushed these ideologies in another direction. Instead of ownership as “ultimate expression of consumer desire” (2012, Bardhi & Eckhardt, p.881) does access form an enough satisfactory motive for acts of consumption (Chen, 2009; Botsman & Rogers, 2010; Marx, 2011). Present-day examples that illustrate this argument are ubiquitous: there is Netflix, AirBnB, Youtube, Spotify, Über, etcetera. The movement from ‘ownership to access’ has mostly been declared by a rapid expansion of technological growth such as the birth of internet, and a consequential shift in the focus of capitalist marketplaces where *experiences* rather than materialities form the crux of exchange (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Rifkin, 2000; Rogers & Botsman, 2010).

Access differs from property mainly because, firstly, the nature of the object-self relationship (2012, Bardhi & Eckhardt). *Property* ensures a long-term interaction with an object.



*Access* is characterised by ‘temporary and circumstantial’ consumption. Secondly, access also differs from property because the rules that govern and regulate the relationship between object and the self are distinct to those of ownership. The owner has the right (and responsibility) to do with the object as he or she pleases. It can be loaned, sold, used whenever pleased, or destroyed. A consumer does not have these rights when merely having access (Ibid.)

Access-based-consumption is also not to be confused with the currently still omnipresent and celebrated concept of ‘Sharing Economy’ (Gold, 2004; Sachs, 2011). The latter entails the idea that sharing can function as a ‘modality of economic production’ (Benkler, 2004). It emerged when the digital revolution, and then mostly the internet, offered opportunities for people to share instead of own. Although it is undeniable that the birth of the internet has contributed to an accumulation of sharable goods, the concept of ‘sharing economy’ for this phenomenon has in the meantime received quite some criticism. Moscow (2004) describes how in the past years new technological features have been welcomed with utopian expectations of greater access, increased choices and broad political participation. This is sensible when we take into account dominant Western ideologies that signal beliefs of democracy and openness (Peterson, 1992). Critical consideration however shows us that new media are usually within a short period of time taken over by financially prosperous institutions and companies (Moscow, 2004). They are the ones who determine the social structure, hierarchy and corresponding (mis-)distribution of power within these media (Ibid). ‘Sharing economy’ could therefore be considered as a label that flows from a deterministic attitude towards technology. Especially when we look at practical examples of the sharing economy, multiple authors argue that the concept should be looked at more critically (Belk, 2014; Hamari, Sjöklint, Ukkonen, 2015; Lamberton & Rose, 2012; Surajandan 2013). Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) describe this issue in a prominent article in the Harvard Business Review which is entitled “the Sharing Economy is not about Sharing at all” (2015). They write that the fundamental characteristics of the current consumption system are not based on a wish to share, but are mostly based on a need for wanting to have access as much as possible, as fast as possible:

When “sharing” is market-mediated — when a company is an intermediary between consumers who don’t know each other — it is no longer sharing at all. Rather, consumers are paying to access someone else’s goods or services for a particular period of time. It is an economic exchange, and consumers are after *utilitarian*, rather than *social*, value.

(section Sharing is a Form, para. 2).

Hence, although the internet has provided for more opportunities to share, the label of ‘sharing economy’ does not cover the crucial essences of a considerable part of current consumption practices.

One of the first authors who did manage to describe fundamental characteristics and implications of the access-economy quite successfully is Rifkin (2000). He notes how “markets are making way for networks, and ownership is steadily being replaced by access” (p.4). According to him is the direct market exchange of property between sellers (companies) and buyers (consumers), slowly being rejected by society. This does not mean that property is disappearing: property continues to exist, but is less likely to be exchanged in the market-place. “Instead, suppliers hold on to property in the new economy and lease, rent or charge an admission fee, subscription or membership dues for its short-term use.” (p.4). Examples of the access-economy in the market-mediated sphere usually contain a business model with a strong hierarchy. The most powerful agents are responsible for regulating and enabling the exchange. This can be because they are rightful owners of the offered experience, but this does not have to be the case (Spotify, Uber, AirBnB). Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) remark that historically, it is not new that consumers pay for access instead of ownership. It is however mostly in the non-profit or government-regulated systems, that we can see these examples of access. One could think of the library, or the public transport system. An aspect which differs from previous times is that these models are currently shifting to the for-profit market-mediated economy.

The second important phenomena that Rifkin (2000) observes is a shift in the market from a focus on ownership towards an economy of cultural experience and a commodification of culture. “We are making a long-term shift from industrial production to cultural production. More and more cutting-edge commerce in the future will involve the market of a vast array of cultural experiences rather than just traditional industrial based goods and services” (p.7). This change from traditional forms of labour into the experience economy is noted by multiple scholars (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Sundbo & Darmer, 2008). Developments in technology drives capitalist manufacturers to replace agricultural and white-collar practices by ever becoming cheaper technological alternatives (Rifkin, 2000). This implies a consequent shift towards a focus on cultural production (Florida, 2004). Hence, the access-economy contributes to this manifestation of an experience economy. After all, when one does not buy an object, but buys *access* to an object, this person buys into an experience of an interaction with that object. Commodification of culture is already quite present: “The old giant of the Industrial Age - Exxon, General Motors, USX, and Sears - are giving way to the new giant of cultural capitalism - Viacom, Time Warner, Disney, Sony Seagram, Microsoft, etc” (Rifkin, 2000, p.8).

The access-economy, which ‘feeds’ on consumption of experiences, has already had incredible consequences for consumption practices of music, film and news (Curtin, Holt & Sanson, 2014; Tryon, 2013). Not only does ‘access’ impose new forms of consumption, it also has its effect on culture consumption in general. Netflix has made it for example less likely for us to pay a visit to the cinema (Tryon, 2013). Possibly the most important implication that flows from the access economy is the sense of more choice, while it simultaneously acts as limitation (Rifkin,

2000; Tryon, 2013). To illustrate this, one could think of the current Hollywood-scene: merely six conglomerates take in more than 85 per cent of the net-revenue of the media practices. Agency in choosing products that cater to one's taste, is therefore complicated in the economy of access. From an economical perspective, consumers have more power and choice to select their preferences. On the other hand it are these organisations who make a first selection in the offered products. They function as so called gatekeepers.

## 1.2. The gatekeeper

The above section shows how a considerable part of society is currently structured in such a way that it offers a great deal of access to the consumer. Nevertheless the model of the access-economy also implies the existence of some sort of mediator or gatekeeper. This section first defines the concept of gatekeeperism and secondly how it can be applied as metaphor in the contemporary field of cultural production.

### 1.2.1 The origin of the gatekeeper

The concept of gatekeepers originates from journalism studies and is in all likelihood most notably first described by White (1950) in his article called "The 'Gatekeeper': A case study in the selection of news" in *Journalism Quarterly*. Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch describe that White's "work tackled the intuitively obvious question of how news organisations solve the problem of so much information and so little space" (2009, p.75). As opposed to previous scholars, White (1950) writes about the agency of the journalist (instead of the channel) and the thereby undeniable bias that flows as a consequence from the selection processes that are structured by personal conviction. The journalist is hereby compared to a historic figure standing near the gates of a city, making a selection of who can enter and who cannot. Only in this instance the 'aspirant townsmen' are embodied by continuous streams of information.

Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch (2007) also describe Warren Breed as another influential scholar. In the article 'Social control in the newsroom' Breed brings to light that selection processes may not always be controlled by journalists, but can also be enforced by supervisors or other influential stakeholders. Later research in gatekeepers' studies argues against this slightly top-down conception of news-production. Gans (1979) argues that instead of some elitist force, imposing their ideals on society "(gatekeepers) view nation and society through its own set of values and with its own conception of the good social order" (1979, as cited in Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2007, p.76). Hence, critical study of gatekeepers can therefore lay bare dominant ideologies and practices that would otherwise be dismissed as natural.

With the arrival of the internet, the traditional structure of gatekeepers has experienced major revisions. The world wide web could always cater to some kind of niche, is not geographically dependent and functions as a fluid, ever-changing medium. Technological

developments have therefore caused gatekeeper studies to receive increased attention (Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2007). As a consequence this entailed that the concept of gatekeeper not only became a popular metaphor for the news, but also for other objects. Netflix, Spotify and Youtube are all software that offer an overwhelming amount of choice. Research shows that traditional authorities that decided on the valorisation of objects, are no longer necessarily considered legitimate, and the consumer has more choice and agency on which items to consume (Janssen & Verboord, 2011). Because of these alterations, it has even been predicted that the gatekeeper might 'lose its job' (Singer, 2001). Nevertheless, as the example of the Hollywood-conglomerates has hopefully shown: the changing structure of current consumption practices does not imply that the gatekeeper does not fulfil any role in contemporary (culture) consumption practices. There are still mediators, whether they are algorithms or agents, that decide in selecting and excluding other objects, be it news, music or cultural venues.

### 1.2.2 Arts & culture memberships: contemporary gatekeepers of cultural products

Gatekeeping-practices in arts and culture have also changed enormously since the digital revolution, as the birth of the internet has had major implications for arts and culture consumption. Direct peer-to-peer communication and the emergence of the prosumer (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010) has led to an abundance of cultural products as consequence. This enhances the importance of gatekeepers, as they take up responsibility for making a selection between various products. Janssen and Verboord (2015) give the following definition of the cultural gatekeeper:

“The term ‘gatekeeping’ has been applied when the focus is on judgments whether to admit persons or works into a cultural field; it has to do with accepting or rejecting works or their creators and the consequences of these choices for subsequent works and creators. Driving forces behind gatekeepers’ decisions range from political and moral concerns, commercial interests, to ‘purely’ aesthetic motives. In most cases, they consist of a mixture of these. (p.4)”

The arts & culture memberships that form the cases of this study all allow consumers free or discounted access to various (cultural) experiences in exchange for a monthly or yearly fee. When looking at the above description it can be concluded that arts & culture memberships function as gatekeepers. The memberships considered in this thesis all play a role in admitting persons, works and even institutions into the cultural field. Their choices also have a considerate consequence for the further life of that object, whether it is a film, a theater-play or a museum. By selecting and sometimes highlighting certain products, they present a more moderated landscape of choice to the consumer, than when it would have been untouched by these organisations. The first section of this text attempts to demonstrate how arts & culture memberships function as cultural gatekeeper

and which nuances can be appointed to the different responsibilities within their practices. The second part of this text describes which kind of implications their manifestation has, by highlighting their effect on the symbolic production of a cultural product.

Janssen and Verboord (2015) observe that in the past years, gatekeepers have taken on other forms than the rather traditional ones. Consumers seem to move away from institutional gatekeepers and experts, partly because of new media technologies, and partly because of bigger societal changes. Democratisation of various minorities, growth of omnivore taste-patterns and the increased focus on the individual “made people less prone to subscribe to traditional cultural hierarchies, collective taste patterns and the judgments of cultural experts, but, instead, increasingly require them to choose individually and to show individual authenticity in their expression of taste” (Janssen & Verboord, 2015, p.15). This has however a somewhat contradictory feel, if we take into account the economy of access. In the access-economy people have more agency *within* the body of their memberships, but simultaneously trust another mediator to make a selection for them. Arts & culture memberships play an interesting part in this debate. On one side they play a pivotal role through their active selecting and excluding practices. On the other side, one could question their cultural authority as people tend to reject very institutionalised organisations. The ways in which arts & culture memberships cope with this paradox, is explored in the analysis of this research.

Janssen and Verboord (2015) criticize how cultural authorities get labeled very easily as a gatekeeper (or “tastemaker”, ‘surrogate consumers’, ‘reputational entrepreneurs’, or even ‘co-producers’ of the work of art.) (p.3)’. In reality there are actually quite different practices at hand with a lot of these mediators, that require other designations. The authors subdivide them in different characteristics, of whom all act as a different ‘chain’ in the process of cultural production: Co-creators/editors, Connectors/networkers, Salesmen/Marketeers, Distributors, Evaluators/ Meaning-makers and Censors. It appears that every function caters to one or more memberships. This section will shortly highlight what every role entails, the analysis of this thesis will take a more thorough look on these characteristic and on how they are fulfilled by the various organisations.

Firstly, it appears that most of the memberships considered in this thesis also function as marketeer as they are active in selling the cultural product by ‘establishing contact with the audience’ with the concerned product (p.6). In particular when they promote particular cultural events by highlighting them through their personal media channels such as blogs, newsletters or other social media. Secondly, some memberships also bear the role of ‘connector’ or ‘networker’, as they “scout for talent via their networks” (p.5). They function as mediator between the product and establish contact between other parties or organisations. This is especially the case when memberships take on a more editorial role in the selecting processes. Memberships that are active when a certain product is still in production, sometimes take responsibility for linking these with other organisations or artists. In this sense they also take on the third role that is identified by

Jansen and Verboord (2015): co-creators. This is because they are partly responsible for the outcome of the end-product. Arts & culture memberships can also function as the fourth role; distributor. This is when they are in charge of circulating cultural products. One of the memberships considered in this research is an online service that grants access to five different films every week. This organisation gets in contact with the distribution companies of these films and takes responsibility for delivering the experience of watching these films themselves. This gives this membership also a role of distributor, because it takes responsibility for distribution of the products. A few of the memberships also engage in evaluation practices. Although the act of selecting a product, and presenting it in a memberships' offer works to a certain extent as a 'seal of approval', some memberships take the fifth role: 'evaluator, classifier or meaning maker' quite a bit further. Some of them present reviews and evaluations on cultural experiences in order to give guidance to the audience. This is strengthened when arts & culture memberships provide information or reviews from channels of which they are themselves responsible. The last function that Janssen & Verboord (2015) discuss is the role of "censoring, protecting and supporting" (p. 8) especially from a policy-making perspective. The only membership that plays a considerate role in these discussions is CJP, who is currently often regarded as spokesperson for children's culture education in the political field. The other memberships did not appear to have a direct influence as mediator in the Dutch political field as such.

The previous section shows that practices of the gatekeeper can be defined by various nuances. Because these organisations develop into forms that cater to current societal needs and practices, sometimes organically and sometimes mechanically, they cannot be considered as a classical gatekeeper that merely functions as "selector". For this reason this thesis approaches arts & culture memberships as 'contemporary gatekeepers', with various nuances and differences in responsibilities, but all offering a selection derived from the multitude of cultural objects to the consumer.

### 1.3. Influencers of taste, or memberships' impact on symbolic capital

Arts & culture memberships fulfil a role as contemporary gatekeeper of cultural goods, but what do their practices mean for the field of cultural production? This section explores the concept of symbolic production, and how memberships have an impact on this element.

This thesis presupposes that value of cultural objects in the cultural field is *created*, and is not something that is inherently present within the cultural object itself. This entails that a work of art is not considered worthy because of an intrinsic power that is captivated in its materiality. A work of art is considered worthy because various agents and institutions who have the authoritative power to have an influence on the status of the work considered that the artwork holds some kind of valuable power. Its 'symbolic value' is attributed by actors from an external sphere, it does not derive from the artwork itself. This idea is similar to what Bourdieu (1996) has

entitled *Symbolic Production in the field of culture*. It entails that “The producer of a the *value of the work of art* is not the artist but the field of production as a universe of belief which produces the value of the work of art as a fetish by producing the belief in the creative power of the artist” (p. 229). This idea of the art-world as an interconnected system that emanates from ‘man-made’ rules and structures is according to Bourdieu considered similar to a game. He entitles this the ‘illusio’: “The collective belief in the game (illusio) and in the sacred value of its stakes is simultaneously the precondition and the product of the very functioning of the game; it is fundamental to the power of consecration, permitting consecrated artists to constitute certain products, by the miracle of their signature (or brand name), as sacred objects” (1996, p.230). This concept of symbolic production and the illusio lays bare a relevant note that needs to be discussed before we can proceed to the next chapter. Similar as to what Becker (1984) argues, it recognises that arts and culture is not produced by the artist or initiator, but that multiple agents are responsible. This makes arts & culture memberships relevant objects of study as they function as actors that have a role in structuring production of culture such as art. There are four important realisations that flow from this perspective.

A first important idea is that these organisations play a role in cultural legitimation. Although Jansen and Verboord (2015) emphasise that cultural legitimation always takes place in a cultural environment that is bigger than just the manifestation of a single object, it cannot be denied that arts & culture memberships play a role in the legitimation of the access-economy. Their mere existence and success support the idea of paying a monthly or yearly price in order to access multiple cultural or artistic experiences. This thesis does not argue that they are the sole initiators who establish this notion; quite the contrary. But, just as every agent or actor in the field of cultural production, arts & culture memberships signal certain standards and values over others, which in their turn echo into the cultural sphere. In this manner they play a role in legitimatising certain practices and phenomena. Secondly, not just the *concept* of arts & culture memberships, but also their selecting practices enforce a certain influence in the cultural field. Their role as cultural authority will influence the consecration and symbolic value of certain objects over others. Choosing to take in very unusual or, on the opposite, only very traditional forms of culture in a memberships’ offer indicates their consideration of what accounts as culture. A third way they influence symbolic production is quite straightforward, as their marketing practices have an impact on “cultural tastes, consumer behaviour and commercial success” (p.12). Lastly, it is important to take into account that arts & culture memberships always act within the “institutional context of cultural evaluation” (p.8) Memberships do not only influence the reputation of the products that they offer, but also influence their own symbolic production by their practices. Their selection, and the way they frame this selection, influences the symbolic production as it signifies characteristics on the identity of the organisation.

The above section lays bare the very social and subjective nature of arts and culture. Value of art-objects is not a given, but is *constructed*. Among other things, this entails that the same cultural object might be very pleasing for certain people but very unattractive for others. People will choose to pay a submission-fee for a certain memberships because they expect its identity and offer will cater to their taste. When looking at these considerations from a social perspective it appears however that taste is not a neutral concept but fulfils various functions in society. The next chapter will explore these ideas, and describe how they can be related to the phenomena of arts & culture memberships.



## 2.TASTE

The first chapter of this thesis has its main focus on the production of culture and how arts & culture memberships can be considered as contemporary gatekeepers of cultural objects. Among other things, it described how the position of arts & culture memberships in the access-economy holds a democratic promise of economically accessible culture for everyone. Nevertheless, these aspects say little about symbolic power relations or class inequality that could be at hand in the social processes that stem from access-economy and memberships. As this research considers arts & culture memberships from a sociological perspective, this chapter explores possible differences between these organisations in their position as mediator while considering theories on class-differences and taste.

The first part of this section describes the so-called 'theory of Distinction' (Bourdieu, 1984). Bourdieu argued that the mere reason that elites consume highbrow cultural objects is because "taste functions as markers of class" (p.2). An introduction to his ideas creates a base of several fundamental theoretical concepts helping in interpreting arts & culture memberships from a sociological perspective in a later stage of this research. Yet, when applying Bourdieu's theories in current societal issues, some disclaimers on his work should be made. The second and third part of this chapter presents a critique on Bourdieu's highbrow/lowbrow dichotomy, and introduces an alternative to classic distinction practices. These new, contemporary modes of distinction do not longer seem to be created by the arbitrary valorisation of 'high' or 'low' culture. Instead, they partly seem to be replaced by a new system of critique that separates "legitimate" from "illegitimate" culture. The construct of authenticity as bricolage, which is (among others) described by Aupers, Houtman and Roeland (2010), seems to play a fundamental role as 'frame' which allows for these complex and contradictory practices of distinction.

### 2.1.1 Field-theory, Capital, Habitus

Bourdieu approaches the world through an analytic framework that subdivides the social world in different fields. "In analytic terms, a field may be defined as a network, or a configuration of objective relations between positions" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 97). 'Field-theory' entails a study of these relations, as Bourdieu argues that 'the real' is understood through relations. It aids in understanding relationships between positions but also can lay bare underlying conditions and power relations which structure everyday affairs in society.

Examples of different fields are endless, but to name some concrete examples one can think of a 'religious field', 'economic field' or the 'artistic field'. Each of them follows a logic that is "specific and irreducible to those that regulate other fields" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.97). Hence, certain values, practices or structures that characterise a certain field, do not hold that same logic in another field. Bourdieu illustrates this by explaining that the impersonal "business is business"-approach is common in the economic field, while the artistic field is characterised by

“rejecting or reversing the law of material profit” (p.98). He calls this the autonomous logic of a field.

Differences of social status are produced and reproduced within fields. Certain agents enjoy empowered positions opposed to others, as they have ‘stakes’ in favour of the specific logic of a field. Bourdieu defines these stakes as capital; they can more-or-less be understood as competences or capacity. Examples of different forms of capital are ‘economic-’, ‘cultural-’ or ‘social capital’. Having more capital leads to more power. Agents will struggle to better their position by accumulating as well as interchanging their capital and thus their position. Some forms of capital are valid and efficacious in practically all fields (‘trump cards’). Others forms of capital are only valuable in a certain field, as the hierarchy of different species of capital can vary between fields. Bourdieu argues that most class struggle or social struggle is an attempt to acquire more *economic* or *symbolic* capital. Symbolic capital can be described as recognition (and misrecognition) of an agent’s capital. It is similar to the notion of ‘prestige’.

The above description of class-struggle and interchanging of capital, might raise the question on how capital primarily is divided between agents. According to Bourdieu this is mostly decided by a person’s habitus. A habitus is “a general, transposable disposition which carries out a systematic, universal application - beyond the limits of what has been directly learnt - the necessity inherent in the learning conditions” (p.17). It could be considered as the sense of ones’ natural surroundings. The habitus is most of the time in harmony with the dispositions of the field. It even appears so natural, that it functions as ‘doxa’: something that is taken for granted. It is when somebody is taken out of their habitus (eg. a ballet-dancer at a rugby match or the other way around) that they might feel uncomfortable or/and highly conscious of their own habitus.

### 2.1.2 Cultural capital Class-Culture Homology

Bourdieu argues that of all capitals, cultural capital and economic capital are most valid and efficacious within most fields. When compared to previous scholars, a new mindset towards social inequality stemmed from Bourdieu’s approach. Instead of viewing unequal distribution of economic resources as sole factor that emanates differences in class, the author argues that the habits (cultural capital), acquired by the home and the school play an inevitable part in creating social difference. He thereby adds a symbolic dimension to class differences.

Cultural capital is constituted in three different forms. Firstly there is the “embodied form”, which is cultural capital acquired and embodied by an agent. This form cannot be “seperated” from the agent. A viticulturist knows a lot about good wines. This knowledge is something that cannot be taken away from him, it is ‘embodied’. A second form of cultural capital is manifested in objects (objectified) that embody this concept. They function as form of cultural capital. An example of this would be a bottle of wine that is considered to hold some kind of prestigious status. The last form of cultural capital that Bourdieu distinguishes is “institutionalised” cultural capital. This is when

liable skills of embodied cultural capital are transferred to an objective value through the education system. If the viticulturist obtained a diploma from an official system of formal education for his skills for example. It will better his position to work at a wine-tasting as oppose to somebody who might know just as much (or even more) but does not have these official credentials.

The notion that cultural capital is an important factors for creating unequal relationships of power in society is called the class-culture homology. The class-culture homology entails that the dominant people, who are in power, have legitimated a certain way of cultural practices, that are difficult to perform by lower classes. The latter have not enjoyed a habitus similar to the bourgeoisie and can therefore not legitimate the cultural practices of the bourgeoisie. In this way, *expressions of taste* have a function in *legitimizing social differences*. Bourgeoisie express, consume and embody a certain preference in art and cultural consumption, and these expressions allow them to distinguish themselves from lower classes: “Taste functions as markers of ‘class’” (p. 2).

### 2.1.3 Class tastes and aesthetics

The manner in which cultural capital manifests itself in daily practices, can be explained through Bourdieu’s notion of class tastes and aesthetics. Bourdieu divides French civilisation in three classes: the bourgeoisie, the petit-bourgeoisie and the working-class. In his work each class has corresponding preferences (and expressions) of taste.

The bourgeois classes, those who have acquired a lot of cultural capital, will prefer expressions of taste that cater to the ‘dominant’ aesthetic. For arts this could be interpreted as something that is commonly referred to as highbrow culture, but, the dominant aesthetic is present in any form of culture. It is a specific type of taste, which can be depicted in every form of cultural expression, ranging from sports and food to arts. There is no pre-set list of objects or practices that account for the dominant aesthetic, it is fluctuant and dependent upon temporally-defined conventions. It can simultaneously be challenged and confirmed by its users as ‘Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier’ (p.6); the elite does not only prefer the dominant aesthetic, but also determines the dominant aesthetic, while it determines them as well. Bourdieu states that it is defined by a few similarities because the dominant aesthetic is constituted by our understanding of ‘good’ culture. The most prominent characteristic of dominant culture is the “ethos of elective distance from the necessities of the natural and social world” (p.5). It rejects a practical approach towards cultural expressions and prefers *form over function*. The love for abstract works as oppose to representative works for example. But, also in everyday practices form is appreciated over function, such as desiring light dinners instead of plates of food that are heavy on the stomach. According to Bourdieu “nothing is more distinctive, more distinguished, than the capacity to confer aesthetic status on objects that are banal or even ‘common’ (p.5). Hence, treating every day or

mundane objects for their form rather than their function is considered to be one of the ultimate expressions of the dominant aesthetic.

Bourdieu signals two types of aesthetic preferences for the petit-bourgeoisie. There is the declining petit-bourgeoisie, and the new 'upcoming' petit-bourgeoisie. The declining petit-bourgeoisie highly values 'traditional' norms and values: 'Hard work and no frivolous nonsense'. They believe that this conviction has brought them to where they stand now. Their artistic preferences are characterised by 'classic' geniuses. Modern or abstract works do not appeal to their taste. The new petit bourgeois is mainly successful because of good and successful education. Their future is full of possibilities. They believe that success equals *knowledge* about cultural capital (because of their education they have relatively much cultural capital). The upcoming petit bourgeois is therefore very fond of the new artists and art-forms such as abstract art, cinema and photography. But, differently from the bourgeoisie who deploy a carefree distance from necessity, the petit-bourgeoisie has something convulsive. They try to justify their position in the social order, by displaying their knowledge on cultural capital as much as possible. To illustrate this, one could think of how the bourgeoisie would have a real painting of a new upcoming artist, but the petit-bourgeoisie has a copy of this work. It shows his or her knowledge about arts and culture.

The working class researched in Bourdieu's work show a preference for what Bourdieu entitles 'the popular aesthetic'. The popular aesthetic forms a subordinate reaction to the dominant aesthetic, and could therefore be classified as a 'taste *for* necessity'. One could imagine how somebody who performs 'practical' hands-on labor experiences a different habitus than the elite (one of limited prospects and few economic capital). These circumstances ask for a practical approach to life, such as 'getting food on the table'. According to Bourdieu this attitude echoes on in one's cultural appreciation: "Working-class people expect every image to explicitly perform a function, if only that of a sign, and their judgements make reference, often explicitly to the norms of morality or agreeableness" (p.5). According to the popular aesthetic, objects or practices should be practical, have a function or contain a clear reference; otherwise they are not considered sensible. Bourdieu's quote also demonstrates that this aesthetic is characterised by applying the schemes of the ethos. It entails that working-classes would prefer a portrait of a person, or a landscape, over abstract art as it represents something. Additionally, a beautiful person or landscape is appreciated even more as it is agreeable to look at. The 'commonness' of these works could be considered banal or kitsch by higher classes. Or, as described by Bourdieu: "Intellectuals could be said to believe in the representation more than in the things represented, whereas the people chiefly expect representations and the conventions which govern them to allow them to believe 'naively' in the things represented" (p.5).

The act of distinguishing oneself from lower classes by expressing certain cultural standards is what Bourdieu calls 'Distinction'. Acts of distinction do not always happen very

deliberately, as the cultural practices are derived from the habitus (which in turn is internalised, and thus does not function on a very conscious level). An agent is therefore not constantly aware of his distinctive position all the time, to him it feels natural. It even feels so instinctive, that Bourdieu argues that bourgeoisie are convinced that their cultural capital is something innate, while it is in fact learnt. The cultural habits and dispositions that the higher classes possess are the effect of their upbringing and education. "Consumption is, [...] a stage in a process of communication, that is an act of deciphering, decoding, which presupposes practical or explicit mastery of a cipher or code. In a sense, one can say that the *capacity to see* (voir) is a *function of knowledge* (savoir)" (p. 2). The 'capacity to see' is a process of learning to distinguish between 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' culture.

Bourdieu argues that distinction is a form of symbolic violence. He argues that the only reason that the higher classes prefer high culture and the dominant aesthetic is to distinguish themselves from lower classes. Bourgeois act as if their attitude of distance from necessity is a gift from nature, while, as discussed before, it is of course learnt. Displaying a lot of cultural capital such as preferring high culture over lowbrow culture, is presented as a natural attitude, but is actually an active investment for prestige. It is a subtle and social process of exchanging cultural capital for symbolic capital.

## 2.2. Critique on Distinction: the Cultural Omnivore

During the course of almost twenty-five years, some important critiques on Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital have been formed. Peterson (1992) argues that the "elite-to-mass hierarchy, which may once have been an accurate depiction of how the class hierarchy was seen, at least from the top, does not now fit patterns of leisure time activities and media consumption in the United States" (p.244). He describes a certain part of upper occupational groups that enjoyed both high as well as popular culture, which he entitled 'Cultural Omnivores'. Instead of a distinction between classes through expressions of high-brow versus low-brow taste, Peterson describes a dichotomy between the cultural *omnivore* and cultural *univore*. Where elites demonstrate a diverse affection for various kinds of music (highbrow and lowbrow), taste-preferences of lower classes show a more univore appreciation for one certain type of non-elite music-form. The idea of a discriminating and excluding elite and democratic and 'anything-goes' lower social class, is therefore not correct. Peterson wonders if the United States always would have shown these different demographics as opposed to Bourdieu's seventies France, or if there might be another explanation at hand. He suggests that it is possible that 'the omnivore' has only emerged recently. He concludes that in order to see if this is the case, it would be necessary to see if the proportion of omnivores to elitists grow each year. This has been researched, and it appears that this is not the case. Instead "differences in socialization between generations, offer the best explanation for the divergence in cultural participation" (Van Eijck & Knulst, 2005, p. 513).

As a result of this decline between barriers of 'high' and 'popular', some authors have argued for a decline in snobbism (Brooks, 2000; Peterson, 1992; Van Eijck & Knulst, 2005). In his work *Bobos in paradise*, Brooks describes how a certain part of the current elite is bourgeois and bohemian (bobo) at the same time. This results in a class that is highly educated, loathes capitalistic ethos characterised by the eighties 'yuppies'-movement and is highly conscious of circumstances of lower classes. He argues that these elitist classes greatly value 'a decline in the legitimacy of snobbism' and hold an inclusive ethos. Hence, we can see a decline in snobbism, because contemporary cultural elites show a preference for high as well as popular culture. It is not longer 'fashionable' to distinguish oneself by only preferring highbrow culture. Nevertheless, deducing from this trend that distinction-practices therefore become less relevant would be wrong. Weakening of the highbrow/lowbrow dichotomy, does not prevent consecration of certain arts objects because those with cultural power have decided on its legitimacy. It also doesn't prevent certain dispositions that are deployed in order to maintain and reinforce social status inequalities. The next section will focus on these practices, and describe how contemporary forms of distinction might still be practiced.

### 2.3. The paradox of openness and distinction

Omnivore theory suggests a democratisation of legitimate culture practices, but, as the previous section points out, this does not necessarily have to be the case. Instead, various authors argue that distinction practices appear *within* genres and practices. A study on this topic that is of relevance for this thesis is performed by Schor, Fitzmaurice, Carfagna, and Attwood-Charles (2015) and describe something that they entitle as 'The paradox of openness and distinction'. Their research aims its focus on four case studies that could all be classified as developments in the sharing economy (not access-economy). The article considers a time bank, a food swap, a makers-space and an open-access education site that all profiled themselves as open and democratic spaces. The absence of aims for capitalistic profit and the novelty of the venues was supposed to challenge the manifestation of traditional acts of distinction. But, "all four sites embrace and prominently articulate an ethic of accessibility, openness, and equal opportunity for all [...] Yet, in each case, we found evidence of distinguishing practices" (p.77-78). In line with Fitzmaurice et al, (2015) and Johnston and Baumann (2007) this thesis argues that a considerable part of contemporary 'legitimate' culture receives a consecrated status when it embodies an 'inclusionary ideology of democratic consumption' on the one hand, but on the other an 'exclusionary ideology of taste and distinction' (p.165). In other words, cultural objects that are considered 'good' by a specific part of the cultural elite appears to be democratic, but also holds distinctive convictions. During the time that Bourdieu wrote his work, a paradox of openness and distinction could not be possible, as the decisive cultural boundary between high-low culture, equalled "legitimate-illegitimate" culture. Currently it appears that the highbrow-lowbrow dichotomy

is not longer very relevant, but that a construct of authenticity can be deployed for distinctive practices. Hence, some cultural objects still receive an consecrated status because those with cultural authority have decided on their legitimacy, but it instead of validating it as 'high class' the framework of authenticity allows for contemporary distinction.

## 2.4. Authenticity

The above section illustrates that the dichotomy between highbrow and lowbrow art forms are perhaps not very relevant anymore. But, it does not prevent acts of legitimisation: "culture that has been endorsed or consecrated by institutions or individuals with cultural authority (universities, critics, etc.) and culture that is lacking such approval, or that is disapproved of by those with cultural authority" (Johnston & Baumann, 2007, p. 197). It appears that 'authenticity' is deployed instead as framework. This section gives the definition of authenticity that will be deployed in this thesis. The use of authenticity as indicator for virtuousness is omnipresent Western society. This relation with the concept can complicate the attempt to break down its 'naturalness'. Because of its dominant position it is seen as universal or even instinctive. The text therefore first shortly highlights Western-European culture relation with authenticity, and then a currently dominant mode of interpretation of the concept.

### 2.4.1 Origins of Western relationship with authenticity

The alleged Western relation with authenticity is perhaps first notably researched by Taylor (1991). In *The Ethics of Authenticity*, he describes how the concept forms an answer to fear of "the loss of meaning, fading of moral horizons, eclipse of ends and loss of freedom" (p.10). It draws back on a belief that formed in the period of Romanticism, where Rousseau is considered to be the most crucial author that gave birth to these ideas. During the Romantic movement the concept of morality as outside voice ('god') turned towards a morality within. An idea of the 'moral compass' was formed, embodied as a natural voice or feeling that emanated from the self. As Taylor writes: "This is the powerful moral ideal that has come down to us. It accords crucial moral importance to a kind of contact with myself, with my own inner nature, which it sees as in danger of being lost, partly through the pressures towards outward conformity" (1992, p. 29).

We can see that these notions of authenticity are still present in Western discourses, while at the same time they have developed into something more of a construct (Peterson, 2005). Additionally it does not help that various kinds of constructions of authenticity are omnipresent in various media. It is offered in commercials (Lau, 2000; Frank, 1998), promised in touristic holiday-destinations (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1998) and considered as a core indicator for quality food (Johnston & Baumann, 2007). It is taken in by capitalistic for-profit businesses but simultaneously presented as something that cannot possibly be exploited for commercialistic aims (Frank, 1998; Heath & Potter, 2004; Slater, 2008). The interpretation of authenticity varies: everybody will have

their own connotation and ideas for what accounts for authentic and what does not. To illustrate this, one could think of the research of Stengs (2010). The author researches why some Dutch lower working classes greatly admire André Hazes, a Dutch famous folk singer. It appears that his fans find that this overweight artist, well-known for his drinking behaviour, doesn't embody any frippery or superficialness. Fans consider him as 'unpolished' and 'raw'<sup>1</sup>, which makes him an authentic figure according to the people that admire him. As will become apparent somewhat further in this thesis: this relation to 'authenticity' is different from the notion of authenticity deployed by the cultural bourgeoisie. This example however shows how the experience of what accounts for authentic is fluid and can differ.

#### 2.4.2. Contemporary definition of the Authentic

The interpretation of authenticity that will be deployed in this thesis is described by Aupers et al. (2010) and unfolds in two ways. Partly it stems from the romantic notion of a search for the natural authentic self, as previously described by Taylor (1992). But, it also has developed into a form that is not mere heritage from the Romanticist period. The current understanding of authenticity also embodies the concept as an active denial of all current systems and constructs (including nature) while simultaneously creating something new out of these elements. "Authenticity is not something you can find in nature, *it is something that you create out of different elements from cultures; it's not 'natural' but 'cultural'* [emphasis added], not essentialistic but constructivistic." (Aupers et al., 2010, p.5). This form of authenticity considers it 'true' or 'natural' to design an individual bricolage of different cultural elements and thereby creating something new. This object, persona or practice is unlike anything else. The lack of resemblance to other forms, makes that it cannot be false or an imitation of something. One of the examples that the authors give to illustrate that this idea of authenticity is popular, is pointing out currently dominant ideologies that reject sex-based gender-classifications (Lindsey, 2015). Third-wave feminism and theories about gender have enhanced consciousness about masculinity and femininity as a construct and recently more debates have opened up to discuss children's gender identity issues (Ibid.). It is considered inappropriate to describe people or practices as 'typically male' or 'typically female'. And, if we were to place this discussion within the topic of authenticity, some popular Western ideologies encourage children to 'be themselves' and act somewhere along the spectrum of masculine or feminine, no matter which sex they have been appointed by birth. This example embodies a collective denial of the static and fixed constructed frameworks of 'man' and 'woman'.

Aupers et al. (2010) describe that cultural omnivourism too, fits quite neatly into this construct of authenticity. Some cultural omnivores appear to attempt to escape from existing cultural classification systems. Instead they valorise products that they consider 'true to them'. This

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<sup>1</sup>This would be defined as first-person authenticity by Moore (2002). For more literature on different experiences and definitions of authenticity see Moore, A. (2002). Authenticity as authentication. *Popular music*, 21(02), 209-223.



behaviour even goes to such an extent, that it favours a denial, or active 'mash-up', of highbrow and lowbrow practices. Also combining Western and non-Western traditions and practices, with cultural (mis)appropriation as consequence, could be considered as an example of these practices. The more 'mixed' various cultural phenomena, the less chance it resembles anything else. This 'new' cultural product, that does not resemble anything else, is considered unique and therefore 'authentic'. By creating this new authentic form, there is a denial of dominant cultural systems and frameworks. Cultural omnivourism: consuming arts and culture that cater to various different social demographics, seems to correspond to these ideas of constructing ones identity through the construct of authenticity as bricolage of various cultural forms.

## 2.5 Authenticity and contemporary distinction practices

The previous section contained a definition of authenticity. This section attempts to illustrate how the framework of authenticity can be deployed for the paradox of openness and distinction. Where the boundaries used to be defined by 'high' and 'low', Johnston and Baumann (2007) argue that frames of 'authenticity and exoticism' are currently important concepts that allow for contemporary distinction practices. This is because "frames of authenticity and exoticism contain elements of democratic inclusivity, but also legitimize and reproduce status distinctions" (p. 169). Hence, these constructs can be deployed in a distinctive manner, while simultaneously signalling democratic and open ideologies. Instead of using the concepts of Authenticity and Exoticism, this thesis will deploy the Aupers et al. (2010) definition of Authenticity. This is because this interpretation strongly relates to both concepts. It embodies the classic 'romantic' notion of authenticity as well as the concept of exoticism (authenticity as bricolage of various cultural phenomena).

Johnston and Baumann (2007) indicate that there are three objectives of Bourdieu's work that remain crucial in achieving distinction present day. They are "boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate culture", "the aesthetic disposition", and "the disinterestedness of producers" (p. 197). These elements function as a point of departure to illustrate how contemporary distinction can take place. Throughout each section becomes apparent how they could apply frameworks of authenticity to justify their actions. It is also explored what this could entail for the manifestation of cultural memberships.

### 2.5.1 Boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate culture

We have seen a democratisation towards highbrow and lowbrow practices, as well as an inclusive attitude towards exotic other unfamiliar culture, instead of merely dominant Western practices. This does however not mean that 'anything goes' in the field of arts and culture. Inevitably, institutions that have cultural authority favour certain objects over others. In order to study contemporary notions of distinction, it is valuable to look how arts & culture memberships make selections, and, more importantly, on which grounds they decide between legitimate and illegitimate culture.

According to Johnston and Baumann (2007), a certain part of cultural elites consecrate cultural objects that corresponds to their construct of 'authentic'. This goes to an extent that "in the United States today, "authentic" or "exotic" cultural tastes are legitimate, while familiar, bland, and broadly accessible cultural forms are deemed illegitimate for upscale consumption" (Johnston & Baumann, 2007, p.197). If we were to take this to the context of cultural memberships, it would mean that cultural products which are very well-known, straightforward or easily accessible are excluded from the offer. Although it can be considered democratic to give a stage to the, for example, unheard and eccentric bands, it also embodies classic notions of distinction. A defining characteristic of these practices is that it signals rarity. Rarity, which is an obvious indicator of exclusiveness, is a form of distinction as it only allows a selected few to consume the certain object. Additionally, there could be a distance from mass-production, which is also a classic disposition that Bourdieu describes. With its original definition deeply rooted from an, almost organic, 'natural' perspective, it is not hard to imagine how the concept of authenticity seems to be a concept that is extra viable for distance from mass-production. Objects that remotely feel like commercial objects or mass-culture are more difficult to consider as authentic, and could therefore be excluded from the offer of the memberships. Lastly, these practices can signal distinction, as the selection of what accounts for the authentic requires a lot of cultural capital.

### 2.5.2. Aesthetic Disposition

The aesthetic disposition is an attitude towards life that is characterised by a preference of form over function. It is the ability to approach even the very common elements in life from an aesthetic viewpoint. According to Bourdieu this is bourgeois behaviour as, similar to distance from necessity, only someone who has enjoyed life in a protected, privileged position will have the natural confidence to approach life without hesitations about daily needs. An upperclass habitus will have taught people not to worry about commonalities, but *has* thought them to approach life from an aesthetic viewpoint. Johnston and Baumann (2007) describe that in the food scene, common food is approached with an aesthetic disposition in order to make them authentic. To illustrate this, they name the example of something common as a hamburger which by one top chef is 'transformed' into a \$39 dollar Kobe beef burger. In memberships you won't easily find a similar example, as the very nature of these institutions embody a certain aestheticization towards life. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to see to what extent these aestheticizations are deployed in their manifestation. Do they try to be very authentic? An organisation that has an overly aestheticized image, website, marketing-campaign, etcetera, emphasises the importance of the aestheticization of life. Another interesting viewpoint would be to look at an organisation's core-values. Does the organisation emphasise a lot of practical and economic advantages? Or is it also somewhat more vague, and perhaps about different, more 'elevated' and artistic advantages?

### 2.5.3 Disinterestedness of producers

The last element of which Johnston and Baumann (2007) argue that it remains important in an omnivorous landscape is the artistic quality of “disinterestedness”. It entails an attitude towards art that prevents it from becoming mondain or common, but instead sacralises it.

The previous chapter introduced the concept of *illusio*. Without an *illusio*, a specific field does not exist, and also does not have any reason to exist as “the *illusio* is the condition for the functioning of a game of which it is also, at least partially, the product” (Bourdieu, 1996, p.228). Disinterestedness gives practices more weight and importance. It can be practiced in multiple ways. Within the *illusio* of the field of arts and culture, the ‘fetishization’ of an artwork plays a crucial part of the *illusio*. Consecrating the art-work, inherently makes all the practices and agents around them more important. A similar idea goes for the ‘ideology of artist charisma’. Idolising an artist into a genius-like position, will automatically lift the relevance of one’s cultural practices. Authenticity can have a function in these constructs, as it can be deployed to enforce a weight on certain products by labelling them unique and linking them to individual creators or locations (and therefore indirectly labelling them as ‘brilliant’). In this sense, authenticity can be used to enforce the *illusio*. Another manner to show disinterestedness is an emphasis on non-commercial motivations. This is similar to shying away from mass-production, but also a manner to reinforce the *illusio* of the art-world, as one is emphasising the intangible and ‘sacred’ aspects of cultural production.

### 3. METHODS

#### 3.1.1 Method

The research question of this thesis is: *How do arts & culture memberships function as contemporary gatekeepers of cultural objects and how do they differ as mediator of arts and culture?* The socio-cultural approach of this question asks us to consider the world as an inherently Bourdieusian site, where power-structures are determined by relations. It does not approach the existing structures of the cultural field as absolute conditions, but considers them as constructions created by mankind. Because of this *constructivist* and *interpretive* nature of the research question, the major part of this research will be of qualitative nature (Bryman, 2015). This thesis researches various relations between agents and objects while simultaneously exploring these relations in a larger context. The research is therefore of descriptive nature (as opposed to predictive) and also aimed to “understand, in depth, the viewpoint of a research participant” (VanderStoep & Johnson, 2008, p.167) These aims also correspond with qualitative research methods.

The first part of this thesis consisted of a research on literature. This helped to create a framework of knowledge on concepts that are relevant for the research, such as the access-economy, gatekeeper-studies, the field of arts and culture and corresponding social conditions. Consequently, this allowed me to decide which questions still needed to be researched in order to present an integral and coherent thesis. These unanswered issues were to be researched through conduct and analysis of semi-structured interviews with employees that work at arts & culture memberships. There are two main reasons for this approach. First of all, as arts & culture memberships have not yet been researched through the perspective of their role as gatekeeper, it was necessary to collect actual data on their practices. These more pragmatic snippets of information cannot be found in existing literature which makes it valuable to approach experts on these issues. Interviewing various employees that can represent arts & culture memberships therefore forms a logical method, as interviews can offer “empirical knowledge of subjects’ typical experiences” and “knowledge of a social situation” (Kvale, 1996, p. 132). It allowed me to explore how processes of ‘cultural gatekeeping’ took place in practice. Secondly it is valuable to conduct interviews because this research also considers these organisations’ identity as mediator of arts and culture. In order to research this, it is necessary to establish how they position themselves in the field of arts and culture. This type of investigation is interested in answers that emanate from ideas, values and opinions. Similar to a conversation, interviews allow for new insights on the other person’s viewpoint. A semi-structured approach is operated (as opposed to non- or completely structured interviews), because this makes it more likely that data can be compared (VanderStoep & Johnson, 2008). Simultaneously, the format of the interview also allows new topics to organically flow from the conversation. This is useful in case other key aspects arrive during our communication that I could not have foreseen.

All conversations are transcribed verbatim and consequently coded and analysed. The codification is “a process that permits data to be segregated, grouped, regrouped and relinked in order to consolidate meaning and explanation” (Gorbich, 2007, p. 21 in Saldana, 2009). First the transcriptions are codified by the elemental method of In Vivo coding. This style is slightly ‘reflective’ by nature, but will not be very interpretive as it always “draws from the participants own language” (Saldana, 2009, p.67). Subsequently the codes organised thematically. A major division is made between themes that signal practices and themes that signal organisations’ values, opinions and attitude towards arts and culture. This is because these ask for different forms of analysis. While the first category is further regrouped by theme, the second category is interpreted by discourse analysis.

### 3.1.2 Sampling

This thesis has its focus on Dutch arts & culture memberships. The Netherlands only knows a small amount of these organisations that play a significant role in the landscape of arts and culture. Because of this situation a small sample as case-study forms a legitimate body of research. The strategy that is applied in order to find the right organisations was criterion sampling, as every membership differed slightly in its actual manifestation. This research has limited itself by focusing on Dutch organisations offering arts and culture events or art objects and where a monthly or yearly fee was paid in order to consume these products. Hence, memberships that intend to offer non-artistic cultural objects such as food, journalism or tech-gadgets will not be incorporated into the research. Aside for one exception (DasMagazin), ownership of products does not take place within these modes of consumption. With DasMagazin ownership takes place in the form of literary magazines or books. Nevertheless, because the organisation has the form of a membership, and simultaneously offers more than just products in the form of various events, it formed a relevant and interesting enough organisation to include in the research. Not in the least because their manifestation resides strongly on the function of the contemporary gatekeeper. They act as a curator and marketer in the field of plenty. The aim was to present a balanced overview of organisations that operated with non-profit aims as well as organisations that were market-regulated. It was also attempted to include the biggest possible organisations, as their weight added a significant relevance to the study. In total ten organisations have been considered of which nine formed the final amount.

### 3.1.3 Data reliability and validity

This section first explains which weaknesses can be appointed to the data reliability and validity. Afterwards, the strengths of the research will be highlighted.

Considering that a Master Thesis has to be written in a time-frame of approximately five months, this does add some limits to the research. It allows for a solid investigation in literature, but, this could always have been done more extensively if more time was available. Also the scope of the research was forced to stay within Dutch borders and it would not have been realistic to include a bigger sample. Another disadvantage would be that the sample is quite small and specific. It is not easily translated to other situations and also is the dispersion of arts & culture memberships in the Netherlands (still) relatively small.

A strength of the research is that the concerned organisations are institutions of considerable status in the Netherlands. Although the sample is small and specific, their practices have a far reach over the country. These organisations have quite some impact in the process of the production of the arts in the Netherlands, of which some of them even act on a policy-making level. Another valuable aspect is that these organisations have not yet been researched from a gatekeeping perspective. The explorative nature of the research brings new knowledge about these objects and their role as mediators. It adds new insights to existing debates about mediators and gatekeepers in the digital age. Additionally could simultaneously be considered an advantage that the research stays within Dutch borders. This is because this makes it easier to compare the organisations as they all function in a similar cultural landscape and under the same policy.

### 3.2 Process

#### **Setting up the contacts**

Four of the organisations I could reach through my personal network (WeArePublic, DasMagazin, Cineville & Cinetree). Getting in contact with these organisations was not very hard. Reaching the other five organisations went fairly easy. I suspect some odds worked in my favour. First of all it might have helped to convince these memberships, that four (for Dutch standards relatively 'big') names already joined my research. Secondly I suspect it helped that I work in the cultural field and therefore know how to set up professional e-mails to various cultural organisations. Additionally the quality of a Masters' Thesis should be of relatively high standards which might have added some weight to the perceived academic relevance of the research. Lastly, the biggest motive might have been that the majority of the organisations responded enthusiastic because they stated to be genuinely interested in the topic. I therefore hope the result will give them valuable insights in their practices as organisation.

#### **Operation of the interviews**

In order to plan the actual interviews I emailed, called and once even tweeted to make sure all organisations were up to date about my requests. My first email consisted out of a short introduction of myself and an excerpt of my research topic. The follow-up e-mail was designed as a friendly reminder where I simultaneously explained some more about my research, or why I was

interested in that specific organisation. Lastly I had some minor exchange of messages with almost every organisation to schedule each interview. In these conversations was stated that the interview would take approximately ninety minutes and that it would be recorded. It was also made clear that the transcriptions of each interview will first be ended to each organisation before it is implemented in the research. All nine interviews took place in a three week time frame from the end of April to the beginning of May. Except for the interview with Rotterdampas, all the interviews took all place in Amsterdam. This usually was at the office of the organisation, but from time to time also in a quiet cafe. The interviews were semi-structured (the topic list and introduction of the conversation can be found as appendix 1.0 and 2.0).

### **Data Collection**

During the conversation I first collected as much information on demographics of each organisation, such as price, offered product, choice of medium, location and amount of members. This would allow me to categorise and classify each organisation, which would help to find patterns in later stages of the research (Saldana, 2009). Additionally, multiple handbooks give the instruction to start with easy questions in order to keep a smooth flow during the interview (Baarda, van der Hulst & de Goede, 2012).

The second and largest part of the interview contained of topics that are more susceptible to interpretation. It concerned questions about the organisation's role as gatekeeper, selection practices and the organisations' general attitude towards arts and culture. The conversations are transcribed verbatim in the software OTranscribe. Subsequently I coded and categorised the transcriptions in computer assisted qualitative software Atlas.ti. This program offers the possibility to systematically analyse each conversation so that it becomes possible to depict certain trends and themes in each discourse.

### 3.3 Organisations

More information on each organisation can be found in appendix 3.0.

	Name of Organisation	Medium	Distribution (geograph.)	Since	Price per year (in euros)	Total amount of members	Business form
1	Cineville	Film	Netherlands	1010	216	22.000	Private Company
2	Cinetree	Film	Online	2012	60	*classified	Private Company
3	Entrée	Classical Music	Netherlands	1994	20	7500	Culture Association
4	WeArePublic	Artistic events	Amsterdam	2014	180 (15 per month)	3000	Foundation
5	RotterdamParks	Artistic & Cultural events	Rotterdam	1986	60	165.000	Initiative from District
6	DasMagazin	Literature	Netherlands, Belgium	2014	35	3000	Private Company
7	CJP	Cultural events	Netherlands	1961	17,5	900.000	Foundation
8	SubbaCultcha	Experimental Music	Amsterdam, Utrecht, Eindhoven, Rotterdam	2006	96 (8 per month)	5.000	Foundation
9	Museumjaarkt.	Museums	Netherlands	1981	55	1.200.000	Culture Association



### Cineville

This organisation offers free access to films at a selection of 39 film theatres in the Netherlands. It allows members to go as many times to films that are showcased by these cinema's as they prefer.

### Cinetree

Cinetree is an online Video-On-Demand service that gives users access to ten films each month. These films are carefully selected by various external 'curators' whom will change regularly.

### Entrée

Entrée is the biggest cultural youngster association of the Netherlands. For a yearly fee members receive reduced access of 75%, 50% or 25% (depending on age) to concerts in the Amsterdam-based concerthall. They also organise special events for members.

### WeArePublic

This arts & culture membership permits access or reduced access to at least 30 carefully selected cultural events in Amsterdam. External curators select the best products of the 80 different cultural institutions that they currently work with.

### Rotterdampas

This district governed initiative offers free or reduced access to over 750 events in and around the city of Rotterdam. An important criterion for selecting certain cultural products is that they have to be reliable, fun and that people will have to leave the house in order to experience the product.

### DasMagazin

DasMagazin started as a literature magazine, but, after a successful crowd-funding initiative, it functions also as a publishing house. They also organise book-clubs and literature festivals from time to time. Membership grants four literary magazines each year.

### CJP

The organisation aims at stimulating arts participation amongst young people (12-30 years). This organisation offers reduced access to various products and cultural events. Every Dutch teenager receives a CJP-pas during their stay at high school.

### SubbaCultcha

Offers reduced or free access to various events, mostly in Amsterdam, but also in Rotterdam and Utrecht. The organisation has its main focus on experimental and upcoming artists. They organise music-related events but also include a few other artistic products such as film and visual arts.

## Museumkaart

The Museumkaart offers card-holders “free access” to over 400 museums in the Netherlands. The organisation is part of the ‘Museumvereniging’, an umbrella association that aims to represent the interest of museums in the Netherlands. Museums that have received a seal of approval by the ‘Museumregister’, a separate organisation, have the choice to be taken up in the offer of the Museumkaart.

## 4. RESULTS: ARTS & CULTURE MEMBERSHIPS AS CONTEMPORARY GATEKEEPERS

### 4.1 Chain of actions from product to consumer

The first and foremost thing that soon became apparent during the process of interviewing was the very social process of each organisations' practices. During the conversations became clear that the process of cultural gatekeeping that took place at the organisations could more or less characterised according the scheme as illustrated underneath. This chapter will take the courtesy to explain its symbols and whenever relevant, link it with the corresponding 'gatekeeper and mediator'-roles that were introduced in the first chapter of this thesis (Janssen & Verboord, 2015).

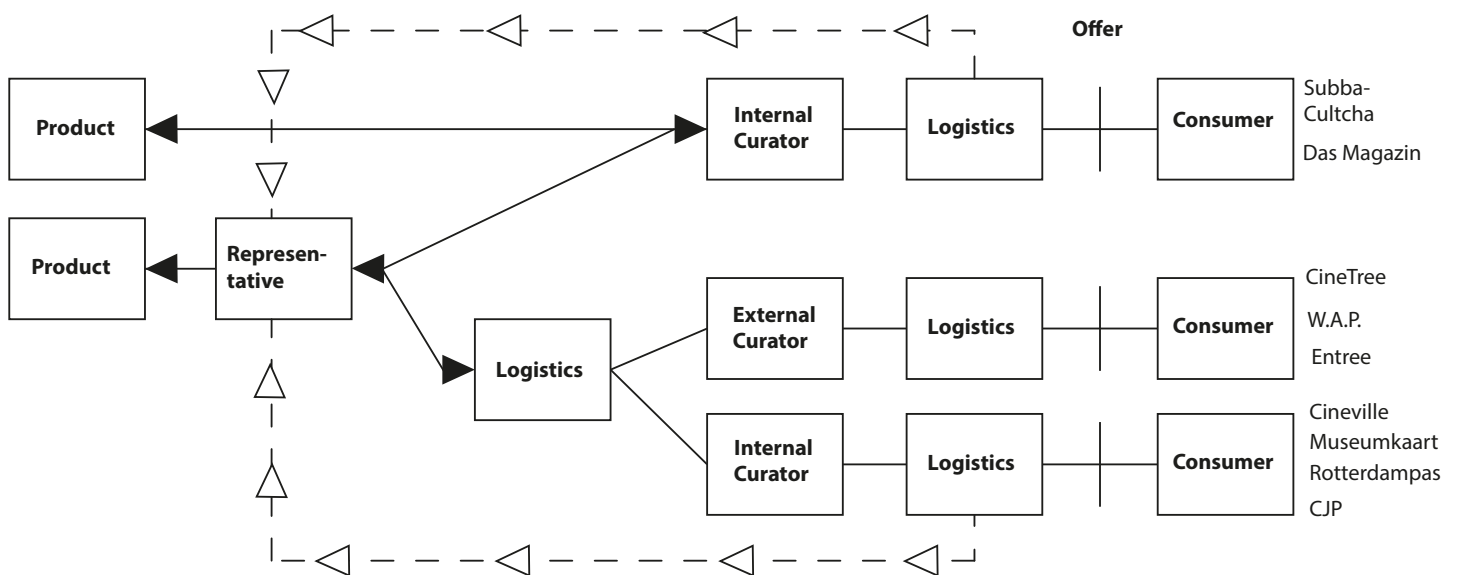


Figure 1. Various structures of processes that take place at arts & culture membership before the product is presented to the consumer [2016] Irene Achterbergh

We start the process of gatekeeping practices of cultural memberships with the **product**. This can for example entail an art-object or an artist. It concerns the core-product that will eventually (whether or not in alternated version) be presented to the consumer. Because the memberships in this thesis present a wide variety of products in their offer, these objects can vary greatly. It includes 'small' products such as the streaming opportunity of a singular film, to bigger cultural objects such as access to a theatre play as well as major cultural phenomena such as a whole museum. It is also important to consider that some memberships mainly focus on a singular medium, hence merely a focus on literature or films for example (DasMagazin, Entrée, Cinetree, Cineville, Museumkaart). Other memberships include a broadened amount of disciplines, but still focus on relatively canonical art forms (SubbaCultcha, WeArePublic). On the other end of the

spectrum are arts & culture memberships that include, next to various canonical art-forms, a wide variety of other cultural expressions, including beauty-salons or theme-parks (Rotterdampas, CJP).

The next step in the process is the first contact between product and cultural membership. Sometimes artists get in contact with a membership to be taken up in the offer, but this is not very likely. Artists and/or object are usually represented by a **representative**. This can literally be an agency, but also a distributor or marketing team. This means that in most of the cases it is usually not the artist or the head of the institution (eg. director) that takes responsibility for getting in touch with an organisation. If this does happen, it is probably because **an internal curator** that has a permanent position as the organisation is very active in the concerned artistic scene (SubbaCultcha, DasMagazin). This person scouts and looks around for talent: a publisher for example. But even in these cases it is quite rare for artists to personally set up an arrangement with a membership. As the following answer to the question 'how does selection take place?' demonstrates: "Yes, that's mostly Daniels job, the chief editor. That's not any different than other organisations. We receive a lot of copy, that's rarely something good. Most is plotted out by Daniel actually. So he imagines from which people he would like to see a story next. And then we ask that person. So it's mainly stories that we ask for" (DasMagazin).

Another example of an organisation that is in very direct contact with the artistic scene is Subbacultcha. Their curators consist of people working in the field. They scout bands and are in contact with various record labels. Because their identity revolves on showing the newest bands, it is important to be aware of all the latest developments in the music scene. It is therefore worth taking a risk on upcoming artists, even if there are not (yet) represented by an agency or music label. SubbaCultcha and DasMagazin also function as co-creator or co-editor of the product. This is because SubbaCultcha organises full exhibitions or gigs for the artists. DasMagazin functions as editor, so to some extent they actually edit the product. A consequence of these modes of selection is that production of art products become more fractured than they would if they were left unaltered in their original form. Another consequence is that upcoming artists who are taken into the offer of a cultural membership enjoy a 'shortcut' to an audience.

A second way that contact is established between product and cultural membership is if representatives get in contact with the **logistic part** of the organisation. As the following quote exemplifies: "We have an editorial team and everyone of them has its own specialty, in some cases more than one, actually. Once a month I ask them if they can look what interests them at the programmes of our partners, but then explicitly in their area of interest. And then they forward to me what they would like to see taken up in the offer. And then it's my job to see what's possible, so I get back in contact with these partners, the organisers at least" (WeArePublic). In this manner, the logistics will first set up some sort of connection or deal with the representative. After these formalities, logistics will discuss the possibilities with an **internal** or **external curator**. This person then gets the opportunity to discuss his preferences. Hence, within these structures,

there is a limited set of products that curators can choose from. A consequence from this selection model is that it is harder for artists to reach audiences. They will have to 'pass more gates' in the process of selection before they have the chance to be presented in the final offer. In both these two models it is evident that all organisations also work as 'networkers/connectors'. They take responsibility for establishing contact and making new connections between artists, agents and audiences.

The next step in the process is the stage where the product reaches the curator. A **curator** can take up an **external** or **internal** position at an organisation. They are considered internal actors if they occupy a job within the cultural membership. They go to the office multiple days a week and occupy a permanent position within the organisation. An example of this would be Cineville, working with an in-house editorial team of four members. Or Rotterdamspas, where the head-editorial also is mainly responsible for making the selection between products that will be featured. Curators can also work external from the organisation. These are curators who do not visit the office on a daily basis, and do not have an obligation to be concerned about the organisation as a whole. Sometimes they have a more or less permanent position (Entree, We Are Public), and sometimes they function as temporary guest-editor (Cinetree). It happens quite often that the curator is responsible for meaning-making. This entails that they will have to explain and report why they think a certain product is worthwhile.

When the curator has made his or her decisions of which products he or she would like to see taken up in the offer, this will be reported to **logistics**, who will be responsible for the final stage of the product. Quite often the logistics first have to get back in touch with the representative to set up a deal. Other times this has already been established during the first contact with the organisation. After clear rules and guidelines on what will be presented have been established, they will be presented to the **consumer**, usually accompanied by some sort of text. In this way memberships also function as salesmen or marketer. They are responsible for setting up the contact between audience and actively try to sell a certain product. An important finding is that the presentation of the offer does not form the end of the chain. The logistic part will actively keep pushing the audience to respond, buy or visit. This is mostly done by social media. Most of the organisations were active on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. They all send out newsletters via e-mails.

We can see that when looking at the process of gatekeeping, a lot of responsibilities and roles defined in the first chapter of this thesis, automatically become apparent. There are however two forms of mediation that not specifically got highlighted as they were only viable for two organisations. A first disclaimer needs to be made on film-on-demand-streaming service Cinetree. This organisation could also be considered as distributor, as they are responsible for "the process of bringing products into circulation for sale, display, or performance" (Janssen & Verboord, 2015, p. 6). The only institution responsible for policy making is CJP. When in 2010 a 200 million cut in

subsidy for the cultural sector was made, this organisation lost the total amount of finances formerly spent on cultural development of high-school students. Through a fierce lobby of contacting various policy-makers and teachers, CJP managed to set up a deal with schools and various national cultural institutes. Because of these actions in the past, CJP is currently considered as one of the key-figures in arts and culture education in the in general Dutch political sphere.

## 5. RESULTS: EMBODIMENT OF GATEKEEPER-ROLE

### *Core values and experienced tension fields*

The previous chapter displayed a general introduction on how arts & culture memberships function as contemporary gatekeepers of cultural goods. The scheme offers a pragmatic overview which considers important chains and agents in these processes. Nevertheless, it does not consider the very social nature of these practices. A lot of aspects play a pivotal part during selection processes, which are not easily converted to abstract schemata. In this chapter will become apparent that the manifestation of these organisations, their practices, identity and values, are subject to various internal and external social factors, which all enforce their influence on the organisation. This section will therefore focus on these more social issues that are considered to play a considerable role in the processes of memberships. It focusses on core-motivations, values and experienced tension areas.

#### 5.1 Go forth and enrich thyself with culture!

The one core-value, the 'raison d'être' that, perhaps unsurprisingly, stemmed from each and every membership was 'enabling people to immerse themselves in the rich landscapes of arts and culture'. Whether this entailed the introduction to a singular medium ("People that normally wouldn't visit a bookshop very easily? To get them to pick up a book?") to a very broad understanding of the word ("We just want to enable people to have fun experiences"). In essence, all organisations were motivated by enabling, and taking away hurdles that people could possibly experience for consuming, arts and culture. To a certain extent, all organisations could therefore be characterised with some sort of 'Bildungs-Ideal', as they all were convinced of an ethos signalling a serious concern for cultural participation.

Reasons that explained the importance of this idea varied. Some of them were mixed with rather utilitarian aims, such as financial motives. Others gave examples that fed on ideas of enrichment of life. The more 'elder' established memberships belonged to this last group. They were presented as an initiative from board members of some sort, who were involved in making arts and culture more accessible to a group of people. These original boards varied from a governmental concern (Rotterdampas, CJP) to institutional interest groups (Museumkaart). They mentioned 'stimulating arts participation and self-cultivation among people' as main objective. The relatively new memberships were usually presented as a business opportunity, combined with the directors 'gut feeling'. To the question 'How did your organisation come into being?' responses were:

"And then the directors realised that there were lots of parties in Amsterdam that wanted to belong to such a group. So these organisations said like: "Oh maybe we can collaborate" or "We can offer

something to your members”. It’s a very easy manner to reach a very specific target audience: young people. So, that formed a kind of possibility, and that’s when they started WeArePublic. But also because they thought it was fun. Because that’s how they do stuff: “that’s going to be fun” (WeArePublic).

“They were four boys who saw that the filmtheaters in Amsterdam suffered from a wrong image. So, that these filmtheaters weren’t very popular with young people. And these boys thought that it were exactly these places where they showed so much beautiful things” (Cineville)

“I think it was a combination of “Such a shame that so little people read nowadays” and simultaneously realising that you can do some smart marketing with it. That you can make literature kind of cool” (DasMagazin).

These responses can be looked at from various perspectives. First of all, I believe that these organisations exemplify an informal social setting that is presently quite common in contemporary work-environments. All respondents talked about the directors with a certain degree of respect, but also as an equal human being. I did not experience a very strong hierarchical structure at any of these organisations. The presentation could also be an (unconscious) attempt to prevent a very formal image of the organisation. We will see in a later stage of this chapter that an informal and personal approach plays an important part in the manifestation of most of the organisations. Calling the originators ‘boys’ and emphasising how they ‘just try stuff that seems fun’ evokes a certain idea of playfulness to the whole organisation. The success of the organisation is presented as something more of a lucky guess with perhaps some witty business insights. When asked more thoroughly it did however become apparent that all directors had an extensive network. Most of them fulfilled a similar or other influential position in another company. Sometimes research was conducted to see if the business operation had any chance of succeeding in the first place. For this reason the idea of ‘boys’ trying out their luck, seems a slightly idealised picture of the operation. Six of the nine organisation were run by men<sup>2</sup>, while the majority of the organisations consisted out of a greater number of women than men. This suggests that gendered demographics also played an part in the success of an organisation, but more research should be conducted before these claims can be made.

Not one of the organisations stated financial aims as first motive. Although some degree of socially desirable answers were probably at hand, the respondent of SubbaCultcha also made a very valid point when mentioning their core value as ‘Hopelessly devoted to music and art’. She

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<sup>2</sup> The head of Cinetree is a woman, Museumkaart and Entree do not have a classic hierarchical structure, where a director was present at the organisation. Nobody at these two organisations bears the title of director.



stated that if you start up a business for the sole reason to get rich, the arts and culture scene might not really be the right area. All organisations exemplified truly a great passion for the arts and culture scene.

## 5.2 Adventures and tension area's

A second core-value that was mentioned by seven of the organisations, seemed to naturally flow from the previous mentioned aim. This motive is probably best summarised by an answer mentioned by WeArePublic. When I asked about their core-values, the respondent explained: "We want to send people on an adventure". This quote exemplifies that organisations did not only want card-holders to stay within the borders of their comfort-zone; exploration of taste was an aspect that was mentioned a lot as important objective. As Cineville explained: "They (the directors) just wanted to make it more interesting to go to filmtheaters, and also create the possibility to experiment a little bit more". Almost every organisation mentioned that, because a membership offered discounted access, it simplified the opportunity of trying something new. The memberships were meant for people to 'try out something that they perhaps wouldn't have gone to otherwise'. This statement lays bare however two somewhat contradictory aspects. First of all one could question what it means to 'go on an adventure' if it is all within the confines of the genre that already caters to one's personal taste. This element will be explored in the next chapter. Secondly is the core-motive of wanting card-holders to experiment and try out new events simultaneously accompanied with various slightly paradoxical tension areas. The five most dominant issues are highlighted in the next section.

### 5.2.1 Established products versus experimental products

All memberships knew 'the magic' of working with big names. As one respondent said: "You're the biggest name that you work with" (Rotterdampas). It appeared that big names almost always gave an impulse to the amount of consumers and also did every membership acknowledge that events that showcased established names sold out faster than not-familiar artists, brands or products. However, all memberships also felt a responsibility to let consumers try out new, experimental objects. The answer of how to deal with this tension field was perhaps as simple as it was effective. When asked: 'Do you prefer to present something that is quite experimental and new or rather something that you know will attract a lot of people but might not be very exciting or renewing?' all memberships emphasised the importance of finding a balance. As one respondent explained: "Once sales are going well, you have the freedom to try out crazy stuff. We're going to try something this Fall that makes me think: "how is this ever going to become a success?', but that not the greatest objective at such a moment. [...] I do know that our spirit is: 'always keep experimenting', but we also have to make money, so there needs to be a balance" (DasMagazin).

Another respondent explained that big names work well for attracting new people, but that the more experimental products were good for people who have already been a member for a while. Another interesting aspect was that there were wildly different attitudes towards big names. Some of the memberships felt that the bigger the name the better. The respondent of CJP explained that the exploration of one's taste has to start somewhere: “/think, personally, that everyone's journey in exploration of their taste starts somewhere else. And that also means that, for somebody, a visit to the cinema can be a first step to get off the couch and to go out in to the world. And if that's a very commercial Hollywood-production, than so be it.” Other agencies considered them more as a ‘necessary evil’ or even rather stayed away from them if they would have had the complete freedom to do so. It was considered that people would find their way to big institutions anyway and it was therefore more ethically viable to highlight the smaller institutions. This already highlights some of the different nuances that arts & culture memberships experience in their responsibility as arbitrator of arts and culture. In the last example these organisations made sure that smaller performances that would otherwise more likely to go unnoticed by audiences, were granted a stage. But, it also embodies a ‘distance from mass-production’. A disposition that will be considered in the last chapter of this research.

### 5.2.2 Stakeholders and expectations from stakeholders

Organisations are interested in partnerships because research (that has been conducted by these memberships) has shown that memberships stimulate members to participate in arts and culture. One of three cinema-visits in Amsterdam is done by somebody who has a Cineville-pas, and somebody who has a Rotterdampas uses his card on average six times per year. Partners receive a contribution from the organisation for each member that consumes their product. This is usually not the full rate, but as membership also stimulates multiple visits, it is still beneficial for these organisations. The respondent of Museumkaart also explained that people are quite often tempted to make some kind of other expenses when they feel like they've entered the event ‘for free’.

Reasons that people become members of memberships were as diverse as the memberships presented and would form an interesting object for future research. Nevertheless there were a few reasons that respondents mentioned quite often as main motives. First of all this were economical advantages. The second most mentioned reason was that arts & culture memberships function as guide which shows relevant and interesting cultural products.

An element that played a significant role in each organisations' practices, was the experienced responsibility towards stakeholders. As discussed in the first chapter, Gans (1979) emphasises how it is too naive to consider gatekeepers as singular forces: they usually act within the confines of external factors and social values. This was an aspect that was usually brought up by all organisations themselves. It appeared that once settled, the manifestation, presentation and identity of the organisation, is not an position that can easily be altered. Practices have to fit into

the confines of the organisation, otherwise there will probably be criticism from external forces who (more often than not) do not tolerate too much change. Multiple organisations mentioned the wish to sometimes experiment more, but not always felt that they were in the right position to do this. One membership explained that some organisations did not want some of their more experimental products taken up in a memberships' offer as they thought that things that were too experimental might scare of customers to visit a next time. The respondent of CJP mentioned that when their offer might become too commercial, some other members felt that the organisation was becoming too banal. It shows how internally these kind of tensions could also play a role. A handful of the respondents made a discrepancy between things that were currently exposed, and changes that they would like to see in the offer. These examples show that all organisations felt the pressure of "institutional context of cultural evaluation" (Janssen & Verboord, 2015, p.8) as discussed in the first chapter.

### 5.2.3 Emphasis on offer, or focus on consumer?

During the course of the interviews it became apparent that, although every organisation wished to enrich consumers life with culture, these ambitions would derive from multiple causes. They could be classified on a spectrum with on one side an attitude that said: "*This* is very good! You should see this!" and on the other side: "We enable, you do what you like best!". These positions were usually corresponding with a few other demographics.

It became clear that the bigger an organisation's offer, the more emphasis was put on the personal taste of the consumer. If the offer of an organisation was relatively small, more focus was put on a selection of quality products. Organisations as WeArePublic and Cinetree could be placed on one end, Cineville and Entrée fairly in the middle, and CJP and Rotterdam-pas at the other side of the spectrum. This might seem fairly logical, as a strong selection automatically demands a strict selection process. But this has consequences for the way that each organisation has taken up their role as gatekeeper. With a strong selection in their offer it is no longer merely a question of financially attractive access, but the organisation takes up a role of guidance. It is also a strong reaction on the abundance of choice. This is something that was also acknowledged by multiple memberships, by mentioning things such as: "I think elderly people might see us more like a discount-card, that's not what we necessarily are" (WeArePublic).

When we recall the model of Janssen en Verboord (2015) we can even add more characteristics to one side and the other. The *stronger* the selection of a membership, also enhances the role of memberships as producers of symbolic value. Additionally it also brings more symbolic value to each product, as they are carefully selected object from the field of plenty. It therefore also adds prestige and a qualitative aspect to the product. It also leaves more space for the organisation to give individual attention to specific products. This is also an element that these organisations played with.

**Q: Do you think that you're partly responsible for the popularity of an author?**

A: Yes, for sure! An example is Walter van den Berg who had written three books when he was still with his previous publisher. He always has gotten very good reviews, but no one ever really noticed him. And when he partnered with us his work suddenly became DWDD-book of the month. Of course that's not something that we decided, but I do think that this was possible if we had published twenty other books. Because then it would not have been possible to spend as much attention to Walter. So you know, I would say that we don't just sell books, we also sell authors, see? So 'This is Maartje Wortel', 'This is Lize'. And other publisher cannot do that in the same way, it's just, it's because we're just a small publishing-house.

**Q: You say that you think that you are partly responsible for the popularity of an object? Do you act in a specific way because of this feeling of responsibility?**

A: Yes sure [...] Yes we're conscious of this. We also try to act very responsible. So making sure that all the partners we work with receive the same kind of attention. Well no, we highlight small agencies more than the big ones, so that's not even I guess. But yes, we try to take responsibility for this. This entails *not* highlighting the Amsterdam city theater three times in a row on our Facebook profile for example.

In this sense they embody various roles that were described by Janssen & Verboord (2015): networker, marketer, evaluator, and also enforce quite some influence on the symbolic value of a product. Indirectly, as their incorporation of the product says something about their values processes, but also directly, as many of them give stories as to why a certain product is worthwhile. They make sure that the product is connected, evaluated, that it meets the right audience and that the artist is given individual attention. Also interesting about these two comments is that they subtly shy away from (anonymous) mass-production. Another way that this is done is by keeping the image of the membership personal.

5.2.4 We are all your friends - Creating a community

Arts & culture memberships want to create an environment where users experiment with their taste. But how do you do this? We have seen in the first chapter that consumers are less likely to subscribe to traditional cultural authorities. This is also acknowledged by most of the memberships. For them it was therefore important that all organisations felt like 'that one good friend who always gives good advice on where to go'. Rotterdampas even conducted a research with test panels to see how their elderly members reacted to a T-V distinction<sup>3</sup>. It appeared that none of the elderly minded if being called in informal ways, while this is a highly unlikely approach from government

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<sup>3</sup> Similar to French 'tu' and 'vous' do the Dutch know a difference between 'jij' and 'u'.

regulated instances. Organisations mentioned it was important to keep an informal and personal sphere for various reasons. A respondent mentioned that in current society, where a lot of our practices and modes of consumption are streamlined by algorithms and parameters, it can be very pleasant to hear an actual person recommend you something. In this manner it is a safe way for people try out new products because it is personal enough to know if it will cater for someones' taste, but the figure is authoritative enough to know what he is talking about.

Organisations found that keeping the atmosphere personal and informal also helped to establish a community. Informal communication created less distance, and therefore created the sense that all members could be a group of like-minded; friends even. The concept of creating a community formed an interesting topic, as different organisations had quite different ideas on (forming a) community within memberships. Some organisations really emphasised the membership as a group. In their practices, it could also be seen that a sense of community was not only created through impersonal tone-of-voice or special events. Emphasising that they were, or could be, part of this membership was a not an uncommon way to attract consumers. The more established organisations expressed doubt towards these practices. The respondent of CJP thought the sense of community acted more like facade, and looked rather nostalgic towards the concept of creating a community: CJP *used* to be a community. Museumkaart brought up the concept of a community, but presented this from a different angle than what was emphasised so far:

A: We think that card-holders, before they bought Museumkaart, they already went to the museum. It's mostly that. And something that we can do is make sure that we create a connection. And I think that's something we're very good at.

**Q: But how do you do this? Create this connection?**

A: Well, by sending them a newsletter. And further to make sure to bother them the least possible. And make sure that the card works, everywhere and all the time.

**Q: But how do you think that this 'bother them the least as possible' creates a connection? I don't think that other organisation that I've talked to would necessary agree with you.**

A: Yes, no, I know. But look, we know from our card-holders that they appreciate the service, just because it works.

### 3. Identity, Strategy, Segment

The sections above illustrates that there is quite some contrast when it comes to values and attitudes of each organisation. This is perhaps not strange, when considered that each conviction is subordinate to the identity of each organisation. SubbaCultcha is very prone to showing emerging artists. It is therefore quite logical that their events might be considered very experimental or artistic by a majority of society. They are keen on showing what is new and Avant-Garde. WeArePublic, who might have a bigger emphasis on presenting 'quality culture', prefers to

work with names that have to some degree a certificate of approval. This is the same for Museumkaart. All organisations caters to a certain segment and is socially embedded in a sphere that allows for enough financial stimuli so that it can exist. Nevertheless, as we have seen in the second chapter of this thesis, are expressions of taste not without consequences. The last chapter will therefore look at arts & culture memberships from a societal perspective.

## 6. RESULTS: ARTS & CULTURE MEMBERSHIPS IN SOCIETAL CONTEXT

The second chapter of this thesis contained an introduction to the theory of Distinction. It has shown that expressions of taste have a function in creating unequal relationships of power in society. This chapter presents an interpretation of each membership societal context. It considers their differences as mediator of arts and culture. The products that these memberships choose to include, the way these products are framed and the general attitude of a memberships towards arts and culture reflects their position in the field of arts and their role as producers of symbolic value.

### 6.1 Medium, offer, framing and distinction practices

Each membership considered in this thesis emanated from a wish to minor the gap between cultural product and consumer. The products that are offered however all ask for a different presentation, and also reinforce a different position of each membership. For this reason this text does not start from a discourse analysis on values of each respondent, but starts with the medium that each membership presents. This is because the medium already has various implications for the further manifestation of the organisation. It then presents the manner in which these products are offered. The description of each offer is loosely based on the theory on the marketing mix as designed by Borden (1964). It functions as framework that allows for comparison between memberships. Additionally it prevents that random characteristics are deployed to the research' convenience. Thirdly this analysis considers how each membership frames this product and service. By studying the expressed values and attitude towards arts and culture?



Figure 2. Process of analysis arts & culture memberships [2016] Irene Achterbergh

These three aspects together create a body of characteristics that can be interpreted to determine to some extent each memberships' position in the fields of arts and culture. It allows us to explore to what extent they display practices of distinction as introduced in the second chapter of this thesis. Do memberships display classic notions of distinction, a paradox of openness and distinction or no distinctive behaviour at all? The analysis contains a special focus on dispositions that signal (1) boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate culture, (2) an aesthetic disposition or (3) a disinterestedness of producers as introduced by Johnston & Bauman (2007). It also considers if *authenticity* is used as framework that allows for a paradox of openness and distinction.

### 6.1.1 Traditional medium, young audiences

The previous chapter described that some of the memberships originated from the 'supply-side' of cultural sphere and others were initiatives that derived from a consumers perspective.

Memberships who presented a single, more traditional highbrow art-form always originated from people who were working in the sphere of that medium. These organisations were created with the aim to make this specific medium more accessible. The three memberships that belong to this category are DasMagazin, Entrée, Museumkaart.

**DasMagazin** started as a foundation with aims to 'Stimulate a reading culture in the Netherlands'. Although nowhere explicitly formulated, do their practices as organisation mainly have a focus on a young audience. This attention on their own generation is established by multiple explicit and implicit factors. They will be highlighted in the next section. **Entrée** is the 'young friends club' of the Amsterdam Concert Hall, and biggest cultural youngster society of the Netherlands. It is initiated to awaken and stimulate enthusiasm for classical music amongst young people. **Museumkaart** is aimed at people of all ages, but the conversation had a big focus on a new platform that was specially designed for children. It appeared that they had initiated on a youngster club ('Generation M'), but, as this had not been a wild succes, the organisation decided to change its course. Their newest campaigns therefore has a focus on children. The respondent gave two reasons for this approach. Firstly because the absolute number of Dutch twelve-year olds in the Netherlands is vastly reducing while the arts are simultaneously experiencing more and more competition from other forms of leisure. Secondly because research has shown that the most important motive for adults to visit museums, were pleasurable childhood experiences (in museums). The respondent stated that this was more important than than social origin.

The rather traditional highbrow media that these organisations (re)present already bear a 'high' status. The cultural legitimacy of these objects has already been established. This can however create a sphere of formal distance. We can see that these memberships were designed as a tool to break down barriers. Financially, but also socially, as an attempt to create a more accessible image of the concerned medium. In this sense they confirm theories presented in the second chapter on this thesis, who argued for a 'decline in snobbistic discourses'. It appears that in order to reach young people, discourses that signal a democratic and inclusive attitude are preferred.

### Medium

The media that these organisations incorporate in their offer are pre-determined (literature, classical music and musea). In order to reach young people, these organisations aim to break down the traditional image of these media. This is attempted in multiple ways. A first manner is by *mixing these highbrow media with popular elements*. Of the three organisations, this approach is



mostly executed by DasMagazin. Their careful combining of objects that stem from highbrow culture as well as popular culture shows a conscious attitude of their position as agent in the field of literature. The magazine aims to highlight 'unusual writers' such as rappers and their weekly social media updates always includes a literary poem about the latest *Game of Thrones* episode. The authors that are published in the magazine were also mainly young writers<sup>4</sup>. Museumkaart enforces pressure on museums to make it more accessible for children. They do this with the use of an application and rating-system, that will be highlighted further in this text. A second approach to reach young people is by *adding events to the medium that are likely to cater to young people*. About ninety per cent of the programme of Entrée is pre-determined by the cultural orchestra and other musical institutions who rent a spot in the building (of which almost all of them classical). The organisation therefore does not have a lot of freedom when it comes to playing with barriers of high and popular as for the medium. This is attempted however, by organising events that are more likely to cater to young people. They organised a pubquiz, collaborations with various DJ's and even organised a slumberparty in the concert hall party when Entrée celebrated 21st jubilee. DasMagazin has a similar approach by organising literary festivals and other festive activities.

### Offer

The execution of the offer leaves a lot of room for the organisations to create a sphere that attracts young people. Firstly this can be attempted by designing *the products* that derive from the medium in such a way that it appeals to young people. DasMagazin as organisation pays a lot of attention to visual stimuli. Their corporate identity is created with the greatest care and everything they publish is designed to the last detail. Entrée -who's visual presentation of their website is designed by the same agency as DasMagazin- is very much young and accessible. During the interview became apparent how very conscious the website is designed. This is exemplified in the tone of voice and the use of bright colours, but also by the software itself. The respondent explained that the website should function equal parts inspirational as informational. It is really meant as a platform for young people to discover and develop musical preferences and taste. As the respondent explained: "I make sure we can present a short clip with every programm, and we have, I call them 'tags'. It allows me to describe the concert, but more in an emotional matter: 'stimulating', 'sensual'." Concerts are not described in a very objective, factual manner, but characterised with tags that cater to people their emotions. The use of visual stimuli such as clips or pictures helps people portray a mental image of what the concert would be like. Another way in which they try to stimulate young people to explore their taste is by a special tool that helps choosing concerts. "So here it says: 'Paradox of Choice?' And then you can choose for the tag "accessible" and then three concerts pop up. Or you can choose "fireworks" and then I've sorted there the, big orchestra's and opera's" Entrée also works with external curators. Two of them are

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<sup>4</sup> The publisher represents writers of all ages.

from the classical music scene, one of them is a DJ and the other is an indie-pop artist. These people present their preferences every month. These approaches are all designed as a tool that help a starting listener to explore his or her taste preferences. Museumkaart has recently developed a special online platform for children where they can play games. They also designed an application in which children can rate museums. It has playful software and includes questions such as: 'what would you do if you were the director of this museum for a day?' When museums have received over forty ratings with an 8.0 average they receive a special label that says 'approved by children'. In this manner Museumkaart enforces pressure on the museums to have an accessible program for children. Another way that Museumkaart designs products in a way that it appeals to young people is the design of the passes. The children's passes have a special design and do not have a picture, but a mascotte 'Tiket'. This is done on purpose, as it was presumed that children will dislike their own picture very soon.

A second way to make these media accessible to young people is by *lowering the price* to such an extent that it becomes attractive for young people. Entrée offers members between 15-25 years a reduction fee of 75 percent for concerts that play in the concert hall. This means that buying tickets for classical music concerts which are normally at least eighty euros suddenly becomes a lot more tempting. Museumkaart offers the pass for children for the price of 32 euros, instead of 59 euros. DasMagazin does not offer lowered prices for children or young people.

A third manner in which these organisations try to appeal to young people is by deploying the right kind of *promotion*. DasMagazin is very active on various social media channels, such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and also has a newsletter. Entrée and Museumkaart also both send newsletters. A very important focus point in the promotion is the tone of voice. The communication of DasMagazin exemplifies an intelligent discourse, but is simultaneously 'silly' enough to portray a fresh and playful image. Entrée makes an effort to describe music lively and visually, without difficult jargon. For Museumkaart the tone of voice is not a specific point of focus. A big majority<sup>5</sup> of the people that currently have a Museumkaart, is older than 55 years, highly educated and enjoys an income that is above average. It appeared that these groups were the most active in checking out the children's program (assumedly as grand-parents). On a level of communication, it was therefore more important to reach the elderly in order to reach the youngest age group. Special promotional initiatives were not appreciated by this group<sup>6</sup>. Another way that promotion can be used in order to cater to a young audience is by breaking down social hurdles. Entrée allows members bring guests to events for the price of fifteen euros. This is initiated to take away pressure to be sociable, something that people might experience for visiting an event. Of course it

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<sup>5</sup> 50% is 55+, 25% is 35-55 years and the other 25% is younger than 35%

<sup>6</sup> The respondent explained that card-holders actually reacted suspicious when they were offered premiums. After sending video's of various museums, card-holder. Received complaints and questions: "is this spam?"

is also an effective way of introducing new people to the culture association which might possibly enthuse them for becoming a member.

### Framing

When the topic of the interview with Entrée shifted to core-values, it became even more apparent how important accessibility is for the organisation. Their practices are very much focussed on an external audience that possibly does not have developed a taste for classical music (yet). As the respondent explained: “Originally, I’m not a ‘classical music-lover’ at all, it’s just that you have to come and *experience* it. And then you’ll notice that it’s not necessary at all to have played the clarinet for years, or whatnot”. DasMagazin also has a big focus on accessibility, “We want exactly to emit things like: ‘Reading is not difficult’ and “We intend to emit that DasMagazin is for everybody”. But, while Entrée is very much focussed on an external audience, is DasMagazin more focussed on creating a community. There is a bigger focus on an internal audience. The respondent explained for example that crowdfunding was an effective way for DasMagazin to start a business as it: “creates an immediate group of supporters”. The respondent also stated that “Yes, well, I noticed for my myself, when the publishing-house was being established that it really was about ‘I want to belong to’. And I mean that in the best way possible! But that we are a little club that people want to join, and were happy to spend money on.” DasMagazin also is very focussed on the authors they publish works from. These were described by the respondent as “the people that supposedly all meet at parties”. The organisation also organises a writers summer-camp that is meant for young writers. It shows that various acts in their behaviour is internally focussed and emphasises a group or community. It appears as if Entrée creates an sphere that is accessible for young people, DasMagazin creates a young sphere that some (young) people want to belong to. Museumkaart did not feel the same pressure to stress their accessibility: “We make sure that there is a connection between people and museums [...] It’s not that they all have to visit. But we should just make sure that people know that it exists.” This could be the case because, as is hopefully made clear, their marketing campaign is not especially aimed at youngsters. They want to reach children, but try to achieve this with communicating to the elder members.

### Distinction

#### Entree

The answer to the question ‘are there distinctive practices present at the manifestation of Entrée, is: ‘yes’. This first of all has of course to do with the medium. The concert hall and its main focus on classical music ‘sets the tone’ for Entrée as association. It’s quite a challenge to counteract the status and connotation of this institution. Also the target groups of Entrée are aimed at musicians, culture lovers and ‘corporate figures’. This are of course people who mostly enjoy jobs in a higher occupational sphere. But, simultaneously the organisation is very much focussed on a group that

might know nothing about classical music. Not one time during the conversation classical music was praised as something sacralised. There was no fetishisation of any art-works and the respondent did not create boundaries between legitimate or illegitimate forms of music. To the question why Entrée deserved a sport in the Amsterdam arts and culture scene, the answer was: "I just think that, in the hectic society that we live in nowadays, that classical music can give you some peace of mind. You're busy all day, running from one place to the next, in the Concerthall, you know, you simply sit still for an hour and a half and you're listening to music. That's just so nice." There were no practices visible that signalled a very strong relation to authenticity. Hence, Entrée shows distinctive behaviour, but this is largely enforced by the medium the represented. In their attitude and practices towards arts and culture they act surprisingly democratic and open.

### DasMagazin

DasMagazin shows practices that signal a paradox of openness and distinction. First of all because there is an (unintentional) effort to create a community. The stronger the focus on a group, the more it will create a sense of 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. Authenticity plays an important role to an extent that DasMagazin is very much concerned with creating an own voice an image: in visual representation, but also as young rebel that act different than other publishers. There is no attempt to be an organisation that breathes 'highbrow art', but rather an attempt to be a -seemingly democratic- authentic body in the field of literature. Their extensive focus on design reveals an aesthetic disposition towards arts and culture. There is a lot of attention on form in everything what that organisation does. The big focus on artists that the organisation employs enforces the illusion ("I would say that we don't just sell books, we also sell authors. So '*This is Maartje Wortel*', *This is Lize*"). It therefore also attributes more importance on the practices of DasMagazin. Practices of openness and distinction are therefore visible at the organisation. Making literature more accessible is one of their core values. They are successful in reaching a *new* audience, but in their practices are perhaps not as accessible for everyone as they aim to be. However, the recent establishment of the publishing house possibly helps in breaking down barriers. As the respondent said: "in the bookshop you can't see it's from us". Contradictory, this might work in their advantage in their aims to be accessible. This is because their practices, positioning and image which mostly take form online and in the magazine, are not directly visible in the bookshop.

### Museumkaart

Museumkaart showed more classic notions of distinction. The qualitative character of their service and museums was emphasised multiple times. This carried out an attitude as if others forms of arts and culture (or other museums for that matter) possibility were less legitimate. They therefore took on a responsibility as producers of symbolic capital which decided on boundaries between

legitimate and illegitimate culture. It also weighed more importance on the practices of the organisation.

**Q: Would you consider yourself a gatekeeper?**

A: To a certain extent, yes, that's what we are. Because we only present museums of quality. And we do everything to make sure that the offer of each museum is as relevant as can be".

Also the description of the average card-holder an image was not a very neutral image. By saying things as: "But think of an EO-familyday. Can you imagine such a familyday for card-holders of Museumkaart? In the GelreDome? That's not something that I imagine, you know what I mean? That's not what we're looking for [...] No, it's a very peaceful community" And: "Faithful and Proud, yes that's two characteristics that, well that card-holders *beam* I would say. A card-holder of Museumkaart is proud. On the museums. Yes, especially that last part". The respondent did not make a special effort to emphasise the importance of accessibility as organisation. This is perhaps also not necessary, as there is not a special aim to make museums more accessible for youngsters, but for children. As described, the biggest part of the card-holders is older than 55. In order to reach children, it was considered sufficient to the organisation to reach these people and update them about the childrens' programming. Museumkaart makes sure there is software that would speak to the imagination of children, and enforces pressure on museums to be more friendly for children. This is their approach as to making the museums more accessible for young people.

6.1.2. Traditional & new art-forms: artistic engaged audiences

Four of the nine cases did not necessarily present traditionally highbrow arts, but offered new art-forms or a combination of these two. These are: Cinetree, WeArePublic, Cineville and SubbaCultcha. As a result, they experienced slightly different tension area's than the three organisations that were just presented. The main difference was a bigger emphasis on the quality of the products. This could be the case because some of the presented works were not traditional highbrow art-forms. Compared with Entrée and DasMagazin, who stretched quite far to emphasise the accessibility of that specific medium, did quality and exclusivity seem more important at these memberships. It appeared that, because the 'boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate culture' were less clear, the organisations had to create and emphasis these more. This therefore also formed a tension area. The organisations wished to stay open and democratic, but simultaneously displayed distinctive practices to justify an image of high quality. This section takes a look at these four memberships, which media they present and in which manner. Consequently they are interpreted in a societal context. It will become apparent how a different attitude towards arts and culture enforces a different position in the field.

## Medium

The arts & culture membership that possibly presented the most traditional arts medium in this category is Cinetree. This organisation presents films or documentaries “with a strong societal profile or films that made a strong personal impact on one of the curators”. Film is traditionally not a highbrow art-form. But, as it the organisation only presents films that should be of ‘enlightening’ nature, it immediately creates a link with classical highbrow art-forms that embodied the “representation rather than the represented” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 5). The majority of Cinetree’s selection are independently produced films, documentaries, and world cinema. The medium that Cineville presents is also film, but considers a wider variety of genre’s. Big action blockbusters as well as smaller independent film productions are products that are taken up in the offer.

SubbaCultcha mostly allows access to music events from bands and artists that are experimental or upcoming, It is a “platform dedicated to promoting emerging artists from international backgrounds”. Some of the shows are organised by the organisation, occasionally they also organise other artistic events such as exhibitions. Because the medium they present can be very experimental, SubbaCultcha takes on a slightly more unique position when compared with the other three organisations of this category. Not dissimilar from DasMagazin, they focus more on an internal group and audience. WeArePublic, an organisation that is founded by the same directors as SubbaCultcha present a wide variety of media and disciplines. To name a few of the products that have appeared on the website in the months from February until May: classic theater plays, eletronic deep-house concerts, mime-plays, classical music, architecture, poetry-performences, debates, photography, modern and classical dance. But, they always select works from the programs of their partners. For this reason their medium exists of more ‘established’ art-products, when compared with SubbaCultcha for example.

## Offer

If we look at the subscription prices of these organisations is Cineville the most expensive (19 euros per month). The second most expensive is Wearepublic (15 euros per month), third is Subbacultcha (8 euros per month) and lastly Cinetree (5 euros per month).

The services that these organisations offer could all be considered as part of the access-economy, but executed in slightly different forms. WeArepublic offers approximately thirty selected events each month, SubbaCultcha about twelve to fourteen. Cinetree allows the possibility to view ten selected films and or documentaries online. Cineville grants unlimited access to films in thirty-nine selected cinema’s in the Netherlands.

While Cinetree presents a similar medium as Cineville, does the execution of their service take on a very different form. When comparing them, we can see that their characteristics gives them different position in the field of arts and culture. Cineville offers relatively a lot of choice to the consumer. It allows card-holders to go to these cinema’s as much as they want. Similar to

WeArePublic, the curating is thus to some extent determined by the selection of theatres the organisations works with. But apart from this there is more freedom to the consumers to choose products to their liking. Cinetree works with external curators, who present a selection of their favourite films. These curators are either famous Dutch people such as actors, actresses or authors. They bring an informal and personal touch to the platform. Otherwise it concerns people that are less famous, but enjoy an influential position in the film business. They are critics or directors of film festivals for example. The number of the final amount that is presented to the consumer (ten) carries that it concerns quite a strict selection process. This approach aims for two different consequences. Working with curators that tell their story about the specific choices they made creates an informal and personal environment. In this manner they form a contrast to VOD-streaming services as Netflix that offers choices that are decided by anonymous algorithms. Secondly does the organisation aim to form a possible solution to the paradox of choice. With a strict selection that is curated by trusted authorities they function as a guide to the consumer. WeArePublic has a similar aim. To the question if they considered themselves as gatekeeper, the answer was: "Yes, that's the core of what we do actually. If you mean with gatekeeper somebody who grants access to interesting culture". They also aim to do this in a personal matter. As the respondent explained: "We want our curators - I mean they know what they are talking about - so they form this authority of course- but it should feel like they are your peers. They do not give an objective review, they tell what they, what stimulates *them*." The personal touch also plays an important part in the approach of WeArePublic. SubbaCultcha acts very much from the 'supply-side' of the cultural scene ("promoting emerging artists"). The two directors were musicians, the two people main responsible for booking artists are musicians. It was also mentioned by the respondent: "All the people that you meet are into music. All the people that you meet are maybe musicians themselves or are maybe involved with some other dimension of the industry so it's a very vibrant and dynamic environment". Their products are less established, and also less 'mainstream'.

As for promotional aspects, this has certain consequences for the organisation.

SubbCultcha does not attempt to appear more democratic than they are: "Of course we focus on a specific segment because -I don't know- just by using our social media channels you already target a certain segment without wanting to do to. Just young students, and young professionals, sort of based in Amsterdam or bigger cities. We target also through our distribution system for example because of course we select the places where the magazine is distributed. So it will be sort of hip cafés and cool bars. [...] So there is this, anything that you will associate with millennials: of course, we are on it." Their position as membership that presents new and upcoming bands. From a promotional perspective, there is one aspect that binds these services: they all have quite a strong presence online. The corporate design of the four organisations is very well executed. Three of these organisations have a similar website. This is especially the case for Cinetree, WeArePublic

and SubbaCultcha. They all use desaturated colours and a white font to introduce their organisation. They all exchange large imagery with clear quotes or headliners, and all deploy a similar navigation through the website. Cineville did not use bright colours or a very trendy font. In that sense the corporate organisation appeared less overly aestheticised, and more 'Neutral'. The website of Cineville is considered an important medium for various reasons. First of all does the website show an overview of every film that is currently shown in any of the 39 theaters. These films are also included in the public agenda, a very important tool for card-holders. But their role as curator also takes on another form because they highlight certain films over others. Additionally they have various themed columns and short entertaining clips. WeArePublic has a website that displays every event that members can monthly visit. They're all accompanied with a picture and a short text from the curator. It also allows members to 'check in' so they can show other members which events they'll visit. Cinetree is of course an online platform, so their whole service is offered online. A promotional tool that they deploy is use of famous Dutch people as curators. The respondent explained that especially when they just launched their website, this was an effective way to trigger new audiences to become a member.

### Framing

SubbaCultcha frames their services as hopelessly devoted to emerging bands and artists. In their practices they are mostly aimed at the production sphere of arts and culture. The respondent mentioned for example that it was not necessarily bad if people did not show up to a show because then at least the organisation have had the chance of seeing these artists play. The other three organisations mentioned accessibility as important core-value. Cinetree and WeArePublic also display discourses that signal accessibility and quality.

The accessible image from Cinetree is established in multiple ways: the presentation of these media through a VOD-system is of course first of all quite open and democratic: it is accessible for any Dutch person that has access to the internet. Financially, the service is low-priced and the design of the website is very playful: it shows yellow bright colours and playful fonts. The homepage shows a clip from Moonrise Kingdom, a quite light-hearted film, but from a director who's name functions as a brand and is well-known independent movies: Wes Anderson. Also in their way of addressing the audience, there is a pretty casual tone. The use of 'we' and 'you', creates the sense of a community of film-lovers. Cinetree also stresses the qualitative service of organisation quite a lot. The first text on their homepage says: "An exclusive film collection by and for film-lovers". On the website in general, the qualitative nature of the films are emphasised quite a lot, not in the least by describing their service as a "Healthy diet" of films, for example.

This attitude towards arts and culture is similar as WeArePublic's. The title of the organisation (*WeArePublic*) suggests an accessible identity. This was also an important aim of the organisation: "Yes I think that, if you talk about core-values, that's one of our core-values. That



we're accessible and that we, that everybody is allowed to join. Of course there are specific people who are more likely to join, and you have to have an interest for culture in the first place to even want such a pass. But, I think it's very important for us that everybody is welcome, and eh, the more diverse, the better." The organisation also displays quite a lot of emphasis on presenting qualitative good objects. On their website, but also in the interview this was apparent ("We search for hidden gems" and "our selection is just very good").

Cineville displayed the importance of quality to a lesser extend. Their main focus was aimed at accessibility: "That's very much in our tone of voice I think. And the way that we present films. I think that, most of time, we're very direct. And that we use clear communication, we don't make things more difficult than they are. Film theaters can have this image that films should only have a deeper meaning or be of significance. At Cineville we think it's totally okay if you go to an exciting thriller and you just have fun. Or something that's just beautiful to watch, but won't be life-changing. That's all completely fine, you know. Going out and enjoying some boobs-guns-helicopter-film that just super nice as well, there is nothing *wrong* with that. And that's something that we also emit.

### Distinction

#### Cinetree

At Cinetree we can detect characteristics that signal a struggle between openness and distinction. It is also visible that the distinctive practices are partly justified through a framework of authenticity. The personal stories of the curators are for example considered authentic voices as opposed to 'anonymous and mechanic' parameters such as Netflix. But this approach simultaneously embodies a distance from mass-production. Additionally, the curators that work in the field of film are considered cultural authorities. They take on a role as producers of symbolic value. When the respondent was asked if these curators could choose anything they wanted the respondent explained that one of the curators wanted to show *New Kids*, but that this was not 'aloud'. And when the respondent was asked for an example of a film that could not be chosen for the platform the answer was *the Transformers*. It shows how Cinetree also create boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate culture. The platform offers a stage to diverse film-productions in the sense that they can originate from all parts of the world: smaller film productions, documentaries and world-cinema are all appreciated. But it is not as open and democratic to an extend that it would also show *New Kids*.

#### WeArePublic

WeArePublic shows similar tension area's. The following quote exemplifies this:

**Q: Would you say that, as the curators must have seen a lot, that there is a tension area between products that they would like to showcase, but cannot be showcased as We Are Public wants to stay accessible as organisation?**

A: Well, yes, sometimes they (curators) say things like: “yes, this is something that people really like a lot”. As if they want to say: “this is a little bit more of an accessible show” And then I say things as: “Yes, but do *you* like it?” I want that personal, I want that they can personally tell me why they like it”.

Accessibility in the conception of WeArePublic is *not* defined as reaching out to the audience and giving them what they would like. It is defined as WeArePublic giving members the tools to understand what is special about the events that *they* selected. We can therefore see that boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate culture play an important part in this construction. It was never explicitly mentioned, but within these boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate authenticity played a role on multiple levels. The organisation shied away from mass-culture (“Supercommercial shows are not that interesting to me because people will find their way to these objects anyway, and we want to present the adventurous things”). The respondent also stressed the importance of a personal story of a curator. Another aspect that is visible from the offer is that it highlights a very diverse and sometimes unusual selection. “Adventurous” products are preferred. Quality is thus not sought through the valorisation between high and low, quite the contrary, but, it is sought in authenticity. However, much cultural capital is needed to decide which of these products are legitimate. Simultaneously these valorisations seem to be determined by the other dispositions. There’s an aesthetic disposition in the sense that the organisation deploys a very well thought of design. There was also a disinterestedness of producers as they gave answers that shied away from commercial motives: “We care about growth, but not so much about financial growth. We care more about the personal growth of the organisation”.

### Subbacultca

The medium that SubbaCultcha represents is by nature experimental. They present it in a young way, and display distinctive practices. They have mostly a focus on an internal sphere, an already existing audience, which is also a very clear focus group (young, international, fashionable). There was emphasised multiple times how members were like-minded people. Interestingly enough the respondent categorised SubbaCultcha with lowbrow culture (“Yes [...] it’s low culture as I understand it is just not as interested in getting acknowledged by official institutions.”), but their attitude towards arts and culture showed very classical notions of distinction: “I would say that good culture is trying to contribute meaningfully to society and its members. And bad culture is just decoration? [...] Something flashy that also disappears in a second and leaves no traces. And no meaningful residue behind.” While they do clearly act as producers of symbolic value:

**Q: And do you think that you're partly responsible for the popularity for an event? Or for like a musician or a band?**

A: Yes. Because as I said, we promote bands that not a lot of people know that maybe have sometimes less than a thousand people following them on Soundcloud or on Facebook. So they have a very small audience at the moment of their first European tour when we book them and bring them to Amsterdam. And Amsterdam is quite a key city on the map of European music. So then it always helps, it's always great, exposure. Because our members are music heads.

In this manner they shows of openness and distinction in little bit different manner than the other organisations. Instead of emphasising a very open attitude towards members, they act very democratic in the field of production. But they are very much responsible for creating boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate culture. These are not structured by valorisations of high and low, but by the search of an unique, new (authentic) sound.

Cineville

Cineville as organisation showed less signs of a paradox of openness and distinction. First of all this is because of the execution of their service. It allows much more freedom to the consumer. Compared to the website of the other three organisations this was really aimed at a functional service, not so much on form. During the interview, there were also no quotes or values that signalled a boundary between legitimate or illegitimate arts and culture-forms and there was no sacralisation of certain films or genre's. When the respondent was asked in a more direct way what 'good culture' meant for Cineville, she actually reacted slightly agitated: "I think that's a very strange question. That would entail, that we, as organisation, know what's best for people or something? That's very old-fashioned. That question annoys me a little bit to be honest.". While interviewee seemed to aware of Bourdieusian discussions, it is not hundred per cent clear if every member of their organisation views it that way. Their website namely does state that it creates access to 'quality films' and 'your way to a healthy film addiction'. It creates the suggestion that there is also something as an unhealthy film addiction. For this reason it does appear that they as organisation suggest that there are boundaries between legitimate and less legitimate culture. Also their responsibility in selecting film-theatres they represent, enforces a certain process of validation. For this reason they do show a paradox of openness and distinction, but act generally more democratic towards arts and culture forms than the other three organisations.

6.1.3 Traditional & new art-forms, cultural products: all audiences

The last category of memberships are organisations that include a wide variety of activities, events and products in their offer. These are Rotterdampas and CJP. They present canonical art-forms as well as cultural products that do not have a very immediate connection to artistic aspirations. It will become apparent that of all cases considered, socially, these organisations cater to the most

diverse group of members. The organisations that are presented in this category are both in some way related to the government. This is probably the reason why these memberships are presented the way they are: it is important that their manifestation and identity really caters to anyone.

Distinctive practices, or acts that embody a paradox of openness and distinction, should not be present. This section looks at the manifestation of these organisations and how they can be placed in the field of arts and culture. Additionally it considers the tension fields that these memberships experience.

### Medium:

The products that are offered to card-holders from CJP are ubiquitous. They include cultural events such as museums, festivals, pop-concerts and exhibitions. But, differently from the previous organisation do they also present clothing-, lifestyle- and electronical brands in their offer.

Rotterdam pas only includes events, but works together with 550 institutions and has a very broad understanding of 'arts and culture', as it also includes hairdressers or the Rotterdam zoo for example.

### Offer

The price of a CJP card is 17,50 euros per year. The price of a Rotterdampas is 60 euros per year, but different discount prices are applied for various people (students, households on a minimum wage). The product of both organisations is similar. They both offer discounts or free access to an event or product. CJP's discounts on events and products usually vary between ten to fifty per cent. Rotterdampas only offers discounts on events that offer a twenty-five or fifty per cent discount, or free access. In total Rotterdampas offers about 750 events. They do not work with curators, but do work with 'testers'. These are members that can volunteer as tester for the organisation. If they are selected, they get the opportunity to 'test' an event and give their insights about it. These will be published in one of the magazines. The aim of CJP is to take away hurdles that young people could possibly experience for consuming arts and culture: "CJP enables young people to develop and explore their cultural taste in the Netherlands and the rest of the world." These hurdles were defined as financial hurdles but also as 'information' or 'time'. For this reason CJP also invests on making sure there is enough information for every person.

As for promotional matters, CJP makes booklets, magazines and there is an in-house editorial team. Rotterdampas has a similar approach, they create a magazine, a year-guide, and a youth summer holiday passport. Subsequently they send out newsletters, last-minute letters and make sure the website and the application is up to date. The promotion of both organisations is done with great care. Cultural products are presented in a very conscious manner. It is not only considered important that information is available, but also that the tone of voice is right. This

means no unnecessary or difficult language. Different newsletters are send out to different target groups.

### Framing:

CJP has various core-values as important guideline for communication such as: “CJP doesn’t enforce, but gives suggestions, it shows what is fun, interesting and relevant. CJP doesn’t create trends, but incorporates them [...] CJP is not an early adapter, but is certainly doesn’t lag behind either when it comes to trends.” It is interesting that they mention that they do not want to be too much of a forerunner when it comes to trends. It shows how the organisation is concerned with catering to the majority of young people, not only the ‘early-adapters’ (SubbaCultcha, DasMagazin). This was also mentioned as aspect when asked about what could possibly be the most positive aspect of the organisation: “That we, I consider it important, that we’re inclusive. So that entails that everybody can be a part of CJP. That’s very hard from a marketing perspective of course, because if you belong to everybody, you belong to nobody. But for us as organisation that’s the core: that we facilitate your personal development”. The aim of the organisation very much resides in the realisation that everybody is different. Every ‘journey’ where people experiment and discover their personal taste starts somewhere else. The respondent explained that for this reason it is not possible to present a small selection as offer. It would never be able to reach such a large audience when the selection was very small.

Rotterdampas is framed as a service for everybody, but internally they do have a special attention on specific focus groups. They initiated the pass approximately thirthy years ago, but realised that, in order to reach these people, it should be avoided that the pass had a stigma. “If you want to make sure the pass becomes a success, than you make sure its a pass for everybody. For students, for young people, for families, for people who go on holiday more than three times a year. For families who can’t hardly buy two breads a week, for elderly people who are at home a lot. For everybody.”. The main logline of the service is: “Almost 750 fun activities, for free or with a discount”. The framing of their activities therefore mainly reside on the importance of having fun experiences.

### Distinction

#### CJP

CJP does not show any signs of distinction. It doesn’t place specific forms of culture above other forms. Nevertheless, this attitude is accompanied with some consequences as well. First of all does CJP for example not form an answer to the abundance of choice. As the respondent mentioned above: ‘when you’re there for everybody, you’re there for nobody’. This could be experienced as negative aspect for consumers. Another aspect that could be considered as a negative effect of the large amount of collaborations, is that CJP works together with very

commercial enterprises. Some of these organisations seem happy to reach a young audience, but do not seem particularly keen on 'social entrepreneurship'. Brands such as Apple, Lebara or clothing shops who offer 10% discount for example. For the image of CJP it can be good to show to stakeholders that they partner with these brands, but one could question if this really forms the financial cutback that will trigger students to explore their taste.

#### Rotterdampas:

Internally Rotterdampas has a bigger focus on reaching people who might experience more challenges to participate in events. But, the organisation aims at everybody, as they want to prevent at all costs that the pass will have a stigma. Rotterdampas does not show distinctive practices.

The number of the presented amount might of cultural events (750) might make it seem as if there is no valorisation process at all. This is of course is not true. As a first rule of thumb the partners have to be willing to give a reduction fee of at least 25 per cent to their products. The respondent also explained that they have quite a strict selection process. Interestingly she also used the term 'quality' as most important value. Instead making judgements on the validation of arts and culture the respondent however meant that the products presented should be from trusted instances. It was also important that partners would not treat members differently than non-members for example. Rotterdampas therefore also functions as gatekeeper, as they are still active as selectors that will present an offer. As organisation they do however not interfere with judgements on arts and culture.

## Conclusion & Discussion

### 1. Discussion

Before answering the research question, the results from the last chapter will shortly be discussed in this section. The first presented category, which consists of organisations that present traditional highbrow media who want to reach young people, shows some paradoxical tensions in their manifestation. Because of the dying interest in classic art-forms such as literature, classical music and musea, Dasmagazin, Entrée and Museumkaart are motivated to make these media more attractive for young people. DasMagazin and Entrée are memberships that are initiated in order to break down the barriers that young people might experience for consuming or participating in these art-forms. An accessible image of these media is achieved to a certain extent, as these organisations manage to reach a younger audience with their approaches. But, when considered from Bourdieusan perspective, it is not always achieved. It is not always possible to create a accessible sphere that reaches further than the 'obvious' social and culturally engaged demographics. There are various aspects that we can mention in attempting to explain this. First of all because the media of these memberships set the tone for the implementation of the organisation. When taking a 'classic medium' as starting point, it's a bigger challenge to attract a very diverse audience. Also because as one respondent explained, this would mean additional and alternative marketing, and financial resources did not allow for taking on such responsibilities. Secondly because, and this was mainly visible at DasMagazin, there were three dispositions present that signalled distinctive behaviour. They positioned themselves as a group. In their manifestation they function as producers of symbolic value, who create boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate culture. They have an overly aestheticised attitude towards their practices and also fetishise the artists, which consequently makes their own practices more important. Museumkaart who does not focus on this same age border, also shows less paradoxical tensions but shows more classic forms of distinction. The reason for their attitude could be explained because their target group (0-18) is differently reached than people in the age border of 18 to 30.

It appears that the second category finds themselves in a bigger dichotomy. Cinetree, WeArePublic, Cineville and SubbaCultcha have to prove themselves worthy as authority in a field of artistic abundance, but should also be accessible enough for people to want to 'join' them. The organisations searched for different ways to embody this responsibility. A first tactic was to present products that embodied classic distinctive characteristics. These products had to have a deeper meaning and be of 'significance'. In this manner they could be presented as products that catered to a degree of quality. Quality was, as predicted, not decided by boundaries of highbrow and lowbrow, but was rather judged through notions of authenticity. The products did have to lead to food for thought, but were not limited to very classic highbrow objects. "A really good garage band is also high culture" as one of the respondents said. Overall the organisations seemed to prefer

underdogs above very bland and broadly accessible products. This more more distinctive behaviour was compensated by furthermore keeping an accessible image. The use of informal curators also forms an fitting answer to these problems. By creating a personal story, it breaks down the very traditional notion of authority, and creates an authentic experience with these figures. Similarly it also allows for distinction, as these curators act as producers of symbolic value. One could even argue that it demands cultural capital from members because they need to have knowledge on who these curators are. (Otherwise it would make less sense for them to become a member). To put it very bluntly: some organisations of this category seem to consider that “making things cool” equals “making things accessible”. They are not aware that this behaviour creates additional and alternative social boundaries that creates insiders and outsiders.

The last category are memberships that include products that cater to arts and culture in a very broad sense of the word. From a Bourdieusan perspective Rotterdampas and CJP are very inclusive. As organisation they aim to reach everybody with their approach. Both highbrow and popular forms of culture are equally respected. A more difficult consequence to these forms of memberships is that partners might misuse the memberships as an easy path-way to the consumer. Rotterdampas therefore showed that it was still important to hold some kind of criterium. In this sense they also function as gatekeeper, but do not position themselves as mediator that judges about valorisations of arts and culture.

While some cases described in this research are arguably ‘better’ in reaching their aims for being an accessible organisation, this thesis is not intended to point fingers. We should also take into account other bigger, societal, issues, that show the complexity of accessible practices in the arts and culture scene. As the respondent of DasMagazin explained did “only one person with colour apply for the summer camp program”. They consequently doubted if they should have accepted this person for the sake of her skin. During the interviews also became apparent that stakeholders hold certain expectations. They enforce to a certain image on the organisation, otherwise they do not want to belong to these memberships. The research therefore also shows how these ideologies and ideas about taste are imbedded in society. To quote Gans once again: “(gatekeepers) view nation and society through its own set of values and with its own conception of the good social order” (1979, as cited in Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2007, p.76). The memberships form materialisations of these discussions, and definitely perpetuate certain ideas, but should of course not be seen as (main) responsible for inequalities that stem from expressions of taste as such.

## 2. Answering the research question

The first section of this conclusion will consider how arts & culture memberships function as gatekeeper of cultural goods. The second section will expand on how they differ as mediators of arts and culture.



This thesis started with an introduction of the access-economy. An economic model where consumers do not pay for ownership over a product, but pay a subscription-fee in order to get access to products. Examples of the access-economy are ubiquitous, and also seem to be a still-growing body. Arts & culture memberships can be considered as materialisations of this economic model: for a pre-determined fee, contributors are granted access to various artistic and/or cultural experiences. While the eldest of these organisations have existed as non-profit organisation for over fifty years, newer for-profit initiatives have appeared in the last decade.

If we view objects from a perspective of the access-economy, we can see that the role of the agent becomes important. They function as gatekeeper, in the sense that they include and exclude objects or products into a field. Arts & culture memberships act as gatekeeper in the sense that they accept or reject works, artists or objects in their offer and indirectly also into a cultural field. Their choices have consequences for the selected products as well as the products that are not selected, as these memberships attribute symbolic value to the products that have been taken up in their offer. In this manner, selected products might find an easier gateway to an audience than if they would not have been selected. Researches conducted by various memberships have shown that people are stimulated in arts-participation through their memberships. It has also shown that members consume relatively more arts and culture because of memberships. Consequently this might also entail that products that are not selected can have more challenges in finding audiences, as they are not represented by a membership.

Memberships bear a responsibility as gatekeeper, but their practices should also be looked at in context. During interviews with various employees that worked at arts & culture memberships became apparent that their actions very much fit into a chain of actions and reactions. The idea of a membership as gatekeeper picking specific products from a field of plenty is therefore not correct. When looked at from a very practical perspective, we can see that products are usually represented by a representative and it takes communication with logistics, internal or external curators and partners in order to establish a selected offer. They therefore function much more as another 'gate' in the process of arts and culture consumption practices. There are also more social issues that enforce effect on the practices of organisation. They also have expectations from various stakeholders to live up to, such as finding a right balance between big names and experimental products for example.

If we look how arts & culture memberships differ as mediator of cultural objects, an interesting phenomenon appears. All arts & culture memberships profile themselves as democratic and open platform. During the interviews almost every membership mentions accessibility as important core-value. In reality it appears that some of them function in a rather excluding manner. This is because their selection practices are structured by values and opinions on what makes 'good' arts and culture. It's normative. These selections are not arbitrary, but show strong similarities to specific dispositions that were defined by Bourdieu's theory of Distinction. Culture

endorses a consecrated status when it signals deeper meaning and significance. It is different from Bourdieu's theory of distinction, in that these selection between legitimate and illegitimate do not take place between high and low culture. Similar to what has been argued in chapter two by Johnstons and Bauman (2007), it appears that (1) boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate culture, (2) the aesthetic disposition, and (3) the disinterestedness of producers, are dispositions that are deployed for distinction. But these practices are validated through a construct of authenticity. The construct of authenticity is thus indeed deployed for democratic as well as distinctive discourses and practices. Other memberships offer a large amount of choice to the consumer. They take up the role as guide to a lesser extent than the just mentioned category. There is much choice and responsibility for the consumer to explore his or her own taste. Their absence from any normative evaluations makes in this sense they operate more democratic.

Lastly there is an important consideration that flows from this research. If access-economy indeed takes on more form, society will develop into a sphere that is strongly defined by subscriptions and networks. Paying a monthly fee for access suggests more agency for the consumer. From an economical perspective this is correct: he or she has more possibilities in the model of access than if there is an economy of ownership. But, if we take into account the very social and symbolic dimension that also plays an important role in agency and cultural practices, other implications should be made. If consumers are bound to networks and memberships it functions as limitation. People become trapped in a web of (social) networks, much more than if they had the freedom to buy ownership over separate individual products.

### 3. Limitations of the study

The interpretive and qualitative character of the research make that it is by nature subjectively interpreted. As researcher I aim to pursue an objective and neutral stance during the whole course of the research. Alternately I can not expect this attitude from the respondents. Although the interview-guide deliberately focusses on the *practices of the organisation*, its representative will be a person. This firstly means that the research can not prevent that the scope of each conversation might vary if other respondents were approached. Secondly it also has to be taken into account that respondents will answer socially desirable answers. The slightly formal setting of a semi-structured interview also does not help in establishing an atmosphere where everything can be said and told (VanderStoep & Johnson, 2008). After each interview was analysed, is researched to what extent this corresponded with the rest of the image of the organisation. The organisations are therefore really considered as a whole. With this approach I hope to have limited personal perspectives of the respondents to the least amount. Another possible weakness is that there could have been expanded more on each membership, but there are limitations as to how extensive and long a Master thesis should be.

#### 4. Suggestions for further research:

This research is of explorative nature. It has rather opened up a new field of questions instead of narrowed down very specific claims or statements. A possible field of interest could be to 'zoom in' more thoroughly on paradox of openness and distinction at contemporary gatekeepers and, or mediators. *How* does consecration exactly take place and *how* do these influencers make decisions cultural gatekeepers make decisions between products. Which values do they hold dearly and where do these come from? Another very important aspect that became apparent during the course of this research is the interconnected nature of ideologies. This research therefore suggests research on members of arts & culture memberships. How do they see the role of agency in these models. And why does this person become a member if some researcher speak of a decline in trust in traditional institutions and a bigger focus on the individual?

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## **Appendix 1.0: Introduction of interview**

Hi, before we start this interview I will shortly introduce myself: my name is Irene. I'm currently in the last phase of my Master Arts, Culture & Society. I live in Amsterdam. I'm currently writing my thesis and the topic concerns Dutch arts & culture memberships and their role as contemporary gatekeeper of cultural goods. I'm super grateful for letting me do this interview with you!

In this conversation I'll ask you everything about 'organisation X'. It will take approximately 1,5-2 hours. Everything will be recorded, but I'll treat all the information confidentially. I'll send you a transcript of the dialogue, so you can check it for mistakes. It might also be good to know that apart from me, the corrector and the second corrector, nobody will read these transcripts. Nevertheless it is possible to stay anonymous as speaker. Halfway June I hope to have finished my thesis, if you're interested in my findings I'm happy to send you the results!

Before we start with the interview I would like to make an important footnote. I want to emphasize the importance of answering the questions with the ethics of the organisation you work at in the back of your mind. And not (just) from your personal consideration. This entails that I prefer to hear answers that are in line with the convictions of the organisation. Even if you don't agree with these rules on a personal level.

I start the interview with a few general questions about the organisation. This allows me to compare the findings of the interview in a later stage of this research. The second and longest part will be about the role of arts & culture memberships as curator and gatekeeper.

I think that's about it. Do you have any questions at the moment?



## Appendix 2.0: Interview Scheme

I. Respondent, Factual information on the organisation	
0.1 Respondent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Name</li> <li>- Job title</li> <li>- Why did you start working at <i>organisation x</i>?</li> <li>- What is the highest level of education that you've taken?</li> <li>- What do you like the most about your work?</li> </ul>
0.2 Organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can you tell me something about <i>organisation x</i>?</li> <li>- How old is <i>organisation x</i>?</li> <li>- How many members does <i>organisation x</i> have?</li> <li>- On which 'products' do you focus?</li> <li>- What is your businessmodel?</li> <li>- How many people are in the organisation of <i>organisation x</i>?</li> <li>- What is the diversion between man/woman? What is general level of education?</li> </ul>

## II. Gepoogde identiteit, strategie en doelgroep

1.1 Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What are the core-values of <i>organisation x</i>?</li> <li>- What makes <i>organisation x</i> unique when compared to <i>organisation z</i>?</li> <li>- What would people see as most positive characteristic of <i>organisation x</i>?</li> <li>- What could people see as negative characteristic of <i>organisation x</i>?</li> <li>- What does the name <i>organisation x</i> stand for?</li> </ul>
1.2 Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What is your mission?</li> <li>- What is your vision?</li> </ul>
1.3 Segmentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can you give me a description of the ideal member?</li> <li>- Do you focus on a specific segment?</li> <li>- Would you consider <i>organisation x</i> as accessible?</li> </ul>

## II Attitude of the organisation (Classic Dispositions)

4.1 Natural ease and confidence	<p>How did <i>organisation x</i> come into being?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Were you lucky to be successful?</li> <li>- Did the director have a big social network?</li> </ul>
4.3 Esoteric Knowledge (insiders club)	<p>What is the representation of your members?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is it diverse?</li> <li>- What is male/female ratio?</li> <li>- Education?</li> <li>- Where do they reside?</li> <li>- Do you think diversity is important?</li> <li>- Do you have a policy where you actively try to attract a diverse group of members?</li> </ul>

## II Attitude of the organisation (Classic Dispositions)

- Is it important to know a lot about cultural events if you want to use a membership from *organisation x* optimally?

## III Role as Gatekeeper

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| 2.1 Selection proces             | <p>How doe selection take place between various objects?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- On which grounds do you make your decisions?</li> <li>- Could you name an example of something that you would not select?</li> <li>- Why not?</li> <li>- What are important concepts or values that guide you in making selections?</li> </ul>   |
| 2.2 Responsibility as Gatekeeper | <p>Do you consider <i>organisation x</i> as a gatekeeper of cultural objects?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do you think you make choice (for the consumer) easier or more difficult?</li> <li>- On which grounds do you think that members make choices to consume certain objects and disregard others?</li> <li>- Do you think that you are partly responsible for the popularity of an object?</li> <li>- <b>Yes:</b> How do you deal with this responsibility?</li> <li>- <b>No:</b> Why not?</li> </ul> |

## IV. Attitude towards arts & culture (Paradox of openness & distinction)

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 3.1 Cultural Capital                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can you tell me something about the offer of traditional cultural institutes versus newcomers in your membership?</li> <li>- Do you think it is important to present products that are derived from traditional cultural instances?</li> <li>- <b>No:</b> how do you know how to make a selection?</li> <li>- Do you need a lot of knowledge about whats going on in the cultural scene to make a selection?</li> <li>- Do you think it is important to present cultural objects that are acknowledged as professional art-discipline?</li> <li>- <b>No:</b> What is important then? How do you know what to choose?</li> </ul> |
| 3. 2 Distance from Mass production                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To what extend does the commercial success play a part in the depiction to take it up in your offer?</li> <li>- Did you reject objects because you thought they were too commercial?</li> <li>- <b>yes:</b> when is something too commercial?</li> </ul>  |
| 3.3 Artistic Creativity, Ideology of Artist Charisma | <p>What do you think is special about <i>organisation x</i>?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- On which object are you the most proud?</li> <li>- On which collaboration are you the most proud?</li> <li>- How important is the role of the artist?</li> <li>- Do you like to work with established names?</li> <li>- What kind of effect does this have?</li> </ul>   |
| 3.4 Historicism                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do you try to find objects that nobody knows about yet?</li> <li>- Do you often choose object that are acknowledged by other critics/instances/ funds?</li> </ul>   |

#### IV. Attitude towards arts & culture (Paradox of openness & distinction)

<p>3.5 Exoticism, + 'Standard' Distinction = Rarity and Obscurity (Inaccessible to most Americans)</p>	<p>Does the organisation present objects that are not typically</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- yes: can you give an example?</li><li>- In which ways do you try to achieve this?</li><li>- Why do you think this is important?</li><li>- No: why not?</li><li>- Do you think this is hard?</li><li>- Why?</li><li>- Do you think it is important?</li></ul> <p>Do you find it important that you present objects that would be considered rare? Do you prefer to present something that might be experimental or something that you know will attract a lot of people but might not be very exciting or renewing?</p>
<p>3.7 Boundaries legitimate VS illegitimate</p>	<p>What does good culture mean according to <i>organisation x</i>?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Do you think there is still a difference between high and low culture?</li><li>- yes: which difference?</li><li>- Does this difference play a role at <i>organisation x</i>?</li><li>- How do you see this in practice?</li><li>- No: But do you think there is a difference between good/bad culture?</li><li>- What is the difference according to you?</li></ul>
<p>3.8 Disinterestedness of producers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Does your organisation have a big focus on financial growth?</li><li>- Do you think it is troublesome if the artists you work with are trying to earn a lot of money?</li></ul>

## Appendix 3.0: Overview of respondents and additional information on each organisation

### Cineville

Respondent: Emma

Gender: F,

Level of Education: Higher Vocational Education, MA in Philosophy

Place of Residence: Amsterdam

Occupation: Head editorial

#### Additional information on the organisation:

- Service: Free access to films at a selection of film houses in the Netherlands. Allows members to go as many times to films that are showcased by these cinema's as they prefer.
- Curator role: selecting and approving filmtheaters in their offer. Additionally they work with a four member in-house editorial team that write about film.
- The organisations main motive is: Started with: give film houses the audiences "that they deserve". (young people) Currently: open for everyone who are open to the idea of immersing themselves in film. Give them an opportunity to start something new.
- Focus group policy: Geographical: 19 biggest cities in the Netherlands (39 cinema's). Age: Open for everyone, but still focussing on young people (25-35) Also they are currently designing a strategy for 18-25 yrs. Social: No special focus

### Cinetree

Respondent: Thomas

Gender: M,

Level of Education: BA degree

Place of Residence: Amsterdam

Occupation: Head of Content, Editor in Chief, Programmer,

#### Additional information on the organisation:

- Service: An online Video-On-Demand service that gives users access to five films each month. These films are carefully selected by various external 'curators' whom will change regularly.
- Curator role: Presenting a small selection of films to users each month. It started mostly with famous Dutch people but now also chooses less famous, film. Such as filmcritics, directors of filmfestivals. etc.
- Motive: "besides nurture and shelter, stories are the things we need most". Storytelling and evoking social change.
- Focus group policy: Geographical: No specific focus group although marketing started in Amsterdam. Age: No specific. Socially: no specific focus.

### Entrée

Respondent: Micha

Gender: F,

Level of Education: BA degree

Place of Residence: Amsterdam

Occupation: Marketing & PR

Additional information on the organisation:

- Service: For a yearly fee you reduced access of 75%, 50% or 25% (depending on your age) to concerts in the Amsterdam-based concert hall. Also they organise special events for members. As a member you're always welcome to bring a guest for 15 euros. (biggest young association of the Netherlands.)
- Curator role: The presentation on the offer through PR: through website, newsletter etc. certain events get "pushed". Also work with four permanent curators, two internal, two external artists.
- Motive: It is initiated to make the concert hall more attractive for young people and to get young people in touch with classical music.
- Focus group policy: Geographical: Amsterdam. Age: They aim at young people (18-35) with a special focus on Musician, culture lovers or corporate. Socially: highly educated.

**We Are Public**

Respondent: Basje Boer,

Gender: F,

Level of Education: Higher Vocational Education

Place of Residence: Amsterdam

Occupation: Head editorial

Additional information on the organisation:

- Service: Permits access or access for a reduced price to at least 30 carefully selected cultural events in Amsterdam.
- Curator role: permanent external curators select worthy objects from the offer of the 80 institutes that WAP works with. Additionally: the presentation on the offer through PR: through website, newsletter etc.
- Motive: Sending people on an adventure. Guide members into trying out new things that they wouldn't necessarily choose themselves.
- Focus group policy: Geographical: People who like to experience cultural events in Amsterdam (mostly habitants of Amsterdam). Age group: Everyone, but communication is young and fresh. Socially: No active policy

**Rotterdam**

Respondent: Madelein

Gender: F,

Level of Education: Higher Vocational Education

Place of Residence: Rotterdam

Occupation: Marketing & PR

Additional information on the organisation:

- Service: Free access or access for a reduced price to various events in and around Rotterdam. An important criteria is that the events have to be fun and people have to leave the house in order to experience the product.
- Curator role: the organisation makes a selection. Additionally: the presentation on the offer through PR: through website, newsletter etc.
- Motive: Get people out of the house and let them experience fun activities.
- Focus group policy: Geographical: people who like to experience cultural events in Rotterdam. Age: no special focusgroup. Socially: Externally aimed at everyone although internally conscious of a special focus on minority groups such as elderly, or families on a minimum wage.

### **DasMagazin**

Respondent: Suus

Gender: F,

Level of Education: BA degree

Place of Residence: Utrecht

Occupation: Publishing Assistant

#### Additional information on the organisation:

- Service: A literature magazine as well as a publisher. Offers four magazines a year and . Funding of their publisher offers free books, invites to the opening party and magazine. Also organises bookclubs and literature festivals.
- Curator role: selecting Dutch authors that will be presented in the magazines, books, festivals, events.
- Motive: promote 'reading culture' in the Netherlands, make literature accessible for young people.
- Focus group policy: Geographical: None (Netherlands & Belgium). Age: young. Socially: no active policy,

### **CJP**

Respondent: Walter

Gender: M,

Level of Education: Economics

Place of Residence: Amsterdam

Occupation: Director

#### Additional information on the organisation:

- Service: Reduced access to various products and cultural events
- Curator role: selecting brands and events. Additionally: the presentation on the offer through PR: through website, newsletter etc.
- Motive: taking away some of the hurdles that young people might experience in order to let them try cultural stuff.

- Focus group policy: Geographical: None (Netherlands) Age: 12 - 35 years. Socially: specially designed marketing for various social 'layers'

### **SubbaCultcha**

Respondent: Andreeaa

Gender: F,

Level of Education: MA in Performative arts & Art History

Place of Residence: Amsterdam

Occupation: Has no title (Administration membership system. distribution of publications, editor)

#### Additional information on the organisation:

- Service: Offers reduced or free access to various events. Main focus on musical events but also a few other artistic products such as film and visual arts.
- Curator role: presenting selected artists as well as organising gigs for upcoming artists.
- Motive: Give upcoming artists the stage they deserve as well as giving users the chance to experience new and upcoming bands and artists.
- Focus group policy: Geographical: Main focus on Amsterdam, but also Utrecht and Rotterdam. Age: 18-35 . Socially: International audience

### **Museumkaart**

Respondent: Mirjam

Gender: F,

Level of Education: X

Place of Residence: Amsterdam

Occupation: Marketing & PR

#### Additional information on the organisation:

- Service: Offers "free access" to over 400 museums in the Netherlands.
- Curator role: only present museums that received a seal of approval (from external organisation). 'Push' certain museums in newsletter that present a special offer to members.
- Motive: Two way motive: service that is offered to museums (more visitors). Let people know that there is such a thing as Museumkaart.
- Focus group policy: Geographical: Netherlands. Age: Everyone but specially designed marketing for various age-groups. Recent focus is very much on children (0-18) Socially: No active policy