

# **The Artistic Toolshed**

A study on the justifications of government involvement in the arts and their evolution in Dutch Cultural policy since the nineties.

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is an exploration of how justifications of government involvement in the arts have evolved in Dutch cultural policy since the introduction of the Cultuurnota in 1993 through the use of the Economies of Worth framework as conceptualized by Boltanski and Thévenot. My analysis has focused, in particular, on the different narratives that exist on the value of art within these policy texts - to reveal their revision as they become absorbed by a dominant neoliberal discourse. Through a rebranding of the objects that make up the “cultural sector”, art becomes reframed as a means of production rather than an instrument of perception. By shifting the discursive focus from the collective (civic) to the individual, the responsibility is repositioned to lie with the artist and the audience. The principle of autonomous art becomes a weapon in a discursive siege for further privatization and industrialization; The concept and understanding of artistic quality, it is implied, has to be broadened, so as to tap into a larger portion of society; To prevent the arts and culture from becoming a self-serving, self-referential bubble with no real ties to the people that fund it. Through this line of reasoning, the reliance on expertise is problematised, which in turn is used as an argument to allow more market forces into the cultural sector, as this would better reflect the wishes (demand) of the general population. Good art, it is implied, finds its own audience; it is entrepreneurial. I argue that the last thirty years of cultural policy in the Netherlands have seen a naturalization of this discourse, presenting it as both inevitable and appropriate

**Key words:** Arts; Justification; Neoliberalism; Cultural Policy, Discourse.

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# Introduction

Right at the moment when a dwindling amount of corona-cases seemed to be heralding the beginning of an end, the Dutch minister of healthcare detonated a final little bomb in the midst of a famished cultural sector: *“We all love culture and enjoy going to museums, but we can easily go a day without it”* (Parool, 2021). Waves of indignation and scorn were sent into the baby blue Twitter troposphere by outraged artists and art-lovers alike. People were eager to confide in Hugo de Jonge why culture is in fact a basic need for them; That putting on a dvd is not a one-on-one replacement for their museum visit. The Dutch corona-minister is not the first to belittle the arts to mere entertainment; to just one of many ways to pass the time. Academics, politicians, artists and probably anyone who has ever looked at something they, or someone else, considered art, have all asked themselves some version of the question: Why should we care about art? Why should our government support, let alone fund it?

The influence of neoliberal agendas on the formulation of policy is a widely discussed phenomenon, and the arts are not exempt from this trend (Alexander, 2018; Belfiore, 2002; Bishop, 2012; Bourdieu, 1996; Gray, 2007). As welfare states were dismantled and liberal governments pushed through privatization across the board, the supported arts were increasingly forced to fend for themselves (Harvey, 2005). Troubled by the thrills and throes of a free market, artists have had to adjust and redefine their own position in these consumerist societies (Malik, 2012). Many have seen in this realignment an artistic field which has become increasingly instrumental (Gray, 2007; Vuyk, 2010; Evans & Sewell, 2013; Peeters, 2020); In other words, the arts as becoming a means to an end - deriving its value from external effects rather than having an intrinsic worth. This instrumentality is sought both in art's social value (Frey, 2008; Bishop, 2012; Alexander, 2018) and in its economic potential (Gray, 2002; Belfiore, 2002). The result is a government that justifies their support for the arts by referring to goals that lie outside of the artistic field; Goals that subscribe to a different logic and fit within a different discourse.

The main research question this thesis intends to answer, goes as follows: How have justifications of government involvement in the arts evolved in Dutch cultural policy since the introduction of the Cultuurnota in 1993? Through the use of critical discourse analysis, I aim to unravel the role of language in constructing a particular relationship between the government and

the arts. My analysis is guided by the Economies of Worth framework as conceptualized by French sociologists Boltanski and Thévenot (2006). Based on the language and rhetorical practises they identify as belonging to each of their seven “worlds”, I have coded policy documents and parliamentary texts to map out which modes of justification dominate the discourse on the arts and culture. I have integrated this analysis into a broader academic and philosophical discussion on the role of art in society; The two most notable works being: The work of Pierre Bourdieu (1989, 1996), whose theory on fields and autonomy versus heteronomy have guided my discussion on instrumentality; And the work of Alan Badiou (2005), which has provided me with categories that reflect different views on the arts; The *Romantic*, The *Didactic* and the *Classical* interpretation. Through this approach, this thesis adds to a relatively novel body of studies which concerns itself primarily with the language used in documents related to cultural policy or subsidy cycles.

In order to answer my main research question, I have structured my analysis along the following sub-questions:

1. What logics dominate texts on cultural policy during my period of analysis?
2. What perception of the role of art in society is reflected by this?
3. How has the value of art been defined throughout this period?
4. How has artistic quality been defined in cultural policy throughout this period?

Given the nature of this research endeavor, I have deliberately avoided defining these latter two concepts prior to my analysis, rather letting them be defined by and through my analysis. I will start off by describing in more detail how I have operationalized these concepts in my theoretical framework. The reason for starting with theory, rather than the more common approach of opening with the literature review, is that this allows me to go through the relevant literature more comfortably, since the vocabulary on which this thesis is based will already be introduced. After this I will go over the relevant literature for this study; Looking in particular at those studies with a similar intent and approach. I will include in this literature review a brief overview of Dutch cultural policy before 1993, distilling what principles dominated the discourse during this period, based on the works of Emmanuel Boekman (1939) and Warna Oosterbaan (1990). Following this is my analysis and discussion, in which I will chronologically go over the discourse on the value of art

and the notion of quality as presented in the texts. This will then allow me to extract several trends for closer inspection and a more detailed discussion, leading up to a conclusion in which I reflect on my main findings as well as suggest some possibilities for future research.

# 1. Theoretical Framework

In this section I will go over the theory I have used to operationalize the concept of *justification* for my analysis. How does the Dutch government justify the necessity of art for society? How does the state legitimize their involvement in the arts? Naturally, answers to any such inquiry depend on the angle and perspective you take; Or in other words, to which mode of justification you appeal. You might argue for state support because of economic reasons: Subsidizing culture would help attract people to other parts of the economy. Or your justification could lean on morality: Everyone deserves access to culture! In looking for how the use of such modes of justification have evolved over the last 20 years in relation to Cultural policy, I have chosen to use three different prominent works that concern themselves with this concept; A sociological analytical framework by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006), Badiou's work on the relation between art and philosophy (2005) and Bourdieu's concepts of Heteronomy, Autonomy and Refraction (1986; 1996). I will relate each of these works back to my research question, clarifying how I have incorporated them into my discourse analysis.

## 1.1 Economies of Worth

In their work *On Justification*, French sociologists Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) created an analytical framework to explain how people justify their actions by appealing to certain principles. They identify six different *logics* pertaining to *worlds* (or *Cités*), each with their own higher common principles, tests, and rules according to which worth is produced and distributed; The Civic world, the Market world, the Industrial world, the Domestic world, The world of Inspiration and the world of Fame. In a collaboration with Chiapello, Boltanski (2005) later added a seventh order of worth to this list: the project-oriented justificatory regime, also called the Network Logic (p. 168). Besides common principles, each of these worlds have their own *objects*, language and grammar, used by individuals to assess the worth of themselves and those around them. For instance, “creativity” and “originality” are objects used to assess worth in the inspired world, whereas “wealth” and “luxury” are concepts belonging to the market world. The discourse analysis used in this thesis is based on the language and categories identified as belonging to these different

logics. This framework allows for a structured reading of texts and situations, to gain a better understanding of how language is employed to construct a certain distribution of worth within a particular field. Ever since the English translation of *On Justification* (2006) hit the academic shelves, it has been used for studying the inner dynamics of a wide variety of fields and cases; The field of cultural policy remaining relatively unexplored in this regard. Recent studies on artist grant-applications in Belgium (Peeters, 2020) and an inquiry into Quebecian cultural policy (Lemasson, 2017) being notable exceptions; Both illuminating the applicability of this framework when it comes to the arts and culture (in my literature review I will elaborate on both these studies). I will briefly go over what the different *worlds* conceptualized by Boltansky and Thévenot entail and how they reveal themselves through language. A more complete rundown of how these *logics* have been operationalized for analysis is included in the appendix.

### **The Inspired World**

*“The Inspired world has to confront the paradox of a worth that eludes measure and a form of equivalence that privileges particularity”* (Boltansky & Thévenot, 2004, p. 157). Key to the logic of the inspired world is its fragile relationship with any type of measurement. Due to this *elusive* affair, any type of evaluation becomes inherently problematic. This conundrum is apparent in the ambiguity that rears its head when the state, or any other appointed institution, is to make a quality assessment of art; For who are they to say what is ‘good’ art? Its higher principle is one of *inspiration*. This is manifested through *feelings* and *passion*. *Spontaneity*, *Uniqueness* and *irrationality* are lauded, all in service of the *imagination* and in order to *create*. Approval of others is not seen as necessary, and things are seen as worthy in and of themselves. Unworthiness comes from *sameness*, *routines* or *habits*. Art and the artistic are most commonly associated with this logic, due to its tendency for drawing on the *subversive*. In its emphasis on being *different* and remaining unaffected by any rules or regulations, an inspired argumentation often relies on, or seeks to establish, pure autonomy as the worthiest state.

### **The Civic World**

In this world it is not the individuals that matter, but rather the *collectives*. Things are meant, above all, to equip the collective in such a way so as to give it permanence and presence and a way of

*assembling*. Individuals ought to direct their *will* to the *general*, overcoming that which *divides*. Anything that strives towards *unity* is deemed worthy. Worthiness forthcoming once individuals can overrule their *selfishness* and fight for a *common interest*. The *Legal* is particularly appreciated within this world, as it can facilitate proper *organisation*. The ‘government’ is an institution considered to be built and legitimized by this logic, as they own and organise that which is *public*. The Civic logic becomes opposite to the Market logic in this sense, as we separate that which is *publicly owned* with that which we consider to be *privately owned*. This distinction forms a key part of my analysis, given the relevance of this shift when it comes to the neoliberalisation of the cultural sector. Of particular interest in this rearrangement, is the use of *composite objects* and *compromises* within policy texts that seek to combine both logics so as to construct a new type of discourse on the role of the government in relation to the arts and culture.

### **The Market World**

This logic is one that revolves around, and is coordinated by, *competition*. Actions are motivated by *desire* and wanting to *possess*, creating *profit*. Worth is expressed in *price and wealth*, and the worthy is *marketable*. States of unworthiness come about from *losing out* and *stagnation*. This world is divided into *buyers* and *sellers, suppliers* and *consumers*. Art and culture, in this sense, would become *products* to be *bargained* on the marketplace. Legitimation is expressed in terms of how well they perform on said market and lend themselves for such *financialization*. The connection to neoliberal discourse is obvious, as a free market in which individuals operate as competing, self-interested individuals relies on the same rhetoric and tests of worth.

### **The Industrial World**

This world’s higher principle is one of *efficiency*. Things are judged based on their *performance, productivity*, and their *functionality*. The unworthy is that which is *unproductive* or *inactive*. An important aspect of this world is its relation to the future; Industrial worth is created through *planning*. Things have to be *adaptive*, not *static*. This temporal element is one of the primary distinctions which sets this logic apart from the Market world, which instead is solely concerned with the ‘now’. This world is all about *measuring, methods, and variables*. Proper *management and leadership* are seen as key to achieving *goals*. Worthy art and culture in this sense would be those

artists and institutions that efficiently and *effectively* organise their *resources* and *output*. This logic is of particular interest to discourses in Dutch cultural policy, as many have pointed out the pervasiveness of this *management*-oriented approach to the cultural sector (Abbing, 2002; Vuyk, 2010; Klamer, 2016). Dutch artists have even explicitly voiced their dissatisfaction with the influence this has had on the discourses surrounding the arts in their ‘The Manifest for a new Understanding of Art’ (*Het Manifest voor een Nieuw Kunstbegrip*, 2011), claiming it does not do justice to the intrinsic worth of art.

### **The Project-Oriented World**

This world is ruled by *activity*. Individuals are assessed based on their ability to stay *involved*, to *communicate* with a diverse *team*, so as to build and maintain a strong *network*. Naturally then, *trust* becomes a valuable currency for the *realisation of projects*. The worthy are those able to constantly move from one project to the next in life, being in an unrelenting state of *adaptability* and *flexibility*. A worthy life, in this sense, is action-packed with projects which are, ideally, as different from one another as possible. One should avoid ever being without *ideas*, always preparing the next move and experience. Think of the surge in ‘self-employed’ artists (and non-artists) causing concern as the traditional career path of climbing the hierarchical ladder within one company is quickly losing ground. Think of your friend who will invariably exclaim she has “so much going on lately!” whenever probed about how she’s doing. The opposition between work and no-work becomes blurred as any moment holds an opportunity for activity, for being ‘busy.’

### **The Domestic World**

A world that is in its essence relational, the Domestic world distributes its worth based on personal relations. Evaluation is done through reference to *generation*, *tradition*, and *hierarchy*. What matters in this world is how this hierarchy is established and how it is maintained through *social bonds*, interactions and *reputation*. What matters is *character* and *manners*. The unworthy is that which *betrays trust*. *Inappropriateness* is a vice and could lead to *disorder*.

## **The World of Fame**

This world is governed around public opinion, placing little value on memory. Worth is distributed based on *respect*, *recognition*, and *attention*. The communication of *opinion* is central, done through the likes of journalists or brands, with a goal of achieving maximum outreach and capturing *attention*. To be unworthy in this world, is to be *banal*, to have no *image* at all, to be *forgotten*.

## **Concluding remarks on the Economies of Worth**

The above descriptions of the different worlds serve only as an introduction to the most relevant aspects in relation to cultural policy and are not exhaustive. Given the relative importance of the Market, Industrial, Civic and Inspired worlds in my analysis, these have been given more attention throughout my thesis. Seeing as the framework itself is meant to be exhaustive, I consider it valuable to have at least a basic understanding of the other three worlds, to grasp the totality of what Boltanski and Thévenot have tried to conceptualize. Not to mention, the Domestic world, the world of Fame and the Project-oriented world each have obvious connections to the arts and culture, but this correlation remains relatively unexpressed in the policy documents analysed.

## **1.2 Justification through Compromise**

Central to this distribution of worth, is agreement or disagreement about which logic, and thus which principles, should hold sway in a given situation or argument. In the case of cultural policy for instance, an artist might assess the worth of her project by how *disturbing* or *unusual* (concepts belonging to the world of inspiration) it is. A civil servant, on the other hand, might appeal to the industrial world in assessing her application; Looking at the realism of her defined *goals* or the soundness of her *planning*. Not surprisingly, Boltanski and Thévenot use the Cultural sector as an example of an area which sees many conflicts about which logic should apply in a test of worth. In such cases of (potential) disagreement, policy often draws on, or creates, common goods or composite objects (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006, p. 211) to justify its presence and authority within a certain field. An example would be the buzz around “Creative cities,” in which the logics of both the inspired and the civic world are brought together (see Campbell, 2011 for a more in depth

analysis of this particular composite object). Another oft heard example would be “Cultural Entrepreneurs,” which could refer to both a market logic and an inspired logic. Such marriages seek to establish a compromise, so as to make possible an assessment deriving from different logics without having to fundamentally disagree. At the same time such compromises reflect, diffuse and legitimize a kind of belief system, particularly in policy documents (Alexander, 2008). During my analysis I have actively looked for and examined such “compromises”, to reflect on their role in the justification of government involvement.

### 1.3 Philosophical inquiries into the nature of Art

It is quite well known that Plato believed most artforms to be a danger for society, as they would undermine the hierarchy he held in such high regard. His pupil, Aristotle, on the other hand, was more keen on the elevating potential of art, as a way for people to transcend their daily lives. You might fault Plato for his ethics, but the idea of art as a counterforce to power forms a key component of why we say art matters today, especially in cultural policy. Similarly, Aristotle’s romantic view almost directly translates to a commonly given definition of art’s value in today’s cultural policy (see my analysis). Almost as if not much has changed when it comes to the philosophical pondering on the role of art in our lives; as if we have been drawing from an enduring set of ideas - an observation which might in itself be quite telling of what art is.

These underlying perspectives on the role and position of art in relation to society are a key to answering the research question at hand. In its essence it is not so far removed from more philosophical inquiries into the nature of art. Notable works from which I draw inspiration include Kant’s ideas on the Aesthetic Judgement, particularly his notion of *disinterestedness* (Van den Braembussche, 2009); Alfred Schutz work on phenomenology (1945), particularly his conceptualization of *lifeworlds* influence my understanding of the way discourse comes to constitute reality; Guy Debord and his work *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), whose emphasis on the sign versus the signified have provoked my own ideas on art and the aesthetic; And finally, Badiou’s work on philosophy and art (2005) in which he distinguishes three archetypical perceptions of art and its relation to society; The Romantic, the Didactic and the Classical. These

categories provide me with a framework along which to align my analysis. Badiou himself emphasizes the significance of these different perspectives for understanding today's cultural policy and funding structures for the arts (p. 11). Building on his ideas I set out to look for the following modes of normative justification in my sources when it comes to government involvement in the arts:

*Romantic* justifications - This type of justification sees art as having a value in and of itself. Art is conceived here not as a means to an end, but as an end in itself. Accordingly, any type of evaluation or assessment of art should be based solely on artistic criteria. Artistic value is seen as something intrinsic - it does not come from any external impact or effect it might create. To speak in Bourdieusian terms; Art in this mode of justification is meant to be autonomous and any type of heteronomy is interpreted as unwelcome (Bourdieu, 1996).

*Didactic* justifications - This type of justification sees art as an instrument. Evaluation should be based on how successful art is in achieving its objectives, not on the artwork itself. (Badiou, 2005, p. 3).

*Classical* justifications - A type of justification in which art is seen above all else as entertainment, meant to amuse and to be enjoyed. Viewed in this way, the only metric by which art should be evaluated is the approval of its audience, its ability to cheer or comfort its onlookers.

## 1.4 Autonomy, Heteronomy and Refraction

In his work on the literary field and the visual arts, Bourdieu (1996) delves into the territory of justification and consecration of art by looking at it through a sociological lens. He has scrutinized the varying ways in which capital is distributed within these sectors by applying his field theory. Fields he sees as social domains of life in which individuals seek to maintain and increase their capital, pertaining to rules specific to that field. Bourdieu argues that fields have an autonomous and a heteronomous pole, highlighting the constant struggle between different principles of

consecration. Within the artistic realm, the autonomous pole would be occupied by those who proclaim an “art for art’s sake” stance; Art to be judged only by field internal logics and critiques. On the other side would be an artist who is in the craft to amass large audiences and monetary gains, residing in the Heteronomous pole. The often formal, sometimes business-like, language that permeates the subsidized art sector, can be considered as a clear symptom of such heteronomy (Alexander, 2018; Gray, 2007; Peters & Roose, 2020). Linking this to Boltanski and Thévenot’s framework, it can be said that the logic of the civic and bureaucratic field here, penetrates that of the artistic field.

A concept related to this phenomenon is *refraction*, a term borrowed from physics to describe what happens when the external influence of, for example, state logic passes through the lens of the artistic field, altering its direction and dismantling its pressure (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 220). In its most explicit form, this could refer to an artist who alters their vision to fit into whatever criteria is required for a grant or subsidy. In its more subtle form, this concept can be used to better understand how a government legitimizes their own presence within a specific area of life, while maintaining their own principles and field-internal logic.

I will use the concepts of heteronomy, autonomy and refraction to guide my interpretation of the eventual results of my analysis. To what extent do the modes of justification present reflect autonomy? How do the different modes interact with each other? How are the justifications for a supported art sector “refracted” through policy?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Cultural Economics and Justifications for the supported arts

The economic justification of publicly funded arts has a rich academic history. Starting with the foundational work of Baumol and Bowen (1966) on *the Economic Dilemma* of the performing arts, many (cultural) economists have since dabbled in the logic behind subsidy structures for the arts and culture. (Some prominent examples include: Cwi, 1980; O'Hagan, 1998; Blaug, 2003; Belfiore, 2002). Stemming from the field of economics, most of this work approaches the topic through a lens of rationality rooted in economic assumptions. As a result, the answer to *why* art should be funded, is often left unanswered. In other words, most of this research is implicitly based on normative perceptions that do not put to question the reality of publicly funded arts (Feder, 2018). Despite this, such economic studies remain popular among arts advocates aiming to appear pragmatic and policy-relevant (Frey, 2008). In this section I will go over the most relevant economic conceptualizations of the arts and culture, so as to be able to link them to the different modes of justification found in policy documents.

Roughly speaking, one can divide literature on arts funding into two strands: One which studies the issue in terms of efficiency; Why is it economically rational to use public money for the arts? The other strand concerning itself more with “noneconomic” justifications, such as social wellbeing or quality of life - but nonetheless still expresses these issues in economic terms. The first strand relies heavily on the idea of ‘market failure.’ Arts and culture are considered a (semi-)public good which would not reach an adequate level of production without public funding. The idea being that many “artistic” goods or forms of expression are often to a large extent non-rival in consumption and non-excludable in nature (Towse, 2011, p.17). Although it is easy to come up with examples of art that does not fit these criteria, this rationale remains popular in cultural policy today (Throsby, 2010, p. 12). In terms of justification, the public good argument is an interesting one, given that it can take on both a romantic and intrinsic view on the arts, as well as a strongly didactic and instrumental one. In conceptualizing art and culture as a “good,” the reasoning becomes part of a market logic. However, the underlying ideas are, in some cases, rooted in a civic and inspired logic: The mere existence of a museum in a town or city may produce social benefits,

even for people not directly “consuming” it; Art can reinforce a sense of national or local identity; Art can make people more understanding of one another. David Throsby (2010) makes the compelling comparison between art and biodiversity; an intangible asset from which we derive utility by simply knowing it exists, something which economists would refer to as “existence value.” Yet in the case of policy, the argumentation is most often intertwined with a didactic and instrumental justification of the arts in its implication that art does not have a value in itself, but rather through its external effects. Notable externalities you will find in literature on this topic include: national identity building, education of values, cultural reputation of a country, and stimulating the rest of the economy (Throsby, 2010).

Another variant of speaking about art in terms of “goods,” “consumers” and “supply,” is the concept of a *merit good*; A good that is socially desirable even when or if individuals do not demand it (Blaug, 2003; Zuidervaart, 2011). Introduced to economics by Richard Musgrave in 1957, it has been used to interpret government expenditure in areas such as food stamps, subsidized housing and education. The concept of a merit good relies heavily on the idea that humans are short-term utility maximizers and will therefore, more often than not, make decisions which are not beneficial in the long run - so the government steps in. Consumer sovereignty is in this sense disregarded in favour of a government that would dictate what is to be deemed “good” for society. This reasoning was especially prevalent in Dutch cultural policy around the 50s yet still has a strong influence today. Back then it was quite explicit in talking about the “elevating” (*verheffende*) capacity of art, a necessary education for a populace that does not know what’s good for them (Oosterbaan, 1990). Today such blatant paternalism is more rare, but the notion of art as a merit good has remained relevant.

### **2.1.1 Art pour l’art, valid or fallacy?**

The approach taken in this thesis seeks to reveal the legitimation that underpin these economic arguments. So instead of looking at why it is economically *rational* to use public money for the arts, it looks at what the underlying principle of this rationale is. One such principle is the popular “art for art’s sake”, or *art pour l’art*, a phrase commonly credited to French writer Theophilus Gratier who used it as a slogan in the preface to his book *Mademoiselle de Maupin* in 1835. Other notable uses of this phrase include the world’s oldest film production studio Metro-Goldwyn Mayer. Their

logo, with the instantly recognizable roaring head of Leo the Lion, is wrapped in a ribbon inscribed with a Latin translation of “art for art’s sake.” An interesting piece of trivia considering the well-known lion logo would by most be associated with the pinnacle of commercialised art. This is not an insignificant phenomenon, as it illustrates how the “*art for arts sake*” ideology is used to promote something that very much represents an opposite view on art. A romantic view of art as something intrinsically valuable, is used here to mask commercial motives and ends up being used as a tool for commercialism instead (Gray, 2007; Malik, 2012). My analysis of discourses on the arts in Dutch cultural policy reveals a similar tendency. The romantic *art for art’s sake* argument is used as a coat for neoliberal and instrumental aims that lie behind the reasoning or the measures proposed in these documents. Through this, the argument for financial withdrawal is made more palatable while at the same time allowing a certain ideology to gain territory within this particular field of policy. I will further develop this point in my results section.

## 2.3 Neoliberalism

Staying true to its etymological roots, neoliberalism has become a term that gets thrown around quite liberally - and for good reason. It is commonly used as a label for *the* politico-cultural viewpoint that has dominated as well as shaped recent history (Bourdieu, 1995; Vuyk, 2010; Alexander, 2018). Neoliberalism denotes a political philosophy that establishes the competitive pursuit of self-interest in a free market as the optimal organizational foundation of society. It favours private over public control, and sees the state as an ineffective device for solving problems or ensuring individual freedom. The state, however, is not entirely useless in a neoliberal society, because “*if markets do not exist, then they must be created, by state action if necessary*” (Harvey, 2005, p.2).

When it comes to discourse, this has meant a re-imagining of the world around us in terms of markets: The audience would become ‘consumers’; a painting becomes a ‘cultural good’; performance would be ‘measured’ and quality could be reflected in prices. This is not to say all other discourses on the arts have evaporated when the Berlin wall was bludgeoned into debris; If anything my analysis would proclaim their perseverance in a reality that seems increasingly hostile

to their principles. It is not so much their existence that is under threat, but rather their interpretation and influence within our political systems - or in this particular case, in Dutch cultural policy (a point to which I will return in my analysis).

Neoliberalism has been described as a power producing philosophy (Bourdieu, 1995) that reproduces dominant privileges (Bishop, 2012). This (re-)production, in part, takes place through language - through the rebranding of objects to fit into a structure that presents the marketability of things as an inevitable and natural outcome. When it comes to justification then, this means an introduction of logics into arguments where different tests of worth, previously held sway. In terms of cultural policy, this means the penetration of neoliberal ideas into an arena where other philosophies previously flourished - reminiscent of the type of heteronomy Bourdieu (1996) speaks about in the arts.

## 2.4 Previous studies done on justificatory discourses in the arts

In this section I will go over some of the studies that have looked at similar themes using a comparable approach as this thesis. Starting with a very recent work titled “Justificatory pluralism in visual artists’ grant proposals” by Julia Peters (2020), for which she has analysed a large body of grant proposals between 1965 and 2015 in Belgium. Her analysis is based on value registers inspired by, among others, Boltanski and Thévenot’s framework. She observed an increased engagement with non-artistic fields over the years, most notably justifications based on social-economic factors. Furthermore, she signals an increased professionalization of artists proposals, closely tied to an increased entrepreneurialisation. This is indicative of an overall streamlining of processes related to the subsidy cycle, and can be interpreted as a sign of different logics and mindsets entering the field of arts and culture. She concludes that “this entrance of field-external discourse indicates heteronomization of artists’ discourse” (Peters, 2020, p.16). This study is of interest particularly because the Belgian context is closely related to the Dutch one. Furthermore, her analysis takes place on the “other side” of the subsidy system than the one studied in this thesis, which might see a different trend in terms of justificatory practises.

Other research has, similar to this thesis, focused on the side of the government in assessing

the evolvement of discourse surrounding the arts. In a study on the legitimation of cultural policy in Quebec, Gaele Lemasson (2017) retraced different regimes of worth in the way state intervention was justified by the Quebecian government. Lemasson put particular emphasis on the use of compromises and common goods in the construction of a successful justification. An interesting element present in the case of Quebec, is the weight given to their french speaking identity and culture, which played an important role in the formation of their cultural policy. Similar sentiments are also present in Dutch cultural policy, where explicit mentioning of “Dutch” culture and arts are manifold. During the past ~30 years, this is usually done out of an economic, market-based logic rooted in a competitive mentality; Dutch architecture as being “among the best,” or the Dutch film industry having to become more competitive on the world stage. The Quebecian context on the other hand, is in large part influenced by their relation to, and position within Canada as a “separate” culture with its own traditions for which they seek recognition. An observation which would suggest, not surprisingly, that historical context has a significant effect on the type of justification employed within policy pertaining to the arts - and by extension the type of goals for which it is instrumentalized.

This brings to mind a study by Kees Vuyk (2010), in which he argues that instrumentality has always been at the foundation of cultural policy, only nowadays it has become more expressively economic. A popular belief portrays the cold war period as the heyday of the autonomous arts in the “West”; An interval in which funding was plentiful and the state recognized the intrinsic value of an independent cultural field, unbothered by state influence. Vuyk argues that this approach to art was no less instrumental than its 21st century counterpart; it was merely a different kind of instrumentality. Rather than being focused on the economy, the discourse of artistic freedom was used as an instrument of propaganda against communism; To contrast the liberty of a capitalist creed with the restrictions of socialism. Once the Iron curtain had fallen and the end of history was proclaimed, the need for such ideological propaganda fell away, and so did the emphasis on art’s intrinsic value and autonomy.

On the other side of the Atlantic, Pyykkönen and Stavrum (2018) have looked at both Finland and Norway to see how entrepreneurship has been introduced into cultural policy parallel to an economization of the “creative industries” in these countries. They find a gradual shift in tone is steadily instilling a more economic interpretation of what art is or could be. They highlight how

concepts such as “creative cities,” “artrepreneur” and “creative industries” are used to make the introduction of this economization seem more natural. This is quite in line with the concepts of *composite objects* and *compromises* (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2012) used in this thesis, a point to which I will return in my analysis.

Similar tendencies have been observed by Vera Alexander (2018) in her study on state funding of British arts organizations. Likewise, she chronicles a development towards heteronomy in the field of art. She describes state subsidies as a “Faustian bargain,” that demand “significant repayment in the form of lost autonomy” (p.1). Much like the argument made here in this thesis, she sees the discourse on art as an autonomous field being hijacked to promote an ideology which essentially requires quite the contrary. Although the British subsidy context differs markedly from the Dutch one, the terminology through which this process unfolds is rather similar. Making Dutch artists and arts institutions more dependent on their own income is presented as an improvement to their autonomy, as though market forces do not bring their own coercive powers into the equation. The fact that subsidy is given, is used as leverage for introducing, or imposing, an entrepreneurial approach on the receiver. A similar point is made by H.K. Lee (2015), who describes the discourse around “creative cities” or “creative industries” as a Trojan horse. Cultural policy, and thus the government, presents the neoliberalising and globalising forces as inevitable. These developments are therefore painted as being beyond the control of the state, as a current one can only submit to. A similar language can be spotted in Dutch cultural policy documents, where these forces are often brought forward without an alternative, as if undebatable and inescapable.

## 2.5 Dutch Cultural Policy before 1993

If anything useful is to be said about discourses on the arts in Dutch cultural policy in the last 30 years, they must first be properly positioned within their history. Inspired by Ferdinand de Saussure (1916) my analysis of the texts and the discourse in question is guided by both a *diachronic* reading, taking into account the evolution and history in which it came about, and a *synchronic* one, the way it appears and functions at present. Luckily such chronicling of Dutch cultural policy has been done since the very dawn of government involvement in the arts. Given the scope of this thesis I

will not elaborate too much on these histories, aiming merely to distill key ideas on the position of art in Dutch society that emerge from these works.

For this brief contextualisation I have looked primarily at two works, the first being the dissertation by Emanuel Boekman from 1939 titled “Overheid en Kunst in Nederland” (English: Government and Art in the Netherlands). In this work which is considered as foundational for Dutch cultural policy as we know it today, Boekman gives a sociological reading of developments in Dutch state involvement in the arts from 1850 to 1939. He explicitly states that readers will not find general ideas on the role of art in society, but rather an overview of events that have brought us halfway through the 20th century, on the brink of a war that would fundamentally shake up these ideas. The relationship between the arts and the state in the Netherlands, he argues, has seen quite a distinct and different development from its neighbouring countries. Contrary to for instance France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Russia, the Netherlands knows a much weaker tradition of state commissioned art and patronage.

Not once does Boekman drop the word “Kunstbeleid”, (English: cultural policy) as Dutch cultural policy after the war came to be known. In hindsight however, his work reads like a blueprint of what was later implemented under this header. He pleads for a government who does not push art in any one direction; An involvement that focuses on increasing interest for the arts and culture among the population and to arouse curiosity where it does not yet exist. The thing that stands out here, is just how similar these principles are to the ones on which our current cultural policy is based.

The second text with a similar approach to the one taken in this thesis, is by Warna Oosterbaan released in 1990. The loosely translated title reads: “Beauty, Welfare and Quality. Cultural policy and justification after 1945”. As the title suggests, he singles out three trends and principles that governed cultural policy in the period between 1945 and 1990. Oosterbaan highlights the government’s changing view - in his view narrowing - of their own role when it came to assessing or judging art. Right after the war this was done to a large extent along ethical criteria, which made place for a more socially oriented approach around the sixties. During this period, a rising number of genres was admitted into the realm of “culture,” and the once widely accepted distinction between “high” and “low” culture lost sway. This endorsement of new art-forms, described by some as a democratisation (Pots, 1999; Janssen, 1999), was visible in the increased

subsidies these artforms received (Pots, 1999) and their entrance into the curriculum of primary and higher education (Bever, 2005). The final stage, until the nineties, is characterized by a Dutch government who further distances itself from such judgments of art, with the notion of *quality* gaining more prominence. Oosterbaan interprets this as an increasing assertion of arts' autonomy as the 20th century arrives at an end.

In terms of justification for state involvement in the arts, many of the objectives and reasoning is still present today, although phrased differently. For instance, the fifties saw a strong emphasis on the “civilising” properties of art. Although the formulation today is different, less paternalistic perhaps, the idea that exposure to art is beneficial to the individual is still very much present in today’s cultural policy. Whereas policy in the fifties dubbed it a “Beschavingsoffensief” (civilising offensive), policy texts today refer to art as essential for “persoonlijke ontplooiing” (self-fulfilment or self-development). This increased focus on the self can be seen as illustrative of an increased individualism that formed a part of our increasingly liberal society as it came to be constituted in much of the Western world as the 20th century unfolded. The change in language, although based on more or less the same principles, reveals how the focus has shifted from a more communal responsibility, elevating society as a whole through art, to a responsibility that lies with the individual, be it the artist or the audience.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Discourse Analysis

A common notion of what Discourse Analysis (DA) entails does not exist (Bryman, 2012, p. 528). Therefore it's useful to spell out what exactly this research aims to do in applying this method. Central to the choice of using DA for answering my research question, is this methods' attitude towards language. Language is seen as not just a means through which we understand the world around us, but as a means through which that world is constituted and produced (Potter, 1997). The method is commonly associated with continental philosophers such as Michel Foucault, for whom the underlying power structures that discourse produces and maintains have been central themes throughout his career. Foucault sees knowledge as historically contingent, dependent on the *episteme* (worldview) in which one lives. This is of particular interest to this thesis as it seeks to unravel the context out of which we speak about, in this case, the arts and culture in relation to the state. Discourse, in this sense, becomes a version of reality that is able to dictate how we view and relate to the objects around us. A certain discourse concerning art, for instance, makes up our understanding and concept of what art is, what it should be, and who should be allowed to make or judge it. This discourse then becomes a framework along which we distribute worth and justify power hierarchies within the field of art.

This constitutive capacity is what makes DA appropriate for the research question at hand, as it aims to unveil how, through a particular discourse on cultural policy, a justificatory framework on the arts and culture is produced. The evolution of this discourse would be telling of how such beliefs penetrate first through language and finally legitimize themselves by, for instance, becoming policy. Three underlying principles guide my understanding of, and approach to, discourse analysis:

- 1) It is *anti-realist*: Therefore it denies that there is such a thing as the “real” reason for why the government should or should not support the arts. Nor does it claim that any research could arrive at a privileged conclusion to such ventures. (Potter, 1997: p. 529).

- 2) It is *constructionist*: It sees these versions of reality as produced and constructed. Thus, any type of discourse only provides one such version out of many possible depictions of reality. Moreover, discourse in this sense is seen as rhetorically organized: It actively seeks to persuade and to establish a version of reality in the face of competing versions (Gill, 2000: 176).
- 3) It sees discourse as a form of *action*: A way of accomplishing things, legitimizing beliefs and giving meaning to social life by making certain activities possible, desirable or inevitable. The documents here analysed then, are not seen as neutral accounts but rather as deliberate attempts at shaping a reality and creating meaning.

In other words, this research aims to unveil how a version of reality is constructed through the texts analysed, why certain discourses become privileged over others; What this tells us about current attitudes towards state involvement in cultural policy and how these might evolve in the future.

An aspect deserving of some more attention, is that of the anti-realist approach. By insisting on reality being little more than that which is produced through discourse, one essentially disregards the existence of a material reality behind this rhetoric. Discourse, in this sense, risks becoming a self-referential sphere in which supposedly nothing of significance exists outside of it (Bryman, 2012, p. 539). (Which, coincidentally, is also a critique used against art that seeks to exist only on its own terms). For this particular research endeavor, concerned with justification and policy, this controversy is of less relevance, as it seeks explicitly to uncover modes of justification through language. What this language represents is, in this case, more important than what is being “done” in a material sense. The approach here taken therefore, is in part functionally and practically motivated given the scope of a Masters’ Thesis. Interesting angles to take for future research, would be to see how the reality invoked in the discourses here analysed, relates to the lived experience of those who practise their artistic craft within these realities.

## 3.2 Research method

To facilitate my discourse analysis, I have worked with a set of categories and codes, more commonly seen in regular content analysis. To structure my research, I have used the Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software ATLAS.ti. These codes are created to ascertain a degree of reproducibility and thus comparability. Additionally, they allow for the longitudinal component of this research to gain more potency and a more objective signalling of trends and changes. I have allowed the coding-tree to grow organically as I went through the texts, going back through the documents when a significant new code appeared. I then subsequently organised these codes into categories that fit into the theory discussed in my theoretical framework. I have included a concise version of the resulting code-tree in the appendix.

As for the Economies of Worth framework, I have operationalised the different logics based on the language, grammar and rhetorical practises identified by Boltanski and Thévenot in their book (2006). The most common discursive indicators I have filled out in an operationalisation table included in the appendix. The different indicators on their own do not necessarily establish that a certain logic is being employed, rather their combination with other indicators and overall connection to the higher common principles that exist for these logics, as discussed in the theory chapter.

## 3.3 Selection of data

The choice of content and time period to be analysed for this thesis has been based on the following; The year 1993 represents a juncture in Dutch cultural policy, as it saw the Law on Specific Cultural Policy (*Wet op het Specifiek Cultuurbeleid*) come into practise. This meant that from then on a system was put in place which would see a policy document, the *Cultuurnota*, released consistently every 4 years. This Cultuurnota is always preceded by a letter to parliament from the ministry in charge of culture, written by either the minister or secretary of state for culture. This letter describes and elaborates on the principles that underpin the upcoming cultuurnota. In between these releases, a variety of letters to parliament are written on topics related to cultural policy, addressing in particular the politically sensitive, clarifying why certain decisions were made. This new system creates a consistent and comparable document output

which lends itself well for the research question at hand, given that they are each concerned with justifying the state's role when it comes to the arts. All combined this has resulted in an analysis of 8 sizeable cultuurnota's and 20 letters to parliament.

### 3.4 Limitations of Research

The primary critique on DA revolves around its high reliance on the practitioner's interpretation of the text in question. At the same time, this is precisely where one might say its' strength lies too; In its permittance to look beyond predetermined categories and outside of the immediacy of the material at hand. The risk here, as phrased by Schegloff (1997), is that "discourse is too often made subservient to contexts not of its participants' making, but of its analyst's insistence" (p. 183). This method of analysis is indeed, by its very definition, highly interpretive. Once you start telling a story, building a narrative, it is easy to fall into a self-affirming trap in which everything can be molded to harmonize with the argument you are trying to make. What is important to stress then, is that I am aware the story told here is informed by the intentions with which I set out to examine my data - an unavoidable aspect of any type of research in my view. The only remedy being openness; I have tried throughout my thesis to be as candid as possible in what story I am trying to tell, why I think this is a story worth telling and what it derives from.

Furthermore, It is important to be aware of the context out of which these documents are released; the strategy that underpins them; and the audience which its creators have in mind. Policy documents are riddled with intent and a rhetoric that very much adheres to particular codes that exist within this context. This thesis is a deliberate attempt to look beyond this veil of formalities; to undress it to the point where something can usefully be said about their role in shaping a reality that exists outside of these texts.

## 4. Analysis & Results

### 4.1 On the definition of the value of Art

Starting off, I will elaborate on the way the value of art has been defined in cultural policy documents throughout the period of my analysis. I am looking specifically at the definition of its *value* rather than more general demarcations of what culture entails, although these two overlap at times. What does and does not belong to the ‘arts’ is an ongoing discussion which in itself reflects a certain view on art. This debate in many ways forms a constant and essential backdrop to cultural policy, as it implies a qualitative judgement as well; Should pop music be considered worthy of the term ‘art’? Do we classify a crowd of adolescents on an MDMA-binge guided by the dependable and unfailing throbs of techno as ‘culture’? The distinction between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture, for instance, is another manifestation of this discursive categorization, a discussion which especially in recent years has been more pronounced in Dutch cultural policy. I will track and dissect the discourse that surrounds these themes, starting with the oldest policy documents from 1993, working my way up to the most recent ones released in 2020. I will use the English translation of the quotes throughout this discussion, followed by the original Dutch word in parentheses.

‘Harness or Spine’ (Pantser of Ruggengraat), is the title of the Cultuur Nota (CN) released in 1997. Culture can become either a piece of armor by which to keep out that which is unknown, a “harness” (harnas), or a footing from which to face variety, a “spine” (ruggengraat). The dominant view on culture which comes forward is one rooted in a civic logic; It acts as a “connector” (verbinder) improving the “cohesion” (samenhang) of “society” (samenleving) (Ministerie van OCW, 1996, p.3). Culture is an “instrument” (ibid., p.4) by which individuals can make sense of the world around them, in particular that part of the world which makes up “society” (de maatschappij, de samenleving). It is compared with religion (ibid., p.23), as both function like a “grip” (houvast), anchoring people into their communities. This communal aspect is presented as especially urgent in light of a culturally diversifying society; culture could be useful to bring these different cultures together; To make them appreciate and understand one another. This indicates a didactic approach, a social-instrumental justification; implied here is that a government can

usefully spend money on the arts to address social issues.

Moving forward four years, the next Nota is titled “Culture as Confrontation” (Ministerie van OCW, 2000), spanning the period of 2001 to 2004. In many ways this builds upon the previous Nota, in that it presents culture as a means through which people come in contact with other people. However, the use of the word “Confrontation” (confrontatie) also indicates a subtle slide towards heteronomy; Culture becomes valuable in its interaction when it moves outside of its own realm, when it actively seeks confrontation. Tearing down the supposed subsidy fortress by which art had been allowed to endure unbothered by external influences, forms a red thread throughout this nota. Too long has art been “protected from the market”<sup>1</sup> (van der Ploeg, 1999, p.3) and have subsidies focused on the “cultural avant-garde” (culturele voorhoede) (p.4). The audience has “become too old and too educated”<sup>2</sup> (p.3). In defining the value of culture, this nota has markedly moved away from this civically rooted understanding of culture towards one more market-oriented. Through its central motto: “To make the best culture popular and the most popular culture the best it can be,”<sup>3</sup> (p. 39) it introduces an element of competition, of maximization, both concepts belonging to the Market World as theorized by Boltanski and Thévenot.

The next Nota gets the header: “More than the Sum” (Ministerie van OCW, 2004). The market logic that nestled itself into the legitimation for public support of the arts has further pushed civic arguments to a backseat, in line with the neoliberalising wave that had struck most of Europe at this point. Artists and cultural institutions “deserve” (verdienen) more “responsibility,” (verantwoordelijkheid) as this would naturally provide them with “more freedom” (meer vrijheid, p.2), which makes for a *better* and *stronger* cultural sector (p.2). Whereas the previous nota spoke of confrontation, this one rolls with “exchange” (uitwisseling), which suggests a transactional view of culture. Right next to this view however, a strongly romantic, autonomous and even inspired interpretation of the arts is presented: “The intrinsic worth of art is more valuable than one could possibly put into words.”<sup>4</sup> (p. 20) The way the argument is built up, presents this intrinsic worth as a natural outcome of art which remains untouched by policy. By holding on to the principle of a

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<sup>1</sup> “... beschermd tegen de markt”

<sup>2</sup> “Het publiek is te oud en te hoogopgeleid...”

<sup>3</sup> “Zo wordt de beste cultuur populair en de populairste cultuur het beste.”

<sup>4</sup> “De intrinsieke waarde van de kunsten valt niet in woorden uit te drukken.”

government that does not judge art, a reasoning is presented in which autonomy, in the form of increased market exposure, is seen as both inevitable and positive for bringing to fruition this intrinsic worth.

The next nota captures this line of thought quite well: “Only in total freedom can art fulfil its role in society”<sup>5</sup> (Ministerie van OCW, 2007, p. 2). This nota, titled “The Art of Living,” has one of the most romantic, inspired and autonomous descriptions of culture out of all texts under scrutiny: “Art’s purpose is not to serve political goals, or any higher power at all. It only answers to itself”<sup>6</sup> (p. 4); “Art does more than just entertain or please; Art can shock, disrupt, make visible that which we would rather not see”<sup>7</sup> (p. 12). Right next to these metaphorical declarations, the logic that dominates is a combination of the industrial and market kind. “Sharper choices” (scherpere keuzes) have to be made for Dutch culture to “strengthen” its position in the “international field” (internationale veld, p. 23). Cultural institutions have to become more “professional” so artists can “cultivate” their “talent” and set up “successful projects” (p.19). The fact that this goal-oriented language is unironically married into a definition of culture as being valuable only in freedom, is a trend that characterises the last 30 years of cultural policy. The idea that the government is a “manager” of the country, ruling it as if it were a kind of firm, has picked up propulsion, and this development has found its way into most areas of policy.

Around 2008 the cultural sector was hit by a perfect storm in the shape of a liberal secretary of culture, Halbe Zijlstra, and a world-wide banking crisis. The result was a heady mixture of budget cuts and a reformation of the subsidy cycle. No longer would the government fund artistic projects directly, instead outsourcing most of this to funds specifically designed for this. The idea being, once again, more autonomy. The policy documents and statements by the ministry of culture around this period, define culture only in terms of personal development. For the first time “identity” takes a front-seat (Ministerie van OCW, 2011, p.3). The discourse becomes strongly individualistic; Culture helps *you* face the future (p.6), it incentivizes *you* (p. 5). In a subtle way this language validates and legitimates an approach in which responsibility is put with the individual, with the artist and audience. Culture is a personal responsibility which the government should

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<sup>5</sup> “Alleen in volledige vrijheid kan kunst zijn rol in de samenleving vervullen.”

<sup>6</sup> “Kunst is niet dienstbaar aan welk politiek doel of welke macht dan ook. Zij is alleen dienstbaar aan zichzelf.”

<sup>7</sup> “Kunst doet meer dan behagen of vermaken; kunst kan ontregelen, choqueren, datgene zichtbaar maken waarvoor we onze ogen liever zouden willen sluiten.”

only address in terms of *market failure*. The logic on which this reasoning relies is market-oriented in its focus on competitiveness; Creativity is a “necessity” to remain “relevant” in a globalising world (Zijlstra, 2010, p. 29).

Fast forward four years, and the heavy hits of the recession have left their marks. However, the new nota “Culture Moves” (Ministerie van OCW, 2015) is a stark departure from the previous one, with a strong discursive focus on the “societal value” of culture. In part this can be explained by the fact that the minister now in charge of this portfolio is one of the Labour party (PvdA). Political affiliation of the minister in charge of our cultural policy has, not surprisingly, a strong discursive influence on the texts in question. In line with this affiliation, the new nota defines and legitimizes culture through civic notions; art as a “public good”, with a strong focus on “accessibility”. Similar to earlier nota’s, this presentation of art as a benefit to society draws from a romantic reading of its value: “The intrinsic worth of culture is the principle on which this nota is built”<sup>8</sup> (p. 2); “Culture has a value which cannot possibly be captured in social or economic terms”<sup>9</sup> (p. 7).

Arriving at the most recent nota “Culture for everyone” (Ministerie van OCW, 2020) has further strengthened a view of culture as a civic object. “Culture connects. Culture is experienced together”<sup>10</sup> (p.13). A new key term is the “broadening” of culture, which is both a response to the sentiment that the arts have become too elitist, as well as addressing the call for more ethnic and cultural diversity that has picked up considerable pace during the preceding years. All of this is very much in line with terminology such as the “social turn of art” (Bishop, 2012) and new forms of “social instrumentality” (Alexander, 2018); both of which point at a general trend of the arts becoming more socially engaged.

Overall, the definition of the value of culture has throughout these years drawn on a relatively stable set of elements, often reformulated to fit into a broader neoliberal discourse. I will dedicate some more attention to the most prominent ones and how they fit into the theory.

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<sup>8</sup> “De eigen waarde van cultuur is ook voor mij het vertrekpunt.”

<sup>9</sup> “Cultuur heeft een eigen waarde die niet enkel is te vatten in termen van sociale en economische effecten, of verbinding met andere beleidsterreinen.”

<sup>10</sup> “Cultuur verbindt. Mensen beleven cultuur vaak samen”

## 4.2 Arts and culture as social phenomena

This view on art became popularized in the latter half of the 20th century in Europe, when philosophers such as Richard Rorty (1989) and Martha Nussbaum (1995) started drawing attention to the capacity of art to bring people together, helping them empathize with others. By extension art was seen as an imperative for a functioning democracy. In particular this extension is reminiscent of one of Friedrich Schiller's (1965[1795]) key arguments in his influential *Letters On the Aesthetic Education of Man*; Only through the imaginative power of art can the concept of freedom in the mind be balanced with the authority of a state - without it society would decay into cataclysmic chaos. In other words, art can make us see eye to eye with our neighbours and our existence; It can serve as a lightning rod for revolution by letting us imagine what could be.

Looking at Dutch cultural policy today, this line of thought can either turn acutely cynical: allowing art - perhaps even controlling it through subsidies - so as to keep the populace happy and give the artistically gifted an "outlet" as it were, while continuing to pursue a neoliberal agenda. Or one might be inclined towards a more benign interpretation: Art is supported because the state values its ability to promote and maintain *social cohesion*, a term used frequently throughout the last 30 years of policy. I would argue that the use of this argument has moved from being rooted in a predominantly civic logic, into a formulation which favours a market-oriented approach. Whereas the earlier nota's presented this social dimension in a rhetoric that belongs to a romantic understanding of culture, with a focus on its *meaning producing* and *connecting* qualities (Ministerie van OCW, 1992; Tweede Kamer, 1995), the argumentation gradually started adopting a discourse which emphasizes the importance of the *encounter* with culture to argue for more privatization (CN, 2008; CN, 2011). Art, it is said, needs an audience to be valuable. The supported arts have too small, too exclusive and monotone an audience - therefore they need to be left to face the force of the market on their own, as this would push them to gain a bigger audience and be of more use to society. This serves as an example of how a popular understanding of art is altered to fit into a dominant discourse and becomes useful in reproducing the ideology that underpins it. Through this altercation, the market solution is presented as the best possible approach for art to fulfill its social function. The language used is instrumental in posing this infiltration of a field-external (Bourdieu, 1996) logic as legitimate and naturally occurring.

In my literature review I already touched upon Vera Alexander's work (2015; 2018), who suggested the addition of a different kind of heteronomy (in a Bourdieusian sense) to be considered in the analysis of cultural fields. Namely, a penetration of state interests through government subsidies. Although she links this primarily to neoliberal interests, she does suggest the language used to promote these is justified through social goals. In her book *Artificial Hells*, Claire Bishop (2012) makes a correlated case, in declaring the "return to the social" (p.3), or in other words, an ongoing history of attempts to rethink art collectively. Similar to Alexander (2018), she chronicles a European trend in deploying a discourse of socially engaged art to justify pulling the public purse for the arts and culture. The question asked while making policy would be: "What can the arts do for society?" Although both studies mentioned look primarily at the United Kingdom, this supposed social wind amidst all the capitalist clatter reached the Dutch dykes not much later. Particularly the Dutch labour party (PvdA) adopted this rhetoric, which can be retraced in policy documents released under ministers belonging to their ranks. "It is not the cultural awareness of society, but rather the societal awareness in the arts and culture that should be strengthened"<sup>11</sup> (Ministerie van OCW, 2004, p.1). In line with this, topics such as participation, inclusion and diversity have increasingly occupied center-stage in cultural policy during the last 30 years. Despite being dubbed a "social turn" by Bishop (2006), she emphasizes the neoliberal agenda of self-sufficiency that underpins this discourse in the case of policy.

The cultuurnota released in 1992 for instance, explicitly states that "giving everyone, regardless of their social-economic background or status, access to culture is not only beneficial to the arts, but also the society at large"<sup>12</sup> (Ministerie van OCW, 1992, p. 41), to later add that this "inclusion requires the active participation of individuals"<sup>13</sup> (p. 42). Although this notion of inclusivity and participation has a benign ring to it, they imply and construct a division between the *excluded* and the *included*. The goal here, according to Bishop (2012), is to have as many people included in a system of self-administering and self-reliance so as to set the stage for a retreating government. To be included - the meaning of which is never quite elaborated on in the texts

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<sup>11</sup> "Het is niet het culturele bewustzijn van de samenleving wat moet worden versterkt, maar het maatschappelijke bewustzijn binnen de kunst en cultuur"

<sup>12</sup> "Dat iedereen toegang heeft tot de cultuur, is niet alleen bevorderlijk voor de kunst, maar ook voor de samenleving als geheel."

<sup>13</sup> "Echte inclusie vereist actieve deelname van het publiek"

themselves - is to have a disposable income and conform to the structure of a regular work week. To participate is to be individually responsible for what was previously the collective concern of the state. The government's justification of its involvement in the arts and culture fits into this reconfiguring of the relation between the state and its citizens, as the arts and culture become both an instrument for including people into this system.

### 4.3 Culture as a necessary component for creativity and innovation.

1995 saw the first Cultuurnota that was released under the header of the newly formed ministry of Education, Culture and Research (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap); before this, culture fell under the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Culture (Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Cultuur). A change that is in itself indicative of a changing view with regards to the function and position of culture within society. It reflects, as well as foreshadows, an increasingly interdisciplinary understanding of what culture could and should be. This increasing stress on interdisciplinarity in the arts and culture can be interpreted as a sign of an increased focus on the heteronomous pole (Bourdieu, 2002). The strength of art, in this view, ought to be found in its ability to transcend its own field. In this particular case, as remains a popular theme until today, art is seen as providing a unique and useful approach to research due to its innovative capacities (Brummel, 2019). This discourse is tightly interwoven with ideas surrounding the *Creative Class*, a terminology made popular by Richard Florida (2002) which found its way into the legitimization of cultural policy all over the world (Brummel, 2019). The underlying idea is one rooted in a very didactic understanding of culture, as a tool to reach maximum creative potential and find solutions to problems that, in most cases, lie outside the artistic realm. The logic on which this reasoning is often based, is an industrial one. Culture can *create opportunities* and help find *creative solutions to complex problems*. (Ministerie van OCW, 2007, p.14; p.28). Other nota's are more explicit about the economic implications of such Creative Cities: "Firms take into account the cultural climate of a city when deciding where to settle. Employees on the other hand, base their decision of where to work on the value of the cultural offer"<sup>14</sup> (Ministerie van OCW, 2004, p.17). The language here

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<sup>14</sup> "Bedrijven nemen het culturele klimaat van een stad in overweging voor de ligging van hun hoofdkantoor. Aan de andere kant letten werknemers op het cultuuraanbod bij het kiezen van hun woonplaats."

used presents audiences as employees and the arts and culture as part of a larger *climate* which attracts high skilled labour. The role of arts and culture is fitted into a broader discourse around human capital and cultural capital, evoking a Bourdieusian interpretation in which individuals seek to maximize their capital within certain fields (1996). Art and culture are thus seen as ways to improve one's position in a specific area of life, which in this case would be, broadly speaking, high skilled labour. The underlying logic thus becomes one of competition and maximization, which would fall under the Market World in Boltanski and Thévenot's framework. The policy here is focused on what the field of art can do for other fields, which in this case is to provide an attractive climate.

A revealing manifestation of this rebranding of 'culture' and 'creativity' into composite objects such as "creative cities" and "cultural industries", is the 2005 report titled *Our Creative Capacity (Ons Creatieve Vermogen)*, an initiative of the Dutch Ministry of culture. The goal was to make more apparent the economic potential of the arts and culture within society, and create more awareness of these sectors within the business world. The terms "art", "entertainment" and "creative industry" are used interchangeably throughout the document. Through a discourse which essentializes, while at the same time reducing, art to a form of finance, it encourages investors to tap into the "economic potential" of the arts. This framing slowly marginalizes - while at the same time hijacking it - a discourse on the arts as intrinsically valuable, as being able to exist in and by itself. Although analysis of recent policy documents shows that the art for art's sake rhetoric is still alive, closer inspection of the discourse reveals that to a large extent this romantic justification has been instrumentalized and made subordinate to a strongly didactic and market based understanding of art and culture. This is visible in the accentuated focus on the individual and their responsibility, the increasing reliance on a market and industrial logic in the justification of government involvement, and the composite objects and compromises that increasingly dominate the texts on cultural policy.

#### 4.4 Culture as a “lens” through which to look at society.

The metaphor of a lens is one of the most consistently drawn up images in any political conversation about art. The idea here is that through art, the world is revealed to us in a manner quite unreachable for our own retina's. We need art, as it were, to show us what the world is really like. Without it we would be blind to so much malignance, so much woe and wrongdoing, that it is critical for any society to maintain a healthy, thriving artistic scene. Heidegger's (1993) essay on “The Origin of the work of Art” comes to mind, in which he uses the example of a Greek temple; It is not just an artfully assembled array of stones, it holds a complete worldview; This temple, he says, discloses the world to us. Another take on this lens allegory is given to us by French philosopher Jacques Rancière (2004), well-known in the art world for his work connecting politics and aesthetics. Politics, he argues, decides how power and wealth are distributed in society. Art on the other hand, dictates what is seen; It distributes the *perceptible*. In the West, both are distributed according to a principle of equality; A view which can be found in the continuing insistence on the fact that the government should not judge art (Thorbecke's adagium); Just like no one should be excluded from having a political say, no art should be considered more worthy than other art.

It is precisely in this last point, the principle of equality in artistic expression, which comes under threat when art is forced to succumb to the pressures of the market. This issue is addressed in varying ways in cultural policy. Around the turn of the twentieth century the discursive focus was romantic and inspired; Art which does not survive the thrills and throes of globalized market forces should be *protected* (Ministerie van OCW, 1992; Tweede Kamer, 2004). It is implied that this art is valuable because it might show us something important which is not immediately obvious, but nevertheless intrinsically valuable; It should be allowed a degree of autonomy in order to fully develop its perspective on society. Further into the 21st century a different line of argumentation is brought in: Certain “experimental” art should be supported because it might not yet prove its market worth (Ministerie van OCW, 2010; Tweede Kamer, 2015); Eventually it might be able to perform, perhaps even profitably, on the market. The “lens”-function is made subordinate to the market function of artistic “goods”; Another example of how a particular discourse infiltrates and reformulates a popular interpretation of art and culture. By implying that neoliberalism will still eventually produce the “best” art - art that might still act as a lens - this approach is presented as

perfectly compatible with a principle of equality when it comes to judging art; The government might be no judge of art, but the market certainly can and should be.

#### 4.5 On the definition of quality

Quality is perhaps the most consistently present criterion and principle in Dutch cultural policy throughout recent history. In his account of pre-world-war-two cultural policy, Boekman suggested that the government should aim to provide “a cultural offer of high quality” (1939, p. 4). Similarly, Oosterbaan used the word “quality” to characterize cultural policy in the period after the mid seventies till the nineties (1990). The word “quality” in itself, however, does not necessarily mean much except that something should be, when compared to other things of a similar nature, show a degree of excellence. As important as this word has been in the government’s approach to the arts and culture, it has caused an equal amount of controversy and contestation. Some even argue that the “quality obsession” was introduced by the government to legitimize a shrinking amount of government expenditure flowing into the arts (Blok, 1994). The question was not: is this art of high quality? But rather; Do we want to spend money on this type of art? If anything defined the last 50 years of cultural policy in the Netherlands, it is an increased outsourcing of, at least in a discursive and managerial sense, the decision about what artistic quality entails. The most common formulation of this transfer of judgement is that the quality assessment would be left to the “experts” (*deskundigen*). With Thorbecke’s adagium still reigning supreme; “The state is not a judge of the arts,” institutions such as the Council for Culture (*Raad van Cultuur*) and a number of funds were set up that would house such autonomous expertise. However, this approach has in itself sparked the necessary controversy, which has gained noteworthy momentum in the 21st century; The heavy reliance on expertise would lead to an emphasis on the *avant-garde*, as well as favouring the *acquired tastes* that had lost touch with the rest of the population (Ministerie van OCW, 2006; Kamerbrief, 2015). In other words, the discourse around expertise saw an alteration during these years, as it was increasingly attached to concepts such as *elitism*, *exclusivity* and a cultural offer that did not match the *demand of the audience* (Ministerie van OCW, 1999, p. 4). As a result, the notion of quality has also shifted from having primarily artistic connotations towards something more problematic, something denoting exclusivity and exclusion. So while this

changing discourse is presented as a certain democratization of quality and art in general, it has simultaneously opened the door for neoliberalisation of the supported arts sector.

More so than the definition of culture, the definition of quality has undergone a notable change in cultural policy over the last thirty years. Earlier nota's spoke of artistic quality in terms of that which was *not easy to grasp* (Nuis, 1995, p.4), that which *required more effort to appreciate and understand* (p. 5). One of the main 'issues' being put forward is a cultural offer that's losing quality, *deteriorating* as it were. The population is said to favour easier forms of entertainment that were becoming more widely available due to the introduction of television and other digital media. At the same time, the growing influence of our North-Atlantic neighbours on our patterns of consumption is seen as a cause for concern (Ministerie van OCW, 1996). The government sees it as its duty to stimulate art of a higher quality, to protect the populace from a homogenous supply of "easily digestible" art and culture. The discourse here is quite paternalistic and retraceable to terminology used from the mid 1950s onwards, which presented art as elevating (*verheffend*) (Oosterbaan, 1990). What distinguishes "better" art remains relatively ambiguous. The image being constructed is one in which good art is that which *shocks*, which steers clear of *conventions* and the beaten path (Kamerbrief, 1995, p.9). It is implied that these kinds of experiences are more often present in "traditional" art-forms such as theatre and classical music.

A bit later on, around the turn of the century, this elevation discourse on art was starting to lose its potency, or at least became more subtle and less paternalistic. "Value cannot be determined solely by experts. [...]. Value is a result of the meeting of ideas and traditions." (Ministerie van OCW, 1999, p. 35). By shifting the centre of gravity away from *expertise* and *high-arts*, the concept of quality was constructed to become more democratic. As well as allowing a broader understanding of what could be deemed "good" art, it also opened up the door for a more market-oriented approach. Artistic quality, it was implied, is at least partially dependent on having an audience, on the "exchange". The following years see this shift solidifying into a broader understanding of what quality entails, an overall move towards a more heteronomous, in a Bourdieusian sense, view of the arts. A good example of this changing understanding is put forward in the nota of 2012: "For assessment of the quality of a work, one should not only look at the artistic quality, but also at the audience reach, the level of entrepreneurship and educational

value”<sup>15</sup> (Zijlstra, 2010, p. 1). This is a stark departure from earlier descriptions of quality and is indicative of the didactic (Badiou, 2005) and instrumental role imagined for the arts. Quality is to be found in field-external effects, in the heteronomous pole as it were (Bourdieu, 1996).

So far my analysis of this shift has focused primarily on the way this discursive reconfiguration has opened the door for further neoliberalisation of the subsidized art sector. Another - not insignificant - trend that has been part of this shift, is the inclusion of art-forms that did not traditionally partake in the roulette of cultural subsidies. The explicit mention of genres such as pop-music, hip-hop dancing and other “urban” cultural expressions into official cultural policy documents (Ministerie van OCW, 2015; 2020), is representative of a changing perspective on what constitutes qualitatively sound art. Interestingly enough, the justification of including these “new” artforms is often found in its success on the market; They are lauded for their ability to find audiences without any subsidies, validating the view that the market is indeed the best instrument for selecting quality. This could be interpreted as an instance of *refraction* (Bourdieu, 1996); A discourse that stems from a broader discussion on decolonization and emancipation of different cultural heritages, is refracted by a policy discourse which alters it to fit within a market logic; Which in its most extreme form suggests that these previously excluded forms of art can now successfully be marketed and commercialized.

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<sup>15</sup> “Voor het beoordelen van de kwaliteit van een kunstuiting, moet niet alleen naar artistieke kwaliteit worden gekeken, maar ook naar het publieksbereik, het ondernemerschap en de educatieve waarde.”

## 5. Conclusion

So, having arrived at the point where one is expected to make up the balance; Can it be said that justifications for the supported arts have become more instrumental during the last decades of Dutch cultural policy? To speak in Oscar Wilde; The truth is never pure, and never so simple. This thesis has sought to stage the evolvment of language in Dutch cultural policy; So as to dissect its role in shaping the discourse on the arts in order to find an answer to the research question: How have justifications of government involvement in the arts evolved in Dutch cultural policy since the introduction of the Cultuurnota in 1993? My analysis has focused, in particular, on the different narratives that exist on the value of art within these policy texts - to reveal their revision as they become absorbed by a dominant neoliberal discourse. Through a rebranding of the objects that make up the “cultural sector”, art becomes reframed as a means of production rather than an instrument of perception. By shifting the discursive focus from the collective (civic) to the individual, the responsibility is repositioned to lie with the artist and the audience. The principle of autonomous art becomes a weapon in a discursive siege for further privatization and industrialization; Good art, it is implied, finds its own audience; it is entrepreneurial. The last thirty years of cultural policy in the Netherlands have seen a naturalization of this discourse, presenting it as both inevitable and appropriate.

In terms of artistic quality, this has introduced a shift from using primarily inspired and romantically rooted rhetoric, towards an increasingly heteronomous, didactic and market-based logic. The concept and understanding of quality, it is implied, has to be broadened, so as to tap into a larger portion of society; To prevent the arts and culture from becoming a self-serving, self-referential bubble with no real ties to the people that fund it. Through this line of reasoning, the reliance on expertise is problematised, which in turn is used as an argument to allow more market forces into the cultural sector, as this would better reflect the wishes (demand) of the general population.

It is perhaps important to stress that this does not imply evil intent in any one actor - rather my analysis seeks to illustrate how a seemingly innocuous discourse legitimates and instills a certain belief system in an area of life which was previously ruled by different principles. Likewise, this does not imply that this is necessarily a bad thing - depending on your point of view, the introduction of

market forces into a particular form of art might really be a favourable outcome. What is more insidious, in my view, is the viral quality of this neoliberal discourse, presenting itself as naturally occurring, a force of nature as it were. Through its sheer power and ubiquity, the conceptualization of society as a sequence of consumption nestles itself into every crevice - reproducing its own logic and worth-distribution by marginalizing other interpretations. I would therefore postulate that cultural policy has not necessarily become more instrumental - speaking of art in terms of its effect and using it to achieve particular goals has always been a part of cultural policy - but rather that the resistance stems primarily from disagreement with the type of discourse that it reproduces, and through this the type of society the government seeks to create by using the arts as an instrument.

Furthermore, this thesis broke relatively new ground in its use of the Economies of Worth framework (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006) to structure a discourse analysis of cultural policy, in particular within the Dutch context. The different logics allowed the analysis to be arranged along clearly delineated concepts and to easily fit the results into a larger body of literature. Likewise, the use of such a framework allows for easier comparison between studies and makes the results less dependent on the interpretation of the researcher. In particular it has provided the analysis with a vocabulary that is able to shed light on a feature of cultural policy which is frequently left unaddressed in more economic approaches; Rather than looking purely at the policy instruments, it investigates the discursive practises that reproduce a dominant discourse. Such examination can make actors within the field of art more aware of how a certain system and ideology is kept in place; Possibly equipping them with tools to challenge the concealed infiltration of an unwanted doctrine.

The content analysed comes exclusively from the national government side of this equation - which should be kept in mind when interpreting the results. Beneficial in this regard, is that it has allowed the discourse analysis to remain focused on one particular source, preventing it from becoming too scattered and disorganised. Interesting future research could look at, for instance, applications for funding by artists in the Netherlands, to see to what degree they adhere to similar logics and trends. Similarly, comparison with municipal cultural policy could be telling of how this “national” discourse influences the rest of a country and if big differences exist between different areas when it comes to the justifications employed.

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## 7. Appendix

### 7.1 Operationalisation Table

<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Variables</b>	<b>Indicators</b>
Logic to which the justification appeals	Inspired Logic	verbinding; zeggingskracht; inspireratie; geestelijke...; natuurlijke dynamiek, reflectie, verwondering; doorbreken van patronen; opwekken van nieuwsgierigheid; avontuur; geestverruimend; kracht van de verbeelding; boven de beperkingen van het dagelijks bestaan tillen; prikkeling van de geest; oorspronkelijkheid; originaliteit; verheffend; uitdagend; prikkelend; verscheidenheid;
	Industrial Logic	inspanning; proces; opgave; manifesteren; functioneren; op peil brengen; organisatievermogen; bedrijfsvoering; meerjarige systematiek; uitvoerend; hoofdlijnen; randvoorwaarden; besluitvoering; kernbegrippen; ... functie; ...producerende; activiteiten; doelmatigheid; doeltreffend; doelen; verwerven; ...overdracht; taken bundelen; effectiviteit; <i>efficiency</i> ; efficiëntie; planning; betrokken partijen; intensivering.
	Market Logic	Commercieel, sponsors, financiële, grootschalig, verhandeld, producten, ...productie; producent; consumptie; consument; opnemen tegen, competitie, vestigingsklimaat,

		<p>concurrentiestrijd, marktwerking;  markt; aandeel; competitiviteit;  concurrentie; vergroting van afzet...;  goederen; diensten; investering;  rendement; privaat; rente; commercieel;  aanbod; vraag; particulier; meten; het  economisch belang; omvang; kosten;  distributie; exploitanten;</p>
	Civic Logic	<p>Gezamenlijk, gemeenschappelijk, vormt  schakel tussen, individu en  samenleving; culturele identiteit;  bindende werking; delen met andere;  maatschappij; geografische spreiding;  betrokkenheid van...; deelnemen;  deelname van; open; tolerant; cultureel  klimaat; leefklimaat; iedereen welkom;  ... voor iedereen; inclusie; samenhang;  saamhorigheid; het volk; groepen;  steden; bevolking; openbare ruimte;  draagvlak;</p>

## 7.2 Coding tree

CODE GROUP	CODES	
Description of art's value	Art as elevating...	Art for individual development
		Art for societal development
	Art as a mirror/lense....	
	Art as intrinsically valuable...	
	Art as an economic force...	Spillover effect
		Art to stimulate/boost creativity/innovation...
	Art as a social phenomenon...	Integration of groups with different "cultural background"
		Facilitating conversation, encounters
	Art as entertainment...	
	Art for research...	
	Descriptions of artistic "quality"	Quality as undefinable
Quality as craftsmanship		
Quality in the aesthetic		
Quality coming from the ability to elicit a strong sentiment		The ability to shock... (challenge - in a subversive sense)
		The ability to inspire...
Quality as coming from the social element		
Quality as economic success		

Cultural policy to address...	Diversity	Cultural diversity
		Diversity in consumption
		Diversity in supply (prevent homogenisation)
		Diversity in management
		Regional diversity
	Economics	Increase/stimulate entrepreneurship
		International competitiveness
		Improving connection with other economic sectors
	Cultural diplomacy	