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# Immigrants' Artistic Practices in Amsterdam, 1970–2007: A Political Issue of Inclusion and Exclusion

Christine Delhay

*This article describes how the simple participation of migrant artists in the art scene in Amsterdam over the last three decades has turned into a political issue. Their claims for inclusion led to questioning the closed character of the Western art world. This critique of the closed nature of the Western art scene and of the exclusionary structures of Western aesthetic valuation has been articulated and dealt with on two analytically different, but empirically intertwined levels: cultural policy and the art institutes. Both the redefinition of the cultural policy and the reorganisation of the field of art itself have been accompanied by—sometimes passionate—public debates. The article takes the city of Amsterdam as the unit of analysis, as the city hosts a rich variety of ethno-cultural communities and is characterised by a large and flourishing cultural apparatus. Of course, the developments enacted in the city of Amsterdam are not unique. They are one particular articulation of dynamics occurring on different scales: global, national and regional. My analysis is restricted to the domain of high culture, and focuses on two subfields: the visual arts and theatre performances. For the purpose of this article, the field of high art is of special interest as it is surrounded by a complex set of—mostly implicit—rules and mechanisms that regulate entry. These mechanisms, which affect different groups unevenly, have become the subject of major critique.*

*Keywords:* Interculturalism; Cultural Policy; Diversity; Performing Arts; Visual Arts; Amsterdam

Until the end of the 1960s, the ethnic make-up of the Netherlands was almost homogeneously 'white'. In 1967 the Dutch sociologist Goudsblom wrote, 'No less than 96 percent of the people living in the Netherlands today were born there, and for

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most of them Dutch is their native tongue [...] its national boundaries have real meaning: they mark a well-defined and to a large extent still self-contained structure' (Goudsblom 1967, quoted in Prins 1997: 112). Even more, besides the Dutch language and the national boundaries, the national culture and identity were still self-evident elements of the Dutch nation-state which rendered each other meaningful and which sustained the 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983). The national culture was seen and felt as a homogeneous inventory of symbolic goods and practices generally shared by all Dutch citizens, and clearly demarcated from cultures outside the boundaries. Although Dutch society had been divided internally by a system of 'pillarisation'<sup>1</sup> until the 1960s, a sense of 'Dutch identity' transcended the internal diversity into a common feeling of solidarity (Prins 1997: 112).

From the 1970s onwards, the demographic and ethno-cultural composition of the population in the Netherlands, as in most Western European countries, has been in a process of rapid change as a result of streams of mass migration. These different ethnic groups came with their own varying cultural repertoires and aesthetic traditions. As a consequence, the Dutch art field has been confronted with artists and audiences of diverse cultural backgrounds which all contributed (and still do) in one way or another to the local cultural flow. As new cultural citizens, these artists are making claims for inclusion. Therefore, this article sets out to document how the participation of migrant artists in the art scene of the last three decades has turned into a political issue as their claims for inclusion triggered a questioning of the closed character of the Western art world. This critique on the closed nature of the Western art scene and of the exclusionary structures of Western aesthetic valuation has been articulated at two analytically different, but empirically intertwined levels: the domain of cultural policy and the domain of the art institutes.

To study the political questions raised and the way they have been dealt with in the two above-mentioned domains, this article will take the city of Amsterdam as its frame of analysis. The city has become an important heuristic zone in understanding matters of cultural reconfiguration. As Saskia Sassen has pointed out, metropolitan centres are *loci par excellence* in which 'the formation of new claims materializes and assumes concrete forms' (Sassen 2000: 167). Moreover the city emerges as a key site where social processes enacted on different levels, the regional, the national and the global, intersect. Cities are thus interesting nodes where various dynamics materialise, cross or connect (May and Perry 2005: 353). Amsterdam is an interesting case for charting processes of cultural interface as the city hosts a rich variety of ethno-cultural communities and is characterised by a large and dynamic cultural apparatus.

In this article I restrict my analysis to the field of high culture, thereby focusing on two subfields: the visual arts and theatre performances. I am aware of the fact that, in post-modern Western societies, the boundaries between high and low culture may have become blurred and the distinction itself has become less taken for granted. Nevertheless, using Bourdieu's terms, one can still distinguish a *marché restraint* (restricted field) composed of canonised and experimental art institutions on the one hand, and a *marché élargi* (enlarged field), the market of mass culture, on the other

(Bourdieu 1971). For the purposes of this article, the field of high art is of particular interest as the field is surrounded by a complex set of (mostly implicit) rules that regulate artists' entry. Within the *marché élargi* or the field of mass culture, artists are welcome as long as their cultural products sell. By entering the field of high art, artists or institutions are subjected to complex procedures of selection, valuation and canonisation by many different gatekeepers. These gatekeepers have the power to make newcomers visible or invisible, to include or to exclude them, to put them centre-stage or to relegate them to the margins. Precisely these mechanisms which affect different groups unevenly have become the subject of critique.

In what follows, the two aforementioned domains of cultural policy and art institutes will be analysed respectively. As national and municipal cultural policy exerts influence on the art scene of the city of Amsterdam, both levels will be charted. This overview will be followed by an analysis of the way the critique has been articulated and dealt with by the art world itself, focusing on the realms of visual and performing arts.

But first I begin with a quick outline of the changing demographic composition of the city of Amsterdam in the period since 1945.

### **The Changing Make-Up of the Population**

Immigration to the Netherlands and to Amsterdam is not peculiar to the postwar period. From the seventeenth century onwards, the city of Amsterdam has been confronted with an almost continuous process of immigration. When Philip II and his Spanish troops succeeded in recapturing the southern part of the Netherlands at the end of the sixteenth century, a massive flight of Flemish people started towards the northern part of the Netherlands. A century later, a stream of French protestants, known as Huguenots, followed. The immigrants tended to concentrate in the main cities. At a certain point in the seventeenth century about one third of the people living in Amsterdam were 'foreigners' (Buikema and Meijer 2004: vi). In the course of the eighteenth century a stream of Jews from Central and Eastern Europe entered the country. Towards the end of the eighteenth century some 30,000 Jews were living in the Netherlands, mainly in Amsterdam (Lucassen and Penninx 1994). However, comparatively speaking, after 1800 not much happened in terms of immigration until 1945, when new migrants started to arrive.

Although the economic situation immediately after World War II was deplorable, a small number of labour migrants was attracted to the Netherlands (Lucassen 2004: 435). Also in that period a first wave of colonial immigration had started. Following Indonesian independence, between 1946 and 1964 about 300,000 repatriates, most of mixed Dutch–Indonesian descent, came to the Netherlands, as did some 12,500 Moluccans, ex-soldiers from the Royal Dutch Indian Army, and their families in 1951 (Lucassen 2004: 435; Prins 1997: 112). At the beginning of the 1970s a second wave of colonial migration to the Netherlands started. With the prospect of the independence of Surinam in 1975, a large number of Surinamese decided to take up residence in the

Netherlands: more than one third of the population left their country. During the earlier twentieth century a small group of citizens from the colonies of Surinam and the Dutch Antilles had been living in the Netherlands: students, educated people, musicians, workers and nurses. However, from 1970 to 1999 the Surinamese population in the Netherlands grew from 27,000 to 183,000. In the same period the group of Antilleans increased from 20,000 to 63,000 (Lucassen 2004: 435).

This increasing immigration from the former colonies was supplemented by labour migration. As in the postwar period, the Dutch economy recovered unexpectedly well, labour shortages led Dutch industry and the government to recruit workers from abroad: from Italy, Spain and Greece in the first instance, later on also from Turkey and North Africa (Prins 1997: 113). Due to the economic recession, the recruitment of migrant workers came to an end in 1973. However, migrant numbers continued to increase considerably because of family reunion among Turkish and Moroccan workers on the one hand, and because of an influx of asylum-seekers on the other. Since the mid-1950s small groups of Hungarians (1956) and Czechs (1968) had settled in the Netherlands, followed in the 1970s by small contingents of Chileans, Vietnamese, Turkish Kurds and Iraqis. In the mid-1980s Tamils, Ghanaians, Ethiopians, Pakistanis and Iranians tried to find asylum in the Netherlands. By the end of the decade the Balkan war triggered considerable numbers of asylum-seekers to the Netherlands (Lucassen 2004: 440).

This complex mix of postwar migration streams caused a great change in the ethnic composition of the Dutch population: an evolution which has impacted unevenly on the four big cities of the Netherlands. In Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht and The Hague one out of four citizens is of 'foreign' descent, whereas in the rest of the country it is one in ten. So the main cities have been confronted with a rich variety of ethnic groups that came with their own cultural repertoires and aesthetic traditions. As a consequence, many new artists tried to position themselves within the municipal art scenes. The way this cultural influx turned into a political question is the main subject of this article.

Before focusing on the process of cultural transformation within the art field of Amsterdam, we will first shed light on the cultural policy developed by the national and municipal government respectively. As the national government funds to a large extent the locally situated cultural organisations, national cultural policy exerts a huge influence on the urban art scene.

### **Cultural Policy at the National Level**

Cultural policy in the Netherlands is positioned somewhere in between the continental tradition of direct intervention and the Anglo-Saxon tradition which puts government at a distance (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science 2006: 12). Large subsidies awarded by the central government are meant to safeguard the autonomy, quality and many-sidedness of the arts (Trienekens 2004: 128). However,

in recent years, the Dutch system has been moving towards a more 'liberal model' in which 'marketisation' of the arts is an important element.

In the course of the nineteenth century, national cultural policy was formulated and framed against the background of the process of nation building. The arts were seen as important tools for civilising the populace and educating them into becoming patriotic citizens. As the Liberals were dominant at that time, they allotted the state, in accordance with their views, a limited role in matters of culture. National government's role was merely to create favourable conditions for the arts to blossom. Cultural initiatives were mainly financed by the well-to-do nationalistic bourgeoisie until the beginning of the twentieth century (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Welzijn [MOCW] 2002; Pots 2002: 81).

A decisive moment in the expansion of the Dutch government's involvement with the arts was the establishment of the Department of Education, Arts and Science in 1918. However, one had to wait until the 1960s and 1970s before national arts policy attained full development: budgets were raised, cultural life flourished and cultural infrastructure developed. In 1956 the Council for the Arts (*Raad voor de Kunst*), a semi-independent body which had to advise government on substantive artistic matters, had been installed. A decade later a whole network of interest groups, consultation structures, intermediaries and minor advisory boards was set up. All of them were officially or unofficially involved in the implementation of cultural policy. Meanwhile, in the major cities, public funding structures had been developed for a longer period of time already, although funding itself occurred in an *ad hoc* way (Trienekens 2004: 126–7).

In the 1970s, the main ambition of cultural policy was caught by the term 'democratisation of culture'. Cultural practices had to reach the lower social class audiences. At that very moment, when a steady stream of migrant labourers was entering the Netherlands, cultural diversity was not yet an issue. As it was assumed that migrants would stay only temporarily, there was minimal policy oriented towards immigrants. Fostering integration was not a desirable goal, as it would only hamper an easy return. The few measures taken were geared towards preserving the migrants' own culture and language so as to make return migration possible, even for migrant children born in the Netherlands (Snel 2003).

In the second half of the 1970s awareness grew that immigrants were in the Netherlands to stay. Only in 1983 did the first official document of the government on 'Minorities Policy' (*Minderhedenbeleid*) appear (van den Broek and van den Camp 1983). In that document, the Dutch government aimed at 'integration with the preservation of one's own cultural identity'. As the government realised that migrants were not just temporarily in the Netherlands, a specific cultural policy for minorities was designed. The underlying assumption of this policy was that fostering migrants' own ethnic identity would stimulate emancipation and enhance integration. From this point of view ethnic groups were encouraged by the government to establish their own cultural and artistic circuits. On the national as well as the local level, a special subsidy system was developed for foreign artists, or '*allochtone kunstenaars*' as they

were called. The development of a different subsidy system meant that foreign artists were subjected to other assessment procedures than their Dutch colleagues (van den Berg 1994: 75). Allocated budgets were rather large and thresholds for being eligible were deliberately kept low. This 'target group policy' was based on the idea that minority-group artists were in need of extra encouragement to improve the quality of their work (Lavrijsen 1992: 350).

At the end of the 1980s the 'target group policy' became increasingly questioned because of its assumed negative effects on integration. From the 1990s onwards, 'minority policy' became more focused on participation in Dutch society instead of sustaining ethnic identities. Likewise, cultural policy diverted from supporting minorities in setting up their own separate cultural circuits, towards encouraging foreign artists to participate in the established cultural field (van den Berg 1994). Cultural-policy discourse became more centered around the idea of the richness of cultural diversity in the cultural field itself (Prins 2000: 14). This discursive shift, in which the central frame of 'minorities' has been replaced by that of 'diversity', was not peculiar to the Netherlands; rather it was one specific instantiation of a more broader European move in the process of coming to terms with minority cultures (Robins 2006: 11).

Although several ministers of culture had paid attention to cultural diversity, it was not until 1999 that the issue was really brought to notice. The policy document *Culture as Confrontation*, written by the Secretary of State Rick van der Ploeg, announced a far-reaching renewal of the cultural field (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Welzijn 1999a). In his view, the current cultural field offered too little room for new productions, and the established subsidised institutions were failing to reach a wider audience. Van der Ploeg's explicit aim was to enhance cultural diversity both in the artistic supply and among the audience. The cultural field had to provide space to other, as yet unknown, artistic products and should reach a broader audience composed of more diverse backgrounds. To achieve these goals, van der Ploeg would earmark 10 per cent of the whole national budget for culture. He also forced organisations themselves to spend at least 3 per cent of their subsidies to stimulate diversity as far as public audiences and programming were concerned. 'Quality', the very bedrock on which the whole Dutch funding system had been built since the 1940s, was to remain the leading criterion in the evaluation of subsidy applications. However, van der Ploeg also put this very criterion into perspective. Audiences reached, subsidy per visitor and the profile of the institution had to be taken into account too. As he aimed for more diversity in the artistic supply, he also pleaded for adjusting the concept of quality to different cultural traditions. It could no longer be self-evident that non-Western cultural products should be judged by Western standards only (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Welzijn 1999b). In order to solve this problem, van der Ploeg would henceforth facilitate representation of all kinds of minority group in cultural institutions and advisory boards. Moreover a range of supporting bodies had to be instituted to stimulate and back art venues

towards more diversity and to support ethnic minorities occupying upper managerial positions within these venues.

As the cultural policy of van der Ploeg elicited strong reactions from artists' unions, individual artists, cultural critics and to a lesser degree from politicians, most of the proposed measures have been diluted or abandoned. However, the Secretary of State's policy has kept the debate live and moving. During his whole term many emotional voices for and against cultural diversity were raised.

Diversity remained on the agenda of van der Ploeg's successor Medy van der Laan, although her policy differed considerably in tone and in implementation. Van der Laan did not believe in a proscriptive policy to foster diversity; in contrast she wanted to stimulate and invite the cultural institutions to co-operate. Therefore she delegated a great part of the implementation of the policy to the 'funds' (semi-public bodies that administer the short-term funding), which she invited to develop their own diversity plans adjusted to the particular cultural domain they are working for (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Welzijn 2003). The Secretary of State's reliance on the cultural institutions' responsibility for encouraging diversity had a depolarising effect on the cultural field on the one hand but, on the other, the feeling of urgency to adapt to the contemporary Dutch diverse society ebbed away. The subject nearly disappeared from the public debate. Halfway through her term of office the Secretary of State announced a string of new measures to encourage diversity. The most eye-catching one was the installation of an institute to foster intercultural exchange and dialogue in the four big cities of the country.

After the murder of the film-maker Theo van Gogh on 2 November 2004, politicians became more and more convinced that, besides fostering the intercultural dialogue, national consciousness and identity had to be reanimated. The Dutch had to become proud again of their history and culture. Therefore a committee of leading scientists was commissioned to redefine the Dutch canon. Another project to breathe new life into Dutch identity is the foundation of a new National Museum of History, in which the Dutch canon has to be presented. The new Minister of Culture has been very concerned about finding an appropriate location in which to build the new museum, while in his policy document, which he presented some months after he came into office, not one idea was related to cultural diversity. However, over time there has grown a certain recognition of the need to engage with diversity within different segments of the cultural field. As a result the minister has been asked to redo his work.

### **Municipal Art Policy and Diversity**

Besides the national cultural policy, cities have been developing their own municipal policy as well. City Councils in Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague have a long tradition of encouraging cultural activities, although interventions generally remained incidental and unsystematic. Within the city of Amsterdam, a real municipal cultural policy, in the way we understand the term today, had been



developed only from the 1920s onwards. In order to make municipal cultural policy more systematic, the Amsterdam Arts Council was founded at the beginning of the 1960s. The Council was established in analogy to the National Arts Council to advise the city on awarding funding (Holleman 2004).

As we saw at the national level, so on the municipal level increasing 'participation' in the arts was a central goal on the political agenda. Efforts were initially directed to stimulate lower social classes; the participation of the 'New Dutch' was not yet an issue. Only at the beginning of the 1980s were new ethnic groups aimed at. In 1981 the City Council allotted a sum of money to subsidise the artistic activities of foreign communities. Therefore, the city of Amsterdam installed a separate *Commissie Allochtone Groepen* to back the city's Arts Council in matters of non-Western culture. The commission was composed of representatives of different ethnic groups and experts in the fields of non-Western music and theatre (van den Broek and van den Camp 1983: 22–3). Besides advising the City Council, the Commission also engaged in familiarising artists and artistic groups from the various ethnic communities with the Dutch subsidy system and in improving their expertise in order to occupy managerial positions within art institutes (Holleman 2004: 61). In 1988, however, the special 'Commission for Allochtonous Groups' was abolished and absorbed into the different disciplinary commissions. The argument behind the abrogation of the Commission was that it was better for foreign artists to merge into the mainstream funding system. According to Marco Bentz van den Berg, General Secretary of the Amsterdam Arts Council from 1986 until 1995, the existence of a separate Commission for Allochtonous Groups functioned as a sort of alibi for the different disciplinary commissions not to engage with projects of non-Western art. Therefore the Arts Council decided to abolish the Commission for Allochtonous Groups on the explicit condition that at least one 'New Dutch' artist or expert would be present in the different disciplinary commissions.<sup>2</sup> However, the New Dutch (i.e. ethnic minority) artists who were in the special commissions have not succeeded in being taken up by the Arts Council.<sup>3</sup> Even today, very few 'New Dutch' are involved in the Arts Council.

Following even further the procedures of the national cultural policy, the City of Amsterdam announced its first four-year plan for the arts (called *Kunstenplan*) in 1993. The aim of the plan was to develop a more coherent policy so that the government could offer more effective guidance and guarantees to the art institutes (Holleman 2004: 64). The copying of the national procedure also led to a division of labour almost identical to that at the national level: the municipal government defines the framework of the arts policy, the Amsterdam Arts Council (*Amsterdamsche Kunstraad* or AKR) assesses the long-term subsidy applications, and the Amsterdam Fund assesses applications for *ad hoc* projects. The first four-year plan continued the targets set out by the previous cultural policy. From the 1960s onwards arts policy, on the national as well as on the municipal level, had tried to enlarge the artistic public and had focused in particular on the lower social classes. At the beginning of the 1990s, this goal remained on the agenda but other social groups were targeted as well. Therefore, the then Alderman for Culture asked the Arts Council to advise him in

developing a policy to stimulate the participation of ethnic communities in the Amsterdam art scene (Holleman 2004: 65).

The Arts Plan 1997–2000 continued once more the main points of the former policy, such as enlarging and broadening of the artistic public and engaging in art education. The plan also stipulated that art institutes should adapt more their artistic programmes to the demands of the public (Holleman 2004: 66). In 1999 the Amsterdam Arts Council presented the city with an evaluation of the policy and formulated some advice for the coming four-year Arts Plan.<sup>4</sup> According to the evaluation, widening the public had been successful: visitor numbers kept rising. However, the more challenging goal of reaching a broader audience, and especially a more diverse one, had not been attained. Art institutes did not succeed in offering appropriate productions geared to specific target groups, and adequate marketing strategies were lacking. Moreover, the staff of the art institutes is composed, one-sidedly, of white men. The Council sees this one-sidedness as cause for concern because this means that the art field does not represent the broad spectrum of Dutch society (Holleman 2004: 67).

Also in 1999 the city of Amsterdam asked the British cultural expert Trevor Davies to articulate his comments on the artistic field of Amsterdam. As far as cultural diversity was concerned, Davies' report was rather critical. The fact that more than half of the population of Amsterdam under the age of 18 had a dual background was, according to him, one of the biggest challenges for the art sector in the very near future. However, he was very surprised to see that there was hardly discussion and reflection within the art institutes on cultural diversity: '...I had expected that the cultural sector [would be] far more involved in and far more experienced with these issues than is the case' (Davies 1999: 48). Besides a lack of competence and experience with the issue of cultural diversity, Trevor Davies also mentioned some more practical problems which complicated the stimulation of the artistic production of the 'new Amsterdammers'. The cultural field is dominated by a relative small number of major institutes which receive some half of the structural funding from the city.<sup>5</sup> This means that the allocation of a considerable part of the budget is fixed. As a result few resources are open to newcomers. Besides, there is a lack of contact and coordination between the city centre, where the big and established institutions are located, and the districts where most of the ethnic communities live and 'different' culture is produced (Davies 1999: 63, 87).

Being aware of the need to adapt the artistic field to the contemporary situation, the city of Amsterdam augmented efforts to further cultural diversity. In 2001 the city participated in the national project 'Action Plan for the Spread of Culture' (*Actieplan Cultuurbereik*) set up by Secretary of State van der Ploeg. The national government was putting an amount of money (675,000 Euro a year) at the disposal of the city to reach a broader and more diverse audience, if matched by the same amount provided by the city. The Amsterdam Council was responsible for the implementation of the Action Plan in the city. After four years, the new measures were assessed and, in the case of Amsterdam, the results obtained were not really valued as positive. Criticisms

were made that the selected art organisations were of a too different genre to bring about any form of cooperation.<sup>6</sup> Neither had collaboration been realised between the selected organisations and the artistic initiatives in the different districts of Amsterdam. In other words, the action programme as carried out in Amsterdam lacked coherence and a clear goal (i-Nova 2004: 11–13). Therefore, the second round of the Action Plan (2005–08) has been implemented differently: the money has not been put at the disposal of regular art organisations but distributed to new and *ad hoc* projects.<sup>7</sup>

The current policy plan, *Amsterdam Creative City*, is not announcing many new views and intentions. Once more, the main points of the former cultural policy—enlarging and diversifying the public, investing in art education and scouting and stimulating talented youngsters—will be strengthened further. What is new, however, is that, for the first time, the horizon of the four-year Arts Plan has been enlarged by framing it within a longer-term vision which links cultural policy with physical planning and the economic and social policy of the city. So Amsterdam cultural policy is, at one and the same time, a product of and contributor to a much broader neo-liberal development whereby cultural policy is gradually used as a device to boost the economy, to contribute to urban regeneration and to improve social cohesion (McGuigan 2004: 101).

### The World of the Visual Arts

During the 1960s and 1970s the Netherlands, and especially the city of Amsterdam, were known worldwide for their liberal and free climate. Equally, the scene of the visual arts was characterised by openness, internationalism and activism (van der Plas 2002). In this period the city hosted an increasing number of foreign artists, many of whom were there for political reasons. A mix of artists stemming from such diverse countries as Colombia, Mexico, Iceland and Israel all established many contacts with Dutch artists. Artists in those days did not feel divided on the base of nationality or cultural background. Being ‘foreign’ was not an issue at that time (López 2002: 141). According to the artist and art historian Gribbling, this artistic circle, drawing on a variety of cultural traditions, contributed to a cross-cultural flow which counter-balanced the so-called Dutch down-to-earthness (Gribbling 2004; see also López 2002: 140). Within the maelstrom of international cultural interfaces the Amsterdam artists’ collective ‘In–Out Centre’ was founded in 1972 by the Colombian artist Michel Gardena. This centre was a meeting and breeding place for many ‘foreigners’ as well as for many Dutch artists. According to the Argentinean artist Sebastian López, the open atmosphere in the ‘In–Out Centre’, one of the very first alternative artists’ spaces in Europe, passed unnoticed by the Dutch daily or specialised art press (López 2002: 140). However, this marginalising strategy did not prevent other new initiatives. In 1975 Ulises Carrión opened the bookshop and art centre ‘Other Books and So’. In 1975, too, the alternative art centre De Appel was founded. The founder criticised the mainstream institutes of modern art for simply presenting already

canonised work; the new centre would present new, experimental and not yet available artistic products in the domains of feminist art and body art/performance. From the very beginning De Appel had a strong link with artists from Eastern European countries like Czechoslovakia and Poland (Jansen 2005: 58; Van Mechelen 2006: 243).

Apart from the artists frequenting the In–Out Centre, Turkish artists were also attracted to the open experimental climate of Amsterdam. These artists were not part of the group of Turkish labour migrants who arrived in the Netherlands from the late 1960s onwards. According to the art critic Wouter Welling (2004), Turkish artists began to migrate already from the 1950s, looking for opportunities to articulate their artistic talents in a free and experimental atmosphere. The migration of Turkish artists intensified in the 1970s. Most of these Turkish diasporic artists settled first in France, from where they moved on to Germany, Italy, Austria and the United States. A few of them came to settle in the Netherlands. Art education in Turkey was felt to be very traditional and uninspiring. There was a lack of museums where art students could see and learn from original art works. According to the artist Nur Tarim, who arrived in 1977, Amsterdam was appealing because of its free and ‘hip’ atmosphere. Also the now-famous Turkish artist Isik Tüzüner has been living in Amsterdam since 1975. Trained at the Academy in Istanbul, she continued her education at the Amsterdam Rietveld Academy, where she returned later on to become a teacher herself (Welling 2004: 107).

In the 1980s, the political and cultural climate changed. ‘Foreignness’ became a pervasive dividing principle socially and culturally. As noted earlier, the term ‘*allochtoon*’ was established and increasingly used as a point of departure for various policies on different levels (López 2002: 141). In the field of culture a separate subsidy system for foreign artists had been installed on the national and the municipal levels. This cultural policy geared towards ‘target groups’ unwittingly promoted cultural segregation within the art field. In 1988, the Turkish artist Bülent Evren, who was involved in the special *allochtonen* commission of the Amsterdam Culture Council, was very surprised to be confronted with a great diversity of subsidy applications, ranging from a Surinam Memorial Day to an Orthodox Russian icon exhibition (Welling 2004: 100). As a result of the lack of rigorous yardsticks in the assessment procedures, all non-Western art became labelled as amateurish. Consequently, the concept of ‘artistic quality’ began to be questioned. Non-Western artists increasingly experienced how the very concept functioned as an effective instrument in closing off the Western modernist art scene. According to Sebastian López, foreign artists did not succeed in capturing the interest of art galleries and museums because their work was considered too idiosyncratic or lacking ‘quality’ (López 2002: 142). The official definition of *allochtoon* artist relegated them to alternative art circuits or some marginal exhibition spaces. The official label turned into a stigma.

Within the context of the Amsterdam art field, the *Tropenmuseum* (Ethnografic Museum of Amsterdam) has played a pioneering role in countering the indifference towards artists of non-Western origin. The museum has regularly organised

exhibitions of contemporary art, stimulating public discussion on cultural diversity. In 1985, the Tropenmuseum organised a meeting for representatives of Dutch museums and cultural institutions to raise interest and provide information about the modern art production of non-Western countries and of non-Western artists living in the Netherlands. But as habitual views on art are not changed overnight, museums of contemporary art remained reluctant to welcome such artists (López 2002: 142–3). In the meantime, these artists tried to create for themselves a niche in the art field: they squatted in galleries and curated exhibitions themselves. They engaged in building up space for non-Dutch artists in cultural centres and brought into being foreigners' art associations (López 2002: 142). Within the whirlpool of these common endeavours the Gate Foundation was set up in 1988 by Els van der Plas. This foundation, of which the Argentinean artist López became director, was meant to provide a platform for contemporary artists from Africa, Asia, Latin America and Oceania. Many speech-making exhibitions have been organised and an information centre has been built up. Unfortunately, 18 years later the Secretary for Culture, Medy van der Laan, decided to stop financial support as of 2006 because of a lack of vision of the institute on its mission. The art collection of the Gate Foundation and its archive and library have been donated to the van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven.

A major watershed in the postwar history of cultural globalisation occurred with the Parisian exhibition of 1989, *Les Magiciens de la Terre*, curated by the art historian Jean Hubert Martin. At the exhibition non-Western and Western art were presented side by side. This exhibition marked the beginning of an era in which many curators began to question the hegemonic perspective of the West. Also in 1989, the then director of the Municipal Museum of Modern Art of Amsterdam (*Het Stedelijk Museum*), once one of the most highly rated museums of modern art in the Netherlands, made the exhibition *UABC* on Latin American artists from Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil and Chile. In 1991 the 'New Dutch' artists were the subject of the exhibition *Het Klimaat* organised by the Cultural Council of Zuid Holland. The 'manifestation' was composed of 30 exhibitions which were spread over different cities and which contained the works of more than 70 'foreign' artists living in the Netherlands. Amsterdam hosted a few of them (López 1992: 54–5). In 1993 *Het Zuiderkruis*, an exhibition devoted to South African modern art, was organised at the Amsterdam Municipal Museum of Modern Art. In 1997 the then director Fuchs presented, although not wholeheartedly, the exhibition *Surinam Art*, first staged in Surinam in 1995 on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of its independence (van der Plas 1998: 76).

These exhibitions, in which 'the aesthetic other' was put centre-stage, have been received, if not negatively, at least ambiguously. On the one hand they were valued for their making visible arts and artists which had thus far been excluded; on the other hand they were criticised for 'othering' or 'anthropologising' non-Western art. *Les Magiciens*, especially, has been accused of installing dividing lines between Western modernism on the one hand and non-Western 'authentic' traditionalism on the

other. Non-Western art was captured by categories such as 'the exotic' and 'the magic'. As time went by and the sharpest criticism on these global exhibitions faded away, there was gradually more space for positive voices, albeit only insofar as these exhibitions were seeking to interrogate the relationships between Western and non-Western aesthetics and discourse (Meyer 2003: 154; see also Kleeblatt 2005).

However difficult it may be to assess the effects of these exhibitions on different levels, one thing can be said: the international debates they provoked have hardly resulted in an enduring opening up of the closed Eurocentric view on modern art spread by the Amsterdam Municipal Museum. In recent times, this museum has been invited to collaborate in two international projects focusing on the position of non-Western art. Both have been passed over by the museum. *The Short Century* (2001), an exhibition curated by the African Okwui Enwezor and co-financed by the Dutch Prins Clausfonds (a Dutch foundation supporting African, Asian and Latin-American art), was valued by art critics as one of the most important exhibitions of the time. This exhibition has not been presented in Amsterdam, nor in any other Dutch city. The exhibition *Africa Remix* (2004) curated by Martin, nowadays director of Kunst Palast museum in Düsseldorf, has been realised with the collaboration of the Hayward Gallery of London, The Centre Pompidou of Paris and the Mori Art Museum of Tokyo, where the exhibition was also presented. The Amsterdam Municipal Museum was invited to collaborate but once again the curators declined the invitation (Kottman 2004). The refusal of *Het Stedelijk* to collaborate in offering a forum for non-Western modern art has been greeted with outrage by the Dutch press.

The Mondriaan Foundation, a national foundation to stimulate the visual arts, was also not pleased with the indifferent stance of the Dutch museums. More than a decade ago the Ministry for Education, Culture and Science charged the Mondriaan Foundation to encourage and financially support culturally diverse arts in the museums. As the Netherlands has become a culturally diverse society, museums should reflect that fact. In seeking to fulfil this mission, the Foundation staged debates and organised workshops to improve awareness and expertise on this issue. The museums reacted (and still react) in different ways and at different speeds to the changed environment in which they function. The great mainstream institutions remain particularly reluctant to alter their preconceived conceptions and habitual practices so as to give room to new artists and audiences. To counter this indifference on the part of many of the major Dutch museums, the Mondriaan Foundation organised the first Development Award for Cultural Diversity (*Stimuleringsprijs voor Culturele Diversiteit*) in the spring of 2006. The directors of the museums reacted furiously to this action. They felt coerced by cultural policy to adapt to cultural diversity which they saw as an attack on their artistic integrity and autonomy. After a while the directors buried their resistance because of the financial incentive the Award was associated with. Amsterdam's *Het Stedelijk* museum did not send in a plan of its own, but collaborated with eight other museums to submit a collective plan. Unfortunately the plan did not reach the shortlist. Some months after the allocation of the award, the conflict between the directors and the Foundation flared up openly

in the press. The directors did not agree with the Foundation positioning itself both as a subsidising body and also as a steering one. More generally, the format of an 'award' as a device to stimulate diversity has been criticised heavily by different actors in the field of culture. So, whatever the long-term effects of this action are on the cultural venues, attention has once more been focused publicly on the issue of diversity (Vinckx 2006).

As mainstream museums adapt rather reluctantly to the many multicultural idioms present in contemporary societies, there are also interesting examples of 'good practice' (van den Berg *et al.* 1999: 18–19). The Amsterdam Historical Museum, for instance, is one of the few that have designed a comprehensive intercultural policy. As the museum is well aware of the fact that the demographic make-up of the Netherlands, and especially of Amsterdam, has changed dramatically, it makes great efforts to reach out to widening audiences. The museum tries to make itself widely accessible on all the levels it works on: the presentation of the collection, temporary exhibitions, the collection itself, and the education programmes and publicity (Konsten 1998: 88). The museum explicitly chooses to present a history of the city in which all sections of the population are made visible. Evaluation of the policy shows that reaching out to new audiences costs a lot of time, energy and resources. But it seems worth doing because new target groups do respond if they are appealed to (Konsten 1998: 97).

### The Performing Arts

Within the field of theatre, as in the domain of the visual arts, the decades of the 1960s and 1970s were boisterous times. Mainstream theatre was conceived of as an old-fashioned bourgeois practice and criticised increasingly (de Vries 2002: 142–3). New theatre movements developed which wanted to remove theatre from its 'elitist' character, and which conceived of the artistic discipline as a suitable medium to deal both with political problems and with everyday life. These movements also wanted to attract new audiences, such as poorly-educated and working-class people. Apart from the regular theatre field, a 'minorities circuit' developed. Because of the special funding system mentioned earlier, most alternative theatre groups remained working within an amateurish atmosphere. According to the renowned theatre critic Zonneveld, even the few groups which did reach professional standards (such as the Surinamese theatre group *Gado Tjo*, founded by Mike Ho Sam Sooi in 1980, and the '*Doe*' theatre set up by Henk Tjon) carried the stigma of 'minority theatre' (Zonneveld 1993: 9–10).

The birth of STIPT (*Stichting Interculturele Projecten op Theatergebied*—Foundation for Intercultural Projects in the Theatre), which was founded at the end of 1970s, marked the beginning of a process of professionalisation of and a breakthrough for non-Western theatre-makers (Zonneveld 1993). Otto Romijn, programmer of the Soeterijntheater (linked to the *Tropenmuseum*), together with the Workgroup for Migration Arts (*Werkgroep Kunstuitingen Migranten*), played a key role in setting up

this intercultural project. Romijn invited the outstanding Afro-American artist Rufus Collins, originally a member of New York's legendary Living Theatre, to train young theatre-makers. After being banned from America because the Living Theatre was considered to be too subversive, Collins went to London where he joined the 'Black Theatre' movement. In Amsterdam he would become the figure-head of what was called 'minderhedentheater', 'theatre of minorities' (van der Geest 2004: 39). Besides Collins, who developed an intensive collaboration with the Surinamese director Henk Tjon, the Turkish actor Vasif Öngören and his wife Meral Taygun were invited to the Netherlands by the then programme coordinator of the Amsterdam Theatre School. The four artistic leaders—Collins, Tjon, Öngören and Taygun—started theatre classes to train young people. This strategy has been tremendously fruitful, as many youngsters trained by them have become successful artists or directors in the domain of theatre.

The collaboration of Collins with Henk Tjon resulted in the foundation of the theatre group *De Nieuw Amsterdam* (DNA) in 1986—at that time one of the very first multicultural companies which had actors of different cultural backgrounds (van der Geest 2004). From 1988 onwards, the theatre company got a national four-year subsidy. The first play that DNA produced in their capacity as a funded and recognised professional theatre company was presented in the *Stadsschouwburg* (municipal theatre) of Amsterdam. This conquest of the white bastion of mainstream theatre by black artists is seen as a milestone in Dutch theatre history (Alkema 1988: 9). The event was made possible not only by the activism of Henk Tjon and Rufus Collins but also thanks to the policy of the then director Cox Habbema, who was convinced the Amsterdam Municipal Theatre had to cater for all sort of audiences, not only for the elitist bourgeois theatre public (Alkema 1988: 9). DNA has grown into one of the most successful intercultural theatre companies, financially supported by the national and municipal cultural policy. However, its life has not been an easy one. Theatre critics reacted in a stereotyping manner and funding was temporarily withdrawn in the 1990s because of 'lack of quality' according to the Culture Council (Keulemans *et al.* 2004: 368).

In the footsteps of Rufus Collins, other theatre companies and production houses have been founded in Amsterdam. When Collins died in 1996, he left the Amsterdam theatre scene with a considerable legacy: 'New Dutch' actors were made conscious of their position in the Amsterdam theatre scene, he introduced mixed casts on stage and promoted the use of texts, music and dance from various cultural traditions. He also confronted policy-makers with their exclusionary policies and campaigned for arts councils and subsidy committees to be represented by professionals from different cultural traditions (van der Geest 2004: 44). In November 2006, to celebrate the tenth anniversary of his death, a lot of attention was paid in the media to the legacy of Rufus Collins. The many tributes paid mean that he has been canonised posthumously as the pioneer who put 'black theatre' on the map in the Netherlands.

While Rufus Collins mainly inspired theatre-makers, writers, actors and actresses of Surinamese descent, Vasif Öngören and Meral Taygun became the figure-heads of



the Turkish and Moroccan community. Unfortunately Vasif Öngören died too early to mark a whole generation, although his influence should not be underestimated as some of his pupils have become successful directors in the Amsterdam theatre field (van der Geest 2004: 54–6).

Another major player in fostering a more 'coloured' theatre scene in the city of Amsterdam at the beginning of the 1980s was Cosmic Theatre. Cosmic, the first intercultural production house, was founded by two young Antillean artists in 1983 (Keulemans *et al.* 2004: 366). Facing the new global society, Cosmic offered a platform for theatre-makers searching for new theatrical languages which could express the intercultural experiences of people in contemporary societies. Interchanges between different cultures are the main characteristics of the productions supported by Cosmic.<sup>8</sup> In the course of 20 years, Cosmic has grown into one of the most appreciated intercultural production houses of the city. Besides its production function, Cosmic Theatre has also been one of the most important participants in fuelling the debate on cultural diversity.

Thanks to the implementation of the policy of Secretary of Culture van der Ploeg, who was the first to really bring the subject of cultural diversity to the fore, some new groups have been funded from 2001 onwards. The implementation of Van der Ploeg's national policy not only affected the national, but also the municipal art field of Amsterdam because of the re-allocation of subsidies. Some famous institutions have disappeared because of the loss of their subsidies. Company Discordia (*Maatschappij Discordia*), Amsterdam's avant-garde group since the end of the 1970s, had to close its doors. New intercultural institutions have been given a chance, including Theater Compagnie RAST, a fusion of Turkish/Kurdish Theatre groups, and Made in Da Shade. Both theatre companies are making their own productions in which they fuse opposing traditions, using simultaneously many different artistic disciplines. Remarkably, the artistic direction of both companies is in the hands of theatre-makers all of whom have been trained by the earlier-mentioned four trainers: Vasif Öngören, Meral Taygun, Rufus Collins and Henk Tjon.

However, more than two decades of hard work has not really fulfilled the ambitions of black performers to move into the mainstream. Most regular companies remain white. They have no coloured actors, they do not invite 'multiculti' directors, and they do no non-Western plays. The Municipal Theatre (*De Stadsschouwburg*) temporarily allowed for diversity thanks to the earlier-mentioned Habbema, according to whom mainstream theatre should open its doors to all artists and audiences. Since she left in 1996 her successors have not pursued this policy with quite the same vigour as she did.<sup>9</sup> Diversity in staff and programming was limited to some casual exceptions. Recently, however, the Municipal Theatre has shown a more willing attitude to cultural diversity, both in its discourse and in its policy. The Municipal Theatre is now presenting itself as a cultural institution in the centre of a city composed of inhabitants of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds and expresses its ambition to cope with this situation. While the main house company remains white, the artistic director is co-operating on a regular basis with one of the

many successful Dutch-Moroccan writers, Hafid Bouazza. To attract new audiences the Municipal Theatre developed a special programme called *Expanding Theatre*. Cooperation has been intensified between *De Stadsschouwburg* and Urban Myth, a young theatre group founded by Jörgen Tjon A Fong. Besides these efforts, also the guest programming is witnessing more openness toward cultural diversity: groups as Rast, De Nieuw Amsterdam and productions of the multicultural production house Cosmic Theatre have increasingly been invited. Young and increasingly famous choreographers such as the Belgian-Moroccan Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and the British-Indian Akram Khan are regular guests of the Amsterdam *Stadsschouwburg*. Efforts are therefore made to open the doors, although there is still a long way to go.

All in all, black performers agree that they do not really succeed in incorporating themselves into the regular cultural institutions. The first theatre award has still to be handed to a non-white artist. In the publication *NIEUW! 20 Jaars Multicultureel Theater*, which was published in 2006 to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the multicultural company DNA, the leading figures and pioneers of multicultural theatre admit that non-white performers and directors have not succeeded in moving into the mainstream. Most black theatre-makers blame the critics and members of advisory boards for not seeing them as full-grown artists. The critics in their turn mention a lack of real talent and an incapacity to bring their interesting stories in a experimental contemporary form (Embrechts 2007). The publication of *NIEUW!* has given rise to a whole range of passionate public debates on the quality and the professionalism of the multicultural theatre which have not yet come to an end.

## **Conclusion**

The main object of this article has been to analyse how the arrival of artists with a non-Western cultural background has turned into a political issue as their claims for inclusion have led to questioning the Western hegemonic view on art. These questions have been articulated and dealt with on two different levels: the level of cultural policy and the level of the cultural institutes. The re-definition of cultural policy and the re-configuration of the art field has raised many passionate debates which in their turn have acted upon the dynamics in both domains and the reciprocal influences between them.

The above analysis has made clear, I hope, that the arrival of 'New Dutch' artists induced a transformation process which was and is not internally homogeneous or homogenising, but which is, in contrast, the effect of a multitude of heterogeneous movements.

From the early 1970s onwards, foreign artists attracted by the openness of the city have tried to make their way in the Amsterdam art scene. They have founded new galleries, theatre groups and production houses. These 'new' institutions contributed considerably to the visibility of 'non-dominant' arts in the city and some of them have become recognised (to various degrees) as respectable institutions in the city's artistic landscape. Entering the established cultural institutions has been more

difficult because of resistance to diversity by some gatekeepers. However, not all the gatekeepers kept the gates closed to newcomers. On the contrary, some have played an important role in backing incoming and minority-ethnic artists jostling for space within the art field. Such 'open' gatekeepers functioned as connecting figures, creating networks in order to support new artists aesthetically but also politically.

As my analysis has also shown, not all the reforming actions set in motion have been successful. Some have had enduring effects in setting up new circuits in the art field. Other initiatives were less successful in their efforts to question the exclusive cultural and institutional structures. Projects dissolved and organisations closed down without having had a fundamental impact on the reconfiguration of the art field.

Cultural policy has backed these transformation processes in ambiguous ways. By relegating cultural diversity in the first instance into a separated funding circuit, cultural policy has left—although with the best intentions—the established art structure untouched; even reproducing the exclusionary structures of cultural valuation.

Being part of a much wider European development, at the end of the 1980s Dutch cultural policy's frame shifted from a 'minorities' to a 'diversity' perspective. However, one had to wait until the end of the 1990s before cultural diversity had been put prominently on the political agenda at the national and municipal levels. Ever since, an amazing quantity of policy documents, advisory and evaluation reports has been produced. In so doing, the government contributed to challenging the conventional codes of Western autonomous art, at least at the discursive level. On the institutional level, the implementation of new cultural policy has not always been an easy thing to do since some actors within the field tried to preserve at all costs the existing cultural structure. Besides, the government itself remained rather reluctant to translate principles into practice. The main reason of this is the translation by policy-makers and experts alike of all the threats and uncertainties associated with cultural diversity into matters of quality. Nevertheless, thanks to the implementation of the diversity policy of the Secretary of State van der Ploeg, a considerable reconfiguration of the Amsterdam theatre scene occurred: 'New Dutch' performers and companies came into the formal funding system. They succeeded in carving out their own scenes and niches. However, moving into the main cultural institutes has been much more difficult to realise.

In very recent years, cultural diversity is no longer the top priority within cultural policy that it was at the end of the 1990s. However, over time, a range of organisations fostering diversity has gradually been instituted, and debates are kept alive. Although ready-made answers have not yet been found, many political questions in relation to the exclusionary character of the art scene have been posed in an irreversible way.

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## Notes

- [1] Pillarisation is the division of (Dutch) society according to religious and ideological denominations.
- [2] Marco Bentz van den Berg, personal communication, 12 December 2006.
- [3] Interview with Luc Holleman, civil servant for culture in Amsterdam, 20 March 2006.
- [4] The evaluation was conducted by Adviesbureau Berenschot and resulted in the report *Evaluatie zakelijke resultaten van 26 kunstinstellingen* (1999).
- [5] Nearly half of the total budget of the Amsterdam Department of Culture goes to the seven or eight great art institutes of Amsterdam. This was mentioned by Trevor Davies in his 1996 report *Amsterdam, Comments on a City of Culture*, and this is still the case today.
- [6] Some of them, such as Cosmic Theatre, had been working already for years to promote cultural diversity and were not pleased to receive this 'beginners' subsidy.
- [7] Luc Holleman, personal communication, 14 December 2005.
- [8] [www.cosmic.nl](http://www.cosmic.nl), accessed 14 April 2004.
- [9] Cox Habbema, personal communication, 16 April 2007.

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