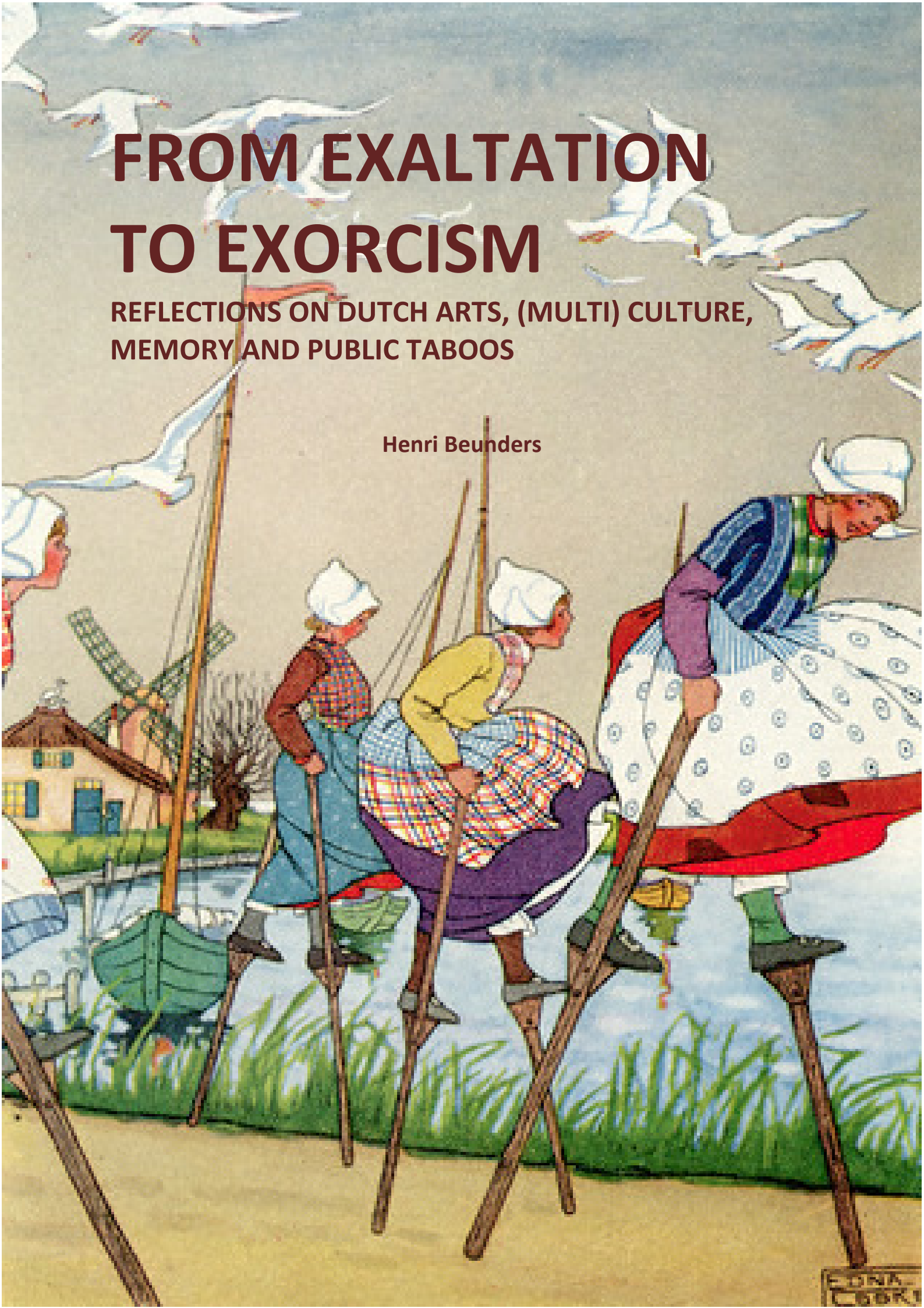


FROM EXALTATION TO EXORCISM

REFLECTIONS ON DUTCH ARTS, (MULTI) CULTURE,
MEMORY AND PUBLIC TABOOS

Henri Beunders



© 2009 Henri Beunders

Chapters I, II, V, VI were translated by Zihni Özdil.

Chapters III and VII were edited by Zihni Özdil.

Chapter IV was previously published in *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture*, Vol. 15/16, 2008–2009, pp. 199–12.

www.henribeunders.com

Content

Preface	4
I Strange Times	5
II The Happiest People of the World	16
III Misconception: <i>The Dutch are anti-colonialists</i> OR: LONGING FOR GHETTOS	28
IV Fortuyn, Van Gogh, Hirsi Ali <i>Why the Unholy Trinity Was Driven Out of the Netherlands</i>	31
V 'CONQUER THE CULTURE!' <i>Cobra, the fellow-travelers and morality</i>	45
VI The battle for the image <i>On the need for censorship</i>	56
VII The Politics of Nostalgia <i>or The Janus-face of modern society</i>	80

PREFACE

In the spring of 2007 I started translating some of the essays of Henri Beunders. I knew his name but had never read his work before. As I was reading and translating his writings, which ultimately became the first three chapters of this volume, I became more and more surprised. In fact, stunned would be a more appropriate term to describe what I felt; written in between 1993 and 1997, these texts are incredibly prophetic in nature. At every page I turned it seems like Beunders, like a modern-day Nostradamus sans the haziness, had been looking in the crystal ball of Dutch society. At the time they were published in the nineties, Beunders's analyses were much condemned. However, the tumultuous period following the revolt of the people in 2002, during which the cards of Dutch society were shuffled completely, proved Beunders had a point indeed. It is precisely this reason why Beunders's essays, even though most were written over ten years ago are, in a sense, timeless.

In my own research on migration and citizenship, I find a lot of resonance with 'taboos' on certain terms and policies and the selective 'Americanization' of Dutch society. We are arranging our society in an increasingly American manner; we are privatizing health care, education, and public services; we are deregulating the economy, media and the welfare system. Yet we refuse to Americanize our attitudes towards free speech, inclusion, citizenship and acceptance of 'the other'. Why is it that the American blue-collar right-wing reactionary in Michigan, who was collecting signatures for a petition against abortion and stem-cell research, responded to my remark that my name would be useless since I was not a United States citizen: "Well, I hope you'll become one soon...Welcome to America."? Such a scenario in the Netherlands is unthinkable. Which Dutch right-wing reactionary would utter the words "Welcome to Holland" to the son of Turkish immigrants? During our road trip through Michigan in March 2008, Beunders and I had the opportunity to observe and compare; we agreed on many points and disagreed on many others.

In a scientific, yet clear-cut and unpretentious language, this volume provides an insight into all of the Dutch self-imposed taboos that lead to 'The Revolt of the Masses' during the election year of 2002 and beyond. Not only multiculturalism, but also the interrelated themes of national narratives, public art, media and culture are covered by Beunders. For those of you who know the Netherlands only by its image of tolerance and open-mindedness, I can only say: "Get ready to be stunned!" Whether you agree with him or not, Beunders is insightful, unconventional and thought-provoking.

Zihni Özdil
Rotterdam, May 2009.

I 'Strange times.'

The Netherlands and its aliens

*Come gather 'round people wherever you
roam
And admit that the waters around you have
grown
And accept that you'll soon be drenched to
the bone
If your time to you is worth savin'
Then you better start swimming or you'll sink
like a stone
For the times they are a-changin'
(Bob Dylan, 1963)*

*They're talking about freedom,
about religion and grace.
But if you're a negro
they slap you in the face
Ring, ring, but I have got to sing
(..)
Together we'll strive for
We'll free people some day
So ring, ring, together we'll sing
Die dom do do die die dom
Die dom do do die dee
(Ferrie Grignard, 1966)*

It happened in the late sixties, 1968, perhaps 1969. I am still too young to remember exactly. I was living in a small town called *Emmeloord* in the northern part of the Netherlands, and attending the public high school there. With seven other children I was in the classical education class, known as 'gymnasium' in the Dutch language. Since every day was one of acquiring new knowledge, school was exciting. Except for visual arts and music: the visual arts teacher felt he was far superior to the simple peasants he had to educate. He was driving a Simca 1300, symbol of urban cosmopolitan European intellectualism, while several of our students drove to school on a trailer truck in wintertime. Our string of beads wearing music teacher attempted to act progressive, but refused to play Bob Dylan or Raw Blues. In his eyes only 'Yesterday' was justifiable modern music. What an ass. The other classes were all interesting, in the sense that they were new, though not necessarily exciting. Like for instance history and geography. The dominating themes were war and misery. Our history teacher, sporting a turtleneck sweater, used to put on a film about Auschwitz and then went off to smoke a pipe-supported cigarette in the hallway. The geography teacher, in sandals and a canvas bag around his shoulder, referred to his course as 'social geography' and all he talked about was racism and exploitation of the third world.

When I returned from school one afternoon, for the first time since the passing of the pastor I found my mother in an excited state. 'The thing I have experienced today,' she said with blushing cheeks. 'What?' The door had rung, and she, a disabled woman, hobbled on her crutches to answer it. 'Guess who I saw? A black guy! With a big box in front of him, full with brushes and shoelaces and such. I was so surprised that I smacked the door shut. When I opened it again, he was gone.' She fell silent, still as much bedazzled as she was ashamed. 'You should see how black he was!'

That was the first time she, though a woman in her fifties, had seen a black person in real life. (I was to encounter my first Jewish fellow citizen/student when I went off to do a history major in Amsterdam, and I only noticed it when she told me she was Jewish.) Was my mother a racist? I do not think so. She was just shocked and, I suppose, frightened about facing another new challenge; the challenge of yet another multicultural society. She still had not gotten used to the multicultural society she had 'migrated' to with my father from provincial *Twente* in the eastern part of the country, seeking a new, better future in the then new *Noordoostpolder*, where the town of *Emmeloord* was situated.

Something needs to be explained here. The name of my high school was the *H.N. ter Veen Lyceum*, named after the Amsterdam sociography professor who received his Ph.D. on his research into the colonization of the *Haarlemmermeerpolder*, where now Schiphol airport is situated. There had been a case of unregulated migration, resulting in a Darwinian 'struggle for life', after which only the fittest remained. Ter Veen spoke quite favorably of those fittest: 'tolerant', 'progressive', 'cosmopolitan' were the terms he used to describe them. According to him the explanation lay in the psychological characteristics of the colonists, the natural selection which emphasized those characteristics and the heredity that had perpetuated all this.

After the fencing of the *Zuiderzee* (Zuider Sea) in 1932, the reclamation of the thus created lake *IJsselmeer* commenced. Questions about how to populate the newly made land, which would be named *Noordoostpolder*, arose. Should the barrier be lifted at a certain Zero hour, allowing anyone who wished to do so to enter? Or was it better to skip the 'struggle' phase and have a pre-selection? The latter was chosen as the better option. However, the pre-selection by no means progressed in a fluent fashion, since the theoretical framework was far from complete. The colonization of the *Noordoostpolder* would be the first, and also last, Dutch attempt to create an ideal society concocted from behind a desk.

Ter Veen had advocated individual colonization. In reaction to the '*Blut und Boden*' theory of the Nazi occupiers, he resisted selection on the basis of biological or ethnic criteria. When selecting farmers, industrial workers and other necessary laborers the following criteria were to be applied: 'alongside professional skill, general aptitude and health and character ought to decide'.

These criteria for selection were adopted. However, they were preceded by a previous phase of selection. By order of the 'pillared'¹ political elite, the *Noordoostpolder* was colonized according to the principal of proportionate and representative justice: every denomination, province, and social stratum was to provide the equal amount of residents as related to their percentage in the entire country. After this, Ter Veen's criteria were applied.

¹ From the early twentieth century up to the 1960s Dutch society was characterized by denominational segregation. Every religious or political denomination was organized hierarchically, whereby only the leaders of the denomination interacted and cooperated while the members lived in complete separation. In the Netherlands coined as 'pillaring', remnants of this segregation, like the distribution of public airtime between denominational broadcasting networks, are still present in society.

Thus, it was a completely 'politically correct', planned 'multicultural' community, for the purpose of creating a useful society and 'the realization of a national unity'. Since unity through assimilation and integration was the purpose, a near totalitarian dispersion policy was applied with regard to housing. It is not possible for me to corroborate this with archive material, because most archives were destroyed for 'reasons of privacy'. And any scientific research on this phenomenon, for instance about the degree of 'success' or 'failure' of the enforced selection policy in a longitudinal study, is still, despite the suggestions to do so, considered too taboo to be eligible for government financing. It would be walking on politically chancy grounds. Suppose the results of such a research were to show that the selection had yielded 'more successful' people. Therefore, I have to rely on my personal memories.

I have lived in two different streets during my residence in that small town, which incidentally was the first municipality to present itself as the central point of Europe on televised advertisements around 1965. So there was no lack of optimism and pretension. In both streets it was all the same: a Calvinist lived on the left side, a Protestant on the right side. Next to that lived someone who was 'nothing'. Only after that there was a Catholic, though not from *Twente* like my parents but from southern *Limburg* province, and so on. My mother used to have a cup of coffee once a week, from 10.30 to 11.30, with the atheist lady from *Friesland* province living on our left, and once a week with the lady from the Protestant *Veluwe* region living on the right. But on birthdays and normal evenings of leisure I only came in contact with Catholics from *Twente*, or at the most from the neighboring *Achterhoek* region.

The melting pot plan was to create 'a powerful spirit of community', 'so that she may lead to gratifying achievements in fields of all sorts'. In this way, something like a 'Homo Zuiderzeelandicus' might come about. Did it? Not that I can remember. The authorities bore only one motto for policy: cautiousness. They wanted to take every group's feelings in consideration as much as possible. Once in a while, however, there was grumbling amongst the population. The Catholics were querulous about the lack of adherence to the closing of the fair on Sundays, while the 'nothings' lamented the ringing of the church bells that ruined their Sunday morning. But it stayed at that. People tolerated one and another. They knew everyone had arrived there for the same reasons: a new and better future. On Queens's day, a Dutch national holiday, it was even chumminess all around. But for intimate sociability 'among ourselves', people scoured the polder for kindred spirits.

My parents had arrived in 1949, full of flexibility, enterprise and goodwill. Twenty years later they had adapted to that new multicultural society in the polder, yet they preferred to rub shoulders with their 'own kind'.

The conclusion cannot be other than that even under the most perfect conditions – goodwill, common goals for the future, a booming economy – integration can never be enforced, especially not from behind an administrative desk. And that the best road to integration is that public high school, founded only because there were not enough high school students to facilitate separate Catholic and Protestant high schools. Incidentally, the Protestants eventually managed to establish their own high school during the mid-sixties.

Nevertheless, on a national level, the up until that point segregated Netherlands approached a historic turning point where the population was indeed united. In the mid-sixties the Netherlands had at last, following all the emancipation struggles, become one unified nation, though admittedly a white one. All, up to that time underlying, non-protestant groups in society were content with what had been achieved: the Catholics had

been content since 1918, the social-democrats since 1945. In the year 1965 the Netherlands was 'completed', that is to say, everyone was taking part in all things national, and was thinking about national things, like The Hague and the welfare state. In our polder, a 65 meter high water-tower was erected as a unifying monument. The nationwide symbol of this Dutch 'imagined community' became the TV broadcasting facilities, located in the centre of the country near *Lopik* municipality. Those broadcasting facilities, along with the supporting transmitters elsewhere, had turned the Netherlands into one big debating society.

However, this overwhelmingly white nation-state was immediately, as a result of the flipside of that democratic and sexual revolution of the sixties, whether consciously or not, enriched/influenced/impaired/deleted (scratch out if not applicable) by the arrival of the 'allochthonous'.² And there were few who saw through it at the time. Because the struggle was limited to one of power between the white: between students and governors, between workers and employers. On top of everything the 'radikalinski's' on the far left were propagating the liberation of all oppressed people in the world. Yet the student occupation of the *Maagdenhuis*³ in 1969 was motivated by the desire of having a say for themselves, not for anyone else. No Italian, Chinese or Moroccan was lying in those sleeping bags. This was in essentially a white revolution. The word 'allochthonous' did not exist and was not used in every day language, barring the 'social geography' classes. In those classes the world was divided in two clear-cut camps, the bad (us) and the good (them), though no one had had any personal experience with the 'oppressed', which in fact eased making that judgment for a great deal.

The most remarkable feature of the arrival of this new multicultural society is that the electorate was never consulted. No political party, except DS'70 and from 1982 on the party of far-right front man Hans Janmaat (Centrum Democraten), ever stated in their campaign programs that the Netherlands should not become a multicultural society, and that aliens or refugees were not welcome. Many aspects of the current society were consciously and actively chosen by the electorate: for the welfare state, for workers rights, against the nationalization of big corporations, against mayoral elections, and they had a say in many other matters. But not in the matter of the multicultural society, while this was one of the, at least visually, most striking transformations since 1965.

How did this come about? I think the triplet of guilt, revolutionary ambitions and naivety will bring us a long way in answering that question.

The Netherlands has increasingly presented itself, as it lost power since the end of its Golden Age some 300 years ago, as a 'decent nation'. Since the partition of Belgium in 1839 this became a household word, as Prime Minister Thorbecke was in the nineteenth century the first to see an advantageous tool in the new weakness of his state in the international jungle: because of its smallness, the Netherlands was 'disinterested' and could therefore serve as a beacon of peace and liberty.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the conviction prevailed among many that that Golden Age had been a unique exception in Dutch history. 'That shall recur never again', thus spoke the popular Romantic historian W.J. Hofdijk. According to him a new task lay ahead: 'It is more handsome to be the most moral nation in the world than the

² This originally geographical term was adopted by Dutch policy makers to define people of foreign background regardless of Dutch nationality, since naturalized aliens no longer could be defined as aliens.

³ The *Maagdenhuis* building is the administrative centre of the University of Amsterdam. In 1969 radical students occupied the building for five days and demanded more democratic influence in university affairs.

most powerful.’ This adage has by and large dominated Dutch foreign policy up to the present.

Of course, in the practice of interior politics little was left of these ideals of decency and tolerance. Catholics had been second-class citizens from the Alteration of 1578, when the Catholic city council in Amsterdam was deposed, until the twentieth century. Until after the Second World War, social democrats and communists were denied a say in ‘the nation’ because they were ‘un-national’ and ‘indecent’. And in the far part of the interior, colonial Dutch East India, decency and tolerance towards ‘the colored fellow human being’ was interpreted in quite an elastic manner.⁴ The native women (and men) served as concubines. Prostitution was rampant. And when the natives would not clear the road rapidly as the white master drove up in his carriage, he would simply be run over. The so-called ‘police actions’ between 1947 and 1949 clearly demonstrated how feelings of fear and superiority can lead to high degrees of ‘violent derailment’, even in the case of those decent Dutch.⁵

During the last few years, in response to the question ‘is the Netherlands full?’ it was often pointed out in newspaper articles that the Netherlands has an age-old tradition of tolerantly accepting strangers: The Fleming, French Huguenots, and Jews. However, in those articles two important things were invariably forgotten. First, that in those days the Dutch public – in absence of democracy – had no saying in the matter. Furthermore, wealthy immigrants – especially when they were adhering the same religion – were always more welcome than the poor.

From about 1500, newcomers were faced with two requirements: that they would not cause any upheaval or unrest, and that they would be able to provide for their own subsistence. Districts averted paupers by threatening them with severe punishments. The purpose of the 1849 Act ‘to the regulation of admission and deportation of aliens’ was, according to the Justice department, ‘providing the government with the means to avert or to compel to leave the country those aliens, whose presence here would be a danger to public order, or who could cause us nuisance by lacking means of subsistence, and are not capable of acquiring them by means of employment’.

This policy was, following a short explosion in common humanity with regard to Belgian refugees during World War I, sharpened even further. It was feared that ‘dangerous elements’ could be among the refugees. From 1918 on, newcomers were obliged to report with local police within forty-eight hours of arrival. This law remained in force until 1967.

The tough attitude of the Dutch government toward economic immigrants during the inter-war period is such common knowledge that just a few examples will suffice. Regarding the thousands of Chinese seamen who fell out of work in Rotterdam, the local chief of police wrote: ‘The development of Chinese quarters within a Western European city like Rotterdam is undesirable.’ His solution was quite straightforward: deportation to Singapore, Hong Kong or China. The department of justice agreed: ‘When a people abandon national feeling and pride, their women will be abused by Chinese and other Asian vermin.’

Reactions to the many Italian ice cream makers were mostly the same, especially during the nineteen thirties. In 1935 three hundred Dutch ice cream vendors held a nationwide demonstration in Amsterdam to protest their Italian competitors.

⁴ The former Dutch colony of East India is nowadays part of the independent nation of Indonesia.

⁵ In 1947 the Dutch government, itself recently freed from German occupation, dispatched a large force to Indonesia, which had declared its independence on August 17 1945. The Dutch coined their military intervention euphemistically ‘police actions’, because they did not recognize the Indonesian proclamation of independence and therefore the intervention was seen as an ‘internal affair’.

Policies were even harsher for immigrants from Germany, which had traditionally been the source of most newcomers. All of the thousands of housemaids were deported as much as possible, and in 1938 the government declared, as it was confronted with a large Jewish immigration, which 'needs to be avoided, like all things that imply the fostering of a lasting residence in our so densely populated country'. Henceforth a refugee was regarded 'an unwanted element to Dutch society'. The Dutch government, fearing an influx of Jewish refugees, responded to the *Reichskristallnacht* pogroms of 9 November 1938 by strengthening the border with six hundred soldiers. Only as a result of massive public indignation about this harsh policy, the government decided to allow seven thousand Jewish refugees after all.

In 1930 the percentage of foreigners in the Netherlands stood at about 2,2 percent. Apart from German and Austrian immigrants, during the nineteen thirties the numbers of newcomers could be expressed not by the hundreds or thousands but by the tens.

After the Second World War these harsh policies remained as the basic philosophy. Of the 40 million refugees and displaced persons produced by the war, approximately 11 million were resettled until the establishment of the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in 1950. The Netherlands, tormented by poverty, unemployment and lack of housing did not want the batched admission of Jews and other displaced persons. In 1946 the Cabinet decided, after much deliberation, to accept five hundred Jewish displaced persons. The primary criterion was family reunion. The second criterion was ability to work. As before the war, the argument was posed that the admittance of more Jews would only exacerbate anti-Semitism. In the following years, the government recruited tens of thousands of workers in the refugee camps for the reconstruction of the Netherlands. Laborers were needed in mining, metal works, the textile industry, brick factories and as domestic and nursing personnel.

Though in between the World Wars the Netherlands had taken the economic value of refugees and not compassion as the main consideration for admittance, continuing this policy became more difficult after subscribing to the UN Refugee Convention. Prosperity could no longer be openly used as a principle in refugee policies. The criterion of 'sufficient means of existence' was filtered by the term 'political refugee'. The Dutch, however, did not put their heart into this change in policy. They did not, for instance, when efforts were made to keep the 'eastern oriented' Indian Dutch in Indonesia. Nor did they in the case of the Moluccans, though this time the refugees only looked for temporary shelter until their hoped independence would materialize.

The Dutch were also reluctant in accepting Hungarian refugees after the Soviet invasion of 1956. Of course there was a great outrage about the Soviet invasion, and a sincere readiness to accept refugees. But again economic considerations soon prevailed in the Dutch government. When compared to other countries, the Netherlands did not accept many refugees, as economical criteria – whether they really benefited the economy or not – were applied. Especially mine workers were in need.

It would be excessive, however, to draw equally negative conclusions about the nineteen fifties as was done for the nineteen thirties. The arrival and reception of the Dutch East Indians was seen as quite exemplary by other countries. Also, in the Netherlands there were no signs on the doors of restaurant and cafés, like the ones which were prevalent well into the nineteen fifties on the doors of English Bed and Breakfasts: 'No dogs, no Irish, no foreigners.' The advent of a multicultural society has always met more resistance in England than in the Netherlands. Even though the British managed rather impressively, under the

captaincy of Monty Python's Flying Circus, to 'laugh away the loss of the Empire'; the revenge of the former colonies – settling as the fourth world in the living room of the first world – has up until today met with little more than a reluctant tolerance. The Reverend Paisley predicted from the sixties on that 'streams of blood' would flow through British cities as a result of the huge influx of immigrants. These streams of blood largely failed to appear. Yet it is telling that only on 1 May 1997 – fifty years after the independence of India – the first Muslim was elected as a (Labour) Member of Parliament. The fortunate one was forty five year old Mohammed Sarwar, a businessman and, of course, millionaire.

Policies towards aliens in the Netherlands, and in other Western European countries, grew more complex after the war. Before 1940, countries were only dealing with bilateral treaties. When the Netherlands would not be particularly interested in having good relations with a certain country, it would be fairly risk free and simple to halt and return immigrants from that country. When the Netherlands was interested in having good bilateral relations, like was the case with Nazi Germany, prudence, if not cringe was the result. After 1945 the Netherlands was dealing with international treaties, which had the term 'humanitarian' embedded in them as a key notion. Subsequently, this complicated the continuation of foregoing Dutch policies, since 'pauper-ness' could no longer be an official criterion to deny immigration.

Regardless of all the adjustments and temporary changes in tack, and surely regardless of all solemn words, the global image about the Netherlands and its aliens has remained the same. The Netherlands still liked to present itself as a 'decent nation', though in practice The Hague was by no means anxious to really apply the Treaty of Geneva. It still wanted to cling to a very restrictive immigration policy. If there was any guiding role left for the Netherlands on international platforms, it was with regard to human rights in general, proudly represented by Secretary Van der Stoep. On average the Netherlands may have had a positive role as norm setter, but this was never corroborated by the level of attention to human rights in their own foreign policy. And how can it be other than this for a small country? Because a small country can by definition not afford to be honorable. And for many, this is hard to digest.

Meanwhile, the grand question remains: how to explain the big reversal in the mid nineteen sixties, when in (segments of) the public opinion 'the multicultural society' became a totem for the Netherlands as a modern 'decent nation'? The answer to this question has a prism-like quality: all sorts of things played a role.

The predominate images are: entrepreneurs wanted guest workers. The first Yugoslavians and Spaniards were welcomed by the mayor at the train station with joyful words, and a complimentary moped as a token of gratitude. Dutch workers were at first not against their arrival. They no longer wished to do any dirty work, and they eagerly, albeit with the charging of 'transferring costs', disposed over their urban flats to a Moroccan or Turk and left for the desired family houses in suburbia, planted plastic tulips in the yard and henceforth named themselves 'employee'.

The government was eager to accommodate employers. Selection committees were sent to Turkey and Morocco, and especially from the last-mentioned country they returned with people who were not desired by their own government. But there was no harm in that. They were 'guest workers', hence they would return to their country of origin after completing toil. Or so it was thought.

Thoughts and opinions in intellectual circles and among all who considered themselves to be left-wing or progressive were most interesting. Whereas the recruitment of

guest workers was in fact nothing more than an economical issue, of which employers benefited most, they made 'the multicultural society' to be an ideological goal. Why? As far as I am aware of, there has not been any research on this. Consequently, personal recollections and provisional contemplations, once again, have to suffice.

The historical context seems to be clear. The emancipation of underlying groups had been completed, and it actually progressed automatically in a desire to emancipate the individual for the equality and fraternization of all individuals. In practice the nation-state was the only frame of reference, yet in theory this form of government was diametrically opposed to all ideas of liberation. The nation-state had been responsible for the War. Therefore, the nation-state had to disappear for the sake of the uninhibitedly unfolding individual, and for the sake of that much needed world government without which peace, security, equality and an unpolluted environment would be unrealizable.

The world had become a village, and the sense of guilt about war and colonialism compelled to let the entire poor world enter our undeserved rich world. I am not sure which factor was most decisive in this whole range of guilt: optimism about the 'Family of Man' orientated media world, the own prosperity, naivety and especially certainty. 'Grandiose and gripping I wish to live, but on a monthly salary', as the famous Dutch author Gerard Reve put it. Most probably, a few radical dreams have subliminally played a role as well. First, there is the never completely vanished wish to cherish others, a modern variant of the nineteenth century *charitas*. The second dream was old as well – after all the Netherlands had for one and a half century been a small, neutral, bourgeois and aloof country – and that was the wish to be just as modern as the United States. America, as is witnessed by the pop songs of Bob Dylan, Ferre Grignard and others, was a country of unprecedented possibilities, but also of racism and poverty. These were real 'grown people' problems. And we wanted them too!

I remember vividly the 1971 *Kralingse Plas* Festival, a Dutch version of Woodstock. There I sold Byrd lyric-books for 2,50 guilders a piece. I did pretty well. Until I was dumb enough to trust a cool looking guy with a box full for him to sell in his town. I never heard from that guy, a fellow white countryman, again. For the black musicians on stage there was nothing but lyrical applause. Of course the audience was completely white, but they all craved the 'enrichment' of a 'multicultural society', like the one on stage. That was real living! We adored Bob Dylan and also all the black blues-singers, even though they sang about slavery and racism. These were problems that we were not yet familiar with at all. But we wanted to have those problems too! And, very naively, we were sure that we would do a much better job in solving those problems. We in Holland were going to have a permanent multicultural dance festival.

The most negative explanation that intelligentsia had for the welcoming of the multicultural society can hardly be substantiated by facts or statements. Still I will present this explanation, for what it is worth. The sixties revolution in the Netherlands was a struggle for power between rising groups and rigid elites. Consequently, it was, as mentioned before, a white people's revolution. And it was, in retrospect, a for the greater part successful one. The former student protest leaders are now in office everywhere, propagating the very free-market economy they used to rebel so vehemently against. As the expression says, 'Things can take a turn'. In the opinion of those 'hash rebels' and certainly the 'radikalinskis', it was apparent by 1970 that the revolution had failed. The Den Uyl government, which did not accomplish the nationalization of all land property and business and the liberation of all oppressed countries, was proof to that. For some this led to frustration. Is it too bold to suggest that those frustrated some, realizing that the revolution had failed because workers

turned out to be content with the right to have a beer, saw in the advent of the multicultural society an opportunity to as yet topple the state and its complacent establishment? The urge for destruction was anyhow quite strong among those few extremists. The German RAF did not hesitate to become as 'quasi-Fascist' as the very 'Konsumterror' state they tried to demolish. *All had to change* is the title of a plucky booklet written by former radical leftists of the time. One of them was Erik van Ree, at one time my neighbor in the student hostel and now an intelligent and interesting columnist and writer. He writes that at those turbulent times of 'Vietnam' he was troubled by 'destruction fantasies' about capitalism. I cannot rule out that these same people, who only trusted a few like-minded ones, also saw the multicultural society as a means to after all dismantle the 'capitalist nation state'.

Have all dreams come true? Has the Netherlands become a guiding nation in the field of the multi-color global village?

I would not dare to answer. In the last few decades both the government and all advisory bodies concerning 'ethnic minorities', have wavered between two opinions too much. Why? Because the notion 'the Netherlands is an immigration country' was not passing lips. And rightly so of course, since the Netherlands is a small country that simply cannot accommodate the entire world. Well, physically it could for that matter. The 5 billion or so numbering entire human race of ours can fit, as journalist Jan Blokker once wrote, in the *Noordoostpolder*, providing that they all stand straight and shoulder to shoulder.

The governmental result of this wavering has been a continuous give and take between the pretension of being a 'decent nation' and the practical necessity of having a 'stringent immigration policy'. The Dutch alien policy has therefore always been one of big words and small actions. And one of a permanent delay on seeking a solution for a question which in former times, when the *Noordoostpolder* was being colonized, and in the fifties when the Geneva Treaty had not yet been implemented for reasons of 'national security', was being answered rather easily: we only allow immigrants who are useful to us, who are flexible enough to provide for their own livelihood without relying much on government for support and who will not cause any public unrest.

Therefore, the Dutch alien policy since the sixties can be characterized as irresolute, and cram-full of illusions. The illusion that the guest workers would eventually return, the illusion that the guest workers would not reunify their families, the illusion that all those Surinamese who arrived after their independence in 1975 would actually and plainly decide in favor of the Netherlands and immediately forget and abandon their origin.

Has the Netherlands at present, in the year 1997, anything to take a pride in with respect to its dealings with 'the allochthonous'? Yes and no.

The population has reacted remarkably considerate to the arrival of the Surinamese, Turks and Moroccans. There are many Dutchmen who made efforts to help them in the practical reception, in learning Dutch, in showing them the ropes of the social labyrinth that is our welfare state.

In my estimation this period is over. We have our multicultural society now, and everyone has acquiesced in it. Most still see it as an 'enrichment' of our culture. At least that is what is being pronounced. Meanwhile, a new segregation is progressing rapidly. The same people who ten years ago were telling me how fantastic it was to have Moroccans and Turks and Surinamese in the same class as their children, one day suddenly decided to send their children a few blocks further to a white school, saying that this would after all be much better: this way those Turkish children could be raised among each other, in their own culture. Then they would be able to preserve their own heritage. And so on.

I owe my own multicultural experiences to the public high school in *Emmeloord*. That school was a mix of all sorts of religions and financial backgrounds. Partly owing to this I am, I think, able to move easily among all walks of life. And I think I have a say in the matter because in Amsterdam's *De Pijp* district I have lived among Chinese, Surinamese and Moroccans. Those times are over though. By now I am living in a white neighborhood and thanks to the *volte face* of the progressive intellectuals living around me, it will remain white. The segregation is now being made sustainable through education. Now there are not only white and black schools but also schools subdivided by nationality: Turkish schools, Moroccan schools, Surinamese schools. Only the 'international schools' in my neighborhood accommodate pupils from diverse ethnic backgrounds. But they are prosperous, rich and therefore considered to be welcome and uncomplicated.

What is to conclude about the Netherlands and its aliens? With consideration of all the prudence this subject demands, I propose the following: partly owing to the advent of the multicultural society, the social democracy has run into trouble. This downturn has produced the current turbo-capitalism in which, as always had been but now ostensibly is proved in a scientific-economical fashion, only labor and money count, not community. The resurgence of social-democracy at the moment, see Tony Blair's landslide victory in the nineties, is only a reaction to this. For decades, workers/employees have just as much grumbled over as accepted the arrival of the 'allochthonous'. Why? Perhaps because of the same mechanisms which Nobel-prize winning African-American author Toni Morrison was referring to when she was describing the position of black people in America: every European immigrant started out at the bottom of the ladder, but they were always one step above black people. So black people have, according to Morrison, kept multicultural America content. Something of the sort has happened in the Netherlands as well. In the past years every white worker/employee considered themselves to be part of the middle class, thanks to the 'allochthonous'.

But those times are over. Since nobody is sure of their position anymore as a result of the *no-nonsense economics*, the people who imagined their position to be secured thanks to the allochthonous are now in a tight place after all. Unemployment threatens everybody now. Consequently the atmosphere is turning grimmer towards the allochthonous, who in fact have entirely disappeared from vision and who, manifest by satellite dishes on their balconies, are participating less and less in our society.

Thus the future of 'the Netherlands and its aliens' may perhaps look as following. We are very content with that anti-allochthonous bungler in Parliament, Hans Janmaat. We only have to say that we are 'against Janmaat' and we are automatically qualified as antiracist. In the meanwhile we all approve of the 'extremely restrictive immigration policies'. But we will never admit to be racists. Of course not, just look at our attitudes towards Janmaat. But what is in fact the concrete situation? We encounter the allochthonous at our work-place, on the streets, at the market. We appreciate them as a part of the police force. And we deal with them flexibly on a professional level – sometimes even warm-heartedly – but no longer as a neighbor, like it had been in former times in the polder where I grew up.

The white and rich have long ago retreated themselves to their video-secured enclaves, surrounded by trusted fellow residents and even more trusted security guards. I quoted those two songs at the beginning because of this reason: Ferre Grignard's song is not sung anymore. Nobody believes anymore that by singing 'Die dom do do die die dom - die dom do do die dee' all people can be liberated. The case is even more severe with Dylan's song about the times that are changing. It is no longer the elite who feel the waters growing

around them. The new modern elite, especially the pop musicians themselves who have become exorbitantly rich, venture in their private jets high above riffraff like me, who buy their records. It is the white people in suburbia who, while stuck in traffic jams, stuck at work, stuck to their mortgages, feel the waters growing around them. They have, every now and then, that very same submerged feeling, artistically expressed in American movies like *Taxi Driver* (1975) or *Falling Down* (1994). And in the fields of literature and arts, the multicultural society has not arrived at all in the Netherlands.

So, *the sixties* song – *The times they are a-changin* – is remarkably up-to-date, but of a reversed purport. However, even though everybody realizes by now that that multicultural society is the hardest to perpetuate, most people will still retain the illusion that we have built up a fantastic multicultural society.

Only one thing is for certain: we have realized the dream. We have linked up with the United States, and with all the problems that are coupled with it. We have become a *real country*.

(1997)

II The happiest people of the world

I do not remember much about the 4 May ceremonies - during which those who fell during and since the Second World War are commemorated in the Netherlands - of the provincial town I grew up in, other than that the flags were flying half-mast and that the streets were just as quiet as usual. After I went off to university in Amsterdam in 1971, I used to live at the *Rozengracht* (Rose canal), which ceased smelling of roses a long time ago and did not resemble a canal anymore either. It was a noisy traffic artery, stinking to high heaven and in desperate need of a subway.

As I was biking it home in the early evening – I did not own a watch at the time - of 4 May 1972, I witnessed a spectacle on this *Rozengracht* that I had never seen before. All traffic came to a halt within a minute, and this seemed to be happening in an entirely voluntary fashion. The tram stopped, the motorists turned off their engines, cyclists dismounted their vehicles, and pedestrians made a halt. The image froze up, and total silence held sway. I looked up to the *Westertoren* (Wester Tower), saw that it was eight o'clock and finally realized that this was the two minutes of silence when *the war* is to be commemorated.

There was prevailing an atmosphere of solemnity, of solidarity, of dignity. Those few minutes are among the most impressive I have ever experienced in Amsterdam. Journalist S. Montag wrote in the Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* (26 June 1993) about a silent commemoration ceremony he had witnessed in London during the 1930s. At the time he had concluded that 'of all commemoration ceremonies, the ones at which all present do absolutely nothing for a few moments are the best'. I had come to the same conclusion in 1972. Most Dutch people did not. A few years later, it was no longer advisable to step down from your bike and stand still on the asphalt of the *Rozengracht* at eight o'clock on 4 May. In their permanent advance, the motorized machines no longer allowed themselves to be brought to a standstill by anyone or anything.

On 4 May 1993 at a half past seven in the evening, I was driving out of Amsterdam in the direction of the German border. At the Berlage Bridge I saw on one of those *mupi* or *billboards*, or whatever name those plexiglass advertising columns go by, the poster which was put up everywhere in the city and advertised the Amsterdam authorities' forceful call to attend the commemoration ceremony at the famous central square of the city, the *Dam*. Similar calls were made four months earlier in an attempt to maximize the attendance of the February Strike commemorations.⁶ Apparently the authorities no longer believed citizens would go to the commemoration sites on their own accord.

At eight o'clock I was driving somewhere in the middle of the country on the A1 superhighway. The slow and mournful chiming was resounding through the car radio, and suddenly the amazement returned. It turned out that I was, along with for instance an Audi-driving German in front of me, one of the very few who did not park their automobile on the

⁶ On 25 February 1941, a general strike was organized in the Netherlands, originating in Amsterdam, in protest of anti-Jewish measures by the Nazi occupiers. The direct cause of the strikes was the German *razzia* at the *Jonas Daniël Meijer Square* in Amsterdam.

hard shoulder in order to spend these two minutes in silence. During the four to five minutes in which I traversed about, say, ten kilometers, I passed an estimated several hundred idle cars. Some automobilists were standing next to their vehicle, bolt upright and their hands stretched along the seam of their trousers. It was almost as quiet as at the *Rozengracht* of 1972.

How is this return of the urge for commemoration to be explained? It is clear that the authorities, especially the local Amsterdam authorities, are keen on stimulating the public commemorations of the Second World War. In 1992, a special 'resistance-tram' drove through the capital in order to uphold the image of the resistance city. There in the eastern part of the country, I passed, from a certain distance, the newest war memorial in course of construction: the *Bos der Onverzettelijken* (the 'Forest of the Adamants') near the city of *Almere*. One tree is being planted for every one of those fallen, and one tree for the 'unknown executed'. The initiators' motive: 'As it grows, the forest both keeps the memory of the resistance alive and symbolizes the fundamentals that were contributed by the resistance to the future of our country and its population.' And at camp *Westerbork*⁷ the stretch of curled up railroad was not found to be sufficiently symbolic anymore, and so the 'polishing' of the site of commemoration had been concluded recently. At the site of the former roll-call spot there are now laying 102.000 stones, with a star on each. In some other countries the craze for commemoration is no different. This is especially the case in the United States, where a great battle about content and publicity rages between the various Holocaust museums.

David Barnebouw of the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation berated this 'Second World War industry' in a critical article in the *Volkskrant* newspaper of 2 May 1992. According to him, administrators hardly dare to refuse when yet another group comes to them with a plan for a street name, a monument, a plaque or some other artistic novelty. That is why the number of war monuments, now already passing over 1500, will most probably only increase in the future. Thus in the next century we will, according to Barnebouw, be stuck with countless monuments of which neither the purpose nor the beauty will be recognized anymore.

This remarkable increase in commemorating the own, or perhaps own made, grief is undoubtedly connected to several psychological and social developments in the modern age. There is a growing need for identity; there is a rapid advance of the ability to empathize with another, while simultaneously the narrow-mindedness that presents one's own behavior and attitude as correct and justified is increasing. Whether to ascribe this paradox to *the* society that burdens the citizen too much, or *the* television that intensifies all feelings, is unclear. Nor is it clear whether a correlation exists between the undulation in the commemoration of the war and the undulation in the appreciation of 'the Germans', and what kind of role television plays in all this. It is clear, though, that the current urge for commemoration does coincide with a very low appreciation of the eastern neighbors, especially among the youth. The conclusion in the recent report *Bekend en Onbemind* (Known and unloved) by the Dutch institute for international relations, *Clingendael*, reads as follows: 'The attitudes of young people towards Germans and Germany is in comparison with their attitudes towards other E.U. countries and people by far the most negative. Of all

⁷ Camp *Westerbork* was a [World War II concentration camp](#) located in the northeastern part of the [Netherlands](#). Its function during the [Second World War](#) was to assemble [Dutch Jews](#) for transport to other [Nazi concentration camps](#).

young people 56% has negative attitudes towards Germany.’⁸ The report does not provide an explanation, one that would have consisted of a large fan of elements: the urge for commemoration among authorities and interest groups who retroactively want to divide ‘the Dutch population’ into a variety of sectors, the education of history which is largely limited to the period 1933-1945 when concerning Germany, the anti-German attitudes of the cultural elite, the lack of contact with the German culture and the abundance of contact with the German tourist in our country, the current extreme-right attacks in Germany, and last but not least the psychological condition of the Dutch in a rapidly changing world.

Before I attempt to further clarify some of those elements, it is good to mention a few words about the relations between the Netherlands and Germany from a historical perspective, even though this has been covered extensively elsewhere.⁹ On the imaging of other countries, during his speech about ‘Germany’s influence on Dutch society’ in the German city of Erlangen in 1925, the famous Dutch historian Johan Huizinga said: The general opinion that one nation has about another is always adverse, at least when it concerns the populations who have something to do with each other. The closer the relations are, the sharper the reaction.’ It is as simple an explanation as it is a vague one. There are plenty of examples of countries that have a lot of mutual contact and still have friendly relations. But is it not more important in the case of neighboring countries Germany and the Netherlands that their especially unequal, almost diametrically opposed, development in terms of power, prosperity and politics could only intensify the antipathy? In the Dutch Golden Age, Germans were seen by the Dutch the very same way some Dutch see the Belgians nowadays: the dumb and vulgar little brother, source for much entertainment.¹⁰ With the downfall of the Dutch Golden Age, this ridicule started to limit itself slowly but surely to the ‘*hannekemaaiers*’¹¹, the peat cutters and the housemaids. After the lines of development crossed in about 1800, it were the Germans (Goethe, Herder, Heine to name a few) who ridiculed the Dutch for their wooden language, their unwieldy heads and clogs, their stinginess and soberness, their predilection for the tulip and track boat.

The Dutch pride definitely made way for the ‘small neighbor-big neighbor feeling’, when Germany became an empire in 1871 after three victorious wars. Yet the relationship became more ambiguous than this Calimero complex: because of the Dutch economic dependence on the German hinterland and synchronously the Dutch military impotence, but

NOTES

⁸ Lútsen B. Jansen, *Bekend en onbemind. Het beeld van Duitsland en Duitsers onder jongeren van vijftien tot negentien jaar* (The image of Germany and Germans among youth between the ages of fifteen and nineteen), Den Haag 1993, p. 47.

⁹ See for instance H. Lademacher, *Fremdbild und Aussenpolitik. Bemerkungen zu den deutsch-Niederländischen Beziehungen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Bonn 1989; J.L. Heldring, ‘Duitsland voor Nederlanders: “geen land” (Germany to the Dutch: “no country”’, in: *Burengrucht. Opstellen over Duitsland* (Neighboring disturbance. Essays on Germany), Deventer 1978, p. 373-384; H.J.G. Beunders and H.H. Selier, *Argwaan en profijt: Nederland en West-Duitsland 1945-1981* (Mistrust and profit: The Netherlands and West Germany 1945-1981), Amsterdam 1983; J.C. Hess and F. Wielenga, ‘Veertig jaar na dato: voltooide Nederlands-Duitse normalisering?’ (Forty years after: completed Dutch-German normalization?), in: *Internationale Spectator* 39, II (1985), p. 686-696.

¹⁰ Rudolf Dekker, ‘Das Bild Deutschlands und der Deutschen in den Witzen Aernout van Overbeke (1632-1674)’, in: *Auf den Spuren der Niederländer zwischen Thüringer Wald und Ostsee*, Berlin 1992, p. 69.

¹¹ Hannekemaaiers, which is a degeneration of Dutch for ‘John the mower’, was a derogatory term that was used to describe German seasonal workers.

also because of the mixture of admiration, envy and antipathy towards the manner in which Germany began to manifest itself politically, technologically, culturally and ideologically.

Before and during the First World War the pro-British, pro-French and Pro-German groups in the Netherlands had kept each other well balanced, resulting in the neutrality of the country, which was canonized anyway due to colonial interests. After that, this presumed to be indispensable for the world, neutral position of 'wobbling' between the three surrounding powers gradually became more unstable, especially when the Nazis set about their electoral advance. For Huizinga that was cause to declare explicitly in Berlin in 1932 that the border between Middle and Western Europe was indeed lying between Nieuweschans and Vaals.¹² For others, who gave the love for Germany or the sacred belief in neutrality the upper hand over mistrust and antipathy, that border was less clearly defined. That is why in their case the German invasion in 1940 led to 'the trauma of a deceived lover'.

After the war, the relationship became even more ambiguous. The Netherlands needed Germany for the economic reconstruction, and it shared by no means President De Gaulle's later opinions on Europe: 'Things would fare well, if only those annoying Germans would for once stay in their beds one hour longer in the morning.'¹³ Perhaps the Netherlands was the first country to commence trading with Germany after 1945 and plea for the reconstruction of German industry. This originated from the thought: the harder they work the better for us. Trade demanded rapid political normalization. The Netherlands was one of the first countries to enter into diplomatic relations with the Federal Republic of Germany.¹⁴ Incidentally, in 1991 queen Beatrix would be the first foreign head of state to pay an official visit to the reunited Germany.

Militarily, the dilemma was that the Netherlands had to secure itself against a possible new German danger and at the same time needed a rearmed Germany as a sandbag against the advancing Soviet Union. Though the NATO and the E.U. solved all large existential problems, they did not solve all the bilateral predicaments that resulted from the war and certainly not the psychological trauma. During these first couple of years of reconstruction there was however barely time to engage in handling that trauma. When in the late forties the communist threat began to overshadow the German threat, Dutch Prime Minister Drees supposed in 1949 that he could declare that the Dutch have sufficiently been able to detach themselves from the memory of war in order to now strive for a conscious policy of cooperation with Germany.

That turned out to be an error. The wave of emotions produced by the pardoning of war criminal Willy Lages in 1952 and the anti-German expressions at the arrival of the first German tourists two years later seemed to be proof that the government had indeed acted without much ado with the perforce extremely rapid political and economic normalization.

However, these are incidents that distort the general picture. While there was indeed an anti-Nazi mood since 1940, until the sixties there was no broad, open anti-German sentiment. On the contrary. Research I conducted with students in early 1992 brought out that, across the board, the admiration for German culture had decreased only gradually,

¹² Nieuweschans and Vaals are the most northern and southern towns along the Dutch-German border.

¹³ Quoted in: Wam de Moor (ed.), *Germans!?*, The Hague 1990, p. 110.

¹⁴ F. Wieringa, *West-Duitsland: partner uit noodzaak. Nederland en de Bondsrepubliek 1949-1955* (West Germany: partner out of necessity. The Netherlands and the Federal republic of Germany 1949-1955), Utrecht 1989, p. 53.

commensurate with the advance of Anglo-Saxon culture, while up until today the popularity of German industrial products has only been growing.¹⁵

In the thirties, German revues were so popular that theatres did not even need to translate the program booklets. In the fifties, German TV-show hosts, like Catherina Valente, were so popular that the streets were empty whenever their shows were on. In the heavier genre of German operas the works of Richard Wagner – which were a purveyor of ideas to Hitler in the opinion of some – survived the war with ease. In 1949 Wagner's *Tristan and Iseult* was performed again and reviewers were, just as at later performances, blazing with enthusiasm. The decline in Wagner performances after 1959 was more related to changing tastes and impecuniosity, rather than the war.¹⁶ The current Wagner revival even coincides with the commemoration wave.

The share of German programs within the total of TV programming has never been large, because German television was in arrear with both American and Dutch television. The share stood at 3, 8 percent in 1957. The largest relapse did not occur until the seventies. In recent years the percentage has been wobbling around 1, 8 percent, of which the largest part consists of 'Krimi' series like *Derrick* and *Der Alte*.¹⁷ The schlager, which remained popular until 1940 – even after Hitler's ascent to power –, made a comeback in the fifties as a heavily demanded request on radio shows: nearly two times per show in 1952. Only after that the appreciation slowly declined. In 1987 on average only one German song was played per show.¹⁸ Yet all the schlager festivals that were organized between 1971 and 1991 achieved great success on television. And on the popular radio show *Met het oog op morgen*, which means 'in view of tomorrow', the German singer Reinhard Mey still wishes us night-night in German every evening. In the new popular genre of top-40, which in the Netherlands is being broadcast since 1958, Anglo-Saxon songs have dominated from the beginning and the German successes can hitherto be counted by the fingers of one hand.

The decreasing knowledge of the German language is one element in the explanation of this downfall of the appreciation for German culture. The German language education, expanded by the Nazis during the occupation, was reduced in 1945 to below the prewar level. It was not abolished like the former Minister of Education Bolkestein had proposed in 1946. German was, he said, the language 'of a criminal people, criminal not since Hitler but since decades earlier...the Dutch system of education must not be made subservient to the learning of the language of this people because social contact with this people is unnecessary in general'.¹⁹ The grand demise of German in education came only after the implementation of the Education Act of 1963, when German was made optional. In 1988 for example, 13 percent of the foreign language students at the university level in Nijmegen took Arabic, 25 percent took Spanish and only 11 percent took German.²⁰ Today, more Germans are studying the Dutch language than vice versa.

¹⁵ The research was conducted in 1992 during the seminar 'German culture in the Netherlands after 1945'. The participants were: Kiki Bunder, Cees van de Geer, Frank Groen, Maurice Heijnen, Marieke van der Honing, Saskia Leeuwangh, Martijn van der Linden, Annemiek van Ravens, Maurice Schot, Patrick Ubags and Harry Wibier. Their essays are open to inspection at the Goethe Institute in Rotterdam.

¹⁶ Harry Wibier, *Het gedoe rond Wagner. De beleving van het werk van Wagner in naoorlogs Nederland* (The fuss about Wagner. Perceptions on Wagner's work in post-war Netherlands), p. 19.

¹⁷ Maurice Heijnen, *Derrick en de Duitse cultuur. Duitse programma's op de Nederlandse televisie* (Derrick and the German culture. German shows on Dutch television), p. 14/15.

¹⁸ Annemiek van Ravens, *Duitse populaire muziek* (German pop music), p. 6.

¹⁹ Kiki Bunder, *Duits in Nederland* (German language in the Netherlands), p. 5.

²⁰ Idem. P. 9.

The declining popularity is altogether less the result of the war than the advance of the Anglo-Saxon culture on the heels of the Marshall-aid, in addition to which the varying quality of the German culture itself should not be forgotten either. The German film industry has, since the boom years of R.W. Fassbinder, W. Herzog and W. Wenders, been stagnant for years, and matters are not standing much better for German literature. The Kohl-government did not mind the decreasing admiration for this kind of critical culture as much as it did the decrease in admiration for the German language. The official policy is: 'He, who speaks German, buys German.'²¹ That is why in early 1993 Bonn tried to close down the poorly visited libraries of some of the Goethe institutes in Western Europe in favor of language education in Middle and Eastern Europe. It was the German business community, Daimler Benz in the case of Amsterdam, who prevented this closing for now.

In violent contrast with the popularity level of German culture and language stands the popularity of German products: it never suffered from the war. After 1945 the import of German cars for example restored immediately to the prewar level of 40 percent of the total foreign car import. As of yet, German automobile import is still around that percentage. And the *Beetle* was already in 1947 (comprising 86, 4 percent of the total German import) the most popular model, even though it was a case of a most suspicious make of car.²² Was it not Hitler who gave Ferdinand Porsche the assignment to develop a car for the German people, the *Volkswagen*? What is more, was it not the Nazi generals who demanded that the bodywork, when taken off, should provide enough space for three soldiers and a machinegun? In the Netherlands there were few who were bothered by the associations the word *Volkswagen* (nor Mercedes, Hitler's favorite brand) could evoke, and actually did evoke among the rare group of Jewish holocaust survivors. Only in intellectual and especially Jewish circles the German automobile has remained taboo. In this manner the current Minister of Health immediately replaced the German car of her predecessor with a French one.

Angry remarks ('Deutsche nicht erwünscht') towards the first German tourists, who visited the Netherlands in 1954 after the abolishment of the visa obligation, conceal the fact that during the following year Germany registered 827.000 overnight stays by Dutch tourists, more than from any other country.²³ And finally, during the first decades after 1945 there was no question of anti-German sentiments in the field of sports, like soccer, neither at the first post-war international match in 1956 nor at the 1966 one. Heated sentiments were reserved for the matches against Belgium. Only after the defeat at the hands of the Germans in the 1974 World Cup final in München, the anti-German element started to play a role in the sports.

So, the conclusion ought to be, provisionally, that after 1945 there was indeed a lot of hatred towards the Nazis among the majority of Dutch people, but not towards 'the Germans', and that from the second half of the fifties on the Dutch people slowly but steadily turned away from the German culture in favor of the Anglo-Saxon. The war plays far less a role in these dynamics than commonly is believed.

²¹ *Die Zeit*, 2 October 1992, p. 60.

²² Cees van de Geer, *Auto's van Duits fabriek in Nederland 1945-1992* (German cars in the Netherlands 1945-1992), p. 6, 10.

²³ Martijn van der Linden and Marieke van der Honing, *Aan het strand is iedereen directeur* (Everybody is a director on the beach), p. 8.

Polls indicate that the level of 'ungraciousness' towards 'the Germans' has been steadily decreasing since 1945, a given that some historians have matched with a commensurate normalization of relations²⁴, in fact proves not much more than that in some eras Huizinga's postulation holds truth: after all, during the first decade after 1945 there were, partly due to the visa obligation, barely any Germans to be seen in the Netherlands. After that the United States became the country that exercised the most political, cultural and military influence on the Netherlands and consequently it was America that from 1960 on evoked the sharpest reactions. Germany became once again – barring the known exceptions of the war criminals known as the 'Breda Four'²⁵ and the 1966 marriage of then princess Beatrix to German nobleman Claus von Amsberg - a relatively unfamiliar country or, in the words of J.L. Heldring: 'no country'.²⁶ The exceptions show that Huizinga's assertion does not hold up in some times and eras. For example, the Dutch image about West Germany was at its worst during the RAF attacks of 1977, when the protest against the government of chancellor Helmut Schmidt – 'the new führer of fascist Germany' – in the Hague expanded into one of the largest in post-war Netherlands, and culminated in riots and the smashing of the windows of Mercedes dealers. The fact that in those years the DDR was perceived as 'the good Germany' among left-wing circles proves that the grand conjunctural oscillations in the attitudes towards Germany are largely formed independent from Germany itself, and any knowledge about Germany. These attitudes or images are formed by information that is not necessarily untrue, but is often incomprehensive and subjective and selected in order to support the desired image rather than undermine it.

When the period between 1945 and now is reviewed, the public opinion about Germany has oscillated back and forth between denial, the hope for the dominance of 'the better Germany' and, at the first signs that this was not coming to pass, fierce rejection. A realistic acceptance or an attempt to a non-emotional influence of the existing Germany was rarely the case.

The increasingly intensifying political and economical entanglement is one of the many different causes for the fact that anti-German attitudes have been gaining field again in recent years. The arrival of Chancellor Kohl in The Hague in January 1993 was barely mentioned in the media, even though it was his first official visit to the Netherlands. True, there was hardly anything shocking or news to report about it anyway. For in The Hague, relations are always characterized as 'excellent'.²⁷ Small differences – 'Autobahn' vignettes, toll charges on freight – are solved time and again. Therefore, the image forming about Germany has never really dominated politics.

The German reunification has also not led to an increased disassociation. On the contrary, in policy reports the government is advised, as the United States is less present in Europe, to look for even closer relations with Germany. And foreign Minister P. Kooymans stated, when he took office in early 1993 following the Atlantic orientated H. van den Broek,

²⁴ See for instance J.C. Hess and F. Wielinga, 'Gibt es noch Ressentiments...? Das niederländische Deutschlandbild seit 1945', in J.C. Hess and H. Schissler (ed.), *Nachbarn zwischen Nähe und Distanz: Deutschland und die Niederlande*, Frankfurt 1988, p. 13-36.

²⁵ 'The Breda Four' were German war criminals who served a life sentence in the panoptical prison of the Dutch city of Breda. After the death of a prisoner the name was subsequently altered to match the number of remaining prisoners.

²⁶ J.L. Heldring, *Duitsland voor Nederlanders: "geen land",* in: *Burengerucht. Opstellen over Duitsland*, Deventer 1978, p. 373-384.

²⁷ See: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 25 January 1993. Small differences -

that he set 'special value' upon an orientation towards Germany. In the matters of the European monetary union, the UN security policy and a joint military force the Netherlands and Germany fully agree.

That is why some observers with a realistic viewpoint conclude that the Netherlands will do well under a German leadership. Historian A.J. Boekestijn wrote on 24 March 1992 in *NRC Handelsblad*: 'We are lucky that Kohl is protecting our real interests and that our own politicians have barely any influence'. The chief editor of this newspaper, B. Knapen, posed during a discussion in 1990 about the forthcoming German reunification the already daring question: 'Is not it then more practical to become a part of federal Germany?' That the government in The Hague would object is most probable. That the public opinion would not accept is most certain.

Nation states in general want to retain their characteristics; otherwise they would not have become nations. But that feeling of being distinct from the rest is in the Netherlands less and less corroborated by visible differences. For the language, which is the last bastion of difference, is also spoken in Flanders. The political integration of E.U. countries, which was decided in Maastricht towards the end of 1991, evoked nationalistic reactions everywhere, including the Netherlands. In all the talk about Dutch identity, which resonated from the European Union treaty of Maastricht, the confusion was great. A small, internationally orientated country, which sees its self-imposed task of 'guiding country' – that is nationalism disguised as internationalism – go up in smoke in an increasingly chaotic world, appears to not have much more at its disposal in order to accentuate singularity. Except for the anti-German sentiment.

It seems that this sentiment needs to be disseminated more and more expressively as Dutchmen and Germans are less and less distinguishable from each other for outsiders. Americans have always taken blonde Dutchmen for Germans. But also in southern Europe little difference is noticed between Dutch and German tourists, neither in behavior nor in taste for sun, water, camping and beer.

The fact that Germans feel more kindred to us than vice versa, only increases the need to emphasize difference by rejecting the neighbors. No Dutchman wants to ride a vacation bus with a German, while conversely Germans do.²⁸ No pupil wants to be in correspondence with a German pupil, while conversely German pupils do.²⁹ The success of the approximately 150 twinnings between Dutch and German municipalities varies a lot. And my impression, based on a random test, is that the liaison is upheld with great difficulty rather than with ease, especially on the part of the Dutch municipalities. The judgment of historian H.W. von der Dunk – 'for the Dutch their repugnance against Germans is a form – their form – of anti-Semitism' – in *Der Spiegel* on 5 April 1993 is, though too bold of a stroke, a rough comparison which can give the Dutch food for thought about their own behavior.

The great sensitivity regarding all things related to Jews and anti-Semitism should most probably be regarded as primarily a suppression of bad conscience regarding the collaboration in the war, and secondly as a function in affirming the own identity. Because if we are not much different from the Germans in this respect either, what else remains to distinguish us from them?

Thus the anti-German reflex surfaces at the first opportunity that comes forward, or seems to be coming forward. The 'Kristallnacht speech' of the German chairman of parliament Phillip Jenninger on 10 November 1988 immediately evoked protest from the left

²⁸ Van der Linden, op. cit, p. 12, 46.

²⁹ Bunker, op. cit, p.13.

in Germany itself too, but was 'collectively misunderstood' in the Dutch media.³⁰ The Anne Frank Foundation immediately reacted with the statement 'it staggers belief (...) what has been said is horrible.'³¹ A similar reaction came after the smashing of the Auschwitz monument in Amsterdam in 1993. This reflex emerged also in 1987 when the supposedly anti-Semitic play *Garbage, the city and death* by Rainer Werner Fassbinder was to be performed. While almost no one had read it, the University of Amsterdam decided to immediately prohibit a symposium about the controversial German philosopher Heidegger. When Dutch journalist Renate Rubinstein, daughter of a Jewish father who was murdered in Auschwitz, read the piece, she concluded: 'Jesus Christ, it is not an anti-Semitic piece!' The thing that bothered her the most about the kidnapping of Jewish actor Jules Croiset by 'young Dutch fascists', which turned out to be staged by himself, was that a lot of acquaintances retrospectively said they had not believed the story at all, but did not dare to say so and therefore evidently there were some things in the Netherlands which could not be published.³²

The framers of the Clingendael-report did not provide an explanation for the negative image of Germany among Dutch youth. Later they wrote that the image these youth have of the Netherlands itself is actually more disturbing. The interviewed youth happened to think of the Netherlands and the Dutch in an extraordinarily positive way (78 points on a scale from 0 to 100). They are tolerant, cozy, practical, sober, friendly, easy to live with, full of humor. The Netherlands is democratic, progressive, peace loving, technically advanced. The report's conclusion: 'Perhaps we are dealing with an (extreme) form of nationalism. If that is the case, it will be of no use to attempt to correct the youth's image of Germany by more education in schools about Germany.'³³

The Dutch image of Germany is indeed more a kind of nationalism, rather than Von der Dunk's 'anti-Semitism'. The fact that the Dutch media prefer to forget racist expressions in their own country as soon as possible – fire bombs at migrant offices and a mosque, the murder of the 15 year old black kid Kerwin Duinmeyer, the murder of a Moroccan youngster in Amsterdam – fits within this nationalism. The refusal to pay attention to the treatment of the 50.000 to 60.000 Germans or Dutch of German origin in the Netherlands itself also fits within this nationalism.

In late 1992 VPRO television paid attention to it for the first time, even though the producers themselves did not quite know how to handle the complaints. Journalist Jan Blokker wrote about it in his column for *de Volkskrant* of 10 November 1992: 'For half an hour (...) all sorts of German types moaned without a trace of evidence about how they were maltreated by all sorts of Dutchmen, who were neither visible nor audible, in such a manner that they were as if they were forced to being *ins Exil*, or more precisely *heim ins Reich* (...). All nonsense of course.'

But nonsense it is by no means. There are Germans in the Netherlands who shop for groceries on 3 May and only venture the streets on 6 May. The Goethe institute and the German consulates do not dare to put out the national flag on holidays. Of the foreign tourists, it is predominantly German automobilists who recover their cars with swastikas scratched in the paintwork or with the windows smashed in. Some Dutch of German origin

³⁰ Titus Ensink, *Jenninger: de ontvangst van een Duitse rede in Nederland* (Jenninger: the reception of a German lecture in the Netherlands), Amsterdam 1992, p. 147.

³¹ Idem, p. 157.

³² Renate Rubinstein, *Overgangscursus* (Transitional course), Amsterdam 1990, p. 128-137.

³³ *De Volkskrant*, 6 April 1993, Forum-page.

state that the derogatory *mof* or *moffin* is no longer an invective because they get far worse things thrown at them, including dollops of spit.³⁴ A female restaurant operator of German origin in Zandvoort witnesses guests who stretch out their arms in a Hitler salute and exclaim: 'Guten Tag, Frau Hitler!'³⁵

Examples of this form of racism can also be found in the material of numerous famous Dutch, for example cabaret artists like Freek de Jonge, Jules Deelder ('Why are Germans buried with their mouths shut? Spares a cubic meter of sand'), Paul de Leeuw and many others. By the way, this attitude changes immediately as soon as they are invited to perform in Germany. Then they hurry to proclaim it was all just a joke. Although De Leeuw pleaded on German television for the free distribution of condoms, because that would reduce the arrival of new little Germans to a minimum.

Many authors do the same. A columnist reported with pride that he had not spent one day of vacation in a German language region.³⁶ In Joost Zwagerman's novel *Vals Licht* (1991) the 'rotten mof' is not even up to the mark as a whoremonger. However, when it appears that Dutch authors like Cees Noteboom and Harry Mulisch, or cabaret artists like Herman van Veen, accomplish great success in Germany, it suddenly is taken as the seal of honor from the citizens of the land of Bach and Goethe, proving their quality. Regular patriotic pride undoubtedly plays first fiddle in the large satisfaction deriving from the successes of Dutch artists and performers in Germany. Or is there more to it? According to the German magazine *Tempo* there is. Last year, *Tempo* saw the lost war as true reason behind the rise of Dutch showbiz in Germany: 'Through television they are Dutchening Germany. In this way they want to avenge the invasion of the Wehrmacht in 1940.'³⁷ I do not know if the war in fact played a role, the public feeling moves in mysterious ways.

In any case we have to, like Von der Dunk stresses, keep in mind the generation-factor when explaining the oscillations in the anti-German sentiment.³⁸ The Dutch who were in their adolescence during the occupation are supposed to be the most anti-German due to psychological reasons. In the 1990 booklet *Germans!?*, which consists of talks about the reunion with well-known Dutchmen who have experienced the war, suspicion and antipathy against the Germans is prolific on almost every page. A few quotes:

- Politician Prof. Dr. Piet Steenkamp (1925): 'I find them to be an extraordinarily intelligent people, but a threat does emanate from them.' (p. 110)
- Actor and director Ton Lutz (1919): 'It is a proud people, against which I have repugnance.' (p. 67)
- Violinist Theo Olof (1924): 'I still visit Germany with certain reluctance (...) There is something called a German mentality. And that is one of obedience.' (p.81)
- Author An Rutgers van der Loeff-Basenau (1910): 'I see the emergence of a super power of which I am indeed somewhat frightened.' (p.95)

Some of these critics, like Olof, came to the Netherlands because their parents had to flee for Hitler, and this fact has permanently strengthened the critical attitude towards Germany. Quite a few people of the 'generation of 1924' have belonged for years and years to the established cultural elite: H.J.A. Hofland, W.F. Hermans, Jan Blokker, Lucebert, K. van het Reve. Since all of them are influential writers, they are bound to have influence upon the

³⁴ *Haarlems Dagblad*, 28 november 1992. Interview with the founder of the Deutsch-Niederländische Verein, Dorethea Adebahr.

³⁵ Letter to author.

³⁶ For example Jaap Koopmans in his column 'Germans' in *Rotterdams Dagblad*, 3 January 1992.

³⁷ *De Volkskrant*, 14 March 1992. Quoted in Maurice Heijnen, op. cit., p. 119.

³⁸ De Moor, op. cit., p. 119.

public opinion about Germany. And as they get older, for some of them the unpleasant recollections of the war and consequently of the Germans grow even more intense. A few examples. Journalist H.J.A. Hofland writes in 1990 about the 1940 bombardment of Rotterdam, which had eliminated the surroundings of his youth: 'As more time passes by, the more severe the German crime becomes.'³⁹ In the same year Karel van het Reve states: 'And yet the misery, the burden of the German occupation, becomes heavier for me each year, because I can stand it less.'⁴⁰

Whatever the role of the media exactly is in the public opinion about Germany (trendsetting or trend following), it is obvious that these leading exponents either directly or indirectly influence the general atmosphere, and not in a favorable way for Germany.

The negative image about Germany of the first postwar generation was, as has been ascertained multiple times, in the sixties largely decided by both the shame about the less than courageous behavior of the parents during the war and, especially, the use of 'bugaboo West-Germany' as an instrument in the battle against the establishment here in the domestic. Nevertheless, the war self-evidently played a personal and direct role among a part of this generation. The defeat of the Dutch football team at the hands of the Germans in the world cup final of 1974 was regarded as a second defeat, and this was a very understandable feeling in the case of some of the players. Midfielder Willem van Hanegem, whose father, brother and sister died during a German bombardment stated the following in 1989: 'The fact that I have an enormous hatred towards Germans is of course related to this background, I do not care for them in any case. Germans are arrogant. They suck up to the top and kick down to the bottom, I do not like that (...) We would have loved to win against those Germans, I had wanted to land Berti Vogts a kick.'⁴¹

Thus, the victory over the German team in 1988 was seen as a 'second liberation', after the one from the Germans themselves in 1945, this time from the German trauma. And so, in this case it was not untrue what poet and 'night mayor' of Rotterdam, Jules Deelder made verse: 'The fallen rose cheering from their graves.'

Now that a lot of the frustration had disappeared, the cheering held on for two years. So was it that the general mood in the Netherlands about the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 was one of euphoria. Even *Volkskrant*-editor Anet Bleich, usually the embodiment of mistrust when it comes to Germany, wrote: 'But at the sight of the touching images from Berlin, I cannot escape the euphoric thought that the Other Germany has better chances than ever.'⁴²

Bitter disappointment usually follows excessive expectation, and so it did in this case. Because of the right-wing attacks on foreigners in Germany, the anti-German sentiment grew again rapidly from late 1990 on, culminating in the protests of May/June 1993 in the wake of the murder of a Turkish family in Solingen. No fewer than one million postcards with the superscription 'I am furious' were sent to the German government. Undoubtedly out of proper and sincere indignation. But perhaps the extraordinary success of the postcard campaign has also something to do with the shame about the misplaced euphoria of 1989

³⁹ *De draagbare Hofland* (The portable Hofland), Amsterdam 1993, p. 22.

⁴⁰ De Moor, op. cit., p. 49.

⁴¹ *Voetbal International*, 1989, nr. 2, p. 58. Quoted in Frank Groen, *Holland-Germany: more than a game*, p. 16.

⁴² *De Volkskrant*, 11 November 1989. Quoted in: *Meningen over... Duitse eenheid. 'Het derde Duitse wonder'* (Opinions on... German unity. 'The third German miracle'), Amsterdam 1990, p. 14.

and, more fundamentally, with the need for exorcism rituals – to keep the own country misery free – and affirmation of the own, distinct identity.

In this respect the postcard campaign was a more drastic, more national variation to the women's magazine type fashion of a few years ago to place wooden geese behind windows, which were to show the direct surrounding just how environmentally friendly the inhabitants were. Now, this need for collective self-exaltation seems no longer to be satisfied by distinguishing oneself through exquisite behavior and extraordinary achievement, but only by bringing down others, preferably the eastern neighbors.

With respect to the end – finishing the murderous xenophobia across the border – this putting down is a risky means. Granted, the remembering of the occupation has always been a method to take the Germans down a peg or two. At state visits to Germany, the Dutch side invariably requests a visit to a concentration camp. These visits were, besides all other characteristics, also a form of *Realpolitik* disguised as morality. And rightly so, necessity is the mother of invention. However, these kinds of actions may, just as is the case with some drugs, have an adverse effect when overdosed. This appears to have happened with the postcard campaign.

Because it were precisely the Germans who pleaded for understanding and solidarity. Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel emphatically asked the neighbors, like the Netherlands, in early 1993 in The Hague to 'raise understanding, not for hatred or violence, but for our extraordinary situation'.⁴³ German Ambassador K.J. Citron repeated this on 29 June 1993 once more in front of the critical editors and readers of *de Volkskrant* newspaper: 'We, however, need – especially due to the bigger burden – the special solidarity of friends and neighbors.'

From the Netherlands they received a lot of criticism and little understanding, and certainly no offer to take over some of the hundreds of thousands of refugees who fled the Balkans. The reaction in Germany was one we have seen before in history: retreating oneself in a resentful isolation. 'If this continues, they can for my part go to hell with a united Europe,' is how one of the angry comments about the criticism from the Netherlands sounded.

Have the Dutch, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, erected a new wall in their minds where fear, arrogance, sense of inferiority and a contorted need for national identity serve as bricks? Some observers, both Dutch and German, believe this. The Dutch correspondent of the German newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Ernst Levy, wrote for instance on 5 September 1992: 'The Dutch regard themselves as the happiest population in the world.' And: 'In any case, most Dutch are convinced that in their country everything is better than elsewhere.' He was not able to detect much of our boasted urge for freedom. 'The culture of consensus has produced virtuous, un-emancipated citizens who react, at the utmost, out of defective discipline. 'Effectiveness' is considered to be a term of abuse, since it is associated with 'the German virtues'.

This is perhaps an exaggerated way of portraying things, but not much. It appears to be justified to conclude that Dutch nationalism has to be kept alive for a substantial part through the anti-German sentiment. In some cases that sentiment is completely understandable, in many cases it has become a kind of religious creed: we are different, better than them, and therefore we are Dutch.

(1993)

⁴³ *De Volkskrant*, 15 January 1993,.

III Misconception:

The Dutch are anti-colonialists

OR: LONGING FOR GHETTOS

The Dutch see themselves as cosmopolitans. And they are, when on holiday. These holiday-cosmopolitans believe they can easily join the great national tradition of global traders who knew what the world had to offer. No culture was too far or too strange, and we went there for a long or a short visit. For the money, colonization, to spread the word of God. For not only do the Dutch know what is good for them, they know even better what's good for other people.

As a reaction to the enforced decolonization (Indonesia 1949, New Guinea 1962, and Surinam 1975), 'makeability' became the new religion in the post-colonial, de-Christianized society the Netherlands wanted to become after the 1950s. Now that it was forced to retreat to its own territory, it was going to turn that boggy polder into a small paradise. A miniature copy of the United States, but without the drawbacks we saw over there, i.e. the din of arms, the phony Hollywood glitter, the belligerent foreign policy, the huge gap between rich and poor, racism and the accompanying ghettos where they stored those black people.

Externally the modernized variation on colonial days was expressed in the popularity of the Third World as an object to 'aid' into a paradise. Concretely by a range of doctors and engineers who would perform their salutary work for a few years in Africa or some other place. At home by donating money with a vengeance. Preferably during a national telethon for a charity far away. Between 1960 and 2000 the per capita yield of such drives was higher in the Netherlands than in any other place in the world. Development aid still is an almost sacrosanct tenet in Dutch politics.

In the meantime the immigrants came to the Netherlands. First, the people from Indonesia, then the 'guest workers' from the Mediterranean, and from 1975 on the Surinamese. Subsequently we experienced a veritable flood of asylum seekers, which reached a peak around 2000. Currently one million of the sixteen million inhabitants of the Netherlands are Muslims. The 'citizens' uprising' in 2002 was a reaction to this influx. And it made the establishment break out in a panic. Populism! Xenophobia! Racism! In the Netherlands! A fierce debate about how things got to this in our peace-loving polder paradise has been raging since. Hadn't Holland managed to develop nicely and reasonably into a tolerant and permanently multicultural dancing feast, a successful experiment to be adopted by the rest of the world?

One of the reasons for this, to many people abrupt change in the nature and image of the Netherlands is sought in the failure to cope with the greatest trauma in our national history: decolonization, and in particular the loss of the Netherlands Indies in 1949. The shame about the excessive violence that was used even in the final stages of the war to prevent independence, is believed to have made the baby boomers take up a new project, pacifistic as well as ethical, for the edification of our poor and oppressed fellow man. In the Netherlands, and also in the Third World, first of all in Africa. But is shame (and naïveté) sufficient explanation for the warm welcome that the notion of the multicultural society in the Netherlands got from the new baby-boom elites? And for the disillusionment, even

shock, about the 'multicultural drama' that, although many did not want to see, was taking place due to a lack of integration?

No, shame and naïveté are not sufficient explanation. As a third emotional breeding ground for the attitude some groups in the Netherlands have towards the multicultural society, we cannot ignore the taboo emotion of envy. What can they possibly be envious about? Colonial times. Because they were born too late, the baby boomers never had the pleasure of actually experiencing those times.

Sure, passionate people in the 1960s and 1970s yearned for distant paradises. But the people who sympathized with Che Guevara, Mao Zedong and Pol Pot, or African model states in the process of formation such as Tanzania, Mozambique or El Salvador never thought of themselves as the oppressed. They were always leaders, whether they were development-aid workers, caring politicians or 'participating' journalists. No matter how well it worked out sometimes, there was always an element of paternalism. We will help you achieve a better future.

Unfortunately for these 'liberators', distant Utopias disappeared in the swamp one after the other, and eventually the whole underlying dream of communism and socialism evaporated. These cosmopolitan revolutionaries, too, were eventually thrown back on the territory of the Low Countries by the Sea.

It is true, the migration flows of recent decades can only be understood as a Western or even global phenomenon. And yet the different European countries took various positions. It is a fact that the Netherlands (the most densely populated country in Europe) has taken in the largest number of asylum seekers and refugees of all EU-countries. Why? Maybe because the only piece of land in the world where we could engage in 'ethical politics' and 'edification of the oppressed' turned out to be our own 'polder'.

And so the Netherlands, after its unsuccessful colonial adventure and equally unsuccessful anti-colonial adventure in the Third World, and after the fall of the Berlin Wall, started on a new colonial project within the confines of its own dikes. This also explains why the asylum seekers who arrived from all over the world since 1990, rather than the earlier immigrants such as the Dutch citizens from the East Indies, Greeks, Spaniards, Portuguese, Moroccans and Turks - who generally had to fend for themselves despite numerous expressions of solidarity, became the new targets of the time-honoured ethical task that 'a small country can be great at'. It is also significant that this new 'colonial project' of the asylum seekers was supported mainly by groups and parties that had little to no experience with pre-war colonial days: D66 (liberal democrats), PvdA (Labour), GroenLinks (the Greens) and a considerable part of the confessional parties.

And so we can wonder whether it was pure solidarity, or rather the need to be scoutmaster or teacher, that was hidden behind the (no doubt sometimes also sincere) cosmopolitan tolerance and humanity each asylum seeker was greeted with from the 1990s on. That is to say, by 'politics' and 'the media' (not by large sectors of society itself, as events in 2002 made very clear). Shouldn't we dig much deeper into the caverns of the psyche of the right-minded part of the nation?

Yes, and when we do we might just discover that the proclaimed need for an egalitarian and peaceable multicultural society was only a facade for the need for a new colonial society. The reality of the coloured, illegal cleaner in the affluent cosmopolitan double-income family - including those of journalists and politicians - was only a first sign. The almost clandestine daily bicycle ride of many progressive parents who take their

children to the white school in a better neighbourhood is another. When the existence of 'black' schools could no longer be denied, there suddenly emerged, like the proverbial rabbit from the hat, the political theory that 'education in your own language and culture' is much better for the preservation of the newcomers' identity anyway. This acceptance of the separateness of the other person comes dangerously close to indifference here. And then a quite common next step is displacement.

After 'the uprising of the people' in 2002 against the multicultural society that brought so much socio-psychological disruption (housing, alienation, crime), the demand that the strangers 'integrate' sounded in unison. This cry of despair was not only based on a new illusion - namely that they would all want to integrate with us - but was also filled with a considerable dose of hypocrisy. Initially these 'angry citizens' - dismissed by the progressive, right-minded part of society as 'envious and resentful white lower class' - were not unsympathetic towards integrating with the ethnic groups. But the social differences were too many and too large, and they were cultivated by the government. Non-adjustment was subsidized. That is what made them furious. They had become strangers in their own neighbourhood, and felt abandoned by the government. And that is why the inhabitants of the supposedly safe suburban paradise they recently moved into also felt threatened by strangers. And so they opted for social and physical safety among themselves, i.e. for segregation.

But doesn't the same hold true for many progressive advocates of the multicultural society? It is a fact that 'politics'- including local politics - has done very little about this integration in previous decades. And has therefore allowed unemployment among ethnic groups to rise to bizarre heights, socio-economic inequality to take on American proportions, and black schools and ghettos to develop.

Apart from shame and naïveté, perhaps the explanation for this indifference is also to be found in their envy of their parents' and grandparents' experience of colonial times. Or could it be even worse? And was this indifference perhaps subconsciously the intended outcome? And was this outcome based on the following, never expressed desire: we - the 1968 generation - not only want to be and remain the intellectual and cultural elite in this country, we also want to be the socio-economic elite: surrounded by 'the lower classes', preferably of all colours, tramps and homeless people are welcome too. That adds a cosmopolitan flavour to the position of the elite.

Even the well-intentioned Mr. Average in the newly built Suburbia in the polder can secretly feel like a colonial when thinking of those 'poor devils' in nineteenth-century neighbourhoods in the *Randstad*, that coloured metropolis which today is as much feared as disdained, and which he avoids as much as he can.

After all the failed projects based on the Netherlands-as-the-model-country concept, the ghettos and black schools in the Netherlands may not be the dream paradise for modern baby boom elites in the better neighbourhoods. But they are the next best thing. And to many people the colonial feeling that now replaces the failed revolutionary liberator feeling does not taste that bad. Perhaps it even tastes so good, that we have no choice but to admit that jealousy of the colonial sense of power (including the longing for hierarchy and segregation) was one of the driving forces behind the entire multicultural project from the start.

And so current reality fits in a typically Dutch tradition. For the class-consciousness and ghetto-thinking of the Dutch have always been as strong as their egalitarianism and cosmopolitanism.

IV Fortuyn, Van Gogh, Hirsi Ali

Why the Unholy Trinity Was Driven Out of the Netherlands

Vulnerability” and “tolerance” are pretty vague notions. A lot of suggestions, images, and good intentions cling to them, while scientific clarity is virtually absent.

The same goes for the Netherlands. Abroad, my country had the image of a tolerant, liberal, and free society, a place where things could be said and done that were forbidden elsewhere. So the question is: how on earth did this country turn into a battlefield due to a clash of civilizations almost overnight? I will try to explain to you how and why in the past decades the Netherlands became so vulnerable that in 2002 a political revolt broke out quite unexpectedly, a revolt that lasted for years and still is not over yet. The crisis resulted in two people becoming victims of political killings, while a third had to flee the country. Because all three of these people were liberal individualists who criticized two types of religion—the political-cultural left, or “Red Church,” and fundamentalist Islam—I will refer to them as the unholy trinity, an unholy trinity that had to be exorcized to restore the peace.

Freedom of speech and freedom of religion are key factors in the Dutch crisis. Cultural wars and mimetic rivalry are other factors. Americanization and the advent of the multicultural society are the *forces profondes*.

TOLERANCE AND THE DUTCH CONSTITUTION

Let us talk briefly about tolerance first. Everybody seems to be in favor of it, except when we collectively decide we must *not* tolerate things, like drunken driving, smoking in public buildings, and so on.

In the present Dutch constitution, created in 1983, article 1 begins with these sentences: “All persons in the Netherlands shall be treated equally in equal circumstances. Discrimination on the grounds of religion, belief, political opinion, race, or sex or on any other grounds whatsoever shall not be permitted.”⁴⁴ In essence, the constitution states that a colored Dutchman has the right to be treated in the same way as a white one. This has, however, nothing to do with tolerance. Tolerance means that a dominant group permits a nondominant group to have opinions or lifestyles that seem to deviate from the usual order. If we ask natives to be tolerant toward exotic immigrants, this implies hierarchy. There is a group that tolerates, and there is a group that *is* tolerated. In the strict sense of the word, tolerance implies discrimination and is therefore hostile to the constitution.

As a Dutch historian once remarked, every philosopher who thought about these things, like John Locke, Mirabeau, or Thomas Paine, knew that the notion of religious tolerance is useless if you assume all men by nature to have inviolable rights anyway, like those of freedom of thought, expression, and religion.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Heringa, A.W., T. Zwart (1983) Grondwet 1983. Zwolle: Tjeenk Willink. Note: All quotations from the constitution are taken from this source.

⁴⁵ E. H. Kossmann, *Politieke Theorie en Geschiedenis: Verspreide opstellen en voordrachten* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1987).

Of course, a nation-state has to be intolerant sometimes, for instance, when freedom of religion is used to undermine the state, when, for example, the state is promoting violence, which in democratic societies is the monopoly of the state. This is a matter of principle. The rest is a matter of political debate. At this point we have to conclude that trying to give meaning to a word such as tolerance can be very complicated and confusing, and that such a word has to be used very carefully. The same goes for all those other container words, like racism, fascism, populism, and so forth, that have been used so frequently in recent decades to label and scapegoat people and things that are feared or simply disliked. But words are important.

The idle and gratuitous manner in which container words of this kind are used to denounce “the enemy” represents the other side of the so called liberal, “tolerant” society of the Netherlands. All this name calling definitely keeps you from researching and facing the things that are really going on. During the 1990s, this name calling resulted in the dominance of political correctness, a phenomenon that leaves no room for doubt as to who the angels and devils are in society, and it implies that there is no need to look into anything any further. This can be quite comforting, that is, until someone, like the representatives of our unholy trinity, enters the stage and pinpoints exactly and without mincing words what the real problems and dilemmas in our modern (multicultural) society are.

One of the dilemmas is the question of prioritizing fundamental rights (as stated in the constitution) when these rights conflict with one another. For example, article 1 states the prohibition of discrimination, which we have already mentioned. And article 6 states that “everybody has the right to profess freely his religion or beliefs, either individually or in community with others, subject to everyone’s responsibility according to the law.” Article 7 states that “No one shall require prior permission to publish thoughts or opinions through the press, without prejudice to the responsibility of every person under the law.” Another part of this article states that this holds true for any medium. But what happens when there is a conflict? In the Netherlands, several orthodox religious leaders have publicly called homosexuals dirty swine and homosexuality a disease. A judge in this instance ruled that article 6 (freedom of religion) overruled article 1 (prohibition of discrimination). We know that a nonreligious citizen who said the same things would have been found guilty of discrimination, and therefore one has to conclude that our constitution can be quite ambiguous.⁴⁶

Readers now probably think, well, this dilemma of conflicting articles is true for any constitution. How right they are. That’s why in America the Supreme Court is so important, and why fierce political battles are fought when the president needs to appoint a new member. But in Holland there is no such thing as a supreme court. Perhaps the fundamental problem here is the total absence of public debate (apart from the occasional cultural conflict between the current elites, who were the generation of 1968, and “the masses,” and the mimetic rivalry among several groups that occurred in the past decade) about the new Dutch Constitution of 1983 and the possible contradictions it presents in practice.

The reason for the absence of public debate is simple: in a society dominated by *one* intellectual group, everybody agrees about the priorities, even the judges. But as soon as someone stands up and says, hey wait a minute, I do not agree, then all of sudden it seems that hardly anyone has given the contradictions much thought.

I would like to say one more thing about the constitution of 1983, because it links the constitution to the generation of 1968 that was in power in 2002 and to the crisis that

⁴⁶ NRC Handelsblad, October 10, 1998; NRC Handelsblad, June 14, 2008.

followed. A Dutch historian in 1984 said about the constitution: “Dutch society of today is asking very much of itself.”⁴⁷ This is not just because it is probably the only one in the entire world that starts with an interdiction—“Thou shall not discriminate”—but because all the other articles combined make up one long catalogue of citizens’ rights, while on the other hand the constitution specifies all the duties that the state should fulfill, duties varying from the provision of good housing, employment, and health care to the provision of privacy and leisure time. Civic duty isn’t mentioned anywhere. We can easily connect the consequences of this constitution to the harsh criticism the British author and former psychiatrist Theodore Dalrymple expressed in his books about the fatal consequences of the (British) welfare state and the anti-authoritarian attitudes the 1968 revolution establishment reserved for those generations raised in British ghettos. For Dalrymple, these consequences are passivity and the establishment’s placing on others the blame for its own failure.⁴⁸

THE FORCES PROFONDES

Violence and religion (the concepts examined at the Amsterdam Conference on Violence and Religion, 2007) are key concepts if we want to understand why the Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn and filmmaker and writer Theo Van Gogh were killed, and why politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali was exorcized by what Fortuyn referred to as “the Red Church” of Dutch cultural and intellectual elites, but perhaps also by the majority of people, who may have regarded her as too dangerous for Holland.

It’s not easy for the Netherlands to cope with realities such as religion and violence. Both our constitution, which consists mainly of statements of citizens’ rights, and the total lack of public debate about the constitution illustrate this. But the real reasons for our problematic relationship with the concept of violence are partly historical and partly geographical. Our country is so small you’ll have problems finding it on a globe. The two world wars left big scars on our national psyche. First, it needs to be stated that we did not take part in World War I. Staying aloof and having the Peace Palace in The Hague seemed to be a better protective shield than getting involved. Being without military defenses, we took the moral high ground to survive. Do not give offense to anyone!

What was striking during the 1960s was the dazzling speed at which secularization spread across Holland. People left their churches faster than in any neighboring country. When Pope John Paul II visited Holland in 1985, demonstrators pelted the popemobile with tomatoes and rotten eggs. The explanation for this fierce anti-church stance of the post–World War II generations seems to be that the corset of prewar morality had been tighter in Holland than elsewhere. The reason for this can be linked to the fact that the Dutch stayed neutral during World War I. The dominant pre-1914 bourgeois and Christian views on morality were able to survive without being interrupted by World War I and the roaring twenties.

During World War II, the Dutch mostly felt humiliation and the need to “adjust” to the German occupation. The peculiar post–World War II history of the Dutch has a great deal to do with the traumas suffered because of the two world wars. The postwar generations were burdened with feelings of shame and guilt about incidents of wartime collaboration, and with feelings of anger about the prolonged restraints of prewar church doctrines. So, the

⁴⁷ Kossmann, opcit, 45. (My translation)

⁴⁸ Theodore Dalrymple, *Life at the Bottom: The Worldview That Makes the Underclass* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2001).

heartfelt cry of “Free at last, away with religion” was part of the Dutch cultural revolution of the 1960s. And Theo van Gogh was its fierce defender.

However, traditionally the Dutch predominantly have a Christian moral code. So, as soon as the 1960s were over, collective feelings of guilt caused a semi-religious agenda to enter the political hemisphere. This was an agenda that made political priorities of the Third World, the environment, animal rights, and so forth. So nonreligious environmental fanatics, like the killer of Pim Fortuyn, essentially had the same motivations as the born-again Muslim fundamentalist killer of Theo Van Gogh.

THE GENESIS OF THE DUTCH CRISIS

Early in 2002, Prime Minister Wim Kok said that the phenomenon of Pim Fortuyn was a matter of “media hype.” In other words, there was much ado about nothing. The concept of media hype is an essential part of the cultural conflicts in Holland, which can sometimes turn into lengthy wars. It is an instrument by which opinion makers are able to denounce events deemed unworthy of too much attention. In some cases it actually says something about the way the media work, but in most cases it doesn’t clarify anything. Years later, Wim Kok, leader of the social-democratic party Partij van de Arbeid (PvdA) was still unable to give any sort of explanation of what had happened in 2002, the year that saw the rise and fall of Fortuyn, an event that halved Wim Kok’s social-democratic party in size, even though Wim Kok and his party had been in government for eight years and many believed them to have been very successful.⁴⁹

That Fortuyn was not a creation of “media hype” is made clear by what happened after his death. Crisis after crisis ensued, as did one more killing. Fortuyn’s friend and adviser Theo Van Gogh was brutally murdered on 2 November 2004. The “banishment” of Van Gogh’s good friend Ayaan Hirsi Ali from the Netherlands during the summer of 2006 was the final “vanishing act.”

Though the media may sometimes be at the heart of the matter, this is seldom the case. The changes in society and in the worlds of ideas are what really matter. In the Netherlands, two (international) structural developments were at the heart of the matter: the Americanization of life and the development of a multicultural society. The emancipation of “the masses” proved to be an extra problem, that is, to those of the 1960s generation who were holding key positions in the public sphere of highbrow culture and media.

But for a complete understanding of the genesis of the revolt of 2002, besides the structural developments mentioned above, it is necessary to look at the Girardian themes of rivalry, violence, and religion (or the lack of it) as well. With the dismantling of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the West had reached “the end of history,” as Fukuyama said. Free-enterprise, democratic capitalism had triumphed. It was against this backdrop that 75 years of Christian-democratic supremacy in Dutch politics came to an end in 1994. After 12 years, the Rotterdam-born Roman Catholic prime minister, Ruud Lubbers, had to leave office after his party suffered a severe blow in the elections, mainly because Lubbers, leader of the Christian-democratic party (CDA), had referred to the Dutch welfare state as a “sick” society that should be turned into a working holding company.

His old Jesuit college schoolmate, Hans van Mierlo, saw the opportunity for which he had been waiting for years. Having turned away from religion, Van Mierlo, a bohemian,

⁴⁹ Piet de Rooy and Henk te Velde, *Nederland volgens Kok* (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 2006).

liberal journalist from downtown Amsterdam, had in the 1960s founded a new democratic party (D'66) on the basis assumption of the political autonomy of the individual citizen, both in public and in private matters. After that, he found himself on the margins of power most of the time, complaining in 1989 about Lubbers, the prime minister and van Mierlo's old school friend: "Why did it happen to him and not to me?"⁵⁰ In 1994, Van Mierlo would become the kingmaker of the Purple Coalition—socialist red, liberal blue, and democratic green. This came about mostly as a result of a mixture of personal envy and politically justified motives.

More importantly, in Girardian terms, it was the first time the archenemies, socialists and capitalists, joined forces in one and the same cabinet, as a result of the socialists' "shaking off the ideological feathers," after many frustrating years of opposition. The fusion led—as new outsider politicians would frequently complain—to boring uniformity in Dutch politics.

"AN AMSTERDAM CABINET"

After the protests of 1968, many Christian media outlets had turned to the left, and therefore the Purple Coalition was welcomed by the majority of the media, as well as by the people. And it was certainly welcomed by the post-1968 generation elites who were by this time living in the centre of Amsterdam and were still under the impression that they controlled the cultural (and political) universe. One of Van Mierlo's friends, the famous writer Harry Mulisch, described the coalition as follows:

'Well, up to now it was always the provinces that called the shots, and I count The Hague among them too. This will become a truly Amsterdam cabinet, a big-city cabinet. The members know a totally different kind of people, move about in other circuits. That gives a cabinet like this a different aura, more worldly'.⁵¹

In other words, a quarter of a century after 1968, the Netherlands, once again, would become a beacon. This time it would become a beacon of progressive cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, and postmodernism, with the intellectual, artistic, and autonomous citizen as the center of all things. However, we all know that postmodernism means irony, that it's the rose that blossoms on the grave of lost illusions. Behind the mask of commercialized progressiveness, most of the Purple enthusiasts felt freed from ideology, free to join the world of money and television. The big fusion between money and culture began. In America, David Brooks called the new elites that came into power under President Clinton "the bourgeois bohemians." They had learned their lessons both from the radical 1960s and from the yuppie 1980s, and tried combining them by living in the best of both worlds, like "Bobos in Paradise." After suffering a severe blow early in the administration due to a skirmish over gays in the military, Brooks writes, the Clintonites settled on "Don't ask, don't tell." "If ever there was a slogan that captured the Third Way efforts to find a peaceful middle ground, that was it."⁵²

⁵⁰ Arendo Joustra and Erik van Venetië, *Ruud Lubbers: Manager in de politiek* (Baarn, the Netherlands: Anthos, 1990), 255.

⁵¹ NRC Handelsblad, 30 September 1994.

⁵² David Brooks, *Bobos in Paradise. The New Upper Class and How They Got There* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 257.

In Holland, where there was a moralistic tradition and where the 1960s had had more extreme results, the commercialization of the media culture happened faster and was more visible to the public. Suddenly writers, journalists, politicians, and intellectuals were rushing over to TV studios to tell all about their unhappy childhoods in order to sell their book, movie, or party politics, or to talk about anything, really, just to stay in the picture.

At the same time, the nouveau riche (Internet, real estate), which for some time had envied the status of the old cultural elite, tried to fight its way into the old but by then commercialized “high” media culture. Suddenly, talk shows popped up everywhere, using pleasant café settings as substitutes for the unsafe and deserted public sphere. All the chattering people sitting at those tables seemed very pleased with themselves. This indeed resembled paradise, and its denizens felt it should never change again. Of course, in spite of all these witty conversations, some topics were still taboo. For example, one wasn’t supposed to comment on the elite—this was the politically correct elite that still claimed to be anti-elite—or talk about the subject of income. This was at a time when, during some television shows, the collective annual income in millions of euros earned by the people sitting at the table was far higher than the number of participants. In America, money is an accepted measure of success, but shame and guilt still surround Holland in this respect. In spite of this, however, it seems that envy is universal.

The new cabinet was in fact pretty nervous about the bold measures it had taken to remove the Christians from power. The instruments to achieve this, for example, were maintaining a politically correct silence regarding unpleasant matters, and intensifying the ties with friendly journalists, just as in the old days of the center/left-wing cabinet of Den Uyl in the 1970s.⁵³ Based on interviews with 750 journalists in the late 1990s, 75 percent of Dutch journalists called themselves leftists.⁵⁴ The result was a politics-publicity complex ruled by stifling political correctness.

During the 1990s, there were indeed politicians who initiated a debate on the downsides of the multicultural society, like the liberal politician Frits Bolkestein, leader of the Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (VVD), who introduced a genre of discourse we might call new realism.⁵⁵ He was immediately labeled a proto-fascist, as Pim Fortuyn would be nearly ten years later. And there was publicist Paul Scheffer, who, in 2000, characterized the Dutch neglect of the country’s immigrants as “the multicultural tragedy.”⁵⁶

Luckily for the Purple Coalition, the Dutch economy started to blossom again. This, together with the emancipating and mobilizing capacity of the Internet, added greatly to the idea of the autonomy of the citizen. Soon, the social law of the revolution of rising expectations came into action, of course, as did “mimetic rivalry on a planetary scale,” to use Girard’s words in his explanation of the 9/11 crisis.⁵⁷

⁵³ Ilya van den Broek, *Heimwee naar de politiek: De herinnering aan het kabinet-Den Uyl* (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 2002).

⁵⁴ Mark Deuze, *Journalists in the Netherlands: An Analysis of the People, the Issues and the (Inter) national Environment* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2002).

⁵⁵ Baukje Prins, *Het lef om taboes te doorbreken: Nieuw realisme in het Nederlandse discours over multiculturalisme*, 2003, www.migrantenstudies.nl/inhoud/2002-4/MS%202002-4%20PRINS.doc, 4.

⁵⁶ NRC Handelsblad, January 29, 2000.

⁵⁷ *Le Monde*, 6 November 2001.

“NIHILISM-WITH-A-HUMAN-FACE”

At the turn of the millennium, however, cultural pessimists complained that the only thing “the masses” were interested in was “fun, fun, fun.” So what went wrong? What enabled a sudden Dutch revolt early 2002 to break through this surface of “fun”?

Of course, 9/11 opened everybody’s eyes, shook everybody’s beliefs, and got on everybody’s nerves. One month after 9/11, Pim Fortuyn was chosen as the leader of a party that had recently entered the national stage, *Leefbaar Nederland* (Livable Netherlands), a party that had been achieving considerable success locally for years.

The country had been—as is always the case in revolutionary situations—in a state of ferment for a long time. Under the surface of “fun, fun, fun,” frustration had been brewing for years. This was, first, because of the gradual disappearance of political boundaries, both literally and figuratively. And, second, it was a reaction to the materialistic (in the economic and philosophical senses of the word) outlook of the Purple Coalitions, an outlook that was dominated by rational choice theories about the nature of human beings.

Prime Minister Kok, born in 1938 in a working-class family, was a former union man. His outlook on life was formed during the years of postwar reconstruction in the 1950s, when working hard got you somewhere. It was a linear way of thinking, in which there was little room for God or philosophy. This traditional economic way of thinking dominated the Purple Coalitions. Van Mierlo’s youthful democratic party added the freedom of choice of the individual in all aspects of life to the political way of thinking. Following the legalization of abortion, homosexual marriage and euthanasia were now legalized. Pragmatism was the magic word.

This humanistic, laissez-faire moral attitude created an ethical vacuum, while the undercurrent of malaise that had been growing since the 1980s about the materialistic philosophy, in which everything was centered around the ego and the individual and around money and success, was misunderstood completely. The question was, and still is, whether a society can do without a religious or ideological foundation. Emile Durkheim may have been the first thinker who said that society and religion are the same thing. Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers was called a “manager in politics.” However, he never threw away his organic Catholic philosophy of being “on our way together.” This Christian idea was traded for the individualistic maxim “Go your own way.”

The Purple view on the autonomy of the individual, the uselessness of a metaphysical morality, and the necessary self-restraint of the state in all things economic, artistic, moral, and societal led to an enormous inability to cope with the greatest problems of the 1990s: violence and the multicultural society with its Islamic newcomers. Because religion was regarded as a private matter, though old-fashioned, some saw Islam as a lifestyle, like being single or gay or being fond of hiking.

The second Purple Coalition did try to reduce the growing number of asylum seekers, whose numerical increase in some years came close to the number of inhabitants of a middle-sized city. The law aimed at reducing the number of asylum seekers passed in Parliament in 2000 as quietly as possible, partly out of fear of the left wing of Kok’s own social-democratic party, PvdA, and partly out of fear of the wrath of the left-wing media. This is one reason why Fortuyn was able to shout out as loudly as he did that the government was neglecting the issue, and why his standpoint on immigration was unambiguous: “Full is full.”

In a world dominated by economic thinking in which the autonomy of the individual is the new God, or idol, it is hardly surprising that the Purple Coalitions were as helpless as they were in respect to the other big, emotionalizing theme of the 1990s: violence. First there was the Srebrenica slaughter in former Yugoslavia in 1995, where the Dutch blue helmets failed to prevent the killing of 7,000 Muslims.

Helplessness was also the operative word in the cases of what during the 1990s became known as “useless violence” in Holland—cases of rape and murder or deadly violence for no apparent reason, apart from boredom or a misinterpreted look. These incidents led to events of national mourning that kept growing in intensity and drew more and more attendants, in Lady Diana style. At one memorial event, in 1997, Prime Minister Kok spoke. He described his own political powerlessness, saying: “I stand here with empty hands.” Instead of being decisive and taking a firm line, a stance that, unknown to him, many people would by then have welcomed, Kok blamed the growing loss of public morality on television, something he apparently could not fix. In 1999, Kok’s minister of justice, after yet another shooting incident at a disco, declared: “It is for society and not for the state to guarantee safety in the streets.”⁵⁸ It was at this time that many citizens, and not only those in the new multicultural ghettos, began to feel as though their government had deserted them. The ever visible “fun, fun, fun” culture of large-scale outdoor amusements may have been simply a reaction to the growing loneliness of the individual citizen, alone with his or her autonomy and television set.

In 2000, the renowned Dutch columnist J. L. Heldring described the dominant climate in the Netherlands as “nihilism-with-a-human-face.” This was a climate to which an enlightened conservatism would eventually offer a good alternative.⁵⁹

ENVY IN THE MEDIA CULTURE

Nobody listened to Heldring’s warning, not The Hague, not Amsterdam, the self-proclaimed creator of the Purple “progressiveness,” and not the provincial town of Hilversum, where all national radio and television stations are based. This was because, after many grassroots mini-revolts in local politics, the real revolt broke out in Rotterdam, a city largely ignored by The Hague, Amsterdam, and Hilversum. There were several other reasons why so many journalists totally missed the rise of discontent.

The first was their marriage to the Purple Coalition, which raised their sense of power and thus discouraged them from going out in the streets and searching for news themselves. The second was the fierce competition between established and upcoming commercial broadcasting stations and established and free newspapers. Journalism was fighting for its own survival. Some quality papers, commercial by nature, even hoped that the expected third Purple Coalition would be willing to subsidize them, so that they would in fact become civil servants, with a lifelong job guarantee.

Commercialization and television in particular made many people in the media world envious and frustrated. In the rest of the West, commercial television had been in existence for decades. But in the Netherlands this wasn’t the case. Until 1989, there were only two TV stations, both publicly funded. All national dailies were commercial, though some of them were guided by foundations with an ideological programme. The image the average journalist had of himself was that of an independent professional, serving democracy, the truth, or whatever the ideology was at the time. After 1990, the first commercial TV and

⁵⁸ Henri Beunders, *Publieke Tranen: De drijfveren van de emotiecultuur* (Amsterdam: Contact, 2002).

⁵⁹ NRC Handelsblad, 1 September 2000.

radio stations emerged in the Netherlands, thanks to Europe's internal market. They were immediately ridiculed by the established media as "pulp" for "simple minds."

Toward the end of the twentieth century, things started to go wrong. The Internet led to desperation: how should the media react to it? In 1999, the first of a series of free papers appeared. This phenomenon was ridiculed too. But what was worse, the number of subscriptions to quality papers decreased dramatically. And what was even worse for the serious journalists of the state financed Public Broadcasting System, the commercial stations had become market leaders.

A late-night talk show broadcast by a commercial station became the most popular show on television, even among newspaper journalists. For a few years, it was the talk of the town. From this moment on, politicians weren't interested in giving interviews to newspapers anymore. Instead they drove to the studio if they wanted to promote a new idea or themselves. In an imitation reflex, newspaper journalists secured their own seats at the talk show tables, and they were increasingly to be found discussing public issues on radio and television as well. So the growing frustration among quality newspapers—the merging of five of them into one only added to the frustration—meant that the media were predominantly involved with their own troubles, and this was one reason why they failed to see what was happening in society at large. Public television journalists' growing unease about their own imitation of commercial television was another.

By the time Pim Fortuyn came onstage in this buzzing media theater and outwitted them all, the quality papers and public broadcasting stations were already nervous and frustrated for reasons other than their legitimate objections to the populist approach of this newcomer.

The negative and defensive atmosphere that existed among the media lasted for a long time after Fortuyn was murdered, and it also dominated reactions to Theo van Gogh and Ayaan Hirsi Ali. All three of these individuals refused to adjust to the Purple consensus on keeping up appearances, and two of them, Fortuyn and Van Gogh, showed no respect for the powers that be in the world of the media. Van Gogh ceaselessly and ruthlessly attacked and offended every dignitary he thought was "collaborating" for the sake of peace, self-interest, or whatever other reason that in his view was hypocritical and in conflict with liberal individualist society.

IRONY DISLIKES PASSION

The left-wing comedian Freek de Jonge, who had publicly ridiculed Fortuyn even hours after Fortuyn was murdered, later recognized that he himself and his avant-garde friends had in fact been complicit in what had happened in Dutch society while he wasn't looking:

'Left intellectuals took part in creating the segregation in the country. With the unbelievable disdain of the left we tortured people who had become rich for a reason we didn't approve of. . . . The landslide at the elections was also an answer to the arrogance and the hubris of the left wing establishment. Irony came first; life itself came second. Serious conversations were stifled at the start. Passion was treated as suspicious. Great engagement was ridiculed. All of that, we have undermined'.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Freek de Jonge, Elsevier, 10 August 2002.

So, while the governing elites after 2002 kept complaining that “the voters,” who in large numbers had voted for Fortuyn and his party, and “the public” in general were “spoiled brats,” “unstable,” and not to be taken seriously, a case could be made for the idea that in fact it might have been the other way around. Many people were just longing for new boundaries and were demanding clear answers from the government to the questions and problems that they had to deal with every day. These problems involved violence and crime, the health care system, the future of their country as a multicultural society, and the future of their country as part of an expanding European community.

I said earlier that the media are seldom at the heart of the matter. More than anything, it is a lack of boundaries and directions and an excess of egocentrism that pose the threat to the coherence of the lives of individuals and that of societies as well. However, the media—newspapers and television—played a very important role in the emergence of the “killing fields” of the Netherlands, in every mimetic sense one can imagine.

The key points here are the hypocrisy that was manifested by the masters of the Citadel of Culture; the diminishing status of the old “queen of the earth,” the quality press; and the envy and frustration that all this brought about. In general, envy seems to be at the center of things when we try to understand the whole period. The bourgeois bohemians could just about handle a radical bohemian like the Dutch rock star and painter Herman Brood. He was a harmless junkie. The neurotic, alcoholic Dutch folk singer André Hazes, who was predominantly popular with “the masses,” could be ridiculed without consequence. He was harmless, too. But as soon as political individuals, like Fortuyn and Hirschi Ali, with real passions and beliefs, who said they wanted to warn people of future dangers, even change society as a whole, came onstage, the progressive portion of the bourgeois bohemians started to get very nervous indeed. Not only were the politicians in The Hague unmasked as emperors without clothes, but many a serious journalist met the same fate. Some of them returned as quickly as possible to the old ideological stance they had earlier abandoned so happily, and started fighting all three members of the unholy trinity, because they were responsible for ruining the cosiness and predictability of the talk show tables, where all the discussions had formerly ended like the old joke of Yogi Berra, who, when asked for a direction, replied: “If you come to the T-crossing, just take it.”

THE REVOLT

So, while the government kept persevering with the message “You’ve never had it so good,” while the mimetic rivalry within the media worlds was raging, and while the anxieties of the 1960s elites about the native masses emancipating themselves according to their preferences were growing, it would ultimately be the neglected constitution that ignited the Fortuyn revolt. On 4 May 2001, a TV program focused on the attitude of Dutch Muslims toward homosexuality. Youths of Moroccan origin openly despised homosexuals. An imam of a Rotterdam mosque, Khalil el Moumni, declared homosexuality to be a contagious disease, which had to be stopped because it would ultimately destroy the country. He also referred to Europeans as “lower than dogs or pigs.”⁶¹

After this, on the Web site of the leading Dutch gay community-oriented magazine, 91 percent of respondents said they agreed with the proposition that “New Dutchmen have to tolerate *our* tolerance or they don’t belong here.”⁶² Here the traditional symbol of the country, Dutch tolerance, was in severe conflict with the new intolerant minority.

⁶¹ Nova, May 4, 2001. VARA/NPS, Director: Carel Kuyl. See also: Prins, *Het lef om taboes te doorbreken*, 14.

⁶² *Trouw*, 10 May 2001; Prins, *Het lef om taboes te doorbreken*.

The Rotterdam imam, quoted above, defended his views by citing the constitutional freedom of speech *and* the constitutional freedom of religion. In April 2002, a court declared he was not guilty of discrimination because he had merely expressed his religious beliefs. All grievances over discrimination were declared to be unfounded.⁶³

As an inhabitant of the Rotterdam ghettos, former professor and publicist Pim Fortuyn had, because he was a flamboyant homosexual, been called a dirty pig many times. He had debated with Muslim leaders like el Moumni, and had published one of these discussions in a book. In another book, in 1997, he warned, in the words of the title, *Against Islamization of our Culture*. He became a fierce defender of Western values, although at heart his success was based in a strange mixture of reaction and modernism. He harked back to the solidarity, safety, and Christianity of the 1950s, while simultaneously pushing forward toward a hedonistic, individualist, Internet world of private enterprise and a small-scale public sector, without state bureaucracy. Work had to be taken away from the managers and given back to the real professionals like the teachers, doctors, and policemen. Fortuyn's message was about going back and forward at the same time, while using the pragmatic present as a starting point. Besides his slogans with regard to the multicultural society—full is full, present immigrants have to integrate first—his clash with *Leefbaar Nederland* was caused by Fortuyn's remark that, if he had to choose between all the articles in the constitution, he would prefer the one that states the freedom of speech over the one that states the prohibition of discrimination. His reasoning was as follows: "If Muslims may refer to our society as decadent, I may refer to Islam as a backward culture".⁶⁴

Van Gogh and Hirsi Ali would repeat the same opinion. And they also claimed the right to offend, as a fundamental part of the freedom of speech, and to criticize religion, as the heart of the Enlightenment.⁶⁵ This would become fatal for Van Gogh. He was murdered in the street by a Muslim fundamentalist after producing Hirsi Ali's 11-minute *J'Accuse*-like movie *Submission* in 2004, a movie that inveighed against the suppression of women in Islam.⁶⁶

CONCLUSION

The fusion of liberalism and socialism in the Purple Coalitions (1994–2002) created a worldview that was based on individualism and material success. Culturally and intellectually, the Netherlands were dominated by Amsterdam, that is, by the bourgeois bohemians who combined the best of two worlds, the radical 1960s and the materialistic 1980s.

Many Dutch people liked to experience the feeling of being cosmopolitan, tolerant, adventurous, and harmonious at the same time. Compared to the people of many other countries, maybe they are. However, in at least two aspects, historical traumas and limited size, the Dutch are blind to some realities in life, that is, with regard to religion and violence. They are not able to cope with those phenomena easily, except by pretending they are not there, or, if that is no longer possible, by negotiating or, worse, by developing an attitude that resembles the Stockholm syndrome: adjusting to a situation because they think

⁶³ Prins, *Het lef om taboes te doorbreken*, 17.

⁶⁴ De Volkskrant, February 9, 2002.

⁶⁵ Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *My Freedom* (New York: Free Press, 2006).

⁶⁶ Theodor Holman, *Theo is dood* (Amsterdam: Mets and Schilt).

themselves too powerless to fight it, and consequently empathizing with or making excuses for the aggressor.

Because of the fact that Holland is a small country with a great past, nostalgic dreams of being bohemian are never out of fashion. During the final weeks of each year, a Dutch radio station broadcasts the “Top 2000,” the favorite pop songs of all times, democratically chosen by the listeners. Almost every year, the number one song has been the same: “Bohemian Rhapsody,” written by Freddy Mercury and originally recorded by the band Queen for the 1975 album *A Night at the Opera*.

Perhaps this song holds the secret to the dream of the sober, level-headed, dike-building Dutch: to live as bohemians. On the other hand, what the late romantic writer Gerard Reve once said—“The Dutch want to live adventurously, but with a good pension in their back pockets”—might hold true as well. This is why ordinary people in an egalitarian society, filled with boredom and unfulfilled aspirations, create real and fictional heroes. Heroes give people a sense of meaning, direction, and satisfaction because they live the life the people themselves know they would never dare lead. In a world without gods, there is a great need for idols.

The 1960s elites, however, thought they were the sole political and intellectual idols needed to run a country and to play a part in the media democracy. Acting in a mimetic rivalry of self-righteousness, “toothpaste authenticity,” and wittiness, they later felt they were booed off their stage by the masses knocking at their door. This unexpected display of disapproval caused them to become nervous and agitated, and made them start fighting with each other while using the unholy trinity as scapegoats for rocking the boat, by exorcizing them completely. This is what happened at the bloody and prolonged night at the opera that the Netherlands lived through after 2001. However, the issues that were raised were substantial: they were the issues of the real world, not those of the TV studios.

The negative consequences of the actions of the unholy trinity were there for all to see. Many members of ethnic and religious minorities felt hurt, insulted, and stereotyped. The consequences for society as a whole of the acts of murder and threats of terrorism are clear as well. In the Netherlands, people have to deal with more state security, increasing social disciplinary conformism, and self-censorship.

The killing of Fortuyn made some of the ousted elite writers, like column writer Jan Blokker, say: “I couldn’t care less.”⁶⁷ Ian Buruma, in his book *Murder in Amsterdam*, does the same thing only more elegantly, as he tries to find ways to forgive all three members of the unholy trinity for their “extremism.” In other words, he is blaming the victims and excusing the killers.⁶⁸ Maybe a majority of the Dutch people thought along the same lines. If so, it was similar to the reaction of the West after the cartoon crisis in 2006. The British weekly the *Economist* criticized the lukewarm response to this crisis by several Western governments, misquoting Voltaire: “I disagree with what you say, and even if you are threatened with death, I will not defend very strongly your right to say it.”⁶⁹

However, there is a very positive result of the crisis as well (while we have to recognize that the word revolt is much more telling than crisis). A key sentence of *L’Homme Révolté*, by Albert Camus, published in 1951, reads as follows:

⁶⁷ *Vrij Nederland*, 20 July 2002.

⁶⁸ Ian Buruma, *Murder in Amsterdam* (New York: Penguin, 2006).

⁶⁹ *Economist*, 9 February 2006.

‘The consciousness comes to the surface together with the revolt.’ A revolt is much more substantial than just resentment, which is poisonous and causes impotence and isolation. The rebel “aspires that the others recognize what he owns—and that he in almost all circumstances is seen as more important than all things he could be envious about. . . . He fights for the integrity of a part of his human existence.”⁷⁰

A revolt may seem negative, because it does not create anything, but according to Camus, revolt is an extremely positive phenomenon, “because it reveals that which is to be defended in human beings at all times.”⁷¹ Of course, Camus linked revolt with the acclaimed postwar freedom. He saw the downside of it too. “In our society the theory of political freedom intensifies the understanding of people, and through that the state of dissatisfaction.” That’s why Camus, in “the desacralized history” of modern times, saw revolt as the only option. “In our daily experience the revolt has the same function as the cogito in the field of thinking: it is the first self-explanatory thing. But this obviousness snatches the individual away from his loneliness. . . . I am angry, that’s why we are.”⁷²

This consciousness, or awakening of “the masses,” is a societal state that didn’t disappear with the death of Fortuyn or with the removal of his disorganized party from Parliament. The sighs of relief that were heard in many retrospective commentaries toward the end of 2002—“a serious case of carnival,” “back to normalcy,” “let us be civil again”—displayed a serious misunderstanding of the structural shifting of the balance of power that had taken place for both the governing political and cultural elites and the ordinary citizens. “The people” now knew what power they really possessed, and they did not intend to give it up easily. Their consumer power and Internet mobilizing capacity have turned them into an unpredictable but powerful force. Voting preferences have become more difficult than ever to predict.

One might defend the claim that since 2002, and again since 2004 and 2006, the emancipation of “the lower classes” and the ethnic minorities in particular has received a great boost, a boost that is unprecedented since the arrival of the first generation of foreign workers in the 1960s. Fortuyn emancipated the lower classes and gave voices to other groups of neglected citizens who longed to raise their voices. Hirs Ali succeeded in lifting the debate on the multicultural society above the predictable lines of class and ethnic groups. Because of Ayaan Hirs Ali, the debate is conducted as it should be, with the use of arguments that go beyond boundaries of gender, ethnicity, or class.

Perhaps, when we think of the present state of caution and downright selfcensorship the Netherlands finds itself in, the only person who really lost his case was Theo van Gogh. But even that’s not totally true. Some of the youngsters of Moroccan and Turkish origin that he worked with in his films and TV dramas owe their present careers to the fact that he took them seriously. If consciousness is at the heart of the revolt, it has been at the heart of the revolt of the ethnic minorities since 2002 as well. And this is exactly what the unholy trinity wanted them to do: to enlighten this society, integrate into it, and behave like participants in it, not as permanent guest workers or asylum seekers, subsidized but neglected. Now they

⁷⁰ Albert Camus, *L’Homme Révolté* (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), 104. (All quotes from this work are my translations).

⁷¹ Ibidem, 104.

⁷² Ibidem, 106.

are, at last, seen as real persons, at least by the media. And communication and visibility is where true acceptance starts.

The unholy trinity has been driven out of the Netherlands. The country has partly returned to its former position of “Don’t give offense.” But at the same time, it’s the legacy of the unholy trinity that our multicultural society is more aware of its surroundings and more grown up than ever before.

V 'CONQUER THE CULTURE!'

Cobra, the fellow-travelers and morality

One of the most interesting analyses on the relation between arts and politics was done by the Italian scholar Antonio Gramsci. He was an unorthodox communist who was imprisoned by Mussolini in 1926. Gramsci's imprisonment lasted until shortly before his death in 1927. In his 'Prison Notebooks' he developed a philosophy of life in which not theory, as was the case with Marxists, but action stood central. Unlike anarchist notions and unlike what Lenin put into practice, Gramsci propagated that in order to change society one needs first to change human consciousness. And in order to achieve that, control has to be taken over the institutions that shape that consciousness: schools, universities, churches, and especially artistic institutions and media. These institutions indeed form public opinion, which cannot indefinitely be ignored with impunity by politicians. In other words, culture is not simply the shining roof rack on top of the economic chassis, as Marx asserted, but rather the epicenter of societal development. Hence Gramsci's slogan became: 'Conquer the culture!' In the late sixties this strategy, albeit directed at bureaucracy, would become popular through radical German student leader Rudi Dutschke's formula of 'the long march through the institutions'. According to some, since the sixties Gramsci's slogan has become the clandestine, sometimes subconscious slogan of the progressive segment in Western artistic elites.⁷³

I had to think of Gramsci in 1992 when I heard the then president of the Dutch Labor Party (PvdA), Felix Rottenberg, say during a 1 May celebration that he would like to see the *International* replaced by Bob Dylan songs.⁷⁴ Evidently he was of the opinion that culture was to procure leftist sentiments, something political theory and utopia was not capable of.

Has not Dutch society in the nineteen fifties been mostly changed by autonomous processes and Americanization, and was not the social criticism that came into being in the late fifties and sixties also an American import? Was not the impact of the fellow-travelers of communism in the fifties secondary to that? Indeed, was not the failure of the fellow-travelers mostly due to their obsession of politics, revolution and theory and their distance from the own, and American, culture? And was not this obsession mostly a personal, usually psychological problem?

I suspect Rottenberg knew about Antonio Gramsci. I do not think most of the people in the 'Rising Netherlands' of the post-war period knew about Gramsci, neither in the societal elite, nor in the what I for convenience's sake will dub political and cultural elite. In the governing elite on the other hand, there was from 1945 on great fear, perhaps even 'moral panic'⁷⁵, about not being able to regain and reinforce the power over culture, and consequently restore the old social order. Partly due to this fear for social derailment, the bids for 'breakthrough' and 'renewal' were short-lived and in vain. Instead, the safe road of restoring the pre-war institutional establishment was chosen, euphemistically dubbed the

⁷³ Richard Grenier, *Capturing the culture. Film, art and politics* (Washington 1991) xix-xlvi; Paul Hollander, *Anti-Americanism. Critiques at home and abroad 1965-1990* (New York/Oxford 1992) 3-78.

⁷⁴ *NRC Handelsblad*, 1 May 1992.

⁷⁵ 'Mel van Elteren, 'Tussen morele paniek en vernieuwingsstreven' (Between moral panic and the strive for restoration), in J.P.B. Jonker ed., *Vijftig jaar na de inval. Geschiedschrijving en Tweede wereldoorlog* (Fifty years after the invasion. Historiography and the Second World War) (The Hague 1990) 175.

'New Truce' by Dutch journalist H.J.A. Hofland. And this restoration of authority was by all means also a restoration of 'morality'.⁷⁶

Such a return to old patterns of thought and living was also to be found among the counter-elite: fellow-travelers who sympathized with communism and social democrats who in the early fifties aimed for a left-wing road of peace. Even though these counter-elites were a lot more favorable to cultural innovation, they too emphasized politics and economy rather than culture in their social thinking. This was related to the experiences of the economic crisis in the nineteen thirties, the horrors of the Second World War, the burgeoning Cold War and the fear of a third world war, but also to the part communists played within the group of 'fellow-travelers at a distance'. In the first decade after the war, the Communist Party of the Netherlands (CPN) was a puritan party of *apparatchiks* and anti-intellectuals. 'You are reading too many books' was a common reproach.⁷⁷ Communism became, according to former communists, a 'dazzled, but nonetheless sincere belief', which due to the self-selected and forced isolation became a narrow-minded church, if not sect, with all its inquisition practices.⁷⁸

The few intellectuals that this 'Stalin fan club' still had in 1950, were Stalinist because of their aversion to 'American imperialism', or out of a need for the security, unity and hierarchy that a close-knit community of faith provides.⁷⁹

Within the CPN this simplification and dogmatization of theory led to such a 'cultural and scientific impoverishment'⁸⁰ that the views and outlooks would nowadays be seen as plainly backward-fundamentalist. In loyal imitation of Soviet ideologists for instance, the CPN denounced not only the decadence of western music, literature and visual arts, but also the reactionary nature of western science. The theories of relativity and evolution were not dialectic and thus incorrect, cybernetics had its nascence in America and was therefore imperialistic, and modern genetics was inconsistent with the total manipulability of man and society. Hence chromosomes, according to Soviet biologist Trofim D. Lysenko, did not exist.⁸¹ Because of this Bible Belt-like mentality, the gap between the CPN and intellectuals, artists and teen-agers remained huge for quite a while, a gap that was only closed to some degree through the student movement of the late sixties.

One example needs to suffice here. From 3 to 28 November 1949 a special exhibition was held in the Amsterdam City Museum of director Willem Sandberg. Under the heading *Exposition International d'Art Experimental*, works of the Cobra movement were to be seen and heard: abstract surrealist paintings by Karel Appel, Constant, Lucebert, and Corneille and similar poems by Gerrit Kouwenaar, Jan Elfburg and Bert Schierbeek. In the artistic views of the Cobra movement the terms 'natural', 'spontaneous expression', 'vitality' and 'playful

⁷⁶ H. Daalder, 'De Duitse bezetting en het Nederlandse gezag na 1945: enige gedachten' (The German occupation and the Dutch authority after 1945: some thoughts), in: Jonker, *Vijftig jaar na de inval*, 162, 165.

⁷⁷ A.A. de Jonge, *Het communisme in Nederland. De geschiedenis van een politieke partij* (Communism in the Netherlands. The history of a political party) (The Hague 1972) 87; Anet Bleich et al., *Stalinisme en destalinisatie. Verslag van het Amsterdamse congres* (Stalinism and destalinization. Report of the Amsterdam congress) (Amsterdam 1981) 193.

⁷⁸ Gijs Schreuders, *De man die faalde* (The man who failed) (Amsterdam 1992) 46; De Jonge, *Communisme in Nederland*, 109.

⁷⁹ Schreuders, *De man die faalde*, 205; Fenna van den Burg, *De vrije kathedraal 1945-1950. Een platform van communisten en niet-communisten* (The free lectern 1945-1950. A platform for communists and non-communists) (Amsterdam 1983) 43.

⁸⁰ Bleich et al., *Stalinisme*, 198-199.

⁸¹ Idem, 193 and 196-197; Anet Bleich and Max van Weezel, *Ga dan zelf naar Siberië!!! Linkse intellectuelen en de koude oorlog* (Go to Siberia yourself!!! Left-wing intellectuals and the Cold War) (Amsterdam 1978) 75.

fantasy' were central. Most of these avant-garde artists turned against the western class-society that had put all creativity in a stifling hold. Their slogan was short but clear: *C'est notre désir qui fait la révolution*.⁸² Their exhibition became a scandal. According to one left-wing paper they were 'bunglers, daubers, swindlers', and another one stated that they were 'barbarians' whose 'monstrosities' only bred 'chaos, degradation, foolishness'. Yet the most ferocious critic was communist politician Marcus Bakker in *De Waarheid*. He could see little more in the exposition than 'a totally nihilistic statement', one of the most dangerous statements 'of our thoroughly sick society'.⁸³

Now, the Cold War was already raging heavily in 1949. And the scandal was exacerbated by the rather frequent use of the term 'soviétique' in the long and incomprehensible opening speech by Belgian artist Christian Dotremont, one of the founders of the Cobra movement. Consequently, some listeners believed it to be soviet propaganda. A scuffle erupted, and the hall was evacuated. The Cobra movement was in fact more anarchist than socialist, yet several members were indeed sympathetic to communism. According to the newspaper *De Parool*, Squire Sandberg should never have made the museum available to these 'militant communists'.⁸⁴

The Cobra movement came to an end in 1951. After having arguments among themselves, the members went their own way. 'Perhaps the Cold War also exerted a disintegrating influence upon the Cobra-group,' is the suggestion of Fenna van den Berg in her dissertation on this scandal in the City Museum.⁸⁵ Her statement undoubtedly holds some merit, but would the new style of art and living have been accepted if it did not have the aura of communism and fellow-traveling surrounding it? After all, since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of communism, fellow-travelers have become the slush of yesterday. A decent snowball cannot be made of it, if any needed, since most targets are no more.

Cobra is still around though. The West still has the free, democratic, capitalist society, which she has been defending from the start of the Cold War, but meanwhile society has altered thoroughly, and in no little respect towards the direction that the Cobra-group advocated in 1949. Nowadays, the average State Secretary or Minister has a painting by Appel or Lucebert on their office wall and a Corneille-tie in their wardrobe. In brief, would not it have been better for the fellow-travelers if they had restricted themselves to influencing the own culture indirectly, in stead of simultaneously proclaiming political utopias and praising far away paradises as an alternative for their entire society?

It seems certain that after the war, the elite estimated the value of culture higher than the political counter-elite did. As for the latter, everything would change after 'the revolution'. And the question is whether the governing Christian-democrats and social-democrats, with the silent approval of modest communists, could have left their conservative cultural mark on the Dutch society of the nineteen fifties if there had not been a Cold War, and if the artistic fellow-travelers had not openly sympathized with communism. Was not the ideological and cultural rigidity one of the reasons why society radicalized so rapidly and openly in the late fifties? Was not besides autonomous factors like improving welfare, urbanization, education and mobility, the Americanization of culture one of the reasons for the – after 1945 generally accepted – undermining of the political establishment

⁸² Van den Burg, *Vrije katheders*, 233.

⁸³ Idem, 232.

⁸⁴ Idem.

⁸⁵ Idem, 231.

from the bottom up? Was not the CPN, and the Soviet Union, in this respect both an effective tool and a handicap for controlling the Dutch social-cultural development in the Christian sense? Did not the rebounding elite allow for more change than they would have cared for?

The pre-war cultural conservatism that was, among other things, expressed in the form of anti-Americanism, had mainly been an affair of conservatives and free-thinking well-to-dos. Christian conservatives preferred ranging all excrescences of modern times under the terms socialism and in particular communism, which was accused of unleashing 'the predator in man' and yielding him to all his sexual and heathen urges. In the interbellum period the confessionals, with their refusal to recognize the Soviet Union, seemed the most eager to put their mark on the image of the nation: the Christian Netherlands versus a bolshevist Russia.⁸⁶

After the war there was no difference. The problem was even more acute: banners saying 'Long live the Soviet Union' were hanging in the streets,⁸⁷ domestic authority and public morals were affected, black market dealings, young girls romancing the Northern American liberators in uniform. The first couple of post-war years are sometimes irreverently characterized as a time when 'all were boozing and screwing'. This was particularly the case in big cities like Amsterdam. And it was exactly in this city where the CPN gained over thirty percent of the votes in May 1946 and became the largest party in the city council.⁸⁸ There, as was predicted, one thing indeed led to another.

In Parliament there were already in 1947 heated warnings of the dangers of communism. The 'unchristian liaisons' that were found across the country provided 'a certain viability of communism'.⁸⁹ Prime Minister Beel responded in early 1948 by stating that communism 'contravenes the Christian notion concerning the nature of man and society' and therefore a reinforcement of Christian foundations was necessary.⁹⁰ However, in this turbulent period of struggle for retaining the Indonesian colony and negotiations for autonomy, The Hague was politically more concerned with groups on the starboard wing of the political spectrum than with the communist threat.⁹¹

The February 1948 communist takeover in Prague was in fact a godsend, because now an assault could be initiated on the CPN, which was in support of the coup. So, although the subsequent indignation was sincere, it was also advantageous in all respects. Communist aldermen disappeared from the city councils, communist Members of Parliament were expelled from several 'sensitive' committees, and the CPN vanished from the radio waves. In fact, sometimes it seemed that the communists and their sympathizers were to be challenged vigorously out of moral principles, and not because of their political aims.

For instance, a Labor Party MP denounced the 'cowboys and Indians playing' of the Dutch Secret Service (BVD) that lounged around the circles of left-wing newspaper *Vrij Nederland* because they were alleged to be 'a communist mouthpiece of the Cominform in the Netherlands'. To illustrate this 'Garnd Guignol-display' he presented the case of a Dutch journalist who was working in France and consequently had had professional relations with

⁸⁶ Ben Knapen, *De lange weg naar Moskou. De Nederlandse relatie tot de Sovjet-Unie, 1917-1942* (The long road to Moscow. Dutch relations with the Soviet Union, 1917-1942) (Amsterdam/Brussel) 16-17 and 247-248.

⁸⁷ Schreuders, *De man die faalde*, 48.

⁸⁸ De Jonge, *Communisme in Nederland*, 91.

⁸⁹ *Handelingen Tweede Kamer* (Dealings of the Lower House), 12 October 1947, 1.4.

⁹⁰ *Idem*, 1 February 1948, 600.

⁹¹ *HP/De Tijd*, 7 February 1990, cf. M.D. Boogaarts, *De periode van het kabinet Beel: 3 juli 1946-7 augustus 1948* (The period of the Beel government: 3 July 1946-7 August 1948) (The Hague 1989).

people like Jean-Paul Sartre. This journalist had applied for a job at a Ministry but was refused. The MP was quoting a report by 'Mr. X', wherein the journalist was described as follows: 'He has contacts with existentialists.' The MP was wondering to what extent this would pose a threat for national security.⁹²

I will put aside here all the parliamentary complaints about the botch-ups of the BVD and all the books and articles that cover this matter.⁹³ The point here is that, evidently, existentialism was seen by the government as a danger for Christianity, just as author W.F. Hermans was sued in 1951 for his novel *Ik heb altijd gelijk* (I am always right) for 'insulting the Catholic part of the nation'.

In maintaining an – on an increasingly formal Christianity depending – authority, the confessionals have undoubtedly benefited from the Cold War, but other measures were needed in addition. The Catholic Church declared in 1949 that communists were to be denied the holy sacraments. In 1954 the episcopacy issued a charge to deter Catholics from social-democracy as well. A year later a thick, three-volume *Encyclopedia of Catholicism* was published in order to compensate the lack of knowledge of the own religion among believers. All this curbed the downfall for merely a few years. What was lacking was a debate on religion and Catholic culture. The 'spirit of the herd' was holding too much sway, as historian of Catholicism L.J. Rogier described Catholic mentality in his renowned speech in 1958.⁹⁴

The willingness of social-democracy after 1945 to cooperate on maintaining the established order and their consequent likewise little interest in political and cultural renewal was due to the same basic reason, which was retaining the own position of power. Furthermore, the Labor Party shared the confessionals' goal of quick reconstruction and economic modernization. In the social field, both groups reached each other in the semi-corporatist, semi-individualist welfare state, both out of belief and out of fear for communism. It was thought that popular support for communism would definitely increase if modernization would get out of hand. Consequently, anti-communism became an important instrument for the Labor Party as well. The electoral gains of the CPN in 1946 only increased the fear and dislike of communists, and because of the Labor Party's embrace of the Marshall Aid and NATO, both parties were drawn into a vortex of mutual denunciation. Prime Minister Drees compared the communists to the Nazis just as easily as the CPN branded him a lackey of the United States.⁹⁵

Thus the Labor Party, by accepting the American military and economic supremacy, retained the blind spot for the Americanization of culture. This hawk-like pro-America stance of the Labor Party can be explained by several traumas from the nineteen thirties: the economic crisis for which no answer was given, the rise of national-socialism that could not be retorted, the 'Munich syndrome' and the painful memory of the unsuccessful post-First World War 'broken rifle' of War Resisters' International.⁹⁶ Therefore the Labor Party was only once in a while concerned about the Americanization of culture, which was becoming

⁹² Handelingen Tweede Kamer (Dealings of the Lower House), 18 November 1949, 592.

⁹³ *Het Parool*, 18 September 1986; *De Volkskrant*, 2 October 1986 and *NRC Handelsblad*, 18 August 1986.

⁹⁴ L.J. Rogier, 'Het verschijnsel der culturele inertie bij de Nederlandse katholieken' (The phenomenon of cultural inertia among Dutch Catholics) in: *Terugblik en Uitzicht, I. Verspreide opstellen* (Retrospect and Prospect, I. Scattered essays) (Antwerpen 1964) 653-671.

⁹⁵ See for instance Handelingen Tweede Kamer (Dealings of the Lower House), 15 February 1950, 272.

⁹⁶ Maarten Brinkman, 'De partij van de Arbeid in de Koude Oorlog 1946-1958. Een overzicht' (The Labor Party in the Cold War 1946-1958. An overview), in: *Groniek. Gronings historisch tijdschrift* 106 (1989) 72-73.

visible from the late forties on, and when they did, the concern was 'modern times' in general.

For example, in the Dutch riots in the wake of the 1956 Soviet invasion of Hungary, which was defended by left-wing newspaper *De Waarheid* with the statement: 'A Soviet tank never shoots in the wrong direction',⁹⁷ already one of the motivations was resistance to what was later to be dubbed 'the establishment'. In these riots the youth went on the offensive chanting 'Rock 'n Roll', and after several days the police intervened with the argument: 'This rock- and roll-gang has to be finished now'.⁹⁸ The Labor Party agreed with newspaper *De Haagse Post*, which ascribed the riots to 'the booming economy – too much money and too little supervision'.⁹⁹

So, as concern for the youth increased, sympathy did not. The secretary of the Labor Party said in 1961 that he found 'Beethoven a historical, and Elvis Presley a hysterical person'.¹⁰⁰ But the Labor Party had not much more to offer than the tried folk dancing, that universal antidote to all vulgarity of culture, until Felix Rottenberg came up with Bob Dylan after all.

From the late fifties on, the same applied for confessionals in their relationship with the church as for the social-democrats in their relationship with the United States: the more the strategic, economic and cultural dependency increased and especially felt, the more the grudge increased.¹⁰¹ So the anti-Americanism of the sixties is partly due the official love for America in the fifties. Just as the total ossification of American policy towards China after Mao's 1949 revolution is to be explained by the 'infinite disillusion with China's incomprehensible ingratitude' towards the United States' well-meant, missionary policy on China during the preceding century. Love turned into hate.¹⁰²

Love and hate summarizes the role fellow-travelers and social-democrats, in short the left-wing intellectuals, played in all this. I will not attempt to provide a decisive definition for the term 'intellectual' here. Definitions vary from 'someone who interprets the world' and 'people who use their common sense only after scientific analysis' to 'someone who is capable of discussing for hours the question of what constitutes an intellectual'.¹⁰³ It is more useful to consider several traits that are ascribed to politically concerned intellectuals: engagement, loneliness, death wish, ignorance, longing for status, appreciation and power, estrangement and hate towards the own society, sense of justice, need for certainty, unity, totality and love. To put it briefly: a totalitarian religion.

Several well-known fellow-travelers, revolutionaries and utopians can serve as a sample for some of these qualities, of which loneliness is perhaps the biggest one. The most influential figure embodying loneliness was Jean-Paul Sartre. He had been a fellow-traveler, communist and Maoist and was the link between the Old and New Left. Sartre said that intellectuals were people with a 'conscience malheureuse', an unhappy conscience.¹⁰⁴ A

⁹⁷ Schreuders, *De man die faalde*, 24.

⁹⁸ Duco Hellema, *1956 – De Nederlandse houding ten aanzien van de Hongaarse revolutie en de Suezcrisis* (1956 – The Dutch stance on the Hungarian revolution and the Suez crisis) (Amsterdam 1990) 247.

⁹⁹ Idem, 247-248.

¹⁰⁰ Bart Tromp, 'Reflections on anti-Americanism and Dutch social democracy', in: Rob Kroes and Maarten van Rossem ed., *Anti-Americanism in Europe* (Amsterdam 1986) 90.

¹⁰¹ Idem, 93.

¹⁰² Jan Willem Schulte Nordholt, *Amerika. Spiegel en vergrootglas van het Westen* (America. Mirror and magnifying glass of the West) (Baarn 1976) 94.

¹⁰³ Cf Dietz Bering, *Die Intellektuellen. Geschichte eines Schimpfwortes* (Stuttgart 1978) 3.

¹⁰⁴ Leopold Labedz, 'On Writers & Revolution. The destiny in revolutionary movements', in: *Survey. A journal of East & West Studies* (March 1988) 360.

sense of loneliness was an important part of that. After visiting China in 1955 he said: What characterizes present day China is the settlement of the wall of loneliness. Nowhere have I ever seen such solidarity.¹⁰⁵

From that loneliness of the mind, with its unsolvable contradistinctions, flows out a need for harmony and closed systems, and consequently an aversion to the democracy and its occasionally uncontrollable changes. When Plato talks about justice, according to 'discerning traditionalist' Karl Popper, he is talking about state terror. Behind Hegel's dialectics is the sophisticated plea for a standstill: the historic period he saw realized in the state of Prussia. And behind Marx's classless society hides the total rule of one class, and thus the destruction of the individual.¹⁰⁶

The intellectual's quest for power and influence reaches back to Plato's concept of the 'philosopher king', and is based on the theory that thinking is the most sublime form of human activity. The best form of government is consequently the 'aristocracy of the mind'. Jacques de Kadt, who was initially a communist and later an anti-communist, advocated an 'intellectuals-socialism' in 1936: 'We are the leaders of society, and therefore we also want to be its masters.'¹⁰⁷ Two decades later, German philosopher Herbert Marcuse wrote in his *Eros and Civilization: From Plato to Rousseau*, the idea of an educational dictatorship, exercised by those who are generally considered to have knowledge of true good, is the only solution. This answer is attained to be forgotten.¹⁰⁸ That is why Stalin and Mao were revered so much, they were dictatorial educators, schoolteachers, intellectuals. Fellow-travelers accepted the 'moral and intellectual submission' that the belief in this kind of political leadership entails,¹⁰⁹ because they never attained that power themselves.

Up until the modern age, an intellectual could only have direct influence if he was an advisor to a ruler. And Aristotle, Ibn Khaldun, Machiavelli and Thomas More can all give testimony to how frustrating this could be: poisoned cup, exile, decapitation. In the fantasy worlds the utopians created, however, they more than rarely played first fiddle themselves. Thomas More confessed in a letter to Erasmus that in his dreams about the ideal island, he saw himself 'in the role of sovereign of Utopia'.¹¹⁰ John Milton wrote in *Paradise Lost* that 'it is better to rule in hell than to serve in heaven'.¹¹¹

The twentieth-century intellectual's need for rule, share rule, or at least advise the ruler, dates back to Voltaire, who was after all interlocutor of Prussian 'philosopher king' Frederick II the Great. In the nineteen fifties, authors like Mary McCarthy and Graham Greene said with certain envy that writers in communist countries were at least taken seriously.¹¹² Lack of respect from the powers that be is one of the main sources of present day intellectual anti-Americanism in the United States. And when given the opportunity to advise, they invariably took it. Régis Debray first had his revolutionary adventures in the Bolivia of his hero 'Che' Guevara, terming Sartre 'the most complete human being of our time',¹¹³ and thereafter he became adviser to President François Mitterrand.

¹⁰⁵ A. Aarsbergen, *Verre paradijzen. Linkse intellectuelen op excursie naar de Sovjet-Unie, Cuba en China* (Far away paradises. Left-wing intellectuals on a field trip to the Soviet Union, Cuba and China) (Utrecht 1988) 104.

¹⁰⁶ See for instance *Die Zeit*, 17 January 192.

¹⁰⁷ Bleich and Van Wezel, *Ga dan zelf naar Siberië!!!*, 86.

¹⁰⁸ Labedz, 'On writers and revolution', 332.

¹⁰⁹ Schreuders, *De man die faalde*, 88.

¹¹⁰ Labedz, 'On writers and revolution', 332.

¹¹¹ Idem.

¹¹² Idem, 354.

¹¹³ David Caute, *The Fellow Travellers. Intellectual Friends of Communism* (New Haven/London 1988) 411.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth century the old mythological and religious ideas – the myth of salvation and chiliasm – were transformed into a secular idea of the perfect society that is created by means of violent change. The concept of revolution, originating from Copernicus, was moving from astronomy to sociology, from the idea of theological utopia to politics.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the stereotype of the ‘estranged intellectual’, was the first who came up with the idea of revolution. From that moment on, some intellectuals became revolutionaries. They were supposed to get the right recognition and esteem after the revolution. In practice, however, a natural death remained the rule rather than the exception for authors in post-revolutionary regimes. Concordet wrote in March 1794, during the Terror, that the ‘improvability of man is absolutely infinite’ and that ‘the current posture of science ensures us that the new time will be happy’. Three weeks later he took poison in order to escape the guillotine.¹¹⁴ After his escape, Lev Trotsky would live for another fifteen years before the frosty axe would hit his head, which actually confirmed his 1924 prediction that ‘future life will not be monotonous’.¹¹⁵

The end of the French Revolution led to a period of rejection of revolution and belief in reason, a rejection that Goya famously summarized: ‘The dream of Reason produces monsters’.¹¹⁶ Alexis de Tocqueville was the first thinker who understood that a revolutionary movement transforms a religious belief into a political belief but retains the basic characteristics. Marx connected the idea of revolution to the idea of history, which replaced God as master of humanity. And Lenin eventually gave Marx’s scientific notion of revolution a voluntary touch, making nerve-racking scholastic discussions on the question whether a country was ripe for revolution no longer necessary. Provided there is the proper vanguard, revolution could be brought about anywhere, whether in the Mongolian steppe or along the rivers of the Congo. Now, the revolution was itself a utopia.

The estrangement that marks the intellectual is according to many, like Tocqueville and George Orwell, the result of lack of administrative experience and particularly power. In the words of political scientist Lewis Feuer: ‘The frustration of their will to rule is the deepest subconscious source of the intellectual’s estrangement’.¹¹⁷ That would be the reason why they connect themselves with the physical power of peasants, the proletariat and the Third World. The great awe of power that the fellow-travelers were in was sometimes an awe of the power of numbers. And they shared this awe with others. Whether it is W.F. Wertheim who called China a ‘wonder’ in 1958 or G.B.J. Hiltermann who returned from Peking very impressed in 1973,¹¹⁸ the magical admiration for China was partly based on the magical phrase ‘one billion people’. For the fellow-travelers it had to be organized power though. That alone was reason enough for the fact that India never became popular among them. India was a chaotic, democratic power without harmony, and that was pretty much the same as here at home.

¹¹⁴ Labeledz, ‘On writers and revolution’, 335.

¹¹⁵ Idem.

¹¹⁶ Idem, 336.

¹¹⁷ Paul Hollander, *Political pilgrims. Travels of Western intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China and Cuba* (New York/Oxford 1981) 47 and 53.

¹¹⁸ Aarsbergen, *Verre Paradijzen*, 98.

According to political scientist Adam Ulam, the fascination of intellectuals for powers like the Soviet Union and China is often based on a certain 'morbid fascination due to the puritan and repressive aspects' and to their 'huge outward self-confidence, which is so conspicuously contrasting with the apologetic, hesitant self-image of the democratic world'. Ulam points out that the enthusiasm for these regimes diminished as the façade of self-confidence started to crumble, thus causing these regimes to become more human in practice.¹¹⁹

And so, discussions on the crimes of communist regimes almost invariably degenerated into arguments about numbers. In 1950 communist historians Jan Romein and Johan Huizinga engaged in a polemic. Huizinga had written that Lenin was accessory to 'one of the worst horrors in history'. No, was Romein's reply, Napoleon was much worse since he was responsible for as much as a million victims, and furthermore: newspapers showed that 'in the United States and England 40.000 people die in car accidents every year'.¹²⁰ In 1951 Bertrand Russell was of the opinion that the United States were just a police state as Nazi Germany had been, and he later worked out that British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan and John F. Kennedy were, purely on statistical grounds, about fifty times worse than Hitler.¹²¹ On the other hand, numbers were irrelevant at the same time. After the execution of the Rosenbergs in 1953, Sartre said that America 'is becoming the new breeding ground for a new fascism [...because] fascism is not defined by the number of victims but by the manner in which they are killed'.¹²²

The appeal of destruction and the *tabula rasa* played a role for some fellow-travelers and revolutionaries. Former Maoist Erik van Ree wrote, in retrospect, that 'self-hypnosis, utopian illusions' undoubtedly played a role, and that the images of Vietnam stirred up 'increasingly intensifying feelings of hate' towards capitalism, 'but', he continued: 'In retrospect I suspect that communism's appeal to me was not so much the utopia, but rather the murderousness itself. Communism and its "people's war" was my destructive fantasy.'¹²³ And the former editor of *De Waarheid*, Gijs Schreuders, did not shy away in his literary settlement with himself from using, besides other motives, the term 'Führerprinzip' to describe his behavior.¹²⁴

There is much to be written on the psychology of the former fellow-travelers, and by now that is also done by them. One shared feature that recurs repeatedly was anti-Americanism, even though the term fellow-traveler was first used in an inverse sense about a century ago, when Alexander Herzen wrote: 'In the future, Russia will have only one comrade, a fellow-traveler: the United States of America.'¹²⁵

Paul Hollander has written a voluminous book on this anti-Americanism. He extends Joseph A. Schumpeter's proposition – capitalism produces criticism, also towards itself – with the point that the source of all anti-Americanism is in the spiritual field: capitalism

¹¹⁹ Hollander, *Political Pilgrims*, 11.

¹²⁰ K. van het Reve, 'Romein over Rusland' (Romein on Russia), in: *Rusland in Nederlandse ogen. Een bundel opstellen* (Russia through the eyes of the Dutch. A collection of essays) (Amsterdam 1986) 249.

¹²¹ Hollander, *Anti-Americanism*, 373-374.

¹²² Caute, *The fellow travellers*, 334-335.

¹²³ Erik van Ree, 'De muis die brulde' (The mouse that roared) in: A. Koper ed., *Alles moet anders. Het on vervuld verlangen van een linkse generatie* (Everything must change. The unfulfilled desire of a leftist generation) (Amsterdam 1991) 45-47.

¹²⁴ Schreuders, *De man die faalde*, 151.

¹²⁵ Caute, *The fellow travellers*, 1.

cannot legitimize itself because it has no transcendent world vision.¹²⁶ Hollander further ascertained that none of the foreign critics had discovered American ills that had not been expressed much earlier and more vehemently in the United States itself.¹²⁷

This brings us back to Gramsci. The question is whether the phenomenon of anti-Americanism has not increased more by the Americanization of Dutch society in the fifties, than by all those pamphlets, petitions and conferences of sympathizers of communism. Pending research on the long-term influence of intellectuals like Jan Romein, the conclusion in the final analysis is that left-wing intellectualism actually did not amount to much in the Netherlands of the fifties. *De Vrije Katheder* was a small elite paper primarily intended for the well-to-do of Amsterdam South. Her five year spanning history is the 'dramatic tale of defeated expectations'.¹²⁸ The ultra left-wing paper *De Nieuwe Stem* with her six hundred subscribers was a professors' paper, according to Dutch writer Simon Carmiggelt a paper for 'shady professors'.¹²⁹ And the left-wing peace movement 'the Third Way', which was started in 1951, received a lot of publicity for several years but never had many members.¹³⁰

The Soviet invasion of Hungary did lead to a 'unique eruption of anti-communism' but it also dispersed the last remains of the post-war leftist-intellectual unity.¹³¹ The disillusion was large. The Soviet Union and Stalin had been revered for much too long. Although they were certainly execrated, the government did not pursue Lenin's motto, 'Intellectuals always need to be handled with an iron fist'.¹³² The driving force behind the anti-communist actions was chiefly the Labor Party. The party proclaimed that it was 'unacceptable' that some of her members signed the manifesto, which the Third Way launched in January 1952 against the Atlantic Treaty.¹³³ And the social-democrat paper *Het Vrije Volk* (The free people) exhorted numerous times to bar communists from playground associations and tambourine clubs.¹³⁴

There was, however, little of the McCarthyism that characterized the United States of the time. The 1951 ban on CPN membership-holding civil servants was not applicable to incumbent public servants. The domestic secret service did indeed blackmail and wiretap, but its role was 'often unbridledly' exaggerated by the CPN.¹³⁵ Romein's wife later said about the relative sidelines, somewhere between Stalinism and McCarthyism, in which progressive intellectuals in the Netherlands were living: 'We did not know Rosenberg trials or persecutions...'¹³⁶ The alienation from the own society was in the fifties not large enough to entice much enthusiasm for far away paradises or resistance against the fellow-travelers. That alienation, and the anti-Americanism, only became a fairly massive matter in the sixties. So Romein retained his job as a professor, communist author Theun de Vries won a prestigious literary award and communist politician Marcus Bakker witnessed the naming of a small room in Parliament after him in 1992

¹²⁶ Hollander, *Anti-Americanism*, 58; Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Kapitalisme, socialisme en democratie* (Capitalism, socialism and democracy) (Haarlem 1979) 175.

¹²⁷ Hollander, *Anti-Americanism*, viii.

¹²⁸ Van den Burg, *Vrije Katheder*, 32, 127 and 296.

¹²⁹ Bleich and Van Wezel, *Ga dan zelf naar Siberië!!!*, 185.

¹³⁰ Idem, 166.

¹³¹ De Jonge, *Communisme in Nederland*, 128; Hellema, 1956, 14.

¹³² Bering, motto.

¹³³ Maarten Brinkman, *Partij van de Arbeid* (The Labor Party) (Amsterdam 1986) 14.

¹³⁴ Bleich et al., *Stalinisme*, 221.

¹³⁵ De Jonge, *Communisme in Nederland*, 105.

¹³⁶ Aarsbergen, *Verre Paradijzen*, 76.

Now that the threat of communism has disappeared in Europe, some critics of the fellow-travelers wonder, to their own surprise, whether those former fellow-travelers were driven by, besides all sorts of irrational feelings, a sincere concern about the United States.¹³⁷ Since Vietnam, many critics of the United States believe that the dream of a better world collapsed in the sixties and that nothing has replaced it. Perhaps this pessimism is now, in the nineties, strongest among the defenders of the free West and the American dream. They too are now detecting the truth of Gramsci's slogan 'Conquer the culture!'

¹³⁷ Hollander, *Anti-Americanism*, xi.

VI The battle for the image

On the need for censorship

Prologue

There is a growing dissatisfaction in society, an increasing need to be liberated from other people's freedom, a louder call for censorship. This dissatisfaction is most visible on the streets, in graffiti and racist slogans, in the destruction of government-placed objects of art and culture, and lawsuits initiated to prohibit all sorts of intended or expressed creativity.

Due to the erosion of a dominant culture and morale, the battle regarding what can and cannot be accepted is slowly hardening. There is an important difference from earlier times: it is no longer the government prohibiting theatrical performances or other expressions of art for the sake of 'good manners' or any other argument. It is the citizens who are taking action against expressions, words and images that they find displeasing.

Is a 'cultural civil war', which is the case in the always excited America, also dozing in the Netherlands? Let us beware of exaggeration. Yet it cannot hurt to try to measure the temperature in our country and contemplate on the controversies in the arts and culture.

The focus herewith will be primarily on political and societal aspects, rather than art-historical trends and theories. The house that is the arts offers such a variety of rooms, alcoves and secret quarters that I, as an ordinary historian, would lose my way quickly. Perhaps every now and then coarse-grained buckshot is used when describing artistic and cultural developments. So be it, because like Paul Valéry once said: 'A simple generalization cannot be true. Yet a generalization which is not simple is unusable'.

In *the battle for the image* the point at issue is the boundary of artistic liberty in the multicultural democracy. The main question is how we can keep this liberty as big as possible without degenerating in a political-cultural catch-as-can.

The parable of the polder

Using the *Noordoostpolder* as a premise to an essay about the arts, culture, and censorship in the current multicultural society? The reader will find it strange. And that is understandable, since it is a somewhat strange story. But I was born and raised there, and therefore know in some degree how life was there in the fifties and sixties, and also know that this story can serve to clarify how much society, and the function of the arts in society, has changed.

The key words in this parable are selection, functionalism and caution. The protagonist is H.N. ter Veen, after whom the high school that I attended in the *Emmeloord* was named. This Amsterdam professor of sociography took his degree in 1925 on the colonization of the *Haarlemmermeer* polder in the previous century. There had been a case of an unregulated influx of migrants.

The result was a Darwinian struggle for life, after which only the fittest remained. Ter Veen judged them in a positive manner: tolerant, progressive, cosmopolitan. In his view the explanation lay in the psychological traits of the colonists, the natural selection which accentuated those and in the heredity which preserved the results of all this.

After the partition of the *Zuiderzee*¹³⁸ (Southern Sea) in 1932, the impoldering of Lake Wiering commenced. Should here also the barrier be lifted at a certain Zero hour, allowing anyone who wished to do so to enter? Or was it better to skip the 'struggle' phase and have a pre-selection? The latter was chosen as the better option. The pre-selection by no means progressed in a fluent fashion though, since the theoretical framework was far from complete.

The colonization of the *Noordoostpolder* would be the first, and also last, Dutch attempt to create an ideal society concocted from behind a desk.

Ter Veen had advocated individual colonization. In reaction to the 'Blut und Boden' theory of the Nazi occupiers, he resisted selection on the basis of biological or ethnic criteria. When selecting farmers, industrial workers and other necessary laborers the following criteria were to be applied: 'alongside professional skill, general aptitude and health and character ought to decide'.¹³⁹

These criteria for selection were adopted. However, they were preceded by a previous phase of selection. By order of the 'pillared'¹⁴⁰ political elite, the *Noordoostpolder* was colonized according to the principal of proportionate and representative justice: every denomination, province, and social stratum was to provide the same amount of residents in percentage terms. Only after this Ter Veen's criteria were applied.

¹³⁸ The *Zuiderzee* was a shallow [inlet](#) of the [North Sea](#) in the northwest of the [Netherlands](#). Its name means 'southern sea' in Dutch.

¹³⁹ H.N. ter Veen, 'De kolonisatiepolitiek in den Noordoostpolder' (The colonization policy in the Noordoostpolder) in: *Mens en Maatschappij* (Man and society) 17 (1941) p 378.

¹⁴⁰ From the early twentieth century up to the 1960s Dutch society was characterized by denominational segregation. Every religious or political denomination was organized hierarchically, whereby only the leaders of the denomination interacted and cooperated while the members lived in complete separation. In the Netherlands coined as 'pillaring', remnants of this segregation, like the distribution of public airtime between denominational broadcasting networks, are still present in society.

Some politicians, like the then spokesperson of the Fries people Dr. Anne Vondeling, were not very fond of this method of 100 % *politically correctly* planned *multicultural* society. He called the selection to be incompatible with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which entitles everyone with the right of free movement within the state. Yet at the same time he pleaded the concentration of the Fries in the northern part of the polder, so that they, verging on Friesland, could retain their cultural traits. The remaining villages should be made either homogenously catholic or homogenously protestant: this would thwart cultural disintegration.¹⁴¹

This proposition was seen as a *testimonium paupertatis* for the 'realization of a national unity'.¹⁴² Since unity, through assimilation and integration, was the goal, a near total policy of dispersal was initially applied in the field of housing. In every street, alongside every path, a Catholic family would for instance have Protestant neighbors on the left and Calvinists on the right. Next to that would live someone who was 'nothing', and so on.

This melting-pot project was to create 'a powerful spirit of community', 'so that she may lead to gratifying achievements all sorts of fields'. In this way, something like a '*Homo Zuiderzeelandicus*' might come about. This, however, did not happen. People once in a while drank coffee at the neighbors, but when there was want for a pleasant and cozy evening people visited each other: the Catholics visited the Catholics, the protestants visited the protestants and the 'nothing' people visited the 'nothing' people.

The conclusion has to be that integration can certainly be stimulated, but not enforced from behind a desk.

Still there was in that polder a certain peacefulness, which seemed to be greater than in the rest of the Netherlands. Not because of adherence to that saying on a pioneer's shed: He, who does not walk in here a buddy, is whacked out again quickly'. But because virtually everyone understood almost automatically that 'adjustment' was inevitable. So for most this attitude came fairly easy. A future was to be gained for oneself, and this did not need to be at the expense of another due the economic growth and social mobility of that time. When problems arose, whether about special education or the dominance of big farming in co-operations, they were resolved swiftly.

Because as it happens, the one thing that lacked until the nineteen sixties in that polder community of 20.000 was democracy. In effect, two institutions were in power: the State Service for the polders that cultivated the lands, and the Public Body for governmental and political affairs. In order to avoid precarious discussions, both functions had been united in one person, Bailiff S. Smeding. He ruled as a 'benevolent dictator' over his polder-empire, without the hindrance of either a city council or pressure groups. His conduct in this multicultural community was characterized by 'cautiousness'. When the Catholics questioned the closing of the fair on Sundays, his answer would be that this offended the Calvinists.

Cultura

The same applied for the arts and culture. Of course, at that time these concepts were only visible in their archaic meanings. *Cultura* stood for cultivation of arable land, and arts represented engineering. In this sense art and culture were abundant in the polder; there were farmlands, roads, dikes and bridges all around.

¹⁴¹ A. Vondeling, 'De keuze van de kolonisten in de IJsselmeerdroogmakerijen' (The colonists' choice in the reclaimed lands of the IJsselmeer) in: *Mens en Maatschappij* 27 (1952), p 26-32.

¹⁴² Sj. Groenman, *Kolonisatie op nieuw land*. (Colonization on new land) Assen 1953, p 75.

The authorities were aware of the fact that a community also needs symbols, and arts and culture in the modern sense of the word. Consequently, a central and recognizable orientation point had to be built. Of course this could not be a church. So, under strict preconditions, a contest was organized for the design of a water tower: the tower was to symbolize the unity of the polder, it had to include a carillon and a platform which provided the residents with the view of the dikes that were on the borders of the community. That tower came into being without any complications.

There were also preconditions put to the sculptures that were placed at schools and institutions. They had to symbolize the elements that made the polder what it is: water, earth, sea, air, labor, and harvest. In the implementation, abstract art was usually preferred. This New Art complemented the New Land, but there was also a realization of the fact that in such a diverse community it could be dangerous to put down a sculpture that represented something specific, like a Madonna or a vicar. In front of a high school, a Zadkine-like horse was erected. The Board, that is local statesman Smeding, donated to the central square an artwork made of concrete that portrayed all sorts of things, from a fruit basket to the remains of a dries off cutter.

A few years after the establishment of democracy by the founding of a city council in 1962, another work of art was placed on that same square. The sculpture was given the title *Vruchtbaarheidssybool*, which means 'Symbol of fertility', and it amply met the postulated preconditions. It did not take long before the visitors of the weekly market dubbed the statue *Gerstekorrel* (barleycorn). Our Dutch language teacher knew better than that. She told us, almost in a whisper, that we were dealing with a phallic symbol here. This revelation, however, did not impress us much. We were more interested in the Rolling Stones' *Sticky Fingers* and other forms of low culture than this stony specimen of high art.

And if the people would have realized that a stiff male genital was standing on display in the centre of their 'community', perhaps ready to ejaculate? Even then I doubt that it would have bothered them. People had other fish to fry than artistic concerns.

Art was either made done with or dealt with playfully. During a senior prom the aforementioned horse before the school was equipped with pink manes; during a European cup tournament another work of art was painted orange, the Dutch national soccer team's color. Yet graffiti is still hard to find in the polder, and works of art are almost never vandalized.

Art adrift

In late 1991, after having lived in the by now truly multicultural city of Amsterdam for twenty years, I was sent a charming file. Sent by art institution *Stichting Cargo*, it was accompanied by a letter asking me if I was interested in joining the recommending committee of the art project *Nationaal Geschenk aan de Zee* (National Present by the Sea). The file contained free-floating prose and elaborate sketches about the various phases in the planned construction of this work of art: a power pylon bricked up with 20.000 loafs of bread. This 'bread image' was to be sunk down in the spring tide of September 1992 as a 'sacrifice' to all that the sea had bestowed on us, like shipping, trade, fish and land.

The plan was full of symbolism, mummery and new folklore. The bags of flour resulting from the yield of one hectare of polder field were to be carried from the northern

part of the country to *Afsluitdijk*¹⁴³ by farmers, who would undoubtedly be wearing clogs. There, some baking and building was to be undertaken, accompanied by the supervision of an expected large audience, after which the trip to open sea was to start. The sacrifice itself would, of course, be filmed.

My first thought after reading the file was: completely ridiculous. They were just as senseless as those two previous projects by artists, undertaken in the province of North Holland. In 1989, funded by government subsidies, an old ship was stranded, disassembled, and dragged to Lake *IJsselmeer*, where it was reassembled and launched in front of a big crowd. The shippers union's protest in order to prevent this 'complete degeneration to which the arts and its subsidizing had fallen prey to' was of no avail. One year later, an artist wanted to slaughter a cow in public and put the tail, paws and entrails in a show-case so as to make manifest the 'death and destruction in our culture'. A Dutch animal rights group had succeeded in exacting a banning order on this slaughtering, though according to legal experts, the major should not have passed the order since this was not a case of public disturbance.¹⁴⁴

The 'bread sacrifice' seemed to become above all an *ugly* work of art, in contrast to *land-art* like the *Observatorium* by Robert Morris, or the spectacle art of Christo. I politely declined joining the committee. Perhaps I failed to see the meaning and beauty of this art project due to a narrow vision, which would undoubtedly have been caused by the fact that I was born in one of those polders. And as far as my knowledge of art reached, it seemed to me that the time-honored theory of conceptualism by Groce and Collingwood was applicable here. Which, simply put, states that a work of art is situated in the brain of the artist, that the essence of art is the 'inner' *expression* of intuition or imagination. And, more importantly, that this expression does not necessarily need to be conveyed through an artistic product because the public is only capable to grasp the 'true work of art' when it experiences the original expression of the artist.¹⁴⁵ So it appeared entirely sensible to me from an art theoretical point of view to hold this plan in the brain of the art institution.

Luckily, that institution was naive enough to name this 'bread sacrifice' a 'national gift'. Thus trouble seemed to be most certainly guaranteed. Had this not always been the case in the Netherlands when a work of art was intended to be *national*?

The end of the whole project is well-known. Sure enough, a nationwide storm of outrage rose up. Environmental movements called it a 'waste of food' and 'pollution of the sea'. The baking industry, 'baffled' as they were about this 'socially irresponsible' plan to dump the daily consumption of 10.000 people worth amount of bread into the sea, advised farmers, millers, and bakers not to participate. The Ministry of Transport received 1200 letters of protest plus a petition, organized by a ten year old girl, which was signed by 33000 people.

In the end, the Ministry did not authorize the project and ordered the dismantling of the twelve meter high pylon. During spring tide the object was transported to Belgium. Later

¹⁴³ After its completion in 1933, the *Afsluitdijk* (Closure Dike) dammed off the Zuider Sea, which then became the fresh water *IJsselmeer* Lake.

¹⁴⁴ T.A. Schiphof, 'Onder verdenking: de overheid en het theater' (Under suspicion: the government and the theatre), in: *Hoe vrij is kunst? Onderdrukking en andere beperkingen aan de vrijheid van expressie*. (How free are the arts? Oppression and other limitations to the freedom of expression) T. Pronk and G.A.I. Schuijt (eds.). Amsterdam 1992, p 36.

¹⁴⁵ A.A. van den Braembussche, *Denken over kunst. Een kennismaking met de kunstfilosofie*. (Considering the arts. An introduction to the philosophy of art) Bussum 1994, p 66.

several dozens of loafs of bread washed ashore the Dutch coast. It had not been an artistic judgment that took down the art project, but the social arguments of various action groups.

Political correctness

In November 1993, the Dutch journalist H.J.A. Hofland wrote that he wondered whether there was, like in the United States, a question of political correctness in the Netherlands. That is, the phenomenon of social groups wanting to enforce their own vision and codes of conduct to general society, and to control the public perceptions about their own group. According to Hofland this was not the case in the Netherlands.¹⁴⁶ I think it is. In the United States, where everything is expressed in a more extreme fashion, controversies catch the public attention more and sooner than their weak reverberations do in the Netherlands. Most of the key words in the 'parable of the polder' – adjustment and cautiousness, well-defined commissioning of art, quality and selection – are not listened to with pleasure anymore in the current multicultural society, not even in the polder itself.

By the end of 1994, newspapers extensively covered the controversy in the United States about the publication of scientific hypotheses regarding the relation between race, heredity and intelligence.¹⁴⁷ Here authorities destroyed the archives that contained the selection reports of the *Noordoostpolder*, in order to prevent that this theme be studied at all. A proposition by the local Heritage Centre to study the second generation inhabitants of the polder in order to assess Ter Veen's hereditary theory was met with great silence. No funds can be raised for it.

In a very politically correct manner, the H.N. ter Veen high school has been re-baptized to the same name as many other high schools were given in the region: *Zuyderzee College*. So, at least 'the image' of the *homo Zuiderzeelandicus* has been created.

If the 'compulsion for decades' is, exceptionally, given way to and consequently the fifties are styled the decade of 'order and asceticism', the sixties the decade of 'freedom and happiness' and the seventies the decade of 'social relevance', then the eighties were marked by that which author Tom Wolfe has summarized in one sentence: 'Let's talk about me, the most fascinating subject on earth'. The slogan of the nineties appears to be: 'Give us our own image'. Formation of image is the most principal preoccupation in current society, with the media and arts serving as the battlefield.

The Iconoclasm

Since the nature and effects of the political and economical establishment are, alas, hardly being contested anymore, culture has become the main weapon in the unrelenting struggle for hegemony in the family, neighborhood, city and country. I shall come back to the reasons why.

As the aforementioned impediments to art projects already demonstrate, opposition to certain artistic and cultural expressions derives from all corners of Dutch society. There are several noticeable categories of protesters: the anonymous vandals and surrounding inhabitants, the artists and the political activists.

¹⁴⁶ *NRC Handelsblad*, 5 November 1993, 19 November 1993.

¹⁴⁷ See for instance *NRC Handelsblad*, 24 October 1994, about the disputed book by Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray, *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*. Free Press 1994.

Vandals and surrounding inhabitants

In 1991 Queen Beatrix devoted her entire Christmas speech to the arts. She said among other things: 'The arts lead the critique against massiveness, and she is inevitably elitist, exclusive and sometimes hard to follow. However, that which was previously accessible for only a few, can later form a starting point to many for a new perception and interpretation of life'. The Queen then asked society to 'big-heartedly tolerate that which is not understood immediately, which even provokes and hurts'.¹⁴⁸

Perhaps the Queen sensed in advance the commotion which would erupt in May 1994 about the sculpture *Nederland, land aan zee* (The Netherlands, land by the sea) by the multi-talented Auke de Vries, which was placed in the new Parliament. The work of art – an orange pennon, a rolled-up flag and a 'bent play of metal and fiber' – was deemed so ugly that politician Hans Dijkstal hoped that it was not attached properly to the ceiling. Then 'the problem would solve itself'.¹⁴⁹

The Christmas speech was a classic defense of avant-garde art. Nevertheless, the era when people, at the sight of an incomprehensible work of art, said what author Jan Terlouw in such instances mumbled: 'quite special'¹⁵⁰, seems definitely over. That 'uncertainty of taste' had resulted from the distaste for the destruction of *Entartete Kunst* in Nazi-Germany and the fear of being branded a conservative – had not we earlier failed to appreciate Van Gogh as a great artist?

Politicians and other public figures now dare to say that they simply do not like some works of art. The common people had always done so. Furthermore, the thing Dijkstal was hoping for, the common people actually bring into effect themselves more and more often; the amount of art that is destroyed nowadays is certainly not meager.

The Dutch government institution for the funding of artists reports a clear increase in violence against works of art. Thousands of cases of 'small vandalism' are reported every year, and about thirty times a year a work of art is nearly completely destroyed.

The curious thing about it is that after one and a half year since its establishment in 1993 by the institution, not a single report was made to the 'arts destruction complaints office'. What does this indicate? That the general public does not really care anymore? Perhaps it even agrees with the destructions? It is more remarkable that also no artist has reported the vandalism of their own work. Perhaps they do not see any point in reporting? Or do they fear that they will not be able anymore to explain the value and necessity of their work? In the eastern city of *Arnhem*, an arts exhibition entitled *Sonsbeek 93* was set up in May 1993 throughout the city, and which was presented as 'art originated in dialogue with the surroundings'. Here, more was destroyed than ever before. This happened despite the increased security measures and despite the fact that some artists camped beside their work for months in order to prevent vandalism.

But was not the compiler of the exhibition, Valerie Smith, to blame as well? She wrote in the catalogue that her aim was to 'provoke excitement and discussion' regarding the theme of 'individual, multicultural and public art'. And that the goal should be 'provocative and enigmatic'.¹⁵¹ Well, the excitement came indeed. For example, on a huge red fence that transformed one square of the town into a show-box, was painted in graffiti: 'Give us back our square'.

¹⁴⁸ *NRC Handelsblad*, 27 December 1991.

¹⁴⁹ *De Volkskrant*, 19 May 1994.

¹⁵⁰ *Kunstbeeld* 18 no 10, p 29.

¹⁵¹ *Sonsbeek 93*. Eds: Jan Brand, Catelijne de Muynck, Valerie Smith. Amsterdam 1993, p 10.

With regard to the organizers' and artists' desire to bring art into society, the director of the *Arnhem* municipal museum spoke of 'a kind of inner tragedy' because society's reaction to it had been: 'I don't need you, go away, I don't think it's beautiful'.¹⁵² She, regrettably, did not draw any conclusions from this. Which surely would have been a quite interesting, since these protest actions were in some cases driven by the same politically correct way of thinking that made her decide that half of the museum's art acquisitions should be women- authored.



17, 5 % Proof ('De Pisser') Arnhem

An example was the work of art by British artist Mark Quinn, which was likewise subject to the heaviest commotion. It was the statue of a naked man, sporting a firm erection, inside of a shower cabin that was shaped to resemble a telephone booth. Periodically, a red fluid spurted out of all body cavities. The Arnhem municipality's explanatory response to the ones who objected, housewives and churchgoers alike, was in the line of 'that interesting dialogue with the surroundings'. The shower cabin was heavily damaged by unknown vandals. The word '*goddeloos*' (godless) was sprayed on the window.

Startled, the organization put out a statement declaring that this *Pisser* was not intended to offend churchgoers. 'That would have crowned everything!' was the reaction of a woman in her letter to the editor of *Volkskrant* newspaper. 'Elevating the offending of others to an art form: disgusting and fundamentally bad in a world that needs to develop itself multi-racially, multi-nationally, multi-ethnically, multi-religiously and so on in order to remain livable'.¹⁵³

Equality

In all these reactions there is little noticeable of the generous tolerance the Queen was calling for. The dilemma of the 'multi-society' is unintentionally made sharply manifest here:

¹⁵² *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 16 February 1994; *NRC Handelsblad*, 9 October 1992.

¹⁵³ *De Volkskrant*, 28 August 1993.

how far can tolerance go? In relation to this, the Queen's own contribution to De Vries's piece in the Dutch Parliament is remarkable. This consists of two texts on a pennant, one line out of the *Wilhelmus* – the Dutch national anthem – and a personal text: 'In the equality of human beings lies the foundation for a peaceful society'.¹⁵⁴ This statement is as lofty as it is vague. Because what does that equality – apart from the equality before God and the law and the equality in the voting booth – then exactly consist of? When it comes to public art, it is found that the urge for destruction – leaving cases of dull-witted aggression aside – often arises from neighborhood feelings of being treated 'unequally' by local authorities: without their participation a work of art has been placed in familiar and immediate surroundings, or a work of art is perceived as a direct insult. A classic example is sculptor Evert Strobos's work that was leveled to the ground in 1984.

To outline protest actions of local residents and all those concerned would require an entire book. Therefore I will limit it to only a few examples.

Years ago, residents of a quarter in the city of *Rotterdam* threatened to 'throw into the Meuse River' an art gift, a robust female figure without a head, when it was placed. The rejection by Dutch Parliament of a statue by Kounellis, also a gift, in 1991 was formulated more diplomatically, but boiled down to the same thing: it was simply not found to be pretty, an insult even. (The rejection by orthodox Christian parties because of the Minister of Culture's explanation that this sculpture symbolized the fact that 'democracy is a work of man' falls under the religious action group category.)

In another city, residents of a quarter, who in their previous houses had faced a factory wall and just had bought newly built houses 'with an unobstructed view', objected the placing of a several meters high piece of metal work in their park. In 1987 the population of small town *Meerssen* was almost unanimously opposed to twelve temporary marl sculptures, including a train made of rusted steel, marl and oil barrels: 'We don't want that rubbish in front of our doors. Is this how our tax money is being spent?'¹⁵⁵ These works of arts were irreparably destroyed by unknown persons.

The essence of these kinds of conflicts lies in either the 'incomprehensibility' or the 'ugliness' that a lot of these modern works of art contain, but also in the question to what extent a work of art in a public space has to be placed in a democratic fashion. Here prevails the still dominating modernistic notion that – in contrary to 'classic art', which usually was only accepted if it sufficed to the demands of the paying patron – the artist himself determines what is art, and not the patrons, let alone the public.

Public taste

This notion is defended fiercely by some artists, like Peter Struycken. His work of art in the Ministry of Transport and Public Works is one that constantly changes the color of the lights in the hallways, to the distress of some officials who work there. They meanwhile have found the secret switch and turn it as soon as they get a chance.¹⁵⁶ Struycken's fierce protest against this type of actions is based on a creating artist's copyright, but especially on concept of the autonomy of the artist. 'That is the enlightened despotism one needs to submit to'. He further stated that a series of democratically selected images seemed to be 'the worst alternative'.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ Idem, 19 May 1994.

¹⁵⁵ Idem, 10 September 1987; *NRC Handelsblad*, 21 September 1987.

¹⁵⁶ *NRC Handelsblad*, 24 April 1992.

¹⁵⁷ *De Volkskrant*, 16 August 1991.

Journalist Marc Chavannes called the rejection of Kounellis's work part of an awakening of the public taste in the Netherlands. But at the same time he wondered: 'Where does the people's voice resound clearly and moderately?'¹⁵⁸ An appropriate question perhaps. But should not the first question have been about why public art should be excluded from the groundwork of democracy: 'no taxation without representation? After all, there are all sorts of ways to close the gap between the arts and the public: assigning brokers between art patrons, artist and public, placing works of art in trial before deciding on their definite settlement, presenting scale models of the intended work of art for assessment and habituation, or letting the public get acquainted with the artist beforehand, if necessary as an artist in residence.'¹⁵⁹

The artists

From the beginning of the twentieth century onward avant-garde art has itself been full of iconoclasm, especially with respect to museum art. French-American Dadaist artist Marcel Duchamp, who was the first to perform an exploit of anti-art by placing an autographed piss-pot in a museum, suggested using a *Rembrandt* as an ironing board. Swiss kinetic artist Jean Tinguely built art machines that destructed themselves.

In the nineteen sixties several artists wanted to raise a fire inside museums because they were seen as the caskets of the arts. Art had to be democratized, and thus brought into the streets. The purpose of this form of art was beautification and 'giving meaning to the surroundings'; though the manner in which this was brought about remained fairly paternalistic. All those social-realistic wall paintings and all those 'little chatter walls, basalt mosaics and concrete triangles' were sharply named the 'monumental expression of Dutch state ideology' by author and art critic Dirk van Weelden.¹⁶⁰ That ideology is the welfare state.

Some of that art is still standing. The feature of a lot of other democratic art was that it was intended to be volatile: they were one-off performances, or the art resulted from interaction with the public: the happening, the art-performance. Moreover, numerous cases of body-art, object-art and land-art fall inside this scope. Even *De tong van Lucifer* (Lucifer's tongue). According to the Dutch artist that tongue is licking 'the sky sensually'. When lightning strikes it, the tongue will bring fire to the earth like Prometheus. Then there would not be much left of that piece but a small heap of twisted copper, but the work of art would have gained its final symbolism. Incidentally, the patron has erected a small lightning rod on top of it for safety's sake.

Artistic mission

Art is often destroyed by other artists or by people who have an artistic mission. The man who destroyed painter Barnett Newmann's *Who's afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue?* declared afterwards that he intended to reduce the 'dominance of abstract art' with this 'tribute to Willink'. His lawyer put forward the nature and title of the work to charge Newman with 'incitement'. He thus introduced to the court what art historian Anna Tilroe called 'the extended appreciation of art'.¹⁶¹ According to this notion, a work of art does not only

¹⁵⁸ *NRC Handelsblad*, 12 June 1991.

¹⁵⁹ A. de Swaan, *Kunst en staat* (Art and state). Amsterdam 1990, p. 35.

¹⁶⁰ *NRC Handelsblad*, 10 June 1994.

¹⁶¹ *Het Parool*, 18 September 1986; *de Volkskrant*, 2 October 1986; *NRC Handelsblad*, 17 August 1986.

constitute the physical object itself, but also the reactions to it and the capturing (and sale) of it on film and photo.

This 'extended appreciation of art' was also the central point in a trial against artist Mark Bridger during the summer of 1994 in Britain. He had turned colleague Damien

----- Picture: '*Cultural graffiti in a side-street of the Nieuwedijk in Amsterdam*' -----

Hirst's work of art – a white sheep, floating in a glass tank filled with formaldehyde – black by pouring ink in it. Why? Because Hirst had said in an interview that the worst thing that could happen was that a visitor would leave the exhibition without any reaction. Bridger: 'So the work was meant to evoke a reaction, which is why I assumed my action was not contrary to the wishes of the artist. I expressed myself as an artist'. Hirst's defense: 'The work of art was made to evoke a mental reaction, not a physical one'.¹⁶² The Public Prosecutor concluded the same in the Newman trial. Whether it is art or no art, beautiful or ugly, 'you keep your paws off of it'.¹⁶³ This does not alter the fact that some artists implicitly or explicitly invite the audience, or in the case of *De tong van Lucifer* (Lucifer's tongue) the sky, to react to their work of art. In view of the iconoclastic avant-garde art the only cogent argument for the claim that 'paws should be kept off of it', is the fact that the work of art is someone else's property. However, this does not mesh with the in artistic circles commonly held notion that graffiti, uninvited painting of other people's property outside of the museum, is in fact a form of art. Except when it concerns *politically incorrect* graffiti, like neo-Nazi slogans.

All these various and sometimes inconsistent defenses of the autonomy of the arts in the end boil down to the rather ingenious viewpoint that it is only the artists themselves who decide what is art and what not, and that they are not accountable to anyone about it. Not even when the work of art stands in a public space.

The activists

Protest against art and destruction of works of art because of religious or political reasons is an impulse typical to the history and nature of the arts. In the Middle Ages, arts and religion were in line with each other. Every time when religious images became mimetic, deceitfully resembling authenticity and inclining to copy a known reality instead of visualizing the unknown, the iconoclasts struck.

In the past century of political state religions, like in Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia, on the other hand, art had to be 'deceitfully real'. And this art did not last long either. After the demise of Nazi Germany and the demise of communism in 1989 in Eastern Europe, the statues of the old regime, just as was the case in earlier political revolutions, were pulled down from their pedestals and most other artistic material was either destroyed or stored away.

In the Netherlands political activists have in the recent past smeared or pulled down 'wrong' works of art, like the Van Heutsz-monument¹⁶⁴ by 'anti-imperialists'. The state and its symbols were also the aim of the fired metalworker who, in a 'racist act of protest',

¹⁶² The Independent, 17/18/19 August 1994.

¹⁶³ *Het Parool*, 18 September 1986.

¹⁶⁴ Joannes Benedictus van Heutsz was an officer and Governor-General in Dutch East-India between 1873 and 1909. He led the pacification of Atjeh, killing some 70.000 civilians. Until the nineteen sixties his status as a national hero was generally undisputed in the Netherlands.

severely damaged ten seventeenth century paintings with a Stanley knife in the *Dordrecht* museum in 1989. 'We are squandering the Netherlands to foreigners. So our old paintings and national anthem are now useless'.¹⁶⁵

Landscapes or still lives are not destroyed; it is usually the figurative arts that are attacked. So the aim of these iconoclasts is not the painting itself, but rather the image, thought or message it emanates.

In the case of the actions undertaken by moral crusaders against certain types of pop music (from Elvis, the Stones and The Doors to Madonna and 2 Live Crew) the aim was both the message and the figure. In the case of the controversial theater performances in the late sixties, the issue was also a combination of message and figure.

There has been little fuss about pop music and theatre in the Netherlands, barring one big and relevant exception: the 1987 controversy about R.W. Fassbinder's alleged anti-Semitic play *Garbage, the City and Death*, which was scheduled to run in Amsterdam and Rotterdam. There was loud protest from Jewish groups and the Minister of Justice urged the cancellation of the play. When the Rotterdam city authorities decided not to implement 'cultural censorship', Jewish activists occupied the stage floor. Several arguments used in the demand for the prohibition of this play were quite interesting. Rabbi L.B. van de Kamp wrote: 'In a period of rising anti-Semitism, racism and discrimination a society cannot permit itself to present, under the guise of culture, art with such a despicable content'. The president of the Dutch Jewish pressure group Centre for Information and Documentation Israel (CIDI) R.A. Levisson claimed that the Jewish leading actor automatically represented the whole group. 'Therefore he must ask himself: does the community wish to be represented in this manner? The answer is simple: the community does not'.

Richard Stein of the Foundation for the Riddance of Anti-Semitism was of the opinion that Jews should not continuously make a stand on their own costs against these kinds of offensive displays 'when they are morally and financially supported by a government that also collects tax money from Jews'. Rabbi Soeterdorp proposed that in the future, when similar cases arise, theatre groups should ask the permission of Jewish organizations in advance.¹⁶⁶

'Strong women'

Similar arguments in an attempt to control the public image of the own group are brought forward by feminist action groups. This had been the case since the first feminist wave. Suffragette Mary Richardson called her knife-slashing of Velasquez's painting *Rokeby Venus* a political deed:

'I have tried to deastroy the picture of the most beautiful woman in mythological history as a protest against the Government destroying Mrs Pankhurst, who is the most beautiful character in modern history.'

Decades later she added: ''.¹⁶⁷

The motive expressed in the latter statement also played a role in the destruction of the work by photographer Inez van Laamsweerde, which was placed under a bridge in

¹⁶⁵ *NRC Handelsblad*, 30 March 1989 and 9 February 1990; *De Tijd*, 28 April 1989.

¹⁶⁶ All quotations are derived from *Toneel Theatraal I* (1988), p 5-11.

¹⁶⁷ Lynda Nead, *The female nude. Art, obscenity and sexuality*. Routledge. London/New York 1992, p 34 ff

Amsterdam in September 1993 (see front cover). The huge picture showed two women sitting spread-eagled.

The photographer herself explained that the picture was about 'strong women'. 'It is a glorification of the woman and her beauty'. She pointed out that sexuality was also part of it. 'The bridge opens slowly, then the image of the women is visible, and then the bridge closes again. Subsequently, the image lies in depth, just like sexuality lies in the depth of our consciousnesses.'¹⁶⁸

In the night before the unveiling an unknown feminist action group by the name *De Schone Waakster* (The Pure Watch Dog) daubed the work of art with brown-red paint (see back cover). The next day the feminist action group *Spuugzat* (Sick of it) was handing out flyers with texts like 'Sex sells, what's the art in that' and 'Down with cunt art'. They considered this work of art, which was close to the feminist club, to be a provocation, just as the prospect of men masturbating behind the wheel. The action group was of the opinion that the city council was hypocrite for pursuing an emancipation policy and allocating funds for the prevention of violence against women, and simultaneously spending 30.000 guilders of city money on this 'depiction of women as sex-objects'.¹⁶⁹ At the same time Christian groups were handing out flyers as well in protest of this depraved and ungodly work of art. *Les extrêmes se touchent*.

It was clear that the photomontage was judged for its socio-political statement rather than its artistic value. And this was not wholly unjustified. It is quite ridiculous to defend a controversial work of art solely on esthetic grounds. Just as ridiculous as the American critic who defended Robert Mapplethorpe's controversial photograph – male fist inside the anus of his partner – by pointing out the esthetic beauty of 'the centrality of the forearm'. Australian art critic Robert Hughes wondered what would have happened if the museum in question would have displayed a photograph depicting a male fist inside the anus of a woman? An explosion of protest would have erupted regarding sexism, exploitation, humiliation and so on.¹⁷⁰

Something similar can be wondered about the 'strong women' photograph. After the vandalism of the piece, Amsterdam alderman for culture Ernst Bakker stated that he, as a governing body, was not to pass judgment as regards artistic content, even though at the same time he made the contradictory comment that the photograph was 'not sexist'.¹⁷¹ How would he have reacted if the depicted women were wearing Islamic headscarves? Would he say that it made the women even 'stronger'? Is it not likely that he then would have to pack his bags and leave because of 'racism'?

The media-society

Journalist Pauline Terreehorst remarked about the 'strong women' that imaging of cheerful and assertive sexuality is not that extraordinary, because it is to be seen in the entire media

¹⁶⁸ *De Volkskrant*, 18 September 1993.

¹⁶⁹ *Vrouwen* (Women), October 1993, p 3.

¹⁷⁰ Robert Hughes, *The culture of complaint. The fraying of America*. Oxford University Press. New York/Oxford 1993, p. 183/184.

¹⁷¹ *Het Parool*, 24 September 1993.

and on billboards. 'Even DIY stores are selling their products through commercials with stripping Chippendales'.¹⁷²

The boundaries between arts, advertising, politics and media have indeed largely disappeared. The visual is politicized and economized. The need and acceptance of esthetics scourge across the country. Indoors every pot and pan has to be 'designer' and nearly just a strong quasi-religious emotion is derived from household items as was in the past from a Virgin statue or Party banners. Outdoors, the situation is little different, except that others determine the images of the new idolatry.

When a car trip through the country is undertaken, a whole range of arts and culture, in the archaic sense, is passed. Local authorities make an effort, though, to convince passer-by's through billboards that their region is attractive. On farming field next to the highway stand advertising boards for Jesus, tractors, spacious houses for sale, amusement parks and new types of potato. The public space is occupied by a visual abundance. And no longer are all the permanently changing commercial images bound to a steady location like storefronts, but they pass the eyes on trams, trains, and buses.

Consequently, public art is increasingly competing with traffic and advertising. The tidal wave of images that is flooding us reminds of that fairy tale about sweet porridge by the brothers Grimm. The little pot that cooks any desired amount of porridge on command – a gift from a good fairy – at first does its jobs well, but then does not know when to stop. The porridge 'rose over the edge until the kitchen and whole house were full, and then the whole street, just as if it wanted to satisfy the hunger of the whole world, and there was the greatest distress...'. Until finally the magic word was found, and the cooking was halted.

All attempts to restrain the expansion of the visual media lose out to the economic and technological developments. Images fly through the air, crawl through cables, become interactive and multiply with 'Grimm-like' speed and intensity.

There are two ways to express thoughts and feelings: through words and through images. The extent to which the visual-esthetic threatens to replace the rational-philosophical is made clear by a comment of French media philosopher Paul Virilio: 'I am no longer an academic being. When I write, I visualize what I write. And if I can't see anything, I can't think'.¹⁷³ But in contrast to tales of the brothers Grimm, where the child itself has to summon the images upon hearing the story, in the case of visual images everything is pre-thought. This is one of the reasons why the TV talk show, as a means to process the overdose of images, has become so popular. The arts have to cope without a talk show. Public art that has a too explicit message is therefore accompanied by fewer words, and less accepted. It is debatable whether, in the by sparkling party lights dominated public space, there is any point left in art that is only form and no longer aims for content or deeper meaning. Should not we join art historian Cor Blok in his doubt as to whether there is any place at all for art in a society that, at best, wants to utilize art as a short-lived and pleasant pastime?¹⁷⁴

Entertainment

There are only a few, like the German playwright Botho Strauss, who advocate the retreat of

¹⁷² *De Volkskrant*, 7 October 1993.

¹⁷³ *Die Zeit*, 4 September 1992.

¹⁷⁴ Cor Blok, 'De geloofwaardigheid van beeldende kunst in de openbare ruimte' (The credibility of expressive art in the public space) in: *Archis* 12, 1990, p 8-17.

the artist to the safe shelter of the 'fenced off' garden in order to take art back to the world of the arts, if not the sacred.¹⁷⁵

---- **Picture: Advertising column near Schiphol** ----

He seems, though, not to desire a complete return to the belief of Kant and Aristotle that something is only art when it evokes tranquility and contemplation, and that anything that excites or agitates falls inside the scope of pornography, propaganda or advertising.

Both the old and the new avant-garde still have a mission and need for the audience. Because although artist Joseph Beuys had sung the requiem of modernism a very long time ago with his exclamation that every human being is an artist, the avant-garde is still engaged in gasping the last breath. But unless a certain 'identity group' within society is offended, there is little left that will impress the overindulged audience. Not even a work of art like American Jenny Holzer's, which drenched the front page of German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung's* magazine edition with the blood of Bosnian women in 1993, and provoked little more than a yawn of cynical boredom.

Although the tide is on the turn, the key word is, when surroundings are observed, not a spiritual message but a commercial one. Some trendsetters in the visual industry – artists, art directors, TV producers, museum directors – have declared the triplet publicity-public-money a Holy Trinity. Likewise the arts, especially the 'postmodern' kind, have become infected with the growth neurosis of capitalism, causing the further degradation of the arts to touristy amusement. Thus we are back at Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's statement in 1775 that the goal of science is truth, and the ultimate goal of arts is entertainment.

For the time being, American artist Jeff Koons, the late epigone of Duchamp, the uncrowned king of this field of profitable arts entertainment, only equaled by Benneton. This Italian sweater manufacturer successfully used placed out of context depictions of human suffering and possibly racist images in their advertising, and further increased their brand recognition by the subsequent public debate about it. 'It is my dream', said art director Oliviero Toscani, 'that there will be one day when Benneton does not need to spend even a dime on advertising in newspapers and magazines'.¹⁷⁶ Then he will have reached his goal; all current events are automatically linked to Benneton.

Disneyland

Thus advertising and television have taken over the role of avant-garde art. The zapping between channels results in a random, but rarely favored program. With the advent of video, which enables the accelerating, pausing or reversal of all images, the unreality is within everyone's grasp. With this the dream of Dada and his followers – elevating life into art, everyone is an own work of art – came true.¹⁷⁷

After realizing that they could no longer compete against the power of media and advertising, a few 'post-modernistic' museum directors have opted for the time-honored argument that camouflages capitulation: 'if you can't beat them, join them'. Likewise, the Amsterdam City Museum acted promptly in acquiring works by Jeff Koons, the Louvre is

¹⁷⁵ Botho Strauss, 'Anschwellender Bocksgesang', in: *Der Spiegel* 47, 6/1993, p 202-207.

¹⁷⁶ *Metropolis* 1985, no 5.

¹⁷⁷ H.M. Enzensberger, 'Das Nullmedium oder Warum alle Klagen über das Fernsehen gegenstandslos sind', in: *Mittelmass und Wahn*. Suhrkamp. Frankfurt 1989, p 89 ff; Umberto Eco, *De alledaagse onwerkelijkheid*. Essays. Amsterdam 1986, p 196.

converted into a department store, and in the construction of the new Groninger Museum in the north of the Netherlands director Frans Haks drew inspiration from Disneyland.¹⁷⁸

Thus 'catching the eye' has become the essence of all the visual that surrounds us, whether it is advertising, media or arts. This has far-reaching consequences. Because if 'catching the eye' as such is considered to be good, it does not really matter what is used to achieve that and 'good' and 'bad' degenerate to merely esthetic categories. Already in the early eighties historian Saul Friedländer was warning, in response to the films of Fassbinder and Syberberg, that the Nazism that these 'exorcistic' attempts to, through pure filmic aesthetics, penetrate into 'the Hitler-in-us' could enhance the 'fascination with fascism' as opposed to decrease it and could even make fascism itself socially acceptable again.¹⁷⁹ This applies to more recent violent films, like Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers*, as well. But, in contrast to former times, nowadays censorship *is* being brought up as a (possible) measure.

Because every possible explanation by a controversial artist – my work is being interpreted wrongly, it was meant as a satire, documentary, glorification, reflection etcetera – loses, due to aestheticization, its vestige of meaning. For we are unable to assess exactly the effects of art.

The politically correct groupings, however, do claim to be able to do that. They claim that in the current media-society, in which all detergents, cars and politicians advertise themselves as soon as they are brought into vision, every word and image is nothing more than publicity. That is why make an effort for the advertising of only the 'fair', and for the 'unfair' not to be seen or heard. With that, they implicitly assume that anything besides advertising cannot be made anymore. Yet the commercial or advertising itself is not called into question at all. No more than the driving force behind it, capitalism, which in certain aspects boils down to discrimination and degradation just as was the case with the colonial image of the 'natives' in former times. According to the German philosopher Christoph Türke, the politically correct actions therefore merely carry with them an adaptation to capitalism.¹⁸⁰

This notion seems too one-sided to me. The flaring struggle over whether to render certain images taboo is the result of the coagulation of divers political, economic and social developments.

The taboo

A taboo is self-evident. When a taboo needs argumentation, it loses its power. That is why taboos belong to static, sacral societies where 'the truth' is still understood singularly. Our society is not static, but rather godlessly dynamic. 'The truth' is shattered into many, innumerable truths. So there are very few taboos. The sixties demand of equality and self-realization is accepted. The slogan of the seventies that anything should be allowed to 'talk' about has become reality. And we are sick of it, to the point of breathlessness. Because the border between own autonomy and dominance over the other is increasingly harder to distinguish.

This has a lot to do with a wrong understanding of tolerance. Tolerance means indeed that a dominant group allows a non-dominant group to have opinions or ways of life that seem to deviate from the regular order. This, however, means that there is a hierarchy.

¹⁷⁸ *De Volkskrant*, 14 July 1993.

¹⁷⁹ Saul Friedländer, *Reflections of Nazism. An essay on kitsch and death*. New York 1982.

¹⁸⁰ *Die Zeit*, 26 August 1994.

Therefore, as E.H. Kossmann states, tolerance in the strictest sense of the word is discriminating.¹⁸¹

As there is less and less political or moral hierarchy, in some cases the feeling of incapacity increases and in other cases the scent of victory enters the nostrils. Both increase the need of taboos. But without hierarchy nothing is self-evident anymore, and consequently there has to be battled for the outcome. This battle is expressed in either collective or individual violence: 'foreigners' are being molested, 'strange' works of art are being smashed, and theatrical performances are being prevented. Or, more peacefully, in the call for censorship: that non-self-evident but enforced measure to put an end to discussion and peace or to maintain or restore balances of power.

If censorship is defined broadly as 'any social crusade or activity that attempts to control the contents of the public debate or the form of the visual image', one thing becomes clear: censor is neither left-wing nor right-wing. There is no imperative, consistent force behind censorship, there are historically no fixed groups who are solely responsible for these crusades. And more than seldom, groups manage to easily combine a demand for freedom of expression and/or behavior on one field with a call for censorship on another field.¹⁸²

The 'religious right' for example has both demanded the freedom to tell in schools that God and nothing else has created the universe, *and* called for a prohibition on all sorts of 'sexually explicit'. In this manner the progressive segment of the country has in the last decades has both taken the freedom to walk around in a monokini or exclaim 'Johnson, murderer!', and demanded the expropriation of the 'people-hostile' newspaper *Bild Zeitung* and the prohibition of 'stereotyping' commercials depicting housewives and detergents.

Contemplation

Likewise, in the nineteen nineties it is no longer only the national government that limits freedom. There is no longer a hierarchical social order that enables it, and no Cold War that necessitates it. And many political and cultural positions are held by members of the 'generation of 68'. And neither is it any longer just the 'Bible belt' part of the population that demands curtailment. It is sooner the left-wing intellectual freedom-fighters of former days who ask for contemplation, restraint and censorship.

A few examples.

Dutch left-wing cabaret artist Freek de Jonge told during a show in San Francisco the story of a girl, who very politically correct received a black doll for her birthday. Her uncle walks in and says: 'What a stink in here'. To De Jonge's amazement the joke bombed miserably. He commented: 'In the United States they cannot afford the luxury of what we call hidden meanings'. His conclusion: 'Sometimes I have the feeling that it would be good if our Dutch theatre would receive more pressure, pressure from outside, yes censorship. Idiotic, but the problem of the arts is that it constantly has to create that pressure itself. Theatre that is under external pressure has to formulate more carefully'.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ E.H. Kossmann, 'Over tolerantie vroeger en nu' (On tolerance then and now), in: *Politieke theorie en geschiedenis. Verspreide opstellen en voordrachten* (Political theory and history. Essays and lectures) Bert Bakker. Amsterdam 1987, p 45 ff.

¹⁸² Cf Patrick Garry, *An American Paradox. Censorship in a nation of free speech*. Praeger. Westport, Connecticut/London 1993.

¹⁸³ *NRC Handelsblad*, 10 December 1993, CS, p 3.

In 1993, Umberto Eco signed the appeal *Call for Vigilance* against right-wing extremism. He was one of the followers of the semiotics that asserts that every truth is constructed and that no truths, but only texts really exist. Only after Holocaust denial is now becoming popular again, he too realizes that there is a truth beyond the word and the image. 'It is the task of intellectuals to draw the line between what can and cannot be tolerated. (...) Holocaust denial cannot be tolerated'.¹⁸⁴

Hans-Peter Duërr, the German ethnologist who has made it his task to rebut Elias' theory of civilization process, now doubts whether the in former days, also by him, jeered off proposition 'porn is industry, rape is practice' contains an element of truth in it after all. His conclusion: 'The question is not for or against repression. The question is: which forms of repression are necessary for society and which not'.¹⁸⁵

Anthony Burgess grew in 1993, just before his death, convinced that arts can indeed be dangerous since a work of art emanates a sort of authority and, as it were, justifies the behavior of the follower. 'It took me fifty years to let go of objections of principal against censorship of television'.¹⁸⁶

Does the age-old saying 'nothing is more conservative than a converted rebel' apply for them? Perhaps. In the actual juridical practice of day-to-day life it is more important to note that the call for governmental interference is now predominantly coming from local administrators, institutions, corporations, emancipation movements, action groups and all possible sorts of image-conscious pressure groups up to the already mentioned unions of skippers and bakers. They demand bans on this or that cultural performance in the media or public space because of the 'ethical', 'social' or 'ecological' unjustifiability. And more often than before, they succeed with the aid of the court in their pursuit.

Power

So censorship has nothing to do with political beliefs of principle about either etatism or civil liberty. It has all to do with longings for justice, respect, meaning, power. And when reality itself cannot be altered, the altering of the image and the word is second best. As French socialist leader Jean Jaures predicted early in the twentieth century: *Quand les homes ne peuvent pas charger les choses, ils changes les mots*. In other words: as reality worsens, language betters. Should we consequently regard politically correct images and language as an airbag against the social crash?

That would be exaggerated, but the word crash brings us to the essence of this story. In democratic societies censorship predominantly rises in times of unclear balances of power, insecurity, change and confusion. At present we are living in such a time. A nagging chagrin has sneaked into society, as well as nervousness. Together they lead to constantly increasing questions about the boundaries of freedom. Not only among the discussed local authorities who rely on debate and oppositional opinions and who now, after decades of first optimistic 'manipulability' and then an anything goes mentality', find solution in gloomy cultural pessimism. More people are concerned too.

Of course, there is plenty of contentment about own success and situation. Nonetheless, a slumbering sort of mutual distaste on the level of daily unpleasantness has arisen. Fear and indignation for the outside world holds sway: about the increasing vandalism and violence, about the more rapidly changing physical surroundings, about

¹⁸⁴ *Die Zeit*, 5 November 1993, p 61.

¹⁸⁵ *Der Spiegel*, vol. 47, no 2, 11 January 1993.

¹⁸⁶ *De Volkskrant*, 22 May 1993.

obtrusiveness of the other, and about the deterioration of morals and community spirit in general. The only thing mutual seems to be the lack of an uplifting vision for the future.

Is the result of all this worry and chagrin that western civilization, just as was the case every once in a while with almost all civilizations in the past, is subject to a period of what Stanley Cohen has described as 'moral panic'?¹⁸⁷ This seems excessive to me. Most people go on with their every-day lives. However, it appears to be unmistakably true that it is only the television shows that still have humor and a relaxed smoothness. On the streets and in serious-meant talk shows other, increasingly faster alternating feelings prevail: indifference and oversensitivity. Both feelings amount to eruptions of outrage and action.

'Anger enjoys a lot of prestige nowadays. It is a luxury, it is chic, it is a noble passion', wrote author Saul Bellow in early 1994 as a reaction to the accusation of racism because he had said in an interview about script-less cultures, that Zulus and Papuas had not produced any Proust or Tolstoy.¹⁸⁸

How is this 'noble passion' of anger, this call for new norms and censorship, this general malaise to be explained? Perhaps with a theoretical three-stage rocket. In that, the countdown and zero is shaped by Nietzsche's statement that God is dead and his prediction that this will result in the collapse of the entire moral system, first visible in modernism. The second stage is the postwar prosperity and the Cold War with its, perhaps just as necessary but in any case paralyzing dichotomist thinking. Finally there is the fall of the Berlin Wall.

In 1989 Gorbachev's advisor Georgi Arbatow said to the West: 'We will do something terrible to you. We shall deprive you of an enemy'.¹⁸⁹ Arbatow was right. Communism functioned as an external skeleton, like mollusks have. As soon as the Wall fell, the West dropped in pieces like a shapeless, aimless, powerless mollusk, desperately seeking a solid core for itself. It has not that find that core. It has only found mutual differences.

While the political elite sees the old thought patterns, notions and ideals crumble before their eyes, they have meanwhile searched for a new grip. That grip is found within the own group, the own identity. Now that there is no longer an external threat, and the state has lost too much moral authority and doubts itself too much to point out a new direction, that identity has become an obsession. Now that the nearly all-dominating global balance between East and West has disappeared, and the released energy has focused on a national consensus on the field of economics, the public is focused towards the search for a new balance between the various, more autonomous parts of the own society. A process of new division of power is in progress.

In the current 'multicultural' society it is nonetheless hard to couple the old ideals of self-realization and freedom, emancipation and integration with the ones of equality and differentiation. In this manner freedom and integration are in danger of losing it out to the need for self-expression and 'sovereignty within the own community'. That sovereignty prompts, just as is the case between states, to permanent alertness and regulation of mutual traffic. If one wishes to view the political correctness positively, it can be said that it is a new form of diplomatic behavior for domestic purposes, and just elements can be detected in it: the words 'nigger' and 'Oriental' are *indeed* discriminating. In other words, it is possible to see the emergence of a new civility in it, a multicultural update for the code of conduct of old bourgeois propriety. The only disadvantage from an objective viewpoint is that every new euphemism is longer than the other: 'poor people' are now 'lesser paid', and so on. The

¹⁸⁷ Stanley Cohen, *Folk devils and moral panics*. Cambridge 1972, p 9.

¹⁸⁸ *De Volkskrant*, 9 April 1994.

¹⁸⁹ Joachim Fest, *Die schwierige Freiheit. Über die offene der offenen Gesellschaft*. Siedler. Berlin 1993, p 15.

advantage from an objective viewpoint is that peace is retained: *If you can't govern by force, you can do it by fraud.*

But is this not largely the result of escapism, of what Dutch scholar Wout Woltz in his lecture on freedom of the press called the 'craving for ignorance'?¹⁹⁰ And shall not this tendency, if the extremist among the worshippers of politically correct get their way, be at the expense of freedom and the truth?

I am afraid the answer has to be affirmative. Because all these regulations of language, image and behavior seem to satisfy a need for new truths and guidelines. Like communism, and before that the church, had supplied. Author Doris Lessing was convinced in 1993 that 'now that the carpet of communism has been pulled from under their feet, millions of people, perhaps without realizing it themselves, are passionately looking for new dogmas'.¹⁹¹

Disillusion

The demise of ideologies that promised a better world, the visual take-over with fragments of hard reality and the understanding that drastic changes are on the way, indeed make it alluring to retreat oneself from the political reality. Some blame the idealists of former days of being immensely disappointed by now and insulted by reality, yet still in a desire to bring about change. That is why for them the images and words that represent this reality are supposed to matter more.¹⁹²

There is undoubtedly a lot of truth in that. However, the disillusion of the 'generation of 68' is merely one side of the medal. The left-wing politically correct activists may indeed wish to create a sort of 'linguistic Lourdes', where the nasty and unfortunate are exorcized by an immersion into the water of euphemism.¹⁹³ However, it is the state that first started this, with the baptism of the Ministry of War to Defense, 'Third World' to 'developing countries', 'cutback' to 'restructuring' and so on.

That communism was largely based on lies needs no further elaboration. But in the West too governments have substantially contributed to the devaluation of the notion of truth. The Warren Report that tried to prove that Oswald was indisputably the sole assassin was not believed. During the Vietnam War a lot of lies were told, no less than in the later Gulf War.

In his book *The Culture of Narcissism*, Christopher Lasch detected in the late seventies a growing pessimism throughout the leading circles in the West. The bourgeois society seemed to have used up its reserve of constructive forces. According to Lasch, liberalism, the political theory of the rising middle class, was no longer capable to explain world affairs, let alone give meaning to it. Modern economy and social order lost their transparency and purpose. While the grudge against the meaningless roles that modern industry dictated, gave people the feeling of 'non-authenticity'. Therefore liberalism reached its logical end point, total individualism, and became a legitimization for war of all against all.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁰ W. Woltz, *Met de handen voor de ogen. Over het verlangen naar onwetendheid* (With the hands before the eyes. On the craving for ignorance). Issued by NRC Handelsblad 1994.

¹⁹¹ *De Volkskrant*, 31 July 1992.

¹⁹² Cf *Der Spiegel* vol 48, 11 July 1994.

¹⁹³ Hughes, op cit, p 18.

¹⁹⁴ Christopher Lasch, *The culture of narcissism. American life in an age of diminishing expectations*. Warner Books. New York 1979, p 18,21.

Because of liberalism, dada and commercials 'presenting yourself in every-day life' became the most important task. Even more, the creation of an individual identity was elevated to the highest form of creativity. Nowadays it seems like everyone is permanently practicing a TV-performance.

The embellishment of reality by euphemisms and lies reached its provisional peak with the arrival of Ronald Reagan, who was extraordinarily endowed with the talent for merging political leadership with image-control. Therefore, the current battle for the image, certainly in the United States but also to a slight lesser degree here, can be regarded as part of a reaction to twelve years of right-wing rule.¹⁹⁵

The swing from one extreme to the other, especially in the United States, is a normal phenomenon that comes together with this. 'Multiculturalism' is a derailment from the emancipation movement because it makes a religion out of 'difference'. Race, ethnicity and sex are elevated to the sole components of identity, while the bourgeois components like faith and character are put in the trash.

With that we return to Jean –Jacques Rousseau, who was of the opinion that our moral salvation is to be achieved by the restoration of authentic moral interaction with ourselves', and to J.G. Herder who added to this that every man (every group, every people) has their own way of being human.

The difference is that there is barely a church, nation or political order to, at least partially, take over the responsibility of humans. Though the more responsibility someone has to carry, the sooner he will be ashamed, feel worthless, empty and ugly. This is certainly true for sexuality, the arena of so many artistic battles.

'Plastic sexuality'

As it is liberated from the automatism of reproduction, sexuality has become intrinsically connected to identity. This 'plastic sexuality' (Anthony Giddens) has also put an end to the dominance of male experience, to the rule of the phallus. Would the 'Symbol of fertility' statue in the polder be tolerated if it was erected today?

Sex is now democratized, and at the same time it is the only remaining passion that can possibly restore the lost contact with the natural and supernatural. But sex alone cannot satisfy all those functions and desires. The result is as much frustration as arousal. All these factors play a role in the battle about the question how or whether sexuality should be displayed in public.¹⁹⁶

The difficulty with the elevation of identity and emotion to the summum bonum is after all that there are no terms, which these feelings can be evaluated with. That is precisely the reason why so much discontent is focused towards public art and culture. This kind of discontent is not only the easiest to transform into action, but also does not need to be, even less than political and economic questions, rationally motivated.

----- **Picture: Political graffiti, Lunteren** -----

¹⁹⁵ Hughes, op cit, p 148.

¹⁹⁶ Cf Anthony Giddens, *The transformation of intimacy. Sexuality, love & eroticism in modern societies*. Polity press, Cambridge 1992.

They are thus both short-term and long-term developments that together have brought some in the West to the conclusion that we have reached the end of the road: in the field of the arts (Arthur Danto), the end of history (Francis Fukuyama), or even the end of reality (*capo di tutti capi* Jean Baudrillard). Even though it useful not to take hyperventilating theorists like them too seriously, it can still be ascertained that in our society the good, democratic and artistic has been bothered by its own success. The society has secularized, democratized, equalized, modernized and supplied with arts everywhere. Because of this success the existing elites have not much left to offer.

Thorbecke

In the summer of 1994 a minor discussion erupted in the Dutch press about the question whether Thorbecke's¹⁹⁷ viewpoint – 'The arts is not a matter of government'- is, after 150 years, in need of revision, because, among other reasons, the state has such a large stake in the arts. The government Council for the Arts was self-evidently of the opinion that it need not: the evaluation of arts and culture should remain in the hands of commissions and experts, and the council will explain to society why a work is beautiful and good.¹⁹⁸

Can this viewpoint be sustained? While the government restricts its role on the field of public art to financing it, the Council for the Arts is succeeding less and less in explaining public art and getting it to be accepted. One conclusion is inevitable: if the situation remains like this, artistic freedom shall be restricted more and more by pressure groups with the thinnest skins but the strongest will and largest mouths.

Therefore, the government ought to find a way to turn this tide. Which way? Let us for now return to the parable of the polder.

¹⁹⁷ Johan Rudolf Thorbecke (1798 –1872) was the first Prime Minister of the Netherlands. In 1848, he supervised the revision of the Dutch constitution, giving less power to the king, and more to the parliament.

¹⁹⁸ *NRC Handelsblad*, 16 July 1994, 6 August 1994.

Epilogue

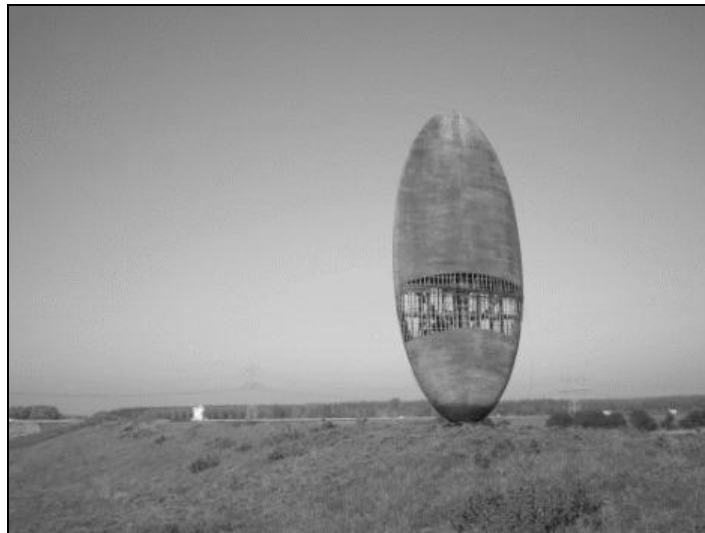
The key words in the story about the polder were selection, caution, benevolent despotism and fairly sharply defined art projects. I will leave aside the word heredity for now.

Is a stronger selection in the field of arts and culture necessary? Yes. The urge for equality and continuously increasing popularity of the occupation of artist has turned the word 'quality' into a suspicious term, a conspiracy by 'the elite' to remain in power. Thus everything became art and artists fell into the mercy of the welfare system. The result can be observed in the municipal deposits, where hundreds of thousands of works of art are stored that are unmarketable, not even for free.

If we take quality as a measure there is also, after forty years of 'one percent policy'¹⁹⁹, an inflation of works of art in the public space. But if we were to employ more stringent standards, who ought to be in charge of them? This would be cause for much discussion. Hence a suggestion: why not appoint an artistic 'bailiff' for the public space?

Of course the chance that a national bailiff of the arts will lead to 'state art' and 'state censorship' does exist and that would be dire because the same applies to the artistic field as it does with monoculture on agricultural fields: it depletes the soil. However, one should not exaggerate in fearing this. After all, has not there always been a government architect? The advantage would be that a bailiff of the arts is more and directly approachable as opposed to all those current arts commissions. And, just as important, they can be lashed out at for their vision regarding 'artistic quality'.

'Democracy's task in the field of art is to make the world safe for elitism'. Thus concludes Robert Hughes his book *The Culture of Complaint*.²⁰⁰ '...' Whether public art will enjoy popularity depends, besides on the artist, on the credibility of the assignment. The Tongue of Lucifer has become a sign of marking and has simultaneously risen far above that.



Picture: *The tongue of Lucifer*, Flevoland

If selection, quality, convincing assignment become the points of departure, the government will have more authority in defending the placed works of art against vandals and activists. As of yet the government leaves the judgment to the court, which often oblivious of what

¹⁹⁹ In the Netherlands, the 'one percent policy' dictates that one percent of the government's budget for construction must be allocated to expressive arts.

²⁰⁰ Hughes, op cit, p 201.

arts or 'public virtue' actually are and therefore tend to decide according to the public opinion. If the state wishes to survive, it has to exercise a social, moral and intellectual authority on society. Of course, nowadays that is easier said than done. The first step could be to show more political courage in the matter of arts, even though artistic controversies undoubtedly will keep resulting in uneasy alliances and unsatisfactory compromises.

The *Arnhem* city authorities have had the courage to, despite the public protest, go through with the already taken decision of purchasing Mark Quinn's shower cabin. The Amsterdam authorities did not have that courage after the commotion in the case of the 'strong women' by Van Lamsweerde. They are still hanging stained under the bridge. This 'caution-in-retrospect' is a fateful sign for the destiny of artistic and political freedom in the multicultural society that the Netherlands has become.

Naturally, one solution would be to, as in the parable of the polder, not to take arts and culture as seriously as is the case at present. There are few signs, however, that indicate this will happen.

VII The Politics of Nostalgia

or

The Janus-face of modern society

*Introduction*²⁰¹

Janus is the god of our times, like he was that of the Romans. In Roman mythology Janus used to be the god of entrances and exits, a deity of beginnings and endings, the god of travel, navigation and communication, the god of going away and returning. His appearance was that of a head with a face on each side of it. Janus was able to look forward and backward, to overlook the interior and the exterior of the house, to see what was in the past, to see what's coming next. Janus, even more important than Jupiter, was the god of time itself.²⁰² The first month of the year is named after him.

Janus has not been treated right in modern western societies. Dictionaries explain the word 'Janus-faced' not only as double-faced but, figuratively speaking, as 'hypocritical', and 'insincere'.²⁰³ But modern society has, since World War II, increasingly taken on the character of a Janus-faced society. In the last decades it is also increasingly corresponding with the manic-depressive character of society. Because, after the Cold War, society has lost a clear sense of meaning and direction nostalgia has become an eye-catching trait of this new character. The question is whether nostalgia is, sociologically speaking, the same as in individual cases: only the safety valve to cope with the continuous change in life, this time toward a turbo-capitalistic, bureaucratic and revolutionary high-tech future.

The starting point of this essay will be that *The Sixties* were the cradle of *Janus-Man*. The conclusion of this essay will be that the 'politics of nostalgia' that became the trademark of Western society since the Seventies turned this ideal of going forward and backward at the same time into a highly successful political and cultural formula.

The question whether there is too much nostalgia and too little thinking of the future and 'real', critical knowledge about the past is a complicated one, and above all a normative and political question. The actual debates in Western countries about introducing or restoring a canon of literature and history demonstrate this. Isn't it possible that it is the relation between past-present-future itself that is suffering from wounds and trauma's? And if so, is there reason for healing this strained relation? As is the case with all the medical theories on melancholy and depression, so it is with nostalgia about 'the lightening past' and with the problems that arise out of the highly emotional confrontation with 'the burning past': it is all about trying to find or restore a balance, in the brain, in the body, in politics and in society as a whole.

Nostalgia and Western Civilization

When does nostalgia occur in history? As a component of the even more nebulous notion of melancholy, it was there ever since Greek philosophical writing. Melancholy has even been called a central cultural idea, 'focusing, explaining, and organizing the way people saw the

²⁰¹ I like to express my warm thanks to Gülçin Körpe for translating the English text into German.

²⁰² F. Guirand and A.-V. Pierre, Roman Mythology. In: New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology (Introduction by Robert Graves). Hamlyn. London ea: 1975 (1st ed. 1959), 199-201.

²⁰³ The Concise Oxford Dictionary. Oxford University Press. Oxford: 1976, 578.

world and one another and framing social, medical, and epistemological norms'. (Jenifer Radden).²⁰⁴

Some say the nostalgic sentiment partakes of one of the great dialectical processes of Western civilization in general: the ceaseless tension of change vs. stability, innovation vs. reaffirmation, new vs. old, utopia vs. golden age. Its role in this dialectic is then that of a brake on 'the headlong plunge into the future' (Fred Davis).²⁰⁵

According to Norbert Elias *homo clausus* is the characteristic of the European identity since the 16th century: man isolated from the rest, and that fact periodically caused moods of cosmic loneliness and nostalgia.²⁰⁶

For others the Enlightenment, and the French Revolution in particular, was the starting point of outbursts of nostalgia. In the emptiness or historical vacuum created by these events an idyllic, pre-historical, and quasi-eternal and quasi-natural past came into being, a past ideally suited for idealization. A past we like to yearn for nostalgically and dream about 'in order to momentarily forget the ugly and unnatural historical world of modernity' (Frank Ankersmit).²⁰⁷ After the guillotine and Napoleon, the previous world seemed remote – 'hence to many doubly dear'. Industrialization and forced migration pushed millions into social circumstances radically unlike those of their childhood. 'Romantics sheltered from devastating change in remembered or invented images of early times'. (David Lowenthal)²⁰⁸

In practice the age of progress was not stoppable. The history of the West became, again, richer in new and revolutionary beginnings than any other. Maybe Ankersmit is right in assuming that Western civilization was the unparalleled master in the production of myth and has the quality to shelter more myths than any other. He takes this assumption a step further. 'The more history we have, the more successful, 'objective', and scientific it is, the more myth we will have as well. Myth is history's alter ego, accompanying it like a shadow wherever it goes: indeed, paradoxically, myth is the best measure of history's own success'.²⁰⁹ Although he talks of myths, it is clear that nostalgia has all sorts of qualities that resemble those of mythology.

Whether nostalgia is inherent to Western civilization or whether it only provides the mood for 'momentarily' forgetting the present, the general idea is that Modernism was carried by a dominant belief in progress and the future. This belief stayed dominant into the second half of the 20th century.

Two events, Auschwitz and Hiroshima, would slowly but severely erode the era of Modernism. A lot of things that have been happening since, show typical 'anti-Modern' traits and are an expression of dissatisfaction about the way in which society since the 'second industrial revolution' had developed. Looking back on more than two centuries of history of Western civilization since the Enlightenment, at the dawn of the new millennium, we could conclude that little was left of the once so optimistic judgements that were made during the era of the Enlightenment.

²⁰⁴ Jenifer Radden (ed.), *The Nature of Melancholy. From Aristotle to Kristeva*. Oxford University Press. Oxford 2000, VII.

²⁰⁵ Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday. A sociology of nostalgia*. The Free Press. New York/London: 1979, 116.

²⁰⁶ Quoted in: John Durham Peters, *Speaking into the air. A history of the idea of communication*. University of Chicago Press. Chicago/London: 1999, 179. See also: Norbert Elias, *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation*. Suhrkamp. Frankfurt: 1976 (1st ed. 1939).

²⁰⁷ Frank Ankersmit, *Sublime Historical Experience*. Stanford University Press. Stanford: 2005, p366; David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge: 1985, 8

²⁰⁸ Lowenthal, *opcit.*

²⁰⁹ Ankersmit, *opcit.*, 367.

After 1945 a sense of deep anxiety and alarm surfaced, although the necessity of rebuilding the destructed countries and the confrontation with the Cold War restored the belief in progress, science and industrialization, almost obsessively. The authorities, and almost all of the populations, were more future-minded than ever, as new technological museums and the world exhibitions during the fifties demonstrated. The year 2000 was a magical notion for urban planning. One could view on display impressive scale-models inspired by 'the way we shall live in the year 2000'. Visionary planners regarded the future almost as 'another country, that one might visit like Italy'. (Reyner Banham)²¹⁰

In this atmosphere after the Second World War nostalgia was viewed as it was during the Napoleonic times, as a feeling of -sometimes fatal- homesickness that particularly inflicted soldiers and youngsters like boarding house students. Probably because of the rapture in time the War represented, nostalgia changed into a longing for times past, real or imagined. The new meaning of the word only crept into the vocabulary slowly, because this feeling was not very popular. Almost everybody, at least in Western Europe, wanted to forget the times of economic depression and war and create a better life. Only some of the older people complained about new products that were no longer 'of pre-war quality'.

It was only after the economic restoration was accomplished, and most of the Europeans were better off than they had ever been before (late fifties, early sixties) that people started to look back on the war, on the trauma's, and on the unthinkable meaning of the invention of the atom bomb.

The origin of post-war nostalgia: the counter culture

Nevertheless, in America John F. Kennedy won the elections of 1960 because he looked young and promised the moon before the end of the decade, a promise that was fulfilled. But before that milestone-landing took place in 1969 the general consciousness already was changing radically towards another view on the real needs of *the global village*. A symbolic turning point, and one that is crucial in this essay on Janus-faced society, was the event of the first world-wide live television show broadcasted in 1967. The show was called *One World*, on which The Beatles did a live-performance of their new single *All you need is love*. That song reflected the spirit of the young, the heart of the *counter culture* that was spreading at high speed through the West.

The counter culture had all the traits of a revolt or rebellion, and was carried by the young upper-middle class generation. It was not a revolt of the deprived but of the well-educated. It was the 'revolt of the unoppressed' (Frank Musgrove).²¹¹ Its birthplace was California, the richest society on earth. It produced a counter culture marked by frugality and low consumption, at least in its own perception. More significant was the rejection of western civilization in general. The idea that this civilization was inhumane, repressive, alienating, materialistic and violent, and that the freedom it was boasting all the time, was nothing more than an ideological appearance, belonged to the standard complaints of the supporters of this counter culture.

Although one might argue that the climate of the sixties was a legacy the Enlightenment decisively had added to European conscience, in social terms we can characterize the 20th century as 'truly Rousseauist'. Not only because the notion 'social contract' puts an ambiguous stamp on all contemporary political theories, but also because

²¹⁰ Quoted in: Lowenthal, *opcit.*, 3.

²¹¹ Frank Musgrove, *Ecstasy and Holiness. Counter Culture and the Open Society*. 1974. 84ff.

the psychological and educational revolution Rousseau created and his critical stance and his hammering on the principle of social equality.²¹²

Although the counter culture of the sixties was a new concept, it's occurrence was no more strange than that of the Counter Reformation and the Counter Enlightenment (*Gegenaufklärung*: a protest movement against a perverted, artificial and 'unnatural' religion or civilization). But before the atom bomb on Hiroshima, the intensity, the scale and impact of this new protest would have been impossible, whatever demographic, economic or educational developments played their part in the protest of this decade.

Because of the political and intellectual implications – de-modernisation and pacifism, instead of progress and militarism – and the recognizable appearance of some of the protesters – hippies dressed as beggar-boeddhist – the farewell to Voltaire, Science and Progress and the return to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's ideals of nature and harmony were immediately the subject of numerous studies. The whole concept of modernisation seemed at stake. Rationalization, individualization and atomization of life, mechanization and automation of the process of production, bureaucratization of the state and corporate business, depersonalization of inter human relations and the obscurity of a social structure in general are the main characteristics and effects of this process of modernization.

Like modernization, the term de-modernization is a container notion for anything that slows down the process of 'progress' [modernization], that tries to reroute the direction of the system since the industrial revolution, that tries to re-evaluate norms and aims. Conservatives, Social- and Christian-Democrats have in their own ways tried to do this during most of the 20th century, but never in quite such a radical manner as the hard core intellectuals of the counter culture. They were advocates of revolution, the writers on more sex and less authority like Wilhelm Reich and Herbert Marcuse, the writers on the wondrous benefits of the new electronic media like media guru Marshall McLuhan and the writers who suggested violence be used to overthrow *The System*, like James Baldwin and Norman Mailer.²¹³

That the counter culture failed in lifting the structures of society out of its hinges, was already clear once the sixties were over. For some of the members of the sixties-generation this fact alone was reason for getting into a nostalgic mood, although it became fashionable to give these feelings an ironic or quasi progressive postmodern twist, now loving camp and kitsch. (Linda Hutcheon).²¹⁴ But, as we all know, irony is the rose that blossoms on the grave of lost illusions.

The question here is what remained of the convictions of this counter culture, and what part of it already at that time had a Janus-faced attitude towards the actual world and the regretted one. To understand what the remains of this counter culture are we have to summarize the common traits of it. According to several early seventies-writers these were as follows:

- a. the rejection of the prevailing system of norms and behaviour, the 'established society';
- b. the rejection of external authorities in the name of individual freedom, self-decision and autonomy;

²¹² See: R. F. Beerling, *Het cultuurprotest van Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Studies over het thema pathos en nostalgie*. Van Loghum Slaterus. Deventer: 1977. Especially Chapter X *Tegencultuur* (Counter Culture) is used here.

²¹³ Paul Johnson, *Intellectuals*. Harper & Row. New York: 1989.

²¹⁴ Linda Hutcheon, *Irony, Nostalgia and the Postmodern* (1997), <http://www/library.utoronto.ca/utel/criticism/hutchinp.html>.

- c. a fundamental trust in humanity because of its original or natural goodness and blaming the loss or corruption of it on society;
- d. a condemnation of hypocrisy in the name of purity, sincerity and authenticity
- e. openness, transparency, and intimacy in all human relations;
- f. anti-urbanism, 'naturalism', 'ruralization';
- g. critical or rejecting attitude towards science, and of intellectualism, rationalism, positivism and objectivism in general.²¹⁵

The main dimensions of these debates were: freedom vs dependency, inner-directed vs outer-directed, subjectivity vs objectivity and transparency vs complexity.

Because the followers of the counter culture aspired to restore everything that had been lost or forgotten, their movements were restorative, reactionary, nostalgic. Things in particular need of restoring were relationships: with god, the absolute, nature, the self, the other, etc. As far as this new irrational, spontaneous attitude was concerned it was time itself that had to be eliminated through closer contact with the eternal or absolute. The praised practice of sexuality had this function of escape, of losing all memory of time, just as the praised practice of taking drugs – LSD, marihuana; XTC much later – had. In this sense the underlying principles of the counter culture, whatever fierce anti-church, especially anti-Vatican, stance they took, were predominantly ethical-religious, like Rousseau had been.

If the members of the counter revolution experienced society as confusing and found it had to be rejected because it always was promising freedom, but never delivering it, it proved an almost unsolvable problem for the authorities, especially during the Cold War during which the West was defending freedom against the authoritarianism of the East. This is why 'the establishment' got pretty nervous and uncertain about the counter culture movement. The *silent majority* kept silent for a long time because they were too busy earning money, socially emancipating themselves, and also because they just weren't as experienced in talking and theorizing than most of the sons and daughters of the well-educated class were.

For now, we can conclude that the hippie-movement was the first large-scale outbreak of post-war nostalgia. But it is important to note that the flowerchildren, the *mystics* or *retreatists* (communes), were only on the fringe of counter culture movement as a whole, like the early ecologists and anti-nuclear demonstrators, and the same goes for the activist, militant and violent wing, the Black Panthers in America and the Rote Armee Fraktion in West-Germany.

The 'middle-of-the-road'-members of the counter culture movement were 'only' revolutionary in terms of creating new lifestyles for themselves and breaking new grounds in the fields of arts, culture and advertising within the existing framework of Western democratic society. They wore a Janus-faced mask from the start.

They didn't reject modern capitalist society, in which the media and the cultural industries were emerging at all. It was *their* new world, it was *their* way of changing culture, and they were getting rich at the same time. Although The Beatles in 1967 idealistically sang *All you need is love*, ever since 1962 they had made an arrangement with their rivals The Rolling Stones about the release dates for their records. Bringing out a new potential no. 1

²¹⁵ Frank Musgrove, opcit., John Passmore, *The Perfectibility of Man*. Duckworth. London: 1970; R.M. Kanter, *Commitment and Community. Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective*. Harvard University Press. Cambridge: 1972; Peter Berger, *The Homeless Mind: modernization and consciousness*. Vintage Books. New York: 1974.

hit at the same time would cost them both money. After all, it wasn't just love, but also money that made the world go round.

The Politics of Nostalgia

In history it is not unusual for nostalgia, or a moral reaction against the present, to go hand in hand with a drive for modernization. Early fascism in Italy was linked to the futurist movement, of which Benito Mussolini was an admirer. Fascism in Italy and elsewhere was carried and promoted by 'states with two faces'. (Tom Paxton).²¹⁶

As for Hitler-Germany, its Janus-faced character is now widely accepted. The co-existence of the dream of becoming the leading nation in terms of industry and technology (Autobahn, television, missiles, etc.) and the dream of returning to the lost Walhalla of the Middle Ages is coined by Jeffrey Herf as 'reactionary modernism'.²¹⁷ Goebbels talked of 'iron romanticism', and with this phrase he not only expressed his own cultural *Leitmotiv*, but that of many Germans. The German writer Thomas Mann, while in exile in America, toward the end of the war wrote, 'This was the characteristic and threatening thing, the mixture of robust modernism, competitive progressivism and the dream of the past: the highly technologized romanticism'.²¹⁸ Later social historical studies have established that Germany under the nazi's had been modernized extensively in spite of its reactionary, pre-modern and racist ideology.²¹⁹

Probably the scholars who wrote their analyses on the counter culture in the early seventies, were too impressed by the shock of the new and the different to discern this double face of much of the sixties generation. Now, about 40 years later and a lot more knowledge of its guru's, it is easier to see this. With the benefit of hindsight we can easily tell that the way the counter cultural movement developed from the sixties on was impressively dominated by the key elements of modernism: money, technology and organization.

Focusing on the political uses of the sixties-born nostalgia, it has been used in an incredible successful way. By Reagan and Bush in America, Thatcher (and Blair) in the United Kingdom, Kohl in Germany, Walesa in Poland, Havel in Tszechoslovakia, and Fortuyn in the Netherlands. The leftwing movement in the West thanks its demise to its linear way of thinking, first advocating a one way street to a better future, then, in disarray, advocating the status-quo of the welfare state, becoming simple conservatives, and as one-dimensional as they once were.

The criticism that politicians like Reagan, Thatcher and Kohl were right-wing reactionaries, may be correct, but their importance is derived from the fact that they certainly had a vision of the future, and at least in economical and social affairs were true revolutionaries.

After having won the elections in May 1979 Margaret Thatcher said: 'Where there is discord, may we bring harmony'. But already in the same year she was dubbed the *Iron Lady*, and she liked it. 'You need a touch of steel. Otherwise you become like Indian rubber'. She

²¹⁶ Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*. Allen Lane 2004 (used here: *De antamonie van het fascisme*, Amsterdam: 2005, 139ff.

²¹⁷ Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism. Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich*. Cambridge: 1984, 217ff.

²¹⁸ Thomas Mann, *Deutschland und die Deutschen*, in: *Essays*, vol.2. Politik, Frankfurt am Main: 1977, 295.

²¹⁹ See: Peter Reichel, *Der schöne Schein des Dritten Reiches. Faszination und Gewalt des Faschismus*. Carl Hanser Verlag. München/Wien: 1991.

brought into practice what she had promised, being raised according to the rules of *The Grocer's Daughter*: 'Pennies don't fall from heaven – they have to be earned here on earth'.²²⁰

In a 1983 radio-interview she evoked the virtues of the past that had formed her and made her tick: 'I was brought up by a Victorian Grandmother. We were taught to work jolly hard. We were taught to prove yourself; we were taught self reliance; we were taught to live within our income. You were taught that cleanliness is next to Godliness. You were taught self respect. You were taught always to give a hand to your neighbour. You were taught tremendous pride in your country. All of these things are Victorian Values. They are also perennial values. You don't hear so much about these things these days, but they were good values and they led to tremendous improvements in the standard of living'.²²¹

Small wonder that she didn't believe in the cradle-to-grave welfare state, let alone in the solidarity of either the trade unions or the counter culture of the Sixties. 'There is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families'.²²² To label this statement as purely reactionary is inadequate. We can just as well consider this vision revolutionary anarchistic, or highly modern, as anonymity and individualism are regarded as the key elements of modern society.

Thatcher's policies included reduced state control, privatisation of state-owned industries, hostility toward the 'dependency culture' of the welfare state, sale of public housing to tenants, and a reduction of trade union power.

Maybe it was nostalgia for the Victorian Age that drove Thatcher. But she brought about a radical change of society and economics that didn't actually bring back the Victorian Age – with its aristocracy and 'enlightened conservatism'. More the opposite. Thatcher put an end to both of these traditional characteristics of conservatism, as Immanuel Wallerstein has observed: 'She ousted every last aristocrat from power and turned the party over to snarling nouveau-riches entrepreneurs and upwardly mobile pseudo-yuppies. The Conservative Party will never be the same again, nor will the British aristocracy. Bye-bye feudalism!'²²³ All those marvellous Merchant-Ivory movies and historical romantic novels today still give us a clear insight into the way this society operated culturally and socially. Thatcher used nostalgia for political ends, and intensified a new wave of nostalgia as a result.

Just after Thatcher Ronald Reagan came into power in the United States, to the bewilderment of many liberal commentators and voters, after using a simple but apparently very effective election campaign slogan: *New Dawn in America*. The motto on the campaign-buttons read: *Let's make America great again*. For the country Reagan's rhetoric was a ceremony that recalled the golden age of economic prosperity and military success before Vietnam, Watergate, civil disturbances, the oil shock, the hostage crisis, and other disorders. Though some associated him only with Hollywood, 'Reagan was in fact supremely well equipped to preach this national revival' (Frances Fitzgerald).²²⁴

National revival meant going back to 'the good old days', and at the same time striding forwards baldly, with trillion-dollar military projects like SDI, in the media dubbed as

²²⁰ See: John Campbell, Margaret Thatcher. Vol. 1. *The Grocer's Daughter*. Jonathan Cape. London: 2000.

²²¹ Quoted in: *As I said to Denis: The Margaret Thatcher Book of Quotations*. Iain Dale (ed.).

²²² *Op cit.*

²²³ Immanuel Wallerstein, *Commentary*, no. 95, August 15, 2002.

²²⁴ See: Frances Fitzgerald, *Way Out There in the Blue: Reagan, Star Wars and the End of the Cold War*; James Combs, *The Reagan Range: The Nostalgic Myth in American Politics*. Bowling Green University Popular Press. Bowling Green: 1993.

Star Wars. So, the cinematic scripted Reagan - cowboy, farmer, jokester - was also an ideologist and a future-oriented visionary.

After his death in June 2004, America was mourning, even those who had hated his politics. Why? Everybody knew that those 80's were not exactly those peaceful, harmonious times, as they now liked to remember. Maybe because they longed for something else. As Ted Anthony phrased it: 'The death of a statesman like Ronald Reagan puts into relief this idea that America is famous for being nostalgic for its own old-fashioned notion of forward thinking'. This was definitely a different kind of nostalgia than that of the sixties. In fact, it tried to 'undo' the sixties' *anything goes*-mentality.

In West-Germany the paradox of being nostalgic and having your mind on the future at the same time was displayed by the conservative Christian-Democratic Chancellor Helmut Kohl during the eighties, resulting in the Reunification of the two Germany's in 1990. The progressive Social-Democrats wanted to maintain the status-quo, acknowledging communist East-Germany, out of fear of escalating the Cold War and out of hope one day a German 'socialist regime with a human face' might develop on the other side of the Elbe. So, Kohl, holding a doctorate in history, was holding ideas that were as hard-boiled as those of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, by saying 'Reunification will come, as sure as the water in the river Rhine floats to the sea'. His stone-hard conviction and longing for German unity made him the strongest promoter of political change. In history-heavy Germany maddening dialectics and coexistence of radical nostalgic and radical renewal ambitions at the same time were nothing new, as we saw before in this essay.

Further East and South, in Poland and Tszechoslovakia, nostalgia and renewal were able to go hand in hand quite well, to the surprise of many Western European progressive and pacifist political activists. Lech Walesa, a devoted catholic, sought the active help of the 1978 chosen Polish pope John Paul II to overthrow the Eastern European variant of the Enlightenment, the communist regime, to restore the old nation-state Poland used to be before Hitler and Stalin occupied it.

Vaclav Havel did things in another, more humanistic manner, succeeding to overthrow communism with a *Velvet Revolution*. To express his gratitude to the people for making it a success and because the counterculture of the sixties seemed to be his ideal society, he invited the sixties pop group The Velvet Underground. But it only took two more years before Havel accepted that his country, a construct of Versailles after World War I, was to be split up in two ethnic nation states, Tszechia and Slovakia. This was not progressive conciliation within a unifying Europe but rather old fashioned nationalism.

Nostalgia and Democratization

Now we will turn to the legacy of the sixties in explaining the widespread nostalgia ever since. For us to be able to understand it, ideally we would have to write an integral social history of the post-war period. To avoid this trap of oversimplification, we will confine ourselves to highlighting some of the tendencies that came to light with a bang during the sixties: the predominance of popular culture, the ideal of democratic equality and the ideal of 'communication' as such. We will leave aside the well-known individual factor of being unhappy with the present state the world has gotten to that causes nostalgia. Popular culture, democracy and communication have become factors that, so it seems, have become permanent promoters of nostalgia.

Let's talk about the oldest phenomenon, that of democratization, first. The legacy of the sixties, the consciousness of individual autonomy and self-fulfilment, is now considered a

strongly democratized life style. The use of the personalized media (mobile, dvd, games, internet), and the influence of the wider public on the content of the mass media, have produced a popular media culture that seems to be a combination of the sixties and, at least in Europe, a revolutionary new predominance of money-making as the biggest driving force of it all. The democratization of the once elitist media, that started already in about 1800, has become almost total.²²⁵

We've already established that democracy and the desire to communicate are two of the most important societal ideals that were left to us by the sixties. So, if more people than ever before can communicate their own ideas and cultural products through the internet, if they can participate in the national quiz or live talk-show every nation has turned into, and if they can enjoy whatever form of popular culture they like all day and all night, the big question is why so many people seem to suffer from depression, and why nostalgia, after all these decades apparently is still on the rise? We might say that this paradox is the consequence of democratization in general and of the legacy of the sixties as well.

Happiness is as vague a notion as melancholy and nostalgia are. Research into this state of mind has to be mistrusted because of this, and because of all the socially obliged answers people are inclined to give on the subject. But a lot of research points out that in many countries at least two thirds of the population thinks itself to be happy or very happy, and this number hasn't changed much over the course of decades.²²⁶

We do know that the reasons for happiness have changed considerably. Before the sexual revolution many people said that slow material progress, having a relationship, children and strong family bonds were the most important. And that religion was the main cause for a long lasting feeling of happiness. Now we know that what makes people happy is first and foremost a matter of personality, a result of nature and nurture, the former being more decisive than the latter.

Only a very few people will be at odds with the idea of macro socio-political developments having a serious impact on groups, or even, to take it a step further, determining 'the mood of the nation'. In societies with a rigid hierarchy, and social positions that almost were hereditary, most people simply accepted their fate. In America from the start, and in Europe since 1945, the situation has become quite different. On the one hand we have created a very unequal society in which a lot of wealth (including fame) is in the hands of the happy few. On the other hand political democratization was given an enormous boost (culturally) in the sixties. Since the arrival of commercials on television in Western Europe the media tells us we have just as many privileges as anybody else. And advertising tells us we are in need of all the things that used to be owned by the happy few.

As a result periodically recurring feelings of grudge and unhappiness are surfacing, caused by this so called 'revolution of the rising expectations'. This dissatisfaction is the result of the ambiguous heritage of the sixties and typical for the post-modernist movement.

What is left of all the great ambitions of the pretentious counter culture of the sixties? In fact, quite a lot. The call for individualism, autonomy, authenticity, subjectivism, openness, intimacy of human relations, the critical judgement of science and economical growth have in large parts of the population of the Western world grown into a personal

²²⁵ Henri Beunders, 'The People Conquer the Media. An Edifying Dumbing Down', in: *Accounting for the Past: 1650-2000*. Vol. 5 of Dutch Culture in a European Perspective .V. (D.W. Fokkema and F. Grijzenhout, eds.) (NWO-project) (Pallgrave MacMillan/Van Gorcum) Assen and Basingstoke/New York 2004, 297-316.

²²⁶ Michael W. Eysenck, *Happiness. Facts and Myths*. Erlbaum. East Sussex 1990, 2.

ideology. The value of intuition, spontaneity, self-knowledge, breaking taboos, play, recreation, directness, intimacy, ecstasy and free time, in short, total self-fulfilment in personal and sexual matters is still appreciated. A wide range of popular television shows and magazines is devoted to the ways by which one can realize them.

In the same manner we must sum up the values of the once scorned modernist culture, and we will see that many of them prevail today as well. To name but a few: technology, discipline, organization, performance, competition, labour/effort, power, force and repression. The characteristics of the modernized human being are: businesslike, impersonal, alienation, complexity, indirect, antagonistic. And in terms of tendencies and ambitions in society: scaling-up, centralization, exploitation of nature, rationalization, objectivism, atomization, institutionalization, expertise, education, abundance, careerism, materialism, fragmentation, urbanization.

What safely can be said about all these modernist and sixties values is that post-modern man is trying to combine a lot of them, not in the least because the corporations people work for demands it. If there's a hand full of key psycho-social processes that distinguish the last half century from the preceding one, they all start with an 'I': intensifying, individualization, informalization, information and internationalization.

It is clear for all to see: money, careerism and personal public success have become more important than ever. Ever since the eighties those values have increasingly become the Holy Trinity of daily life. Even in the expanding cultural industries and the 'new economy', where freedom and creativity are supposed to be the key factors, the dominant traits are those of the old capitalist industries: efficiency, automation, organization and marketing. Not only in the state institutions but also in the world of free enterprise, bureaucracy and strict social rules of behaviour are the dominant characteristics.

Little wonder that in this rat-race society the sixties-ideals have to be preserved for the after office hours, at home or outdoors. Apart from the serious threats and disorders in the world, it is this Janus-face attitude of modern man in daily life – strict and disciplined at the office, and celebrating free time *en masse*, whether operating multimedia machines at home or participating in mass spectacles outdoors – that causes so much uncertainty about the real identity of modern man and modern society.

What is the consequence of this 'split-personality' situation for nostalgia? Let's quote Fred Davis's view of 1979. Nostalgia is 'a distinctive way of relating our past to our present and future and is, like long-term memory, reminiscence and daydreaming, deeply implicated in the sense of who we are, what we are about, and whither we go. Nostalgia is one of the means we employ in the never ending work of constructing, maintaining, and reconstructing our identities'.²²⁷ And the nice result of it, he says, is that in a nostalgic mood the glorification of the past always wins from the complaints about the present. Otherwise we would succumb to melancholy or depression. One of the functions of nostalgia is to ward off these serious illnesses. That nostalgia is not the memory of the real past, is a cliché. It is as Davis writes: 'Nostalgia is memory with the pain removed'.²²⁸

The problem now, a quarter of a century later, is whether modern man still has only *one* identity to keep alive or to restore.

²²⁷ Fred Davis, *opcit.*, 31.

²²⁸ Fred Davis, *opcit.*, 37.

The dream of total communication

Nostalgia was promoted in personal life by the invention of the photo camera and later the film camera promoted nostalgia. Because images of personal events could now be stored, memories were very easily produced and reproduced. Once photography was invented, studio photography soon caught on everywhere in the West. Photographs were, as painted portraits had been before, a tangible record of existence, but much easier to manufacture.

By the spread of ready-made camera's a self composed visual autobiography became possible for the wider public from 1900 onward, as Nancy Martha West has demonstrated in her book *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia*. The central argument of her book is that 'Kodak taught amateur photographers to apprehend their experiences and memories as objects of nostalgia, for the easy availability of snapshots allowed people for the first time in history to arrange their lives in such a way that painful or unpleasant aspects were systematically erased'.²²⁹ Kodak's advertising purged domestic photography of all traces of sorrow and death. By this, an ethos of our present culture was given shape, based on the seeming contradiction of valuing the present moment and valuing a past that seems lost.²³⁰

The visual autobiography's at first wasn't used by writers and historians in their research of the real past. The common culture phenomenon only gained importance during the second half of the 20th century when virtually anybody could afford a camera. And thanks to the digitalization of photography, by camera or mobile phone, the creation of a self-felicitous nostalgia is taking on dramatic forms. What Daniel Boorstin noted decades ago seems now to have become a reality: 'We are flooded with disposable memoranda from us to ourselves'.²³¹

The interactivity of visual communication, a late follow-up of the telephone conversation, brings up the point of the ideal of total and successful interpersonal communication once again. This ideal of spontaneous and lasting spiritual unity through effective communication was expressed strongly by the mystics of the sixties-generation. In the fifties humanistic psychologists like Carl R. Rogers exalted communication to be the ultimate goal and the panacea for all interpersonal problems.

The sixties guru's of communication and modern media were Andy Warhol and Marshall McLuhan. McLuhan was strongly influenced by the church father of the middle-ages Thomas Aquinas and was especially interested in Thomistic angelology. Angels do not reason: they have immediate knowledge by intuition. McLuhan saw this as analogous to the instantaneous transmission of information by electric media. The new media, like radio and television, would eliminate the limitations imposed by space and time, would make man metaphorically angelic. The meaning of this metaphor, according to Tom Dilworth, was that by moving at the speed of light, electricity maximizes intelligibility. Like angels, we know everything and we know it quickly.²³²

In the late sixties McLuhan had become famous for slogans as '*the medium is the message*' and '*the global village*' and he was very optimistic and lyric about the electrified communicated future of the Disfeyfied world. As far as he was concerned the world had

²²⁹ Nancy Martha West, *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia*. University Press of Virginia. Charlottesville/London 2000, 1.

²³⁰ West, *opcit.*, 189

²³¹ Quoted in Lowenthal, *opcit.*, xvii.

²³² Tom Wilworth, in: *At the Speed of Light There Is Only Illumination*. A reappraisal of Marshall McLuhan. John Moss and Linda M. Morra (eds.) University of Ottawa Press, 2004, 17-36.

indeed become a village, with all the directness and intimacy of small town life. He even likened it to the mystical body of Christ – as the fulfilment of human destiny and purpose.

Celebrated in his time as a guru who had seen the glorious and peaceful future, McLuhan is now qualified as both progressive and conservative. Behind his mask of progressive and very sellable praise of modern media as the way to a unified mankind, intimates saw a reborn catholic with pre-modern and reactionary views on communists, Jews and women. If things got out of hand, he said in private, God (or the Vatican) would come to the rescue.²³³

What's important here is that this exalted vision about the paradise, the supposed result of the popular media culture, as far as the interpersonal communication is concerned could only lead to disillusion, and promote nostalgia.

McLuhan's guru-compatriot Andy Warhol in his own commercial ways brought into practice what McLuhan was preaching. By converging art, cinema and rock-music, he was pushing the boundaries of all-in-one communication to its limits. One of his famous slogans: 'In the future everybody will be world famous for fifteen minutes'. This ideal of totally democratized fame and fortune has not left Western society since. It's the driving force behind the *Big Brother* and *Idols*-like television contests ever since. But, as some of his biographers have pointed out, like McLuhan Andy Warhol privately counter-weighted all these spectacular visions of the transparent, commercial and interactive future by closing all doors behind him in his Manhattan apartment, and regularly visiting the nearby church.

These controversial hero's of the counter culture were full of ambiguity about the things they preached and practiced. They privately clung to pretty religious and/or reactionary views to survive the storm of change. Most of their followers only saw in them the positive possibilities of the new media culture.

But it should not come as a surprise that in the decades to follow, the hubris of total and successful communication, of fame and fortune for everybody, caused severe disillusionment.

Popular culture and nostalgia

The explosion of popular culture, the possibilities of digital storage and the infinite recycling of all its products, is now followed by the revolution of personal communication. This means that not only the personal biography is omnipresent, but for at least half a century, popular culture is as well.

In fact, the time we live in has probably been more 'widened' by the past than maybe ever before. The present, inclusive of the audio-visualized fictionalized past and all the fictional fantasy worlds of music, books and movies, has become our natural biotope.

With so many old musical used-to-be-rebels-now-kings still alive and going around, with all the new cultural products that are produced at ever higher speed, with classic texts of Shakespeare, Aristotle and other heroes of 2.000 years of high art available on the internet, we can say that, in the first decade of the 21st century we are surrounded by popular culture and have access to all the classics we want.

We might even say that the popular culture of the last half century forms an all-embracing dome around and above us, and that we live in it without sometimes even noticing it. Isn't life comparable to what was depicted in the movie *The Truman Show*, where the main character (actor Jim Carey) isn't even aware of the fact that he is living his life

²³³ Brian Fawcett, in: *At the Speed of Light There is Only Illumination*, 207-221.

under the invisible dome of studio lamps, to provide a sensational *real-live soap* for millions of tv-viewers? Seen in this exaggerated way a Baudrillard-like question arises about the external, media-driven signifiers of meaning to our domesticated lives and whether we realize how far this goes.

A lot of critics have lamented the overwhelming influence of the mediatized and fictionalized world on the daily life of the individual. It is suspected of promoting political inertia, apathy and obesity. This negative view can be countered by the fact that, since the early nineties at least, the longing for reality, out-door activities and a body felt community rose to spectacular heights as well. In stadiums, to feel the excitement of football or pop music, in disco's, to feel the excitement of the many heart beats per minute, in theatres to enjoy the big comeback-kid of popular culture, the musical, or in all the Disneyland-like attraction parcs.²³⁴

Most of these leisure activities have been criticized as being vulgar, childish and dominated by fictionalized feelgood nostalgia. But these activities might just as well be regarded as a healthy reaction to the isolated life people are to lead otherwise, with only their eyes and ears to enjoy a popular culture 24-hours a day, and often in total solitude.

The 'event society' (*die Erlebnis Gesellschaft*, Gerhard Schulz)²³⁵ is the reaction to this passive, one-way-traffic version of cultural and informational input. Sitting indoors may be satisfying for a long time but it won't be forever. The senses of touch, taste and smell have to be satisfied as well. For touch and taste there is not yet a satisfactory remote way of fulfilment. In short, the intimacy of other people's company appears to be a necessity of life, again, which can't be substituted.

In the context of this all encompassing popular culture the once one-dimensional concept of time-related nostalgia loses a lot of its former meaning. The concept has become more complex than ever before. 'And there's chaos in the kingdom' (Andrew Solomon).²³⁶

There are numerous ways of interpreting its meaning or importance. Some speak of the irony of it, others emphasize the permanent Kodak-feelings of nostalgia people create for themselves. Some study the ways industry and advertising use nostalgia, like for example Nike did in 1987 by using The Beatles-song *Revolution* to promote its *Revolution in Motion* advertising campaign.²³⁷ And others focus on the nostalgic function of sports in the sport halls of fame and museums in America.²³⁸

Once, when Davis wrote his book *Yearning for yesterday* (1979), feelings of nostalgia had less to do with how recent or distant these events are than with the way they contrast with events, moods, and dispositions of our present circumstances.²³⁹ Of course, there is still a lot of time-related nostalgia, certainly in Eastern Europe, considering the movie-hit *Goodbye, Lenin*. One might say that because of this ever heavier burden of historical culture we are almost physically leaning backwards, and are no longer, with our heads held high, sailing against the wind, toward the future.

²³⁴ Henri Beunders. Publieke Tranen. De drijfveren van de emotiecultuur. Contact. Amsterdam 2002.

²³⁵ Gerhard Schulze, *Die Erlebnis-Gesellschaft: Kultursoziologie der Gegenwart*. Campus Verlag. Frankfurt am Main: 1992.,

²³⁶ Andrew Solomon, *The Noonday Demon. An Atlas of Depression*. Scribner. New York: 2001, 12.

²³⁷ Jeremy Howell (1991), 'A revolution in motion. Advertising and the politics of nostalgia.' In: *Sociology of Sport*, 1991, 8,3 (September), 258-271.

²³⁸ E.E. Snyder, *Sociology of Nostalgia: sport halls of fame and museums in America*. In: *Sociology of Sport Journal* (SSJ), 1991, 8 (3), 228-238.

²³⁹ Fred Davis, *opcit.*, 11.

Right now, in early 21st century, nostalgia is going in all possible directions, of which the past is only one. Mainstream pop music predominantly is about love and romance, and functions as a permanent satisfier of nostalgic feelings. In cinema the last decade has seen dozens of blockbuster movies about far away pasts, *Alexander*, *Troy*, *Gladiator*, *Kingdom of Heaven*, *King Arthur*, etc. But at the same time, as was and will always be the case, sci-fi films like *Star Wars*, *The Terminator* and *The Matrix* were blockbusters as well. The same goes for the genre of fantasy, like *The Lord of the Rings* has proven. In popular literature it's the same picture. Historical novel-detectives like *The Da Vinci Code* or fantasy novels like *Harry Potter* provide all kinds of 'other worlds', present or future ones.

Of course, we could just simply regard all these products of popular culture as being nostalgic expressions. But nevertheless, by this we would stretch the concept of nostalgia. We can refer to it as escapism, a protest against *the disenchantment of the world* (Max Weber) and keep on worrying about the unpredictable future, or change the word nostalgia back to its original meaning of melancholy again.

Nostalgia has become the necessary half of the Janus-face of modern man, while the other face has its eyes on reality of today or tomorrow. The huge success of all the before mentioned books, music and movies, is not simply explained by the psychological necessity of 'momentarily' escaping the harsh realities of life. In the first place it is to be explained by the deeply rooted loss of direction and meaning of life itself since the sixties.

People are not just in search of forgetting, they are also actively in search of meaning and guidelines from all those fictionalized worlds of fantasy. And these norms and values are, in most cases, much more clear-cut and unambiguous than those of fifties existentialism with its *film noir* and open or down-right depressing endings.

What the Janus-faced political leaders are advocating in terms of returning to the morality of bygone times (to '*The way we never were*', Stephanie Coontz)²⁴⁰, is the crux of most of the present day popular culture, at least in movies and novels. Their lines of narrative are all about good and evil and the temptations of man.

It may be a fact that history is colonized by the audio-visual entertainment industry. But as a historian I dare to say, it is a small offer if the reward is new curiosity, new enthusiasm and new ethical solutions in a world that seems to lack all of this.

Conclusion

Perhaps European man indeed has been a *Homo Clausus* from the 16th century onwards. Disillusionment about the impossibility of real contact with other people might periodically have put him into the nebulous state of melancholy. And perhaps the Enlightenment periodically has asked too much of modern man, making nostalgia a useful safety valve as a result. Perhaps the ideal of communication, which came into being at about the same time God was declared dead, was carried to such extremes in the 20th century that nostalgia (and depression) was a logical consequence. Perhaps all media, starting with the invention of the Kodak camera, have made modern man more prone to feelings of nostalgia because 'we are flooded with disposable memoranda from us to ourselves' and are swamped in images mediaculture is projecting about other people and other times, other worlds. Maybe it is

²⁴⁰ Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*. American Families and the Nostalgia Trap. Basic Books. New York: 1992.

true that the more successful our society is, the more myths it is inclined to produce, and the more fictionalized our media driven dreamworlds will become.

Having said this, the overall conclusion about the meaning of nostalgia for the individual and the society in psycho-sociological terms, has to be that 'there is chaos in the kingdom'. The Janus-faced character of modern politics in Europe and America proves that the crisis of modernism continues until today. The politics of nostalgia can indeed be labelled as highly political, partly, as we have seen, it can be explained as a reaction to the sixties, while, for the other part, its ongoing success can be attributed to the ambiguous Janus-face of society.

All in all, the answer to the question about the 'right' relation between nostalgia and reality, between past, present and future, is: it's all about balance. It isn't very surprising that this solution has been acknowledged by the medical profession for a long time. Every theory on melancholy and depression, from the humoral theories from Ancient Greece to those of the 17th century, through mechanical theories ever since the discovery of blood circulation, till the neurotransmitter theories of today, in the end boil down to restoration of balance in the body and the mind. This is true for the relation between the individual and the other(s) as well.

