

Paper proposal: Participatory Practices in Arts and Heritage

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CONTEXTUAL COLLABORATION

While artists of the eighties have been accused of being ‘complicit’ with the art market, artists of the nineties have often been characterised as critical, especially because of the way they engaged with the audience and communities.¹ Many exhibitions of this decade also encouraged artists to embed their work in a specific social context.² This paper will explore how cultural policy in the Netherlands may have encouraged this kind of engagement with the community, using the work of Jeanne van Heeswijk as a case study.

Claire Bishop has pointed out how in 1997 the New Labour government of the United Kingdom ‘deployed a rhetoric almost identical to that of the practitioners of socially engaged art in order to justify public spending on the arts.’³ According to Bishop, the question the government asked was: ‘what can art do for society?’⁴ and the answer was: lessen social exclusion and increase public participation. Bishop argues that the reasoning behind this policy was that people who feel included by society would be less likely to cause trouble and become dependent on welfare.⁵ In other words, inclusive cultural events were to lead to the acceptance of the status quo. Even though Bishop also briefly goes into the cultural policy of the Netherlands, she focuses on policies after 2005 and does not mention how ‘inclusivity’ had already been a part of the Dutch agenda since the mid-eighties.

The crises of the eighties ushered in many neoliberal reforms in the Netherlands: the Beeldende Kunstregeling was repealed, for example, and the granting of subsidies was delegated to cultural funds.⁶ For an artist to be successful entrepreneurial skills became increasingly important and art institutions became more reliant on marketing strategies. The government started to value audience figures and government agencies began to urge cultural institutions to reach new audiences.⁷ While the new generation of artists seemed ‘critical’, it is striking how well some of their projects fit into the new criteria of government agencies and how willing corporations and municipalities were to commission projects like *Until we meet again* (1995-2008).

In 1995 the municipality of Vlaardingen asked Jeanne van Heeswijk to propose a series of sculptures for the district of Westwijk, which was to be redeveloped from 1995 to 2005. Instead she decided to involve the community of Westwijk in a series of art projects with other artists during the period of construction. These projects, collectively titled *Until we meet again*, were supposed to generate a discussion about the redevelopment-plans and ‘involve’ the residents in these changes. Meetings with residents were organised and commissions created.⁸ But how much influence did the residents really have? What position did the municipality and the building corporation take in this project? Would Arnstein classify this project as an act of empowerment or an act of tokenism? This paper will attempt to answer these questions and relate them to the cultural policy of the Netherlands at the time.

¹ See for example: Chavannes, Marc. "Meedeinen op de traagheid van de tijd", *NRC Handelsblad*, 12 mei 1993. Weibel, Peter. *Kontext Kunst: Kunst der 90er Jahre*. Cologne: DuMont Buchverlag, 1994. Boomgaard, Jeroen. "De utopie van de argeloosheid." *De Witte Raaf*, 13 (1999) 77, pp. 23-25. For a critical overview of these ideas see for example: Steiner, Barbara. "Corruption, Corruptibility and Complicity." Translated by: James Gussen. *Meaning Liam Gillick*. Ed. Monika Szewczyk. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2009. pp. 71-90. Fotiadi, Eva. *The Game of Participation in Art and the Public Sphere*. Maastricht: Shaker Publishing. 2011. Kok, Annemarie. *Kunstkritiek in een tijd van vervagende grenzen. Over engagement, design en commercie 1989-2015*. Rotterdam: nai010, 2016.

² Examples include: 'Sonsbeek 93' (Arnhem, 1993), 'Project Unité' (Unité d'Habitation, Firminy, 1993) and 'Entre-Deux' (Galerie Mot & Van den Boogaard, Brussel, 1996).

³ Bishop, Claire. *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. London: Verso, 2012. p. 13.

⁴ Bishop, 2012. p. 13.

⁵ Bishop, 2012. pp. 13-14.

⁶ Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCenW). *Cultuurbeleid in Nederland*. The Hague: Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2002.

⁷ Hoeven, Quirine van der. *De grens als spiegel: Een vergelijking van het cultuurbestel in Nederland en Vlaanderen*. Den Haag: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2005. See also: Provincie Groningen. *Provinciale subsidies op het gebied van kunst en cultuur, 1997-2000*. Groningen: Provincie Groningen, 1997.

⁸ Basualda, Carlos, et. al. *Systems: Jeanne van Heeswijk*. Translation: Ben Carter et. al. Berlin: The Green Box. 2007.