1. Performing Arts in Urban Society: Preliminary Definitions

1.1. Definitions of Culture and Art in Dutch Cultural Policy

In order to study the views on functioning of performing arts in urban society as they are present in Dutch cultural policy, it is necessary to have definitions of the terms ‘culture’, ‘art’ and ‘functioning in society’. Although the research focuses on municipal policies, these definitions can be derived from national policy documents. There are two reasons for this. First, the responsibilities of national and local government differ with regard to the Dutch performing arts. Since 1985 the production of performing arts has been almost exclusively the responsibility of the national government (see Van Maanen, 1997, p. 234). Second, as will be shown in more detail in Chapter 3, municipal governments nowadays closely follow the national cultural policy agenda, precisely as a result of these complementary responsibilities. In doing so, they adhere to the same definitions of culture and art. As the research focuses on the period between 1992 and 2005, the definitions of culture and art will be derived from the policy documents leading up to this period.

The Notitie Cultuurbeleid (Document on Cultural Policy) published in 1985 can be regarded as a common base for all cultural policy documents. This letter to parliament was drafted under the responsibility of Elco Brinkman (of the Christian Democratic Party). He did not aim to describe the cultural policy in detail but wished to express the starting points of Dutch cultural policy based on the broad political consensus on these starting points (Ministerie van WVC, 1985, p. 2). The document eventually led to the adoption of the Wet op het Specifiek Cultuurbeleid (Specific Cultural Policy Act) in 1993.

Two meanings of the word ‘culture’ can be found in the Notitie Cultuurbeleid. The first is culture in the sociological or anthropological sense. This refers to the norms and values that people share. These norms and values form the foundation of society. The second meaning refers to culture in a more specific sense, namely, the products of the expression of these values and beliefs through aesthetic means. Culture, in its specific meaning, is related to art. The following quote reflects both meanings.

For all kinds of values that people in a certain society share: their opinions about what is worth pursuing, the way they interact, they way they express themselves – all these matters are often

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1 With the exception of youth theatre and the major theatre companies in Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague.
experienced as being the way they are as the result of historical developments. (...) But within that more spacious domain of culture there are traditionally certain areas where culture reaches self-awareness, where it justifies its actions, where the process of culture forming is consciously anticipated, countered and reflected, in both a confirmatory and confronting manner. Besides religion, philosophy and science, cultural expression, one of these areas is art, the artistic and its corresponding cultural expression. This is the area where a culture is made sensorially perceptible and represented, albeit often in an indirect, symbolic sense, in human design. (Ministerie WVC, 1985, p. 5)

Although this quote does not give an exact definition of culture (in both meanings) or art, it is of interest. Culture is regarded as the result of a historic development. Within the broad domain of culture (in its anthropological meaning) there are systems that function to facilitate this development, ‘where culture becomes aware of itself’. Religion, philosophy and science are such systems. The arts and cultural expression (in its specific meaning) are also such systems. Cultural artefacts function in a specific way as they are perceptually discernable and they are intentionally created, indirect, symbolic expressions. Brinkman uses the term ‘culture to the second degree’ (cultuur tot de tweede macht, ibid., p. 6) to denote artistic forms of expression which serve as commentator and pacesetter (gangmaker) within culture. A report by the Harmonisatieraad Welzijnsbeleid (Council for Harmonization of Welfare Policy) which had been used to formulate the Notitie Cultuurbeleid contains a more specific description. The report concludes that, in the 19th century, the arts were used as expression of absolute values, of ‘how things have always been’ and was mainly concerned with expression of national identities. In the 20th century, the focus shifted towards a more personal level. Art became a value in itself. 2 ‘Art is the resource of the avant-garde par excellence, ousting beliefs such as “that’s just the way it is”’ (Harmonisatieraad Welzijnsbeleid, 1985, p, 8). It can be assumed that this is what is meant by ‘pacesetter’ within culture. This view on art and culture, though not very precise, forms the basis of the formulation of Dutch cultural policy. It is of particular importance that art is viewed as having a function at a personal or individual level as well as at the collective level. People derive ‘sensory, emotional and intellectual’ frames of reference (ibid., p. 11) from cultural expressions. Renewal of these expressions through experiment is needed for the common good (ibid., p. 11). Therefore the goal of cultural policy is the preservation and renewal of cultural values as well as making them accessible and promoting participation in cultural events (ibid., p. 27).

These conceptions of culture and art are reminiscent of the definitions of culture that can be found in a book which was published by Zijderveld two years earlier. 3 He based his ideas on the work of sociologists such as Weber, De Tocqueville, Simmel and Mannheim, and defines culture as follows:

Culture consists of human aspirations, of ideas that reflect what people wish to be and to become, to experience and to do. The core of these aspirations consists of values, norms and meanings that largely existed before we were born and – although changed to a greater or lesser degree – will survive after we have passed away. (Zijderveld, 1983, p. 43)

2 The view on art as a value in itself will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.
3 Zijderveld is generally regarded as one of the party ideologists of the Christian Democratic Party in the Netherlands. It is therefore not unlikely that Brinkman based his political views on Zijderveld’s work.
Zijderveld points out that these values and norms are intangible. They are expressed in symbols which comprise the meaning of a culture (Zijderveld, 1983, p. 34). These symbols are not only of an aesthetic nature but also comprise social security systems or institutions in society. Culture (in its specific meaning) and art can be regarded as one of these systems where the culture (in its anthropological meaning) becomes apparent. Culture’s essential function is to lend collective identity to groups of people (ibid., p. 44). Zijderveld describes identity as everything that answers the question ‘who am I?’ (ibid., p. 31).

1.2. Culture, Art and Identity: Views from Theory

In his introduction to sociological theory Newman describes culture in the same way as Zijderveld although he relates culture to the concept of society. ‘Sociologists define society as a population living in the same geographic area that share a culture and a common identity and whose members are subject to the same political authority’ (Newman, 2004, p. 19), thus adding a geographic notion to the idea of culture and identity. He stresses that society is not a fixed phenomenon, it can be modified by the actions of influential individuals but

sometimes the actions of ordinary individuals mobilize larger groups of people to collectively alter some aspect of social life (...) In sum, we live in a world in which our behaviours are largely a product of societal and historical processes. Society is an objective fact that coerces, even creates, us (...). At the same time, we are constantly creating, maintaining, reaffirming and transforming society. (Newman, 2004, p. 21)

What Newman denotes as society corresponds in essence with what has been called ‘culture’ in the anthropological sense in the policy documents. Newman reserves the term ‘culture’ for culture in a more specific meaning which he views as the mortar that holds the building blocks of society together (ibid., p. 25). Culture ‘consists of the language, values, beliefs, rules, behaviours, and physical artefacts of a society. (...) Culture gives us codes of conduct – the proper, acceptable ways of doing things’ (ibid., p. 31). Although with the inclusion of artefacts in this definition Newman mixes both the connotation of culture as intangible and its condensation in tangible objects (or, in the case of the performing arts, as performances that can be experienced), the definition once again centres on the norms and values that govern people’s everyday lives. Thus Newman essentially uses the same definition of culture as is present in the national policy documents, although he adds the geographical dimension.

Newman describes identity as follows:

Identity is our most essential and personal characteristic. It consists of our membership in various social groups (race, ethnicity, religion, gender and so on), the traits we show, and the traits others ascribe to us. (Newman, 2004, p. 128)

With this definition he points to the fact that people can have several identities at the same time, being a member of several specific social groups, or rather: the specific composition of the memberships of social groups of one person determines his or her identity. This point will be taken up in Section 9.2. It is useful to compare the notion of identity found in
Zijderveld’s work to that in Fischer-Lichte’s. She regards the history of European theatre as a history of identity. She uses a general definition of identity (as opposed to specific definitions used in philosophy and psychology) which denotes:

certain aspects and factors which allow someone to say ‘I’, which provide him with an awareness of his self and in this sense, a self-consciousness – whether as a member of a culture, a nation, an ethnic group, a family, or as an individual. (Fischer-Lichte, 2002, p. 2).

Her definition incorporates both Zijderveld’s notion of the term (‘who am I’) and the element that Newman stresses: identity relates a person to groups, be they defined through culture (in its anthropological meaning), ethnicity or nationality. This membership of a certain group provides persons with frames of reference (Harmonisatieraad Welzijnsbeleid, 1985, p. 11, referred to above). This level of definition of culture, art and identity should suffice for now. Culture is a term that refers to the norms and values that people share. They are at the basis of structuring society. The norms and values are not constant, they evolve. They are the result of an historic development which can be called tradition. The norms and values cannot be easily observed as they are intangible. However, they can become apparent in symbols. Cultural expression and art are such symbols. Although the concept of identity culture and art relate the individual to the collective level, this relationship is double-sided. Society as an objective fact coerces and even shapes an individual, thus determining his or her identity. The specific composition of memberships of specific social groups makes up one’s personal identity. Membership of certain groups provides the individual with frames of reference. Cultural expression refers to all forms of symbolic expression which function to represent shared values and beliefs in society, representing the identity of members of that society and/or of specific groups within society. Art is regarded as a specific form of cultural expression. Artistic expressions are those in which existing values and beliefs are challenged, ‘tegenstrevend’ (counteracting) in the words of the Notitie Cultuurbeleid (Ministerie van WVC, 1984, p. 6). As a result they aid the development of society.5

1.3. Functioning of Culture and Art in Urban Society

The term ‘functioning’ refers to the object of research in this study. In studying the policy documents, it is useful to determine the goals of the cultural policy in societal terms. This means that the goals of cultural policy should not be studied in terms of the output (numbers of cultural institutions that are being subsidized, the number of shows and exhibitions they produce, or the social and geographical characteristics of the audiences for these events) but in terms of the outcome. What are the effects that politicians expect from the arts in society?

4 Newman describes these building blocks as statuses, roles, groups and organizations. For the present discussion, however, it is not necessary to go into such detail; see Newman (2004), pp. 21-8.

5 Note that a leap is made from cultural expressions to artistic expressions here. The quote clearly disregards the fact that there are also cultural expressions which are not symbolic expressions, i.e., they are not aesthetic in their nature. For instance, lectures and articles in newspapers are indeed cultural expressions and can be ‘tegenstrevend’ too. However, such cultural expressions do not function on the level of perception but on the level of cognition. But the policy document – and the present research – focuses on art policy, thus cultural expression, and the aesthetic are used interchangeably, whereas in fact they do not have the same meaning.
Chapters 2 and 3, which are based on cultural policy documents, cover the way Dutch policy-makers regard art’s functioning in society; i.e., what are the societal processes they wish to encourage and where do these processes manifest themselves? Specifically this functioning should be at city level, for the research aims to develop methods for local politics to measure the effect of cultural policy.

To analyse the policy documents a simple model will be used. This model is based upon two questions. The first deals with whether or not the functioning is considered to be specific to the arts. The effects of the arts in society can either be specific to the arts – i.e., they concern functions that cannot be achieved through other means – or they can be side-effects. Such side-effects can also occur as a result of other than aesthetic activities. In the present research, the effects that are intimately bound to the nature of art will be called ‘intrinsic’, the other effects will be called ‘extrinsic’. These terms have been derived from aesthetic theory, although in aesthetic theory the common approach is to distinguish between intrinsic and instrumental. A work of art can either be valued as a contingent means to a particular end, i.e. instrumentally, or valued on the basis of the imaginative experience it affords, i.e. intrinsically (see Kieran, 2001). The intrinsic qualities of an artwork prescribe and guide active mental engagement and responses to the work. To value a work instrumentally implies that it can be replaced by any other work or activity that satisfies the end realized. As Kieran demonstrates, this approach is not without flaws because, if artistic pleasure is defined as the end realized by participating in artistic activities, all artistic qualities are by definition of an instrumental rather than an intrinsic nature (ibid., p. 216). This is why in this research the term extrinsic is preferred over instrumental as it does not concern the purpose audience members have in seeking out aesthetic experiences. 

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6 This distinction concurs with Abbing’s description of external effects in cultural policy. External effects occur for other than the parties involved in an economic transaction and thus are external to the individual transactions. For instance, a consumer buying an old monument in order to take up residence there produces effects for others in addition to buying and maintaining the building: people passing by will experience the beauty or history of the building, a tourist agency may even organize tours passing by the monument. The owner of the monument receives no financial compensation for these effects. In economic theory this can warrant government support (see e.g. Abbing, 1989, p. 207). Abbing distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic external effects. Extrinsic external effects satisfy consumer needs that can also be satisfied through other than artistic means. According to Abbing, a strict distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic external effects is not possible for consumer needs ultimately cannot be described individually from one another. He argues that cultural consumption satisfies different mutually dependent consumer needs, both intrinsic and extrinsic (Abbing, 1992, pp. 172-3). Though the division between intrinsic and extrinsic effects may be problematic, as Abbing suggests, it is useful in structuring thinking on the functioning of culture and art in society.

7 Carroll (1999) and Davies (2006) use the term ‘aesthetic properties’, see Chapter 6.

8 In his introduction to the philosophy of the arts, Davies (2006) also distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic. However, he approaches the subject from the issue of the autonomy of the arts, which leads to the conclusion that art functions intrinsically when art is valued for its own sake. He proposes that there are two strands in art philosophy concerning the value of the experience which is evoked by the consumption of art. On the one hand, there are philosophers who think that the pleasure derived from the experience of art for its own sake (i.e., the artwork is contemplated not for any ulterior reasons) is the sole intrinsic effect of art consumption. On the other hand, ‘it is plausible to think that art might have intrinsic and extrinsic value. It can be a source of pleasurable experience, which we
The second question covers the issue of for whom the functioning is considered to occur. The question can be clarified on the basis of the concept of the art world (Becker, 1982). Performing artists are part of an art world which aims at producing cultural events on stage. In turn, this art world is a part of society as a whole. From this society, the performing arts world draws an audience which participates in the productions. As theatre can be regarded as a two-way communication activity, the cultural activities have effect on the performing artists themselves and on their audiences. The effects on the artists themselves can be regarded as a feedback loop: through their work and the audience’s reaction to it, they gain more experience in expressing themselves on stage. This can be regarded as artistic growth which will be the basis for new productions in the future. The effects on the audience can be divided according to the level at which they occur: individual or collective. The effects can occur for audience members individually and at collective level: that of society. Here, a feedback loop also exists, for the effects an individual spectator experiences (either of intrinsic or of extrinsic nature) will influence his or her perception of future performances. Furthermore, the effects on collective level influence the culture of a society as a whole and therefore influence both artists and audiences, which, in turn, affects the way they produce and experience plays.

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<th>Functioning from the perspective of:</th>
<th>Intrinsic Functioning</th>
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<td>Artists</td>
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<td>Audience collectively</td>
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Table 1.1. Theoretical categorization of functions of performing arts in society

have accepted above as a form of intrinsic value, and it can provide information that is useful for helping us to navigate and comprehend the wider world’ (Davies, 2006, p. 200, italics QLvdH). This suggests that when the experience of art provides us with information that is useful in everyday life, this should be regarded as an extrinsic function. However, Davies does not make clear why one cannot think of the apprehension of this information as an intrinsic function as well, when this information is inherently bound to how the artwork is conceived. This argument will be extended in Chapter 6 of the present research. Note that Davies uses the term ‘value of the experience’. This suggests that there are certain values within the experience that have certain effects – or functions – for the individual audience member. The distinction between values and functions will be introduced in Chapter 6.
Theoretically, the functioning of performing arts in society can therefore be considered to occur in six different categories. The functioning of performing arts can occur for the performing artists themselves, for the individual spectator, and at collective level. The functioning can be either of an intrinsic or an extrinsic nature (see Table 1.1). It is not immediately apparent whether this table is entirely relevant. There are two problems with the model:

First, the question arises as to whether or not the extrinsic functions of performing arts should be included within a framework describing the functioning of performing arts in urban society. This seems unnecessary, for these functions are not related to the specific artistic qualities of the performing arts and therefore the societal effects of this type of functioning can be achieved with other publicly or privately funded activities. Leaving extrinsic functions out of the evaluation presupposes that the public funding of the performing arts is legitimized solely on the basis of the intrinsic functions. However, extrinsic functions may be a legitimization of cultural policy, or combinations of intrinsic and extrinsic arguments can be expected to exist. An investigation should be carried out, based on the policy documents of cities and the national government, as to whether or not this is the case.

Second, the question arises as to whether or not extrinsic functions are feasible with regard to the artists. It seems likely that in this simple model all effects in the ‘feedback loop’ through the artists are intrinsic, for they are defined as the professional experience of a given performing artist. This would mean that box ‘B’ is empty by definition. However, some extrinsic functions of performing arts for the artists can be conceived. For instance, the provision of a source of income for the artist and co-operation with other people as a meaningful form of social interaction can be seen as functions for the artists that are extrinsic. For the present research, the question as to whether or not governments use these extrinsic functions to legitimize cultural policy is a relevant one. Abbing suggests that there has always been a sharp distinction in Dutch cultural policy between policy measures aimed at cultural and artistic activities (and their functioning in society) and the artists themselves. Policy covering artists has always been the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Welfare (see Abbing, 2002, p. 214, and Pots 2006, p. 258). Measures to influence the income of artists, such as the Beeldende Kunstenaars Regeling (Policy measure for the visual artists) and the Wet Inkomensvoorziening Kunstenaars (Act governing the income position of artists) have been brought into force by the Ministry of Social Welfare (ibid., p. 315). It therefore follows that, in the cultural policy documents of the Dutch government, the income policy aimed at artists need not be discussed and therefore cell ‘B’ could prove to be of no relevance for the present research. It can also be assumed that politicians are not especially interested in the effects for the artists, either intrinsically or extrinsically. This would mean that cell ‘A’ is empty as well. Whether or not this is the case should be indicated by the policy documents.
1.4. Political Orientation and Cultural Policy in the Netherlands

A last issue that should be addressed before turning attention to the policy documents is the question as to whether or not views on culture, art and its functioning in society vary as a result of the political orientation of elected officials. This would present an obstacle for the research. Kassies is of the opinion that art policy in the Netherlands has not undergone much politicization. He argues that governments of different political orientations have adopted the same principles for art policy. Moreover, the programmes of political parties do not differ in a manner that leads to greatly different policy orientations (Kassies, 1983, p. 11). Winsemius (1999) researched the political debate on the art policy in 1992 and came to the same conclusion. In a research for the Scientific Council for the Government Policy (Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid, WRR) Hoefnagel did find differences in the orientation of political parties towards cultural policy. His research is geared, however, towards cultural policy in a broader meaning that includes education policy as well as media policy. The differences between political parties have been most markedly present in these policy areas and not in the arts. Furthermore, Hoefnagel states that there is no causal link between the ideas of different parties and their behaviour in political decision making (Hoefnagel, 1992, p. 103). From 1980 onward, the essential values underlying cultural policy have been shared by the dominant political fractions (liberals, Christian-democrats, social-democrats and social-liberals) (ibid., p. 105). However, slight differences still exist because the shared values underlying the cultural policy stem from different views on mankind and society. Therefore each party emphasizes different points within the value system underlying cultural policy. Different preferences also exist regarding the type of legislation and policy instruments that should be used. A different language even is used to verbalize the cultural policy: the liberals tend to use more economical and legal reasoning than the other parties do, for instance (ibid., p. 105).

All three studies indicate that the Dutch national government’s cultural policy in general and its art policy in particular can be studied while neglecting differences in political orientation of the government officials. The studies indicate that the legitimization of cultural policy has been under no serious political debate, and from 1980 onward the existing differences between political parties concerning the art policy have become less and less relevant. Moreover, by studying various consecutive policy documents, one can trace changes in the legitimization of cultural policy, so these, if they exist, should not impede the results of this research.

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9 Note that, for the sake of clarity in the discussion of the policy documents, Chapters 2 and 3 will not refer to the distinction between the individual and collective level on the side of the audience. This distinction will be reintroduced in Chapter 4.