

This is the text of Hans Abbing's inaugural lecture on the occasion of his appointment as professor of art sociology (the Boekman Chair) at the University of Amsterdam in 2005.



## From High Art to New Art<sup>1</sup>

(Version EN 060408)

**Cover Text:** Youngsters and increasingly more older people are turning their backs on classical concerts. This is not because they do not like classical music or lack the education that enables them to enjoy the music. They simply cannot cope with the classical concert etiquette anymore and thus they feel increasingly uncomfortable. The etiquette here has become too formal and too elitist. They prefer the informal concert situations of pop music where there is more space to move around, people can react to the music, and do not have to be quiet for the entire duration of a concert.

Our society has been undergoing a fundamental process of informalization since the 1950s. Different art worlds respond to this process in different ways. The classical music world's response has so far been one of resistance and denial. Here the code of conduct has actually become even *more* formal over the past 50 years. The current subsidy systems in various European countries enables the classical music world to remain largely unaffected by change. If this situation continues unheeded, the classical concert will lose more and more of its market share.

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### Dutch Data on Graying Audiences

"Public interest in art is declining and the young are defecting en masse." Actually, the story is quite the opposite. Interest in art and in particular the performing arts and art museums continues to grow across the entire arts spectrum. This holds true for both young and old, although it is probably a little more true for the older generations. In general, one can speak of a "graying" of the art public but this is solely the result of the fact that older people are going out more often.

The notion that the art public is graying and that interest in the arts is on the decline is in part true with regard to the performing arts and art museums because they are usually associated with high art, which includes classical music concerts, the ballet, and a good portion of theatre, all three of which are heavily subsidized by the government. The high performing arts and art museums are the most heavily subsidized and are simultaneously the very genres that are most often associated with a graying public.

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<sup>1</sup> In writing this paper, I must express my gratitude for all the advice I was able to use from, among others, Maks Banens, Hans Onno van der Berg, Anne van der Eerden, Dos Elshout, Ruben van Hooff, Herman Fluitman, Truus Gubbels, Lucas Hendricks, Johan Heilbron, Sacha Kagan, Bram Kempers, Jeroen de Kloet, Almut Krauss, Henk van Os, Pieter van Os, Giorgos Papadopoulos, Jeroen Roscam Abbing, Barend Schuurman, Cas Smithuijsen, Cas Wouters, Olav Velthuis, P.W. Zuidhof, and the students who participated in the classes I taught at the University of Amsterdam in 2005. I must also thank Andries van den Broek and Frank Huysmans at the Socio-Cultural Planning Commission who made an exception for me by sending me previously unpublished tables based on AVO data files. Obviously, the aforementioned people and the SCP bear no responsibility for the contents of this paper. I also thank the participants of the Klamer seminar, especially Arjo Klamer and Willem Schinkel, and the staff of Algemene Cultuur Wetenschappen at Erasmus Universiteit, especially Ton Bevers, Suzanne Janssen, Wouter de Nooy, and Antoon van den Braambussche. Over the years all of them inspired me. Finally, I thank Bart Plantenga for his translation the Dutch text.

In absolute terms, the decline in audience share for classical music concerts is not that dramatic, but in relative terms, the percentage of total audience share for classical concerts is shrinking rapidly. The question of whether the tendency to go out among the older generations will continue to increase remains uncertain. In any case, the increases will eventually level off. This implies that the moment the graying of the classical concert-going public slows down, the audience figures will begin to fall at a much faster rate than is currently the case. This basically means that classical music will lead an increasingly marginal existence.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> According to Seabrook (2000), the classical music world is gradually turning into one among many other musical subcultures.

Fig. 1. Percentage of adults in 1987 and 2003 who made at least one visit per year<sup>3</sup>

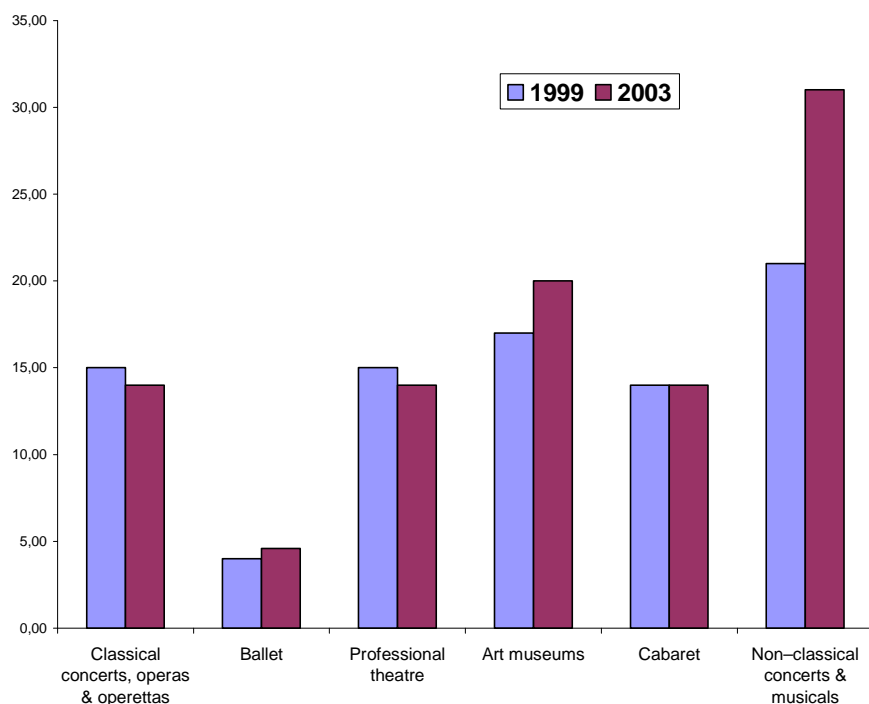


Figure 1 shows the percentages of adults who, in 1987 and in 2003, annually visited at least one of a wide variety of art institutions. The following analysis is limited to those over 19 years of age; in other words, generally speaking, adults. This is necessary because of all of the obligatory trips that school children make, which would result in less-useful figures. Figure 1 also reveals that attendance at non-classical music concerts has increased by approximately 50%, while cabaret attendance rose by some 30%. Art museums showed an increase of 20% and professional theatre measured a slight attendance increase, while classical music concerts experienced a decline of almost 10%. Between 1983 and 1995, classical concerts actually showed a 20% increase in attendance, but the last 10 years has seen a 20% decrease.

<sup>3</sup>The data in this figure are derived from data in a report produced by the Dutch Social and Cultural Planning Commission (SCP), Broek, Huysman et al. (2005), and from additional data supplied by the SCP. While figures for the year 1987 exist for museums generally, they do not exist just for art museums. Figures for art museums have only been available since 1995. Because CBS (1999) p.45 shows that the overall visits to art museums during the period 1987–1995 developed similarly to museum visits generally, I assume that the at least-once-annual visits to art museums developed in a parallel fashion as those to museums in general during the period 1987–1995.

Fig. 2. Percentage of adults in 1999 and 2003 who made at least one visit per year<sup>4</sup>

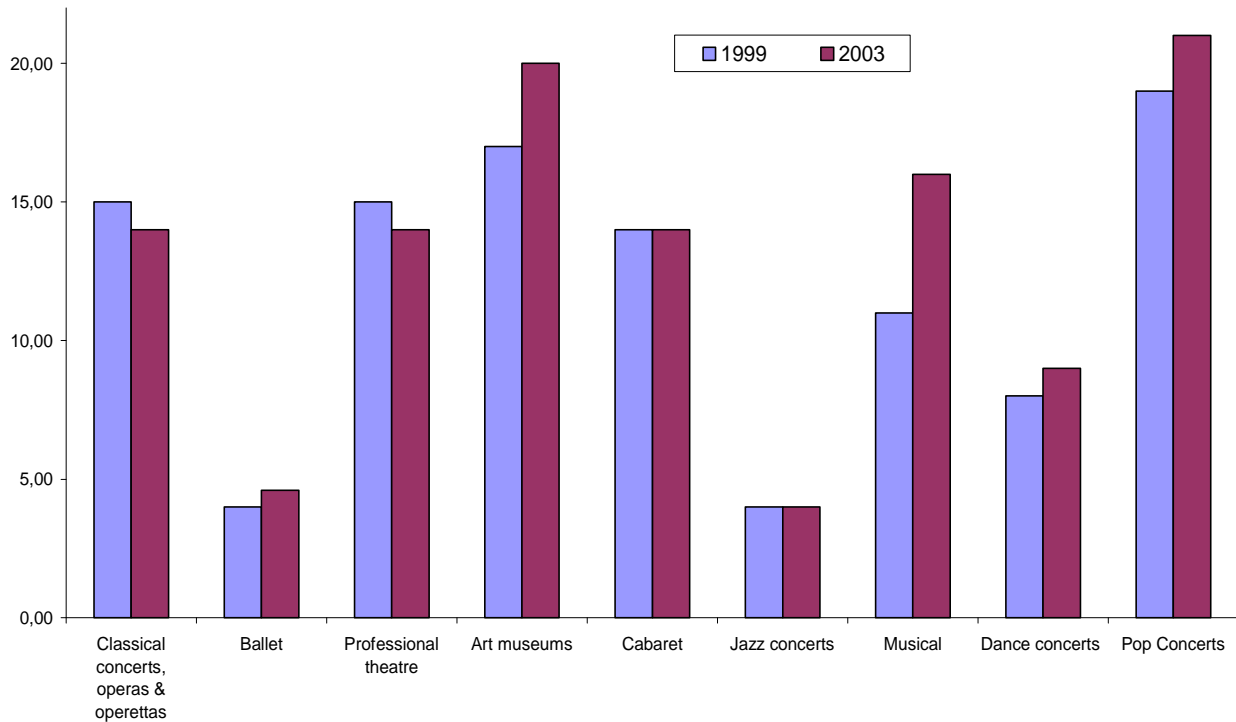
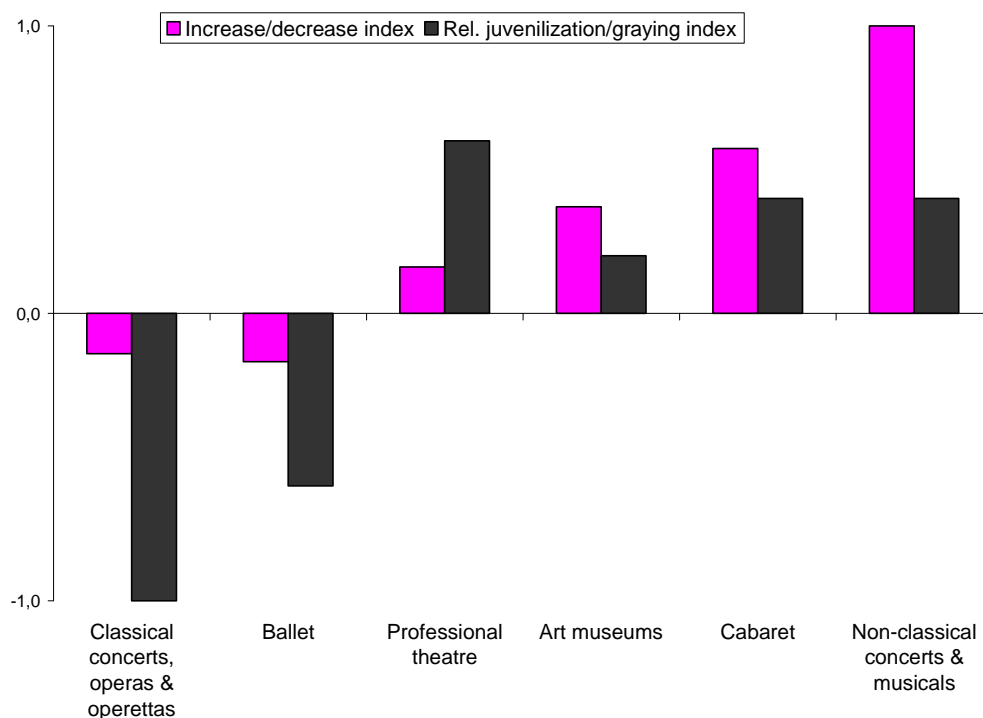


Figure 2 clearly shows a continued decline in classical music concert attendance in the period 1999–2003. In this period, it is the tumultuous attendance increase of musicals that is largely responsible for the increase in visits to non-classical concerts. In the period prior to 1999–2003, the increase was due mostly to dance (i.e., techno and house) concerts, which barely existed 10 years earlier. At this very moment, musicals have already surpassed the combined opera and classical concert attendance figures. Meanwhile, the last decade has shown that attendance figures at pop concerts have just about leveled off.

Figure 1 shows attendance developments between 1987 and 2003. Based on these data, I have calculated an attendance increase/decrease per category for the same period 1987–2003. In Figure 3, the results are represented by the purple bars. On the left, we see that visits to classical concerts and ballet have declined, while on the right, we see that visits to non-high art forms has increased the most.

<sup>4</sup> The data in this figure are derived from data in a report produced by the Dutch Social and Cultural Planning Commission (SCP), Broek, Huysman et al. (2005), and from additional data supplied by the SCP. The Social and Cultural Planning Commission has, since 1999, begun asking respondents about four subgroups in the fairly all-inclusive category of non-classical concerts. The SCP, for instance, has no separate categories for opera and cabaret. The opera falls under the category of classical music concerts while the sizeable audiences that cabaret attracts are spread across a variety of other genres. Also overlooked are those who attend the increasingly popular poetry and literature events. The SCP does ask about cinema and discotheque attendance, however. I will not at this time discuss these last two categories because my results would otherwise lose some of their significance for a portion of the readership. (Prior to 1995, the SCP did not specifically inquire about visits to art museums as a separate category; they only inquired about museum visits to all museums together. Because CBS (1999) p.45 shows that the actual number of visits to art museums developed similarly to that of overall visits, I assume that in this figure that the change in the number of at-least-once-per-year visitors during the period 1987–1995 corresponds with the overall change.)

Fig. 3. Developments in Visits and Graying 1987–2003<sup>5</sup>



In its investigations, the Dutch Social and Cultural Planning Commission, obviously also requested the ages of the respondents. Based on these data, I have created a juvenilization/graying index corrected for the relatively stronger average rise in attendance for older people compared to youth. The grey bars in Figure 3 represent this graying index. At the left side the audience for the classical concert and the ballet is graying, while there is net juvenilization in the other categories.

The 1969 so-called Tomato Action by a group of young actors and directors who shook up the conservative Dutch theatre world precipitated a trend toward juvenilization in this world. But in the process, the theatre lost some of its audience share. Since then the theatre-going public has remained relatively young, while, more recently, attendance figures have begun to rise again. (Radical renewal always causes initial losses, but: nothing ventured nothing gain.) The rise however, is almost exclusively due to the increases in unsubsidized productions. The market share of subsidized theatre has fallen by half over the past eight years.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The data in this figure are derived from data in a report produced by the Dutch Social and Cultural Planning Commission (SCP), Broek, Huysman et al. (2005), and from additional data supplied by the SCP. Increase in non-classical concert attendance = 1.0. Graying in classical music = 1.0. Average juvenilization/graying = 0. The latter implies that the index has been corrected for the existing net graying. The increase in the inclinations of people over 50 to visit performing arts and museums has been considerable. Without the correction, the average would have been +0.125 (instead of zero). In calculating the index, I counted adults under 50 as “young” and those 50 and over as “old.” The graying of the non-classical concert audiences is than it would have been, if it had been possible to split this category into the separate categories pop, musical, dance, and jazz. Because attendance figures for musicals grew very much during the period 1987–2003, this has led to a distortion of the overall outcome. Given the additional data for the period 1999–2003, it is plausible that the pop music audience has also been graying a little. Meanwhile, the jazz audience has grayed considerably, while the audiences for dance and musical have remained fairly stable with regard to age.

<sup>6</sup> Post (2006).

Fig. 4. Subsidies per Visitor<sup>7</sup>

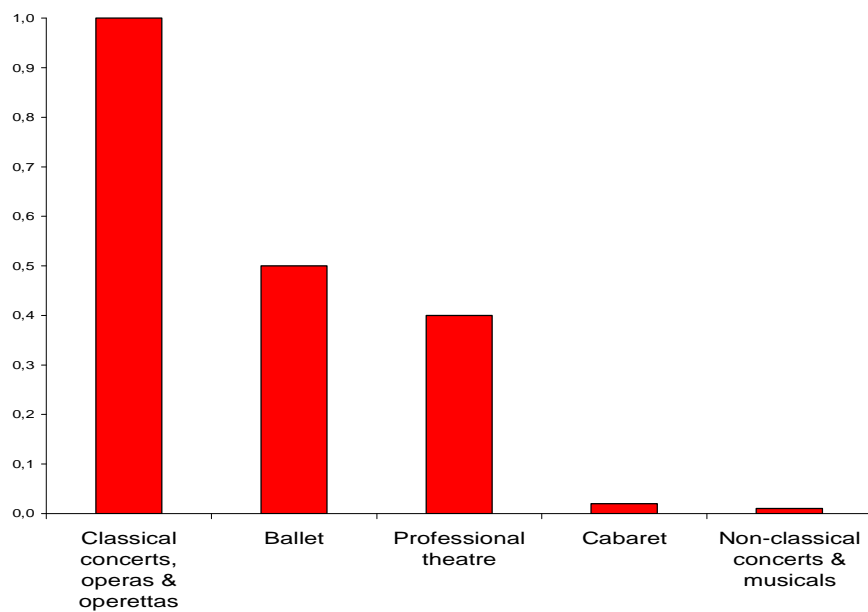


Figure 4 shows an index with red bars that represent the average amount of subsidies per category that the various governmental agencies contributed per visit in 2003. The high arts on the left receive considerable amounts, while cabaret and non-classical music received almost nothing.

<sup>7</sup> Source: for total subsidies per category, Smolenaars and Ministerie van Onderwijs (2002) and VSCD (2005); and for visits per category, Broek, Huysman et al. (2005). Similar to the previous figure, a visitor is someone who over the last 12 months visited at least once a performance in a category. The amount of subsidies per visitor of a classical concert = 1.0. I did not include accommodation subsidies or indirect subsidies. I also did not include museums because at the moment it is currently impossible to gauge what part of overall subsidies is spent on conservation and what on exhibitions.

Fig. 5. Visits and Graying Developments 1987–2003 and Subsidization<sup>8</sup>

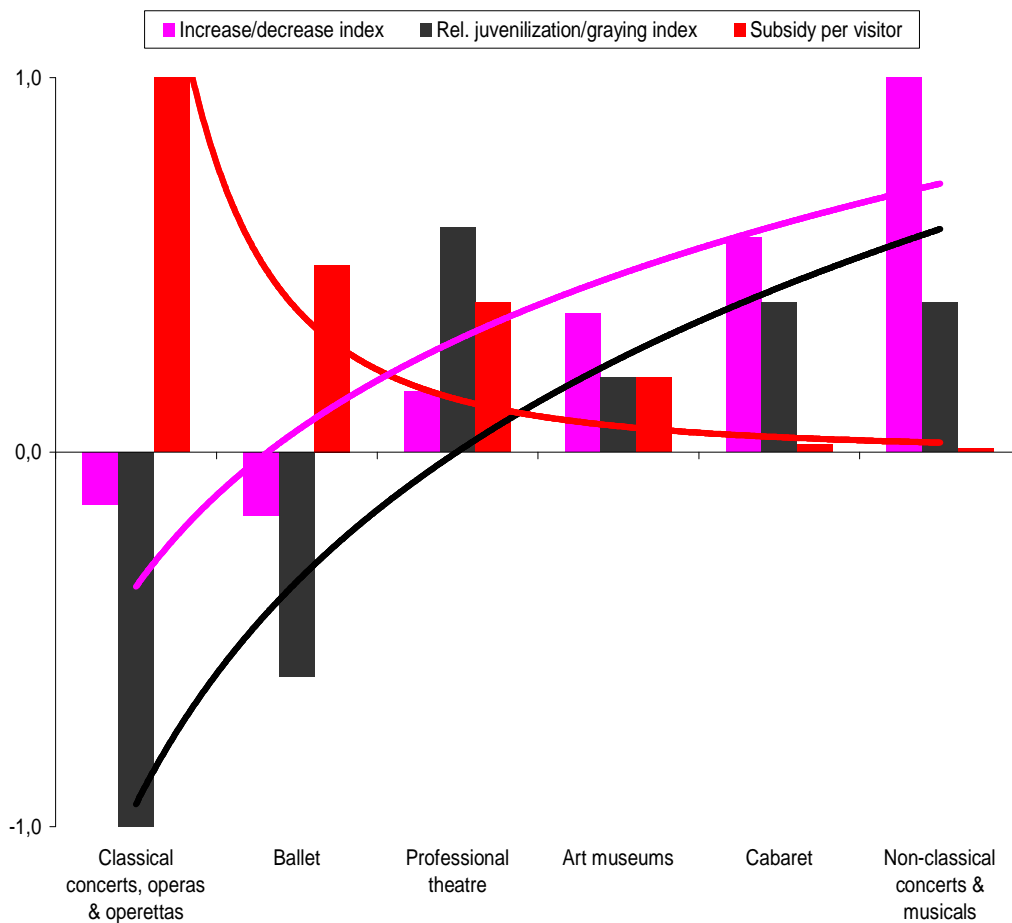


Figure 5 combines the three previous figures. I have added flowing lines to the graph as visual support, which run through the tops of the bars. The figure shows that graying goes hand in hand with audience share losses and with high subsidy levels. That is very clear in the instance of high performance arts, especially classical concerts and the ballet, as well as typical non-high performance arts such as cabaret and non-classical concerts. These performance art genres show a graying of their respective audience shares with increases in subsidy levels.

It is impossible to blame this on coincidence. Concerning the first two, it is logical that a continuing long-term trend of above-average graying will lead to both audience and market share losses.<sup>9</sup> But what is the relationship between these two and subsidy levels? Are subsidies in part responsible for graying? At the

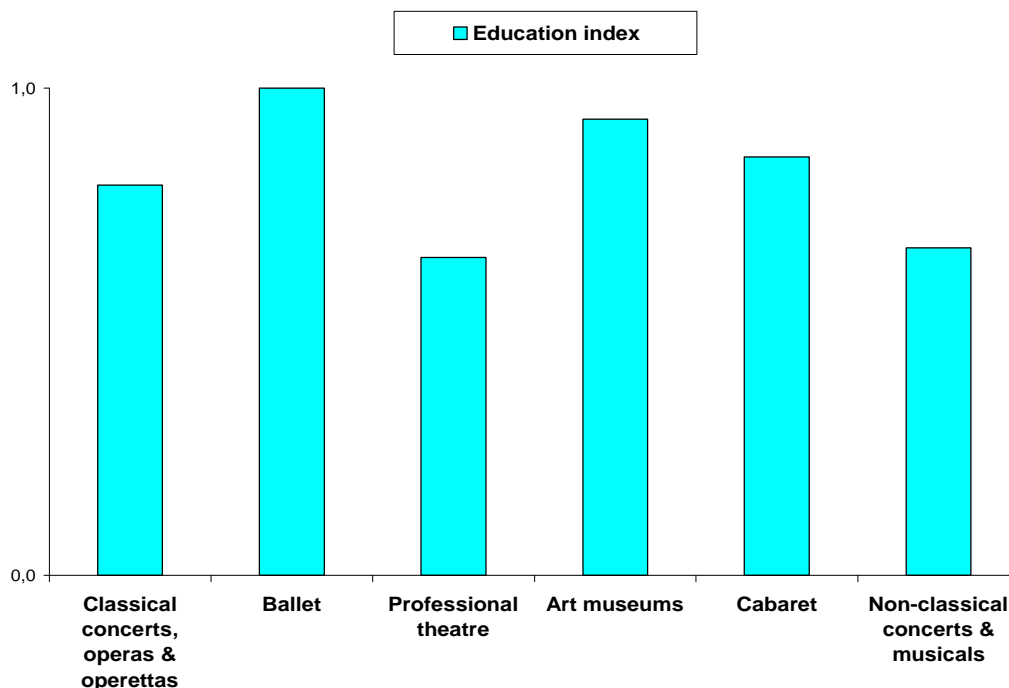
<sup>8</sup> For sources see previous notes. The lines serve as visual summaries of the indexes. (To enable the software to construct a line for the subsidy index, I have also added a subsidy index also for the art museums in such a way so that the line has the same form as it would have had in Figure 4.)

<sup>9</sup> Audience and (financial) market shares correspond with one another, but the nature of this correspondence can vary per category of performance arts and art museums. Nevertheless, I suspect that the audience shares shown in figure 2 are a good indicator of market shares except in the cases of art museums and smaller performance arts such as ballet and jazz. The latter two supposedly have larger shares than indicated in the figure. While that of the art museums is actually lower than indicated because they charge an average admission price that is significantly lower than the others. I arrived at this conclusion because the larger performance arts in Figure 2 with respect to size do not differ that much from each other. This is because, unlike in figure 1, none of performance arts represented are a collection of important, but very different, sub-genres and because Broek, Huysman et al. (2005) show that the visitation frequencies do not diverge very much from each other and because this is also true in the case of admission prices.

end of this lecture, I will attempt to provide an answer to the question of whether there is a link between the two.

But first I'd like to clear up a persistent misunderstanding. Many people continue to believe that it's people with higher educations who attend high art presentations, while the non-high art categories on the right side of the figure are more commonly attended by those with a lower education level. This is totally not the case, however, as is shown in Figure 6.

Fig. 6. Overrepresentation of higher-educated people among performing art and art museum visitors in 2003<sup>10</sup>



This index offers a measure of over-representation of higher educated visitors (with Dutch HAVO, VWO, or MBO degrees).<sup>11</sup> The differences between the various categories here are negligible. It is revealing that the average visitor to the currently very popular cabaret presentations is better educated than those attending classical concerts and that among non-classical concerts, dance concert audiences are as highly educated as classical music audiences, and generally higher than those attending jazz or pop concerts. In all of the categories of the performing arts as well as the museums, those with lower educations are strongly under-represented. The cultural diffusion programs of the 1960s and 1970s did little to change any of that.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The data in this figure are derived from data in a report produced by the Dutch Social and Cultural Planning Commission (SCP) report, Broek, Huysman et al. (2005), and from additional data supplied by the SCP. This index stands for the over-representation of higher educated visitors (with Dutch HAVO, VWO, or MBO education). Ballet = 1.0. A position on the horizontal axes implies no over- and no under-representation.

<sup>11</sup> The strong over-representation of the higher-educated visitors corresponds with a strong over-representation of higher income groups. Pommer and Jonker (19994) p.73.

<sup>12</sup> Due to the increase in the rise of general education levels, the percentage of higher-educated people has increased. Therefore, interpreting cultural diffusion in a limited sense, there has been some diffusion since the 1960s.

### **The Role of Upbringing and Education**

The question is: Why has the interest of the higher-educated visitor shifted from the high to the non-high or less-high performing arts?

It is certainly not related to prices. Thanks to the ever-increasing levels of subsidies since the 1960s, the prices of high performing arts and art museums have risen just as much as those of the non-high arts.<sup>13</sup>

Is all of this somehow the result of one's upbringing or lack of education? It is true that more and more people are no longer receiving the proper cultural education they need to fully enjoy the higher performing arts and art museums. But this is not due to a lack of formal and informal training with respect to the artistic conventions associated with the traditional high performing arts and art museums. Research on this topic by Bonita Kolb for the prestigious British Policy Studies Institute, concluded that the level of knowledge among both young and old is still quite adequate to be able to enjoy the high performing arts and art museums such as ballet and classical music.<sup>14</sup>

The main explanation for this shift and the graying phenomenon has to do with the gradual dwindling of a particular kind of capital which has little to do with the content of the artworks. People increasingly lack the knowledge and understanding of the behavioral conventions involved in the consumption of high art performances. In my opinion, the composition of the cultural capital of the large majority of young people has changed; so much so that they no longer participate with any degree of ease or pleasure in any of the usual formal ways of consuming high art events. This is a result of both informal and formal education. Sitting still does not come natural. It is taught by parents and teachers. 1950s children were required to be quiet during their lunch periods and at school they were taught to remain quiet and sit with their arms folded. Going to church also helped. However, it has been some time since kids have been taught this kind of discipline.

The headline in the press release of the aforementioned British research report published in 2001, declared "Excessive Formality Blamed as Young Turn Backs On Classical Concerts." It continues: "Classical music is in danger of losing whole generations of young people, who are turned off by the formality and elitism associated with its live performance..."

Formality regarding conventions doesn't only bother the young. An Increasing numbers of older visitors also lack the education to participate with ease in these formal situations. They often end up trying very hard just to fit in with the old-fashioned conventions, but with less and less success. A side effect of this is the coughing phenomenon – a growing problem area. This is similar to the phenomenon of portions of traditional theatre audiences now beginning to sigh much earlier during a performance than before.

### **Informalization and Changing Conventions**

To clarify my position concerning changing conventions and capital, I will now present a thought experiment.

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<sup>13</sup> Abbing and Kagan (2007).

<sup>14</sup> Kolb (2001).

Imagine a primitive man who has never seen much of the modern world. He goes to a classical concert at the Concertgebouw and right after goes to a pop concert at the Paradiso.<sup>15</sup> What does he see? At the classical concert, he immediately notices the silence in the hall. There is little noise before and after the concert or during intermission; people here talk more softly than they would in normal everyday situations. (The director of the Boekman Foundation, Cas Smithuijsen – no primitive himself – has written extensively about the increased levels of silence one experiences during a classical concert as well as the development of concert etiquette.)<sup>16</sup>

Our primitive man also notices that the audience barely exhibits any physical reaction to the music or to one another. There is no humming along or tapping one's feet to the music, let alone people dancing. He *does*, however, notice that when people fail to abide by the accepted norms there is an adverse reaction. The transgressors are warned by means of special signals that they are disturbing the enjoyment of others with their behavior. (Of course, such signals cannot but disturb others as well.) And finally he notices that people applaud at distinct moments in a seemingly ritualistic manner. He notices that people find this enjoyable and relaxing.

Meanwhile, at the pop concert he immediately notices the general liveliness of the audience. He sees many people dancing. He sees few people sitting and even fewer places to sit. He notices that there is no one single way to dance, that the dance styles are highly varied, and are noticeably influenced by the music's beat. People react strongly to each other and to the music. Sometimes people utter or produce their own sounds, by, for instance, clapping or singing or howling along to the music; sometimes they are even encouraged to do so by the musicians or DJs on stage. During the course of the concert, people come and go, buy drinks or strike up a conversation at the bar.

Our primitive man considers the general lack of movement by the audience during the classical concert strange. But the behavior he encounters at the pop concert, which he perceives as unpredictable and chaotic, he finds even weirder. Because he is used to rituals that follow certain patterns, the experience at the pop concert is actually further from his reality than the experience at the classical concert. This makes sense literally because pop concert etiquette or rather, the pop concert's social codes of interaction are not as old as those of classical concert etiquette.

The difference between the two codes of conduct is indeed related to the progress of our times and the evolution of human beings. The West has seen a relaxation of these codes since the 1950s, while Westerners have simultaneously become, in common parlance, more "social." This deviation from behavioral norms can be found everywhere across the board from Amsterdam to Hong Kong. Depending on the lifestyle of those involved, these processes experience their ups and downs, but the long-term trend is unmistakably one of increased informality.

It is not easy to fully appreciate the significance of contemporary cultural developments, but I am convinced that Cas Wouters is correct in his analysis of the informalization process as a deeply embedded process that has an impact on every aspect of society. There is not one single social theory concerned with

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<sup>15</sup> The Paradiso and its counterpart, the Melkweg (Milky Way) are Amsterdam's main concert halls where, on average, higher-educated Dutch people and foreigners go to hear pop, rock, rap, or dance music. The Melkweg also offers theatre, film, art exhibitions, and poetry readings.

<sup>16</sup> Smithuijsen (2001).

these multifarious social developments – including, for instance, Richard Peterson’s theories, which are concerned with genre-omnivorism in art – that can avoid touching upon the theory of informalization.<sup>17</sup>

Wouters has written three important books on the subject of the process of social informalization, in which he examines various areas of everyday activities.<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, however, he has not yet investigated the performing arts. I hope to be able to give him a helping hand in this regard.

The emergence and success of a new social code among the new audiences and the simultaneous graying of the audiences who attend high performing arts and art museums is mostly the result of this process of informalization. As I mentioned earlier, the youth of today, not to mention as more and more of their parents, can no longer cope with the formal etiquette codes that were once considered normal and pleasant. . This has had the consequence that they – both young and old – have abandoned the high performing arts and art museums.

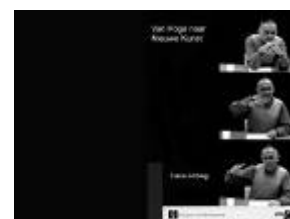
Because the informalization process works in a surreptitious manner and thus may be easily overlooked, I would have, given more time, loved to have been able to provide you with some examples, which would clearly show the importance of this informalization process. I can, at this juncture, only show you a few images and have limited myself to one example of the informalization of behavior; an example I have deliberately chosen from outside the world of art.

I sit and work an hour or two per day, in the Haarlemmerdijk branch in Amsterdam of the Coffee@Company, a Dutch version of Starbucks. (I also often sit and work an hour or so every day in Café Floris on the Brouwersgracht, where unlike the Coffee@Company, they play only classical music.) The Coffee@Company’s hallmark is the placement of a long table in the middle of the café.<sup>19</sup> This is almost the only place to sit. The Coffee@Company opened its first branch in the Netherlands seven years ago and has since opened a total of 10 branches in Amsterdam. The latest plans include new branches in other Dutch and European towns.<sup>20</sup>

Is it possible for someone to just sit at this long table reading or typing away without being disturbed by others? Yes, as far as mobile phones are concerned; they no longer bother me or anybody else in the café. But this is not



*Society has become more informal  
People have changed*



*Teachers have lost their  
blurry introspective gazes  
and have become more  
communicative*

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Peterson and Kern (1996). Peterson (1997) is aware of Riesman’s work concerning informalization, but does very little with the findings. The same goes for Janssen (2005) who in her empirical research attempts to test Dimaggio and Peterson’s theories with regard to cultural classifications for Europe. For the relation between informalization and omnivorization, see Abbing and Kagan (2007).

<sup>18</sup> Wouters (1990), Wouters (2004) and Wouters (2006/7).

<sup>19</sup> Other details about the Coffee@Company concept that come to my attention is their music and service policies. The staff – just two per location – are not just encouraged to be polite but also informal with their customers, but also to “have a good time” among themselves. It is striking that the music policy here encourages the staff to, within certain parameters, choose their own music that is played at a relatively low volume with the condition that they don’t play popular hits and certainly no oldies but goodies, i.e., pretty much the opposite strategy employed by super markets and department stores, who prefer to focus on a “feast of familiarity” when it comes to their background music.

<sup>20</sup> It’s not easy to pin down the extent to which informalization has influenced any one specific area of our private lives. Perhaps the presence or absence of long Coffee@Company-style tables can serve as a proxy variable in our attempt to measure the influence of informalization on our everyday private lives when it concerns relating to other people in more or less public spaces. It is possible that when it comes to the informalization of daily life, the Netherlands has now surpassed the United States to lead the world in the level of informality of everyday human encounters.

always the case. There will always be some incidental disturbances, like people who are talking too loudly or others who want to strike up a conversation. But these kinds of nuisances can for the most part be satisfactorily mitigated with a bit of negotiation. I use the word “negotiation” to call attention to a 1979 article by Abram de Swaan, who writes about a shift from a top-down order-giving household to one based on negotiation.<sup>21</sup> This article can probably be considered as the catalyst for an increased interest in the notion of informalization among Dutch sociologists.

That I feel at ease sitting at the long Coffee@Company table is basically due to the fact that by now I am fairly well educated in the art of negotiation. If a somewhat boisterous economics student sits next to me, for instance, and informs me that he too types with two fingers, and meanwhile tries his hardest to engage me in conversation, I consider this an inconvenient predicament at best. In one way or another – there are countless behavioral options available as far as my reaction is concerned – I almost always succeed in striking some sort of compromise with my over-communicative neighbor, which usually results in him making several more comments, more than I want, but certainly less than he would have liked. (Had my neighbor been a young gym teacher then I may well have chosen a different approach.)

Ten years ago, I would have never thought that I would ever be seen regularly writing at a long café table with total strangers all around me, some of them chatting away on the phone or with one another. Back then, for instance, whenever I took the train I would seek out one of the since-then done-away-with work train compartments. But people change and not only when they are young.

This kind of ongoing – and for the most part – automatic negotiating process is also typical of the newer performing arts and art museums. It is pretty much the case for both consumption and production, as much as these are distinguishable any more. One example of this is the conduct of audiences during brief silent periods in a piece or during quieter passages at various concerts.

Another example: If someone is taking up too much room on an over-crowded dance floor in the Milky Way, for instance, others dancers will request, most often in a friendly manner, that he tone it down just a bit. This results in an almost automatic social negotiation process that generally results in a compromise, whereby the transgressor agrees to restrain himself, but is at the same time allowed a little more room than the average dancer. If, on the other hand, someone at a classical concert begins to noticeably hum along with the music and after a warning from his neighbors continues his humming, there is no room to negotiate and no compromise. Sooner or later he is forced to leave the hall.

By the way, these types of rigid etiquette rules are relatively new. Although less than 120 years ago, some rigid rules did exist in the classical concert setting, there was no rule that demanded absolute silence. For instance, on more than a few occasions, drinks were served *during* a concert. In the course of the 20th



*Dance styles have changed*



*Behavior in public spaces has also changed (Queen Beatrix with rapper Ali B)*



*Coffee@Company  
Amsterdam*

<sup>21</sup> Swaan (1979).

century, the demands for silence and non-moving have become increasingly stricter, while the rest of society has become increasingly informal.

There are many rules of etiquette associated with a classical concert, the ballet, or a more traditional concert, which if not abided by, do not necessarily lead to physical exclusion so much as some degree of social exclusion. If the youths in Kolb's research fail to have a good time because they are unable to follow the codes, they are not physically expelled, but suffer ostracism of a more symbolic kind.<sup>22</sup>

An important corollary to the differences between the social codes of those who attend high art concerts and those who attend new art concerts is the difference in the nature of their feelings of togetherness. So-called sociological diary and memory research has shown that people attending their first pop concert were impressed by aspects that can be included under the denominators "we-ness" and "new-ness."<sup>23</sup> From the very earliest ages, the young have been listening to pop music on the radio not only among themselves but also with their parents and there was much discussion about what they were listening to. Meanwhile, the parents' initial aversion to the music quickly turned to interest in, and sometimes even enthusiasm for, the new music.

For that matter, the attraction of live concerts is always grounded in the experience of togetherness. This applies to both high art and new art concerts. Moreover, togetherness often results in both pleasure and annoyance. Annoyance can, however, strangely enough, actually intensify one's pleasure. I am convinced that if an audience was totally quiet during a classical concert, the experience of the individual concert-goer would be less satisfying.

Nevertheless, the nature of the experience varies. The difference lies in the goals of the various concert-goers. In a high art situation, the visitor is chiefly interested in an individual aesthetic experience. He wants to experience the artistic artifact alone and individually, whether it be a specific painting or a specific performance. He or she is seeking a "we-less I" (or Waldhoff's "*wir-loses Ich*") experience.<sup>24</sup>

In the new concert situation as well as the musical and new theatre, dance, and museum situations, the audience is generally much less interested in this aspect. This individualistic or isolated experience is replaced by one that strives for a situation that is characterized by a more communal sharing of the aesthetic experience. Sharing often increases one's levels of concentration and intensifies the aesthetic experience. This has pretty much always been the case for the genres of cabaret, operetta, and vaudeville.

I deliberately placed my primitive man in two concert situations that on the surface appear to be quite different from one another. In Figure 2, overall music attendance is high at the two extremes: that of the classical concert and that of pop and dance concerts and the musical. Evidently, in music, there is a clear dichotomy, which corresponds with, on the one hand, formality and on the other, informality.

This does not mean, however, that there is no overlapping of these informal and formal audiences, but this is a relatively small group. This group is thus not only omnivorous with respect to genres but also with respect to formal and informal consumption situations. At the same time there is also a small but growing group of musicians (and an even larger group of theatre actors) who can relatively easily and with

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<sup>22</sup> This means that most outsiders have to deal with a prohibitively high "social price." For the notion of social price, see Abbing and Kagan (2007).

<sup>23</sup> Jokinen and Saaristo (2005).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Wouters (2004).

equal measures of pleasure perform in both the formal and informal situation, sometimes even with the same ensemble.<sup>25</sup>

I think that in the case of music, the term “dichotomy” is even more appropriate because the majority of classical concert-goers look down at the music of choice of the other concert-goers and are more likely to believe that this other group’s music is not “real” art. It is striking, but fairly understandable, that the disdain is not mutual.

At first, it seems that it matters for the analysis whether audiences have seats and pretty much remain seated for the duration of a performance or whether people are standing – or even more dramatically – are standing on their seats, as was the case for the first large jazz concerts in the Netherlands in the 1950s.

As a 10-year-old boy, on my way to my weekly recorder lessons, I would bicycle past the Houtrushallen in The Hague, which I watched with some excitement. That’s indeed where it was all happening: Whatever that “it” was, it was supposed to be scandalous, but for me it represented potentially more freedom and less claustrophobia.

Therefore, the level of formality or informality is neither dependent upon whether the audience is seated nor whether there are other restrictions of movement in place. In May of 2006, Sonny Rollins will perform in Amsterdam’s Concertgebouw. It will be a concert with seating, but I guarantee you that the ambience will be informal and certainly appealing to both young and old alike.

It would also be inaccurate to measure the level of formality or informality solely on the audience’s outward expressiveness. One can usually find a chair to sit down in, in the balconies of the Paradiso and Milky Way. And whether it is a pop, techno, or punk concert, today’s audiences in general do not stand on these chairs. It is just not done. This demonstrates that contemporary concert codes of conduct are also based on more generally accepted norms.

The recent exhibition of Rineke Dijkstra’s extraordinary video art at the Stedelijk Museum is a good example. Two separate screens show images of teens dancing to electronic dance music in front of a white backdrop. It appears that she pretty much grabbed the teens right off the dance floor and instructed them to just go on moving as if they were still out there on the dance floor. These teens can be seen moving in an exceptionally restrained manner and that has next to nothing to do with the camera itself. These teens are merely conforming to the conventions of their peer group or subculture. Nevertheless, the way they control their bodies differs fundamentally from the way that classical concert-goers control their bodies. The bodies of the teens are anything but rigid or inert. In fact, the video reveals a broad range of conduct and movement. Each of the teens, within a certain range of acceptable movements, still manages to find dramatically unique movements, which undoubtedly have a lot to do with individual character differences.



*Het Parool, 26 March 1956*  
*“Lionel Hampton once again stirs the crowd to a frenzy”*  
*“This has nothing to do with jazz”*



*Dancing in a restrained manner*

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<sup>25</sup> This is common among musicians who perform World music. I have two examples from my own experiences that illustrate this. I once saw the Kronos Quartet at the Concertgebouw and then a second time at Panama, an Amsterdam dance club. I also saw a performance of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer’s Night’s Dream* produced by the British theatre group TNT at the Milky Way and then a second time in the Amsterdam Stadschouwburg (City Theatre). For me, they were two totally different aesthetic experiences.

This level of variation and the bounded freedom of choice are typical of the informal character of this type of consumption situation.

The art museum's browsing public and the seated audience of the cabaret and musical performance as well as of a growing number of seated concerts in jazz and pop also restrict the audience's overall range of acceptable movements not unlike those experienced by the teens in Dijkstra's video. At the same time however, the consumption can be characterized as basically informal.<sup>26</sup> This also holds for an increasing part of the theatre as well as the more folkloristic performances of classical music, such as the concerts of André Rieu.

What I also noticed about the teens in Dijkstra's video and what I have seen with my own eyes at various techno and rap concerts in the Milky Way, is the wide variety of dance styles out on the dance floor. These dance styles are somewhat determined by what group or subculture the dancers belong to. Many of these subcultures have more or less attained global status. It is interesting for sociologists who study forms of inclusion and exclusion at this point in time to witness the phenomenon of how members from very different socio-cultural groups with distinctly different subcultural behavior patterns agreeably and quite peacefully share the same space at new art concerts. One notices that at this micro-level the processes of identification and (dis)identification (or discrediting) go effortlessly hand in hand.<sup>27</sup>

### Characteristics of High Art and New Art

The term low art is seldom used anymore. Therefore, I used the term non-high art. From now on, however, I will call non-high art "new art" and this is with the implied purpose of introducing it as the successor to high art. The question is whether this is anything more than a rhetorical exercise. Does it make sense?

Table 1. Common characteristics of high and new art

HIGH ART	NEW ART
Emphasis on <b>authenticity</b> of artwork and the individual person as an authentic artist.	Same, but to a lesser extent. More emphasis for creative teams.
Particular attention paid to the notion of <b>original</b> .	Less emphasis on originals.
Focus on the unique qualities of the artist and the notion of the <b>artist as genius</b> .	Same, but to a lesser extent. More emphasis on stars and producers.
Inclination to <b>reject new techniques</b> .	Open to new techniques.
Inclination to <b>reject commerce and the market</b> .	Same, but to a lesser extent.
Emphasis on <b>complexity and essential prior knowledge</b> .	Same, but to a lesser extent.
<b>Product variation is limited and concerns details</b> .	Much product variation.

<sup>26</sup> People in museums, for instance, seldom walk exclusively along the walls, moving from one painting to the next but increasingly they can be observed moving freely through the halls, crossing at odd angles to observe something else, etc. Loer (2005). Even the way a show is displayed has become more varied, with the order being less often chronological and more often associational or thematic.

<sup>27</sup> Swaan (2000) discusses the process of (dis)identification with its sometimes disastrous results.

<b>Limited interest in innovation.</b> Innovations of outsiders are considered threatening.	More interest in innovations and outsiders.
<b>Formal consumption practices.</b>	Informal consumption practices.

On the left-hand side of the table you will see a number of characteristics that are often – but not always – associated with the kind of art many people regard as high art. Within each category it is mostly an issue of more or less. Moreover, not all social groups and groups of experts agree on what genres of art should be considered high art. But even if they were to all agree, there are many different combinations of characteristics that may end up determining whether a work of art is high art or not. Thus, although the characteristics more or less typify or characterize high art, there are always exceptions when it comes to any one particular characteristic and thus, the presence of any one characteristic is an inadequate condition for the existence of high art.

A fairly typical characteristic of high art is the relative importance both the consumer and producer place on the notions of authenticity and the artist as genius. Another typical characteristic of high art is the importance both consumer and producer place on the idea of the original, by which we mean, the artifact, the composition, or the performance itself. These types of qualities are related by what Maarten Doorman calls the “Romantic Order.”<sup>28</sup>

This is related to how the world of high art places relatively more importance on products that differ only ever so slightly in their various elements. This is certainly the case with classical music where the experienced audience notices the very slightest variations in the performances of a piece of music. At the same time, there is little attention or respect for drastic re-workings or innovations, even less so if they are produced by outsiders. Outsiders are viewed with suspicion. That is why, in the Netherlands, translations of Schubert by Lennie Kuhr singing in a “normal” voice as well as, until recently, opera lyrics translated into Dutch by Jan Rot were soundly criticized or, even worse, simply ignored. The same can be said for classical music elements in pop music.

Meanwhile, other art worlds place less emphasis on differences in detail. The production variety is larger and both consumers and producers place more importance on dramatic innovations as well as innovations introduced by outsiders. The enthusiasm and eagerness with which the established modern art world embraced the graffiti of street artists is an example of this acceptance. The differences between the high and new art worlds are also highlighted by the fact that, until recently, almost no pop musicians ever graduated from music conservatories. (Although current figures show some increases, the numbers are still low compared to the number of students and graduates in the classical departments at the conservatories. Pop students remain extremely under-represented especially considering the total number of pop musicians who are currently performing for remuneration compared to the number of classical musicians who get paid for their performances.<sup>29</sup>) In practice, pop musicians were forced to take expensive private music lessons. It is a remarkable fact that many successful pop

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<sup>28</sup> Doorman (2004).

<sup>29</sup> Abbing and Kagan (2007).

musicians since 1950 have also had the benefit of studying at a visual arts academy on some level.<sup>30</sup> Apparently this is where they picked up their artistic attitudes, which purportedly have had some influence on their success in the market. The visual arts world is evidently less scared of newcomers and outsiders than the classical art music world.

Furthermore, high art is fairly typically characterized by a general rejection of the introduction of new techniques in the creation and production of art by consumers and producers alike. High art also customarily rejects commerce, which goes together with the common practice of artists and art institutions applying for donations and subsidies. This rejection is often closely associated with a certain level of anxiety and, not unrelated, to a certain level of contempt for the market and technology. At the same time, the consumer and producer emphasize the importance of an artwork's complexity and the need for prior training.<sup>31</sup> Another typical high art characteristic is that both producer and consumer relatively easily attain a certain level of prestige through their associations with high art.<sup>32</sup>

The difference between high and new art characteristics is, indeed, a question of more or less. In this context, it is worth noting that the producers and fans of electronic dance music and rock music also value the alleged authenticity of a work and the maker as a unique author. Moreover, producers and consumers in the world of new music also acquire prestige by association, not least of all by showing contempt for commercial "pop-pop music". However, on average these aspects are weaker than they are in, for instance, the classical music world.<sup>33</sup> And the collaborative aspect in creation or production is less veiled than it is in high art.

It is interesting that the world of "pop-pop music" – as opposed to that of the rock world – has its stars but that these stars are usually not regarded as authors. I think that nowadays people who participate in new art genres, not only in music but also in theater, for instance, acquire less prestige from their associations with their art form than is the case in high art.<sup>34</sup> Whether this is related to the possible transition to a post-modern age depends on the meaning of this not-always clear term.<sup>35</sup> I anyway expect that in the future, participation in the production and consumption of art will likewise offer less and less distinction to its participants than is currently the case.

It is my contention that of all the characteristics, the one regarding the formality of the consumption practices of high art is the most universal of the many characteristics associated with high art. (Personally, I am not aware of any important exceptions.) And because this quality is, more than any of the others, to a great extent dependent on the passage of time, I find it justified and quite desirable to call the non-high arts *new art*.

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<sup>30</sup> Abbing and Kagan (2007).

<sup>31</sup> The emphasis on complexity in relation to cultural participation can also be found in the works of sociologists such as Ganzeboom (1989). Wilterdink (1990) and Alexander (2003) reveal that upon close examination, an artwork has an infinite number of qualities that can more or less be perceived as complex. People attach value to an artwork's perceived complexities, so that every measurement of its complexity must be based on a subjective and socially determined choice to be able to be measured accurately.

<sup>32</sup> Bourdieu (1979).

<sup>33</sup> Kloet (2005) reveals how the emerging "art scenes" in China and Hong Kong place more value on the purported higher level of authenticity of rock music as compared to that of "pop-pop" music.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Bourdieu (1979), Swaan (1986) and Peterson and Kern (1996).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Wilterdink).

I will now once again turn to Figure 5. For me, the order of the categories from left to right indicate a decline in formality, or if you will, an increase in informality, or in other words a shift from high to new art. However, because each of the categories is comprised of a number of sub-categories that are more or less formal, the precise sequence is open to further discussion.

You may have noticed by now that none of the basic qualities associated with high art refers to the qualities of the artifact, or the composition or performance of the work itself. These qualities are “value-free,” i.e., they have no value.<sup>36</sup> It is only through human intervention that these qualities give the work its meaning. In other words, they only become meaningful as artworks through “the social”.<sup>37</sup>

In this respect I agree with Howard Becker that the artwork moves through time all the time changing its shape.<sup>38</sup> These shapes can be experienced as complex or simple. The artifact as such is not complex or simple. Whether the art work in its specific shape is experienced as complex depends upon its social setting.

The relative inertia of high art and its concomitant lack of innovation is related to the numerous aforementioned qualities commonly associated with high art.<sup>39</sup> Due to forms of social monopolization, the inertia and its perpetuation are more intense in the classical music world than they are in other art worlds.

Moreover, social, cultural, and economic factors all play their roles as well. In our book *Moving Art*, Sacha Kagan and I will delve deeper into these factors and their relationships.<sup>40</sup> When it comes to the classical music world we point to, among others, the relatively high degree of social monopolization, which is enforced by the various social networks of art “officials,” to borrow Becker’s term. Officials like Von Karajan and, currently in the Netherlands, Reinbert de Leeuw have given and continue to give de facto leadership to effective social monopolies – monopolies that, much like in other industries cause inertia and dearth of innovation.

### **The Limited Effect of Art Subsidies**

As noted earlier, the high performance arts and art museums that appear on the left side of Figure 5 are the art forms most commonly associated with graying and dwindling audience shares.. This is because the young are less and less interested in these art forms, while at the same time, these forms continue to receive the lion’s share of government subsidies. In the present context, I cannot discuss factors that explain the increases in subsidies per visitor, usually by hundreds of percent, in the period 1950–1980 nor the ways these increases were encouraged by the various art worlds or “sold” to the

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. Smith (1988).

<sup>37</sup> This “value-free” point of departure in art sociology is not an expression of reductionism. To the contrary. I think that the present criticism of the art sociological approach, for instance Coleman (2004) and Doorman (2004), is unjustified. The approach is sound. What at times could be criticized, however, is that some sociologists have an insufficient level of knowledge of their chosen topics – in our case art. Depending on the issue, **however, basically, those who peer down from the 10<sup>th</sup> floor may not always be seeing enough**. As in any science, good research is a combination of, on the one hand, commitment and participation and, on the other, of being able to keep a critical distance to produce accurate results.

<sup>38</sup> Becker (1982).

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Becker (1995). As the economic historian Baudet (1970) long ago demonstrated, there can be no innovation without diffusion.

<sup>40</sup> Abbing and Kagan (2007).

“man in the street.” In this context, De Swaan’s theory regarding the double morality with respect to the diffusion of high culture is of particular significance here.<sup>41</sup>

In the present context, I am interested in the existence and nature of a possible relationship between the level of subsidization and inertia. As noted, among highly subsidized art worlds there continues to be a great deal of inertia, especially in classical music. Considering the current relationship between subsidy levels, graying, and loss of audience and market shares, the obvious conclusion would be that subsidies contribute to graying and loss of audience and market shares.

I think this conclusion is wrong, however. In the period 1950–2003 the high art visitor in the UK has received less than 50% of the subsidies received in the Netherlands and other European countries.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, UK attendance figures during the period 1950–2003 are no lower than those on the mainland and, according to experts, the quality of the average concert was also no lower. Furthermore, the graying and decline in audience share in the UK were approximately the same as in the Netherlands. Plus, in the UK, as elsewhere, those with higher educations continue to run the show. Although the prices on average are somewhat higher in the UK, this has not led to a decline in attendance figures.<sup>43</sup>

This makes it reasonably safe to conclude that subsidy levels have little influence on attendance figures or quality. I suspect that if the Netherlands had had lower subsidies in the period 1950–2003 comparable to the level of those in the UK, the situation in the classical music world would not be all that different from the situation that currently exists with its much higher subsidy levels.

However, it is also true that, because of lower levels of subsidization, the UK’s high art institutions pay more attention to markets and their developments and presently are better aware of the problems of graying and declining audience shares. That is why we currently see a great deal of experimentation with new products in the UK and people are much more conscious of the *excessive formality* in the consumption of art. The British government as prominent patron, seems to be more concerned about these developments than the Dutch government. That is why it financed Kolb’s research. As a consequence, the English classical music world is better equipped to deal with recent developments than their Dutch equivalent. (At the same time, the UK seems to be undergoing a hardening of viewpoints, which probably has to do with the present attention for the growing problems. In any case, there can be no improvements in health without first being sick.)

How does the coming decade look for high art in the Netherlands? Well, it is highly likely that, in one form or another, part of the performance art world which is presently regarded as high art will survive and will continue to be called high art. But, then again, this doesn’t necessarily mean that this part of the high art performance world will be identified by the same characteristics or combinations of characteristics that it is today. Moreover, the current split between high and new art will probably gradually begin to disappear. The currently very *museumified* classical concert scene will end up following the strategy that museums have been assuming for some time already. Thus, audience

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<sup>41</sup> Swaan (1986).

<sup>42</sup> O’Hagan (1998) p.139. In this respect, it is worth noting that the donation levels in the UK are higher than in other European countries. In the near future I intend to do a more detailed comparative study on these matters.)

<sup>43</sup> Abbing and Kagan (2007).

behavior will continue to become increasingly informal and more varied, the same as production methods. I predict that within the next five years or so most, but not all concerts, spectators will be able to watch the faces of conductors and musicians on large video screens, something that home viewers long ago grew accustomed to and have grown to value.

Because classical musicians who are worried about losing their jobs will increasingly sound the alarm, I expect that the art lobby will become less conservative, which will in turn precipitate reasonably rapid changes. We will also witness the emergence of a new generation of culture entrepreneurs, who will start presenting classical concerts in various new formats without the aid of government subsidies. There is a potentially huge audience waiting for this type of production. Some of these entrepreneurs will feed into the already lucrative trend, which I call the folklorization of classical music. At the same time, I expect the emergence of passionate cultural entrepreneurs, comparable to the Dutch cultural entrepreneur Joop van den Ende, who will appear on the classical music scene not to add folklore concerts but to breathe some new life into the museum branch of the classical concert world. They will certainly and gratefully exploit the trend of more old people going out more frequently, and thus fill a hole in the market, which the current inert classical music world has ignored till now.

Those free classical concerts and opera productions will find a production formula that will distinguish them from the current subsidized productions. By using long-term contracts with local and thus less-expensive soloists, the booking of larger halls and longer runs the cost per spectator will no doubt decline significantly. The use of electronic amplification will increase and the present practice of secrecy in this regard will gradually disappear.<sup>44</sup> (There is, in any case, currently already far more electronic amplification in classical concerts than the producers are willing to admit. For example, it is fairly common that the voices of more and more classical singers are being amplified these days. The same has already been the case for some time for orchestras performing in large halls in the US, or in spaces like the Queen Elizabeth Hall in London. But today's regular concert-goers, armed with their general disdain for electronic amplification, don't want to hear any of this.)

This has in general been going on for a long time already in the museum and visual arts worlds. This is not unlike what used to be common practice in the classical music world prior to the twentieth century. The classical music world will necessarily develop again a keener interest in more contemporary music productions, which would include everything from new classical to techno. There will in any case be a large increase in cross-over festivals from what is presently available. In such festivals classical, contemporary, and cross-over music formats will be presented on a variety of stages together. The paternalistic and thus counter-productive practice of presenting some new works at the end of a classical concert to an audience that is interested mainly in the great masters, will certainly come to an end.

The very nature of the subsidy system will inevitably change as well. Structural subsidies will be reduced and there will be more money for temporary or one-time projects. If such policies precede rather than follows the changes in the classical music world, and if the new subsidy system is implemented in a

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<sup>44</sup> All these changes show the limited value of the cost disease theory which is popular among many cultural economists and policymakers. I think that this theory is obsolete and to apply it is irresponsible, not only because of the ever-changing nature of the performing arts, but also for methodological reasons, Cf. Abbing (2002) and Abbing and Kagan (2007) – for a draft version of the chapter on the cost disease: see [www.hansabbing.nl](http://www.hansabbing.nl).

somewhat abrupt way, it is bound to contribute to the revitalization of classical music. (In this context it is worth noting that my earlier position about the limited long-term effect of subsidy levels does not count, or at least less so, when looking at the short-term effects of fairly large and abrupt changes in the subsidy system.<sup>45</sup>)

What I do not expect – but would nevertheless very much recommend – is that Dutch dignitaries, whether they like it or not, begin to openly express appreciation for contemporary new music from pop to techno through their own channels. This has been and remains a fairly common situation in countries like France and the UK. By 1965, Queen Elizabeth had already honored the Beatles at Buckingham Palace in full view of both the British and world press. In 2006, it remains totally unthinkable that the Dutch government would ever request Queen Beatrix to officially honor DJ Tiësto with knighthood in a public ceremony as she did some time ago with classical conductor Bernard Haitink. (I know this is only part of the story, but it is worth noting that considering Tiësto's sizeable contribution to the Dutch gross national product he is certainly contributing more to Dutch export figures than the Beatles were in 1965.) That Queen Beatrix takes great pleasure in hugging rapper Ali B in public is a nice touch, but this has nothing to do with honoring a person's contribution to the arts.

But even without a significant change in the attitudes of the Dutch cultural-political elite, I expect that the aforementioned scenario will eventually end up revitalizing the classical music world in the Netherlands. The dichotomy in music will gradually fade away, which will ultimately help prevent a major hiatus in the musical canon.<sup>46</sup> All's well that ends well.

But then again, maybe not totally. Everything will be fine when it comes to music. But the fact that the current musical dichotomy in the Netherlands is larger than it is in both the UK and France, is not a separate, unrelated issue. It is intertwined with a cultural split in society in general, a split that exists in every Western country, but seems to be more pronounced in the Netherlands.

Successive Dutch governments have proven to be generous when it comes to handing out money. Although the pop music world receives proportionately very little money in the Netherlands it still receives far more than their equivalents in France and certainly in the UK do. More importantly, community art projects – such as those supported by foundations like Kunstenaars&Co, for example – also receive more money than their equivalents in many other European countries.

Thus, it is those who live on the underside of Dutch society, who, when it comes to money, are treated relatively well. This means that the general preference of Dutch politicians to keep both friend and foe happy by offering them financial support has resulted in a distribution of income that is less unequal than in most other European countries. But this is not necessarily the case when it comes to the distribution of respect in this country once ruled by regents. (Sociologists such as Goran Therborn are now placing more and more emphasis on the sometimes very unequal distribution of respect and I think they are right in doing so.<sup>47</sup>)

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<sup>45</sup> In another realm, Nooy (1996) has managed to emphasize the relatively large effect that changes have on the way funders distribute subsidies among artists. Systemic changes shake things up. In my terminology I would say that these systemic changes more or less help break up local social monopolies.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Kempers (2000) en Doorman (2004).

<sup>47</sup> Therborn (2005) and Sennett (2003).

I think that in countries like the UK and France, despite, or possibly even *because* of their aristocratic pasts, the apportionment of respect is actually less unequal than it is here in the Netherlands. In the relatively informal Netherlands, we don't often express our feelings of superiority outwardly,<sup>48</sup> but in a somewhat veiled way the behavior of the elite is paternalistic and people have little respect for the cultures of others (including that of the young) and their inherent qualities. This posture carries with it certain risks, especially in the case of young immigrants.

One final note. If we can classify television and semi-public spaces like the Coffee@Company as street, then the material necessary to do innovative social science research in the area of art and culture can literally and figuratively be found in the street. The street however, often appears to be a fairly distant place for the average scientist doing research in this area. I mean this figuratively as well. Many of them it seems have an innate fear of street culture. This makes it all the more difficult to get a better perspective on this interesting material.

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. Wouters (1998).

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