

High, Serious and Popular Art Events

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This is a first draft version of large parts of the fourth chapter of the book *The Value of art. A Sociological Study of Art, Artists and the Arts' Economy* that I am presently writing. For who is interested I have included a provisional table of contents of the book at the end of this file.

Comments are very welcome!!

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Several references to relevant literature will be added in a later stage.

In the final stage the text will be edited and the English corrected.

In a previous chapter called Art Events the main unit of analysis in the book, the art event, and its ingredients and outcomes are explained. In art events people interact while focusing on art. Art events run from a concert in a stadium to a conversation about art. The focus on art is an ingredient of an event. For participants symbols of membership or precious objects are an outcome. They are charged with value. People who participate in successful art events get vitality or emotional energy out of their participation.

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Illustration

Still to be written.

Introduction

In this chapter I shall develop a distinction between on the one hand high-and-serious art events and on the other popular art events. The distinction rests on a difference in the nature of the interaction event (or interaction ritual). In high-and-serious art events art is a precious object and symbol of group membership, while in popular art events this is not the case. Moreover, though exceptions exist, subdued behavior is a clear symptom of high-and-serious art events. Other characteristics which are more or less symptomatic for the latter are discussed as well. An example is that in high-and-serious art events there is often (but not always) less interaction between performers and audience.

By distinguishing high (or serious) and popular art events instead of high (or serious) and popular works of art I bypass, at least for the time being, complicated and often frustrating discussions on which works are high or serious and which popular.

Further down in the chapter I shall make a distinction between high art events on the one hand and serious and popular art events on the other. Formalism and ceremoniousness are characteristic of and not of the other two. I have the impression that especially in modern art circles a distinction is emerging between high art and other serious art and I think that my distinction between the respective events covers this difference well.

I commence the chapter by giving a description of characteristics of a typical classical concert and a typical pop concert that matter for the present analysis. For most people a classical concert is a high art event par excellence, whereas a pop concert is certainly not a high art event. For the classical concert I have chosen a concert by a symphony orchestra.¹ The vast majority of people going to classical concerts visit concerts by symphony orchestras. Moreover, if there exists different degrees of highness, without any doubt the symphony concert will be the highest.

(Unless otherwise stated in this chapter the term art event refers to what in the first chapter has been called a full-scale art event: an event that starts with entering the hall or museum and stops with leaving the venue.)

1. A Classical Concert and a Pop Concert

Setting foot in a classical music hall one cannot but be impressed by its opulence. In the foyers of older halls this shows from rich decorations, carpets, chandeliers etcetera. In the newer halls it shows above all from the spaciousness of the entrance hall, but also from the solidness of the materials used. From the ticket box to the cloakroom and toilets there is a careful avoidance of anything that could be vulgar.² People waiting to enter the main room behave in a subdued way, even though there is a clear air of excitement. They remember their manners. There is an exchange of courtesies. At the same time behavior is casual; people feel at home.

Entering the main room the excitement increases. Especially in the older halls the impression of opulence is particularly strong. However, somewhat unexpected, in the many rows of chairs that face the stage the chairs turn out to be close together and their backs are straight. They are uncomfortable and leave little room to move. (In theatres the backs of the chairs are somewhat less straight, but only in modern cinemas the chairs are really comfortable.) Even turning one's head to the person behind takes an effort and cannot but disturb the persons sitting next. The stage turns out to be high. Given its height communication between musicians and audience must be difficult.

When the musicians enter they ignore the audience. The men in the orchestra wear tuxedos and the women long black dresses. (In other than symphony orchestras there may be no tuxedos and long dresses, but the clothing is nevertheless exclusively black with some white.) When the conductor

¹ For an illuminating and more extensive account of a symphony concert and its setting see Small (1998).

² Small (1998) *

enters the lights are dimmed and the musicians rise. There is applause, the conductor bows and then turns his back to the audience. He raises his baton, the musicians are in attention and within a few seconds all conversation in the hall has stopped. The audience is altogether still. Apart from some occasional coughing the audience remains still till the end of the first part. The silence continues till the conductor let his baton fall and visibly relaxes his body. There is a short intermission, in which people sometimes whisper to one another and reposition their bodies. During the intermission the conductor does not turn his body towards the audience. After around a minute he raises his baton again and once more the audience becomes still. The same is repeated after each part until the last part is finished. Then again the audience remains silent till the conductor relaxes. Next the conductor turns around and faces the audience, the audience starts to applaud, the conductor bows and makes a gesture to the musicians who rise as one man, now face the audience and bow as well.³

Behavior can differ from one concert to another. The applause can be more or less enthusiastic and may last shorter or longer and this may somewhat influence the subsequent behavior of the conductor and the musicians, but the variation in behavior is limited. Nevertheless, when the orchestra played well, it is clear that the audience is happy to applaud. During the pieces it was hard to tell if people particularly liked the concert, but during the applause audience members clearly communicate with one another. Enthusiasm spreads and if several audience members rise more follow.

Apart from the moments of applause the audience behavior is subdued from entering to leaving. But for the duration of the playing it is more than subdued. The stillness is remarkable and extends to the facial muscles. In shots of the audiences on television one clearly sees that bodies including heads and facial muscles are still and usually also relaxed. Most often it is impossible to tell whether someone is completely taken away by the music, is attentively following minor details, is thinking of problems at work or is bored. During the break or after the last piece when people move to the exit one senses more or less excitement, but behavior remains subdued. For instance, one does not hear loud exclamations or people shouting to someone further away. People know their manners. And for the duration of the event the behavior of the attendants and of the service personnel at the bar, in the cloakroom and the toilets is polite and subdued.

The common characteristic of a symphony concert, continuously subdued behavior, also applies to other classical concerts and opera, serious theater, serious dance and some jazz performances. During the actual performance in a theater the audience has slightly more space to move and the facial muscles may occasionally show some emotions. But general behavior is as subdued. The latter applies as well to most museum visits and visits to commercial galleries, including the openings.

Let us now have a look at a pop concert. Pop concerts are held in very different types of venues. Nowadays part of them is in buildings, which are primarily used for pop concerts. Often they have a history of being used for other purposes like some sort of industrial activity, but some are newly build. In both types the interior and exterior of these buildings are above all functional. Compared with the halls for high or serious art events there is little luxury. Moreover, the large majority of pop concerts are given in spaces that are multifunctional like small clubs, tents, halls and stadiums.

Choosing a type of pop concert to describe is problematic. There is much variety and there is not one dominant type of pop concert that is frequented by the large majority of people visiting pop concerts. Moreover behavior differs a great deal between concerts. (In this book I use a broad definition of pop concerts and pop music. It covers most music that is usually called popular music and that became popular after the Second World War.) There are singer-songwriter concerts where people may or may not be seated and where there is usually no dancing. In these concerts the audience often starts to applaud when it recognizes a song and so temporarily drowns the music. Nobody seems to mind this. People are visibly enthusiastic. After the end of a song or piece there is applause, often with hands above the heads and sometimes accompanied by whistling.

³ If soloist are present the above procedure may differ somewhat.

In many pop-pop concerts and rock concerts with a large audience in the hall people will at times wave their arms or sing along with the music. Or to give another example, during metal concerts part of the people dancing may bump into one another in the *before mentioned mosh-pit and there may be some so-called stage diving. In many concerts people are likely to ask for an encore. "We want more." But there are also dance concerts in which many people dance, but not everybody and not always, while there is little or no applauding. Here the music may last for hours without interruption, while DJs cleverly take over from one another. When they take over the audience sometimes, but not always, says goodbye to the previous DJ with some applause or it welcomes the new and often more famous DJ this way —usually the "best" DJ come last. Many more examples of differences in behavior in various types of concerts could be given. Also within one type or genre behavior may differ from one occasion to another. At the same time average behavior changes slowly over time. For instance, presently stage diving in metal concerts is rare, while 20 years ago it was common.

In pop concerts not only the audience behavior is varied, but also the behavior of musicians. Some may sneakily enter the stage; others enter with special announcements or light effects. After a song some musicians just verbally thank the audience (bowing is rear), others may in some short sentences tell what is next, others again tell an anecdote or make a joke, while a star-musician may shake hands with people close to the stage. In some concerts musicians try to encourage the audience. They may invite people to wave arms, sing along or applaud louder. "I can't hear you." This way they promote interaction with as a result a noticeable more enthusiastic mood in the hall, which in turn influences the behavior of the musicians. Many forms of communication exist: Interesting is the one in which the DJ in his choice of music responds to the mood in the hall and so in turn influences the mood; if successful there is a clear feedback loop.

In shots of audiences on television one clearly sees that most, but not all, audience members are far from still; even seated bodies move, as do facial muscles. One clearly sees that someone is completely taken away by the music, attentively following minor details, is excited or bored. Also, at least for a while, some faces may well be as "empty" as those during classical concerts. In many pop concerts there are also shorter or longer periods in which the audience is altogether silent, the same as in classical concerts

In pop concerts behavior during the breaks and while entering and leaving the hall is usually not subdued. People may well show their emotions with little restrained: they may laugh aloud or shout to somebody at a distance. Also the behavior of the service personnel is less controlled. For instance, people in the cloakroom may cry that people collecting their coats should go first; or they may openly show that they are in a bad or cheerful mood. Therefore, an important common characteristic of many pop concerts is the opposite of that of many classical concerts: behavior is relatively informal and not continuously subdued. The same applies to so-called light opera, musical, cabaret, poetry slams, folk art events, and part of dance and jazz performances.

2. Concerts are Celebrations

The differences between a classical concert and a pop concert are striking. Nevertheless, there are underlying correspondences. This shows when we look at the two types of concerts from the perspective of the art event as interaction event (or interaction ritual) as discussed in Chapter 1. In this context I shall once more use the concepts that were used earlier to describe interaction events and that were depicted in Figure 1 on page *.

By communicating their main focus of attention in both types of concerts people become mutually aware of each other's focus. Because generally the audience of the classical concert is very still, the way it communicates its common focus of attention appears to be less clear than in the case of the pop concert. However, the very stillness, the erectness of the people and all heads being turned in the same direction is also a form of communication, "Without exception we are all into the music."

During both concerts there is a shared mood . The mood is not constant, it develops. When in a pop concert a subtle ballad follows a loud and whipped up song the shared mood in the hall is bound to change. The same applies in the case of an adagio following an allegro. Moreover, when the song, part or piece is well done the intensity of the shared mood is likely to increase. A strong mutual focus and a shared mood reinforce one another. Even in the case of a silent audience, the feedback loop is also likely to result in some attunement of the bodily rhythms of audience members,.

Next, in a successful classical or pop concert these characteristics of a concert bring about collective effervescence, a contagious stirring. In pop concerts the “stirring” usually shows all through the concert. In both concerts applause is a clear form of stirring. And in a classical concert the hush of attention when the director raises his baton is also a kind of stirring. And when the stillness when the music plays is intense it can also be interpreted as an expression of collective effervescence. The stronger the collective effervescence the more successful the concert is likely to be. It shows from the emergence of precious objects or symbols of group membership and feelings of solidarity and righteousness as well as from a general positive feeling among the visitors: they feel strengthened by the concert.

In both types of concerts the precious objects or symbols of group membership that are generated are celebrated during the event. Usually the music, the performer and/or composer represent the most intense precious objects. In classical music with its strict division between composer and performers, the foremost precious object and symbol of membership is often the composer, who in the majority of concerts is dead and thus anyway absent. A concert of the *Fifth of Beethoven is above all a celebration of Beethoven: he is the precious object and symbol of membership. He considerably adds to the concert being a celebration, a feast. In an important pop concert usually the main musician on the stage is the foremost precious object. But when the singer-songwriter (that is, the composer and performing musician) Elton John plays his own most well known songs, these are precious objects as well. At the beginning of each of such songs the audience applauds. Nevertheless, the *birthday boy is Elton John. He is the symbol of group membership par excellence. At times many other items in concerts can become precious objects and symbols of membership as well; like in pop concerts the waving and stretching of arms, stage diving, lightning and clothing, and in classical concerts the interior of the hall, the tuxedos of the musicians and the stillness during the performance.

The use of the adjective “high” in high art suggests that the preciousness of the precious objects in a classical concert is higher than in a pop concert. But this is not necessarily the case. In pop concerts the precious objects can be just as “sacred” as in classical concerts . The main performer, the band, the music, the genre, they can all be precious objects that are very much respected and celebrated. And in the case of a star performer, like for instance Justin Timberlake, the veneration or worship of Justin as precious object and symbol of group membership can be immense.

In both types of concerts symbols of membership may go beyond the event at hand. In chapter 1 it was noted that Madonna and Bach are also collages of all sorts of bits of information, true or false, about and around them. Moreover imagined worlds and the imagined community of all people involved in such worlds can become precious objects, like the community of all lovers of classical music and even wider the world of classical music and the community of all reggae fans and the world of reggae.⁴

Group solidarity is important in both types of concert. And in both types of concerts standards of morality or feelings of righteousness emerge. The feeling of righteousness in judging Justin Timberlake to be an extremely precious or sacred object can be just as intense as in the case of

⁴ For a discussion of the term imagined community see Anderson*.

Beethoven. Therefore in both cases a possible imagined community is at the same time a moral community.⁵

In both a successful pop concert and a classical concert individual visitors can be said to get charged with emotional energy. The concert gives them strength, vitality or confidence. To a degree this is also what they take home. The positive feeling can last hours or may be revoked for days, months or sometimes even years, be it ever less frequent and intense. (The remembrance of the visit to the Brahms-Strawinsky concert under the direction of Simon Rattle in the Queen Elizabeth Hall in London in 1976 brought Thomas good feelings till the present day, the same as his earlier visit (in 1968) to a concert by Jefferson Airplane and the Doors in Amsterdam [this is a reference to an illustration in a earlier chapter]).

3. Art as Symbol of Group Membership

In high-and-serious art events art is a symbol of membership, while in popular art events art is not a symbol of membership. This is the criterion I use for distinguishing both types of events. Analyzing them as interaction events classical and pop concerts turn out to have much in common. But looking now closely at the specific ingredients and outcomes of events, certain fundamental differences can be observed. In this the difference in art being or not being a symbol of group membership stands out. I shall use it as a criterion for distinguishing high-and-serious art events and popular art events. It applies not only to concerts, but to all art events, from performances and museum visits to conversations. Moreover the phenomenon that behavior is or is not relatively subdued is an important symptom of high and popular art events, which I will discuss in the next section.

High-and-Serious art events	Popular art events
Art is symbol of group membership (criterion)	Art is no symbol of group membership
Behavior is relatively subdued (symptom)	Behavior is less subdued

Table * Criterion and foremost symptom of high-and-serious and popular art events

In art events people focus on works of art, artists and/or objects and activities that at that moment are related to art, like a hall, clothing, audience behavior and the event itself, or they focus on art related concepts as people may do during conversations on art. During the events all such items can become precious objects and symbols of group membership. Simultaneously related standards of morality emerge. The symbols have goodness, they are right; foremost the event itself is precious and right. When outsiders disagree, there is righteous anger.

If necessary the precious objects will be defended against the disrespect of “outsiders” who do not agree with their sacredness. If during the break in a Mahler concert someone would state that Mahler’s music is pompous and is inferior music or, worse, would say that classical music is not of our time, others will certainly defend Mahler’s music and classical music generally and may well ask: “What are you doing here.” Membership and feelings of solidarity evidently do not extend to this critical person. Mutatis mutandis the same can apply to pop music. As noted the sacredness and righteousness of the symbols generated during a Reggae concert do not have to be less intense than during a classical concerts. (If people who meet during concerts, from ancient music played on “original” instruments to reggae concerts, believe to be “very right” and at the same time feel threatened, they may well be inclined to sectarianism. Righteousness, evangelism and extreme

⁵ Among others Goffman Co 23) uses the term moral community.

protectionism tend to go together. This was indeed the case in many ancient music circles as well as in Reggae circles in the seventies and eighties and in some of such circles this is still the case.)

The distinction between high-and-serious art events cannot be based on the degree of sacredness of the generated symbols; in my approach it rests on the presence or absence of art (or the arts or the world of art) as symbol of group membership. In many high-and-serious art events art, the arts and the world of art are celebrated in a rather straightforward way, be it not all the time. In speeches or introductions during performances and openings, in lectures, in programs and program notes, in catalogues and subscription folders numerous references to art and the arts are made. Such references are absent in popular art events. On other occasions references can also be more indirect in high-and-serious art events. Nevertheless, the world of art, the imagined community of art lovers, of cultural people who respect art and are convinced of its importance, is a symbol of membership. Popular art is called art, but art is no symbol of membership in popular art events. The popular arts and their users do not belong to the world of art.

In this context it is also telling that in high-and-serious art events composers, choreographers, playwrights and visual artists are referred to as artists, while in the popular arts this is hardly done. Moreover, the areas in the popular arts, in which this happens, are always those which are moving or attempting to move in the direction of the high-and-serious arts, like presently part of “serious” pop music.

The goodness or rightness of the precious objects or symbols of membership of a popular art events does not extend to and is not derived from the rightness of art nor from the rightness of popular art or of entertainment. Popular Art and Entertainment with capital first letters do not exist. At least for the time being, their goodness is less intense and less widely circulated. And irrespective of the shared mood, the enthusiasm and the feelings of solidarity and even superiority that participants of popular art events may have and irrespective of the extreme sacredness of their precious objects, the rightness of their symbols has no link with the goodness of art, that is Art-with-a-capital-a.

If the precious objects in popular art events are threatened—for instance when somebody puts down Justin Timberlake—people are ready to defend him, but at such occasions nobody will feel that popular art or entertainment is treated disrespectful and needs defending.⁶ But when somebody speaks bad of Beethoven’s music or other precious objects in classical concerts the goodness of Art-with-a-capital-a is at stake and disbelievers must be punished by banishment.

In many high-and-serious art events there are no straightforward references to art and art appears to be not an important symbol of membership. Nevertheless, at any time it can easily be evoked as an intense symbol of group membership. This is what can be expected. Most participants enter art events bringing cultural capital in which the value or goodness of art is an important cognition that is laden with emotion. During a successful art event the cognition is reinforced and feeds back into the same and successive events.

The righteous anger that emerges when important symbols in high-and-serious art events are threatened, forms an indirect proof of the importance of art as symbol of group membership. At such moments art becomes a symbol and the goodness of the symbol contributes to the righteousness of the anger. In defense of the prominent symbols of the events almost always additional arguments are used which refer to the general value and goodness of art. This is what Thomas experienced in the illustration. After suggesting in an interview that experiments with classical concerts in which part of the visitors could stand and move around while the music played, classical music people were

⁶ However, presently mild forms of a veneration of entertainment can be observed. For instance, watching the presentation of the Oscars on television I get the impression that it is more than a celebration of film and filmmaking; to a degree it is also a celebration of entertainment. I remember that once in his word of thanks the film actor Tom Cruise said * that he would continue to act as well as possible in the service of entertainment, as if entertainment is something with universal value that can be served and demands respect. Nevertheless, if entertainment has some universal value the respect for entertainment is still of a very different order than the respect for Art.

offended. Next they not only defended the stillness during classical concerts, which is clearly a precious object and symbol of membership during classical concerts, but they also started to defend art. Feelings of group solidarity and expressions of righteous anger emerged which extended to art and the world of art. Thomas, visual artist or not, represented a threat to art. He could not possibly be a member of the imagined community of true art lovers. A well known critique called Thomas “a stranger in the world of art”. Being an outsider he was disqualified. He had no right to speak. Moreover, because of art’s association with civilization the expression was certainly intended to be malicious. This is not a cultural person.

The art-as-symbol criterion allows for a grey zone between high-and-serious art events and popular art events. At present certain “serious” pop music events may well inhabit this in-between zone. In those direct and indirect references to art and the world of art are more common than is common in pop music events. But otherwise the distinction is absolute. If gradually art and the world of art would stop to be symbols of membership in art events, in my definition all art events would become popular art events. This is not what we see at present, but in comparison to popular art events the domain of high-and-serious art events appears to become smaller.

4. Subdued Behavior

In comparison with the behavior in popular art events the behavior in high-and-serious art events is relatively subdued; not occasionally, but most of the time. There sometimes are preplanned intermissions in which behavior is relatively less subdued or controlled, like when an audience applauds, but before, after and in-between the behavior is continuously subdued. The latter also applies to behavior that precedes or comes after the main performance or act. Entering the hall, during the break and while leaving behavior is subdued as well. And during an opening in a gallery also before and after the speech behavior is subdued. The continuously subdued behavior is not limited to audience members; it also applies to other people present. Also the behavior of attendants, bar-personnel and people working in the cloakroom is relatively restraint.

In high-and-serious art events continuous subdued behavior is an input in the event that adds to the success of the event. It easily In most popular art events continuous subdued behavior is not an input. On the contrary, if people would continuously behave in a subdued fashion, this would certainly go at the cost of the event’s success. Most likely the event would not be successful and strengthening at all but only depressing. However, this does not imply that behavior in popular art events is never subdued; it implies that it is less subdued and more importantly that it is not all the time subdued. Emotions and the expression of emotions are withheld but not all the time. When people feel like it they let go, but only when this does not bother others (too much). Therefore the nature of self-control differs from that in high-and-serious art events. There is controlled decontrolling —a phenomenon that was *discussed at some length in the previous chapter.

Because in high-and-serious art events subdued behavior is an input which can easily turn into a precious object and symbol of membership, people who do not respect it are punished. In the museum room or the foyer visitors will turn their heads to look at someone who talks or laughs too loud, the more so if this way he shows personal emotions like anger or pleasure. The mere turning of heads is a form of shaming. He is isolated, not one of us, no member. The aspect of shaming is also very noticeable when people in the classical concert hall cough while the music plays. At such moments stillness turns into an extremely precious object and feelings of righteous anger among other visitors emerge. Even people who are too far away to be noticed by the “sinner” nevertheless turn their heads and often they look at one another to promote feelings of solidarity: “we know the rules; he does not; he is not one of us.”

Continuous subdued behavior is an important symptom of high-and-serious art events. I call it a symptom rather than a criterion because, given the art-as-symbol criterion, which was presented in

the previous section, there may be exceptions; cases in which art is a clear symbol of membership while behavior is not subdued. (However, it is telling that it is hard to find examples. Maybe certain exited discussions on art between artists in a pub setting can serve as an example.) As in the case of the art-as-symbol criterion the distinction is not clear-cut, behavior can be more or less subdued. In high-and-serious art events behavior is more subdued and more continuously subdued and in popular art events this is less the case. Presently some, not too serious, jazz concerts and some serious pop concerts hold in between positions.

Postponement of collective gratification
Rhythmic entrainment is limited
Little interaction between performers and audience
Personalities of performers are relatively unimportant
Solenn and serious tone
Rich ambience
Many inflexible rules

Table * Secondary symptoms of high-and-serious art events

There exist certain characteristics of events that apply more often or stronger to high-and-serious art events or performances than to popular art events. Because there are many exceptions they can only be symptoms. The more of these symptoms apply, the more likely it is that these events are high-and-serious events. Most of the symptoms are related to the aspect of restraint.

First, gratification during the event is more often and for longer periods postponed in high-and-serious art events. Participants make an effort, they put energy in the event, but collective effervescence and with it gratification only becomes strong during the moments of applause: that is, at the moments that people can actually move their bodies. As noted in Chapter 1, focused crowds boost their collective effervescence far more when their bodies are physically active than when these are passive.⁷ Physical activity contributes much to a shared mood, feelings of solidarity and the bringing of energy to individual participants. In popular art events in between the moments of applause there usually are far more moments of clear collective effervescence and gratification. For instance, people move their bodies to the music or they laugh out loud during a play or musical. This also implies that, secondly, in many high-and-serious art events rhythmic entrainment is limited. Through rhythmic entrainment in singing or humming along with the music a feedback loop could be generated that would add to the shared mood which in turn could contribute to the intensity of the event.

In the third place there tends to be less communication and interaction between performers and audience in high-and-serious art events than in popular art events. In the earlier description of pop concerts examples of communication in popular art events were presented that would be unusual in high-and-serious art events. For instance, pop musicians make jokes in between song or invite people to wave arms or applaud louder. Another example is that of the DJ who adopts his music to the mood of the audience and in turn influences this mood.

Fourthly, the personalities of artists and audience members tend to be less pronounced in high-and-serious art events than in popular art events. This is understandable because when behavior is subdued, it is also somewhat uniform and impersonal: no behavior stands out. Therefore the

⁷ Coll 83?

participants in such events are somewhat uniform as well. People can be said to show less of themselves than when behavior would be less subdued.

Fifth, the quiet, serious and often solemn tone of presenters and critics is a characteristic of many high-and-serious art events. This characteristic shows clearly from the announcement of classical pieces and performers in the hall and on radio and television. In popular art events the tone is hardly ever solemn; often it is informal and at times it is exalted, as in: "Ladies and gentleman I present to you the one and only ...". The somewhat grave tone in high-and-serious art events is also typical for discussion programs about literature, dance, serious theatre, most jazz and above all classical music: the tone is serious rather than playful. Unlike in discussions about pop music there are few jokes, no exclamations and little putting into perspective. This is more than just a form of subdued behavior. It is an extra that is intended to express respect for Art-with-a-capital-a.

In the sixth place, even though there are clear exceptions, the ambiance of high-and-serious art events tends to be more rich and serious than of popular art events. For instance, in relation to the number of visitors buildings for high-and-serious art events are far more costly than those for popular events —see Box * on page *. Seventh, again per user, for many (but not all) high-and-serious art events there is more public and private financial support than for popular art events —see Box * on page *.

Finally, the rules of conduct during the performances in high-and-serious art events tend to be stricter than in popular art events. They are often inflexible and therefore not negotiable. Therefore they leave little space for the controlled decontrolling, *which was discussed in the previous chapter and which is so typical for the new informal society. People must be still, whether it makes sense or not. What makes sense depends of course on the group of participants. For instance, not being allowed to turn to one's partner to whisper something in his ear during a loud passage in the music or to make drawings like Thomas did, probably makes no sense to the people who do so. But it makes sense to others who are distracted, even when there is no audible distraction it still causes a visible disturbance and therefore be distracting. Typical for strict rules is that the mere fact of people not obeying them is already distracting. In a way the sense of strict rules lies in them being strict.

The cause of the importance of subdued behavior and the common occurrence of the *eight characteristics in high-and-serious art events rests primarily in the importance of paying respect to art as a symbol of group membership, to Art-with-a-capital-a. Evidently in our Western culture paying respect to, at least until recently, widely worshiped symbols like Art or God requires subdued behavior. (This is indeed a cultural phenomenon, as is demonstrated by the far less restrained behavior in forms of worship in other cultures as well as in the Christian religious services in some negro communities in the US.)

Also for various other reasons, which were discussed in the *previous chapter, for the nineteenth century bourgeois subdued behavior was a necessity and postponement of collective gratification added to the intensity and the endurance of art event. The lack of collective gratification was at least partly compensated by internal forms of gratification in a being-alone-together, and thus in a special form of solitary art events. Moreover, a subdued or sedate mood was in keeping with the difference in social-class tone and as such it was also rewarding.⁸ For various social groups and in various degrees these reasons are not just remnants of the past but are still valid.

5. Formalism and Ceremoniousness

Presently I want to make a distinction between high art events on the one hand and serious and popular art events on the other. High art events are ceremonies and behavior is relatively formal. Serious and popular art events are no ceremonies and behavior is less formal. I have the impression

⁸ Collins (2005) 59

that in modern art circles a distinction between high art and serious art is emerging which broadly corresponds with this distinction. It is “in the air”.

High art event	Serious art event	Popular art event
Art is symbol of group membership	no symbol....
Behavior is relatively subdued		...less subdued....
Many formalities	Few formalities	
Event is a ceremony	Event is no ceremony	

Table * Criteria and symptoms of high, serious and popular art events

Behavior being formal refers to formal in a narrow sense. Formalistic may be the right expression. It is behavior involving many so-called formalities. (It follows that formal behavior in this narrow sense is only part of formal behavior in the wider sense in which it is the opposite of informal behavior.) Formal in a narrow sense refers to the phenomenon that the rules of conduct or etiquette serve good or proper or civilized behavior and that behavior is more or less scripted. An example of a script is that a man opens a door for a woman. Especially among the aristocracy and later among the higher echelons of the bourgeoisie all sort of detailed scripts existed which conducted behavior. Some of these continue to exist, be it in a far less rigid form than, for instance, some 50 years ago. Nevertheless, looking at people in the foyers of concert halls and theatres, still much scripted behavior can be observed. Many of these are scripted chivalries. Because of the script they are predictable and will be expressed irrespective of the way someone feels about others. If in the foyer someone is having a conversation and person he does not like appears and who evidently wants to join he will stick to the script and introduce him “enthusiastically” to the other participants in the conversation. (But often he will at the same time in subtle ways, which may actually be scripted as well, make clear to the newcomer that he does not like him and that he is not welcome.)

When scripts are altogether fixed and leave no space for improvisation, also not in the order of the actions, the script is a protocol and the event is a ceremony. Often such protocols do not only prescribe the behavior of people but also attributes like clothing. The description of the classical symphony concert presented in the beginning of the chapter is a clear account of the execution of a protocol, which prescribes the clothing of the musicians and the successive actions to be taken by the musicians and the audience. As noted: the conductor enters and the musicians wearing tuxedos rise; the conductor takes his position, raises his baton and next the members of the audience stop their conversations and become still; at the end of a part the conductor stands still and after the finish of the piece the members of the audience start to applaud; the conductor turns around and bows, the members of the orchestra etcetera. Unlike in the case of scripted formalities the behavioral rules of a ceremony have an all-or-nothing character. Therefore they are more than strong conventions. Orchestra members must rise when the conductor enters. The conductor must shake hands with the first violinist and with the soloist if present. Audience members must be absolutely still from just before the first note is played till after the last tone has died away.

Ceremonies that are alive make people focus and bring about a strong common mood, feelings of solidarity and excitement. They give energy.⁹ Thomas in the illustration found the moment in the concert in the Queen Elisabeth Hall just before the music started and almost thousand people all at once became silent, particularly exciting. In pop concerts such ceremonial behavior does not exist. There is a strong convention that when the music commences audiences become silent (from very

⁹ Collins (2005) *

silent to just more silent than before) but this generally happens only after the music has started. In the concert by Jefferson Airplane which Thomas visited some years before, there was a moment that the musicians wanted the audience to be still before they began to play a certain song. They had to ask for it and there was a short moment of negotiating going on between the musicians and the audience, which in this case also added much to the intensity of the event. But improvised communication is clearly an altogether different mechanism in raising attention and increasing intensity than the strict following of a protocol.

In high art events the protocol is an important precious good and symbol of group membership. Not sticking to its prescriptions is disrespectful, a threat to the concert, to classical music and ultimately to art in general. It is anyway distracting and for participants it goes at the cost of the intensity of the event. It spoils the event. Therefore the protocol is protected with all means. If people whisper to one another while the music plays they are shamed. Regular participants see to it that they will never do this again. However, in the long run not all corrective behavior is successful. Presently regular concert goers complain much about audience members who do not stick to the existing rule in the protocol that people must only applaud after the whole piece is finished. They start to applaud after the end of each part. It is possible that this will gradually lead to a change in the protocol. And maybe in ten years time not applauding after each part would be disrespectful.

When people who know the protocol well do not stick to its rules, they cannot but do this deliberately. If the conductor would enter together with the musicians or would let musicians wear clothing, which is not just black and white, he knows that he makes an important statement; not just "Today I felt like something else", but "I no longer agree with the nature of this ceremony. I want to change the rules." Or, "I no longer agree with so many strict rules; I want concerts to become less ceremonial."

The rules of a ceremony can indeed have become dead letters and rather bore participants than excite them. In that case the event is merely an empty going through of the forms.¹⁰ Or it is exciting for a few and a dead letter for others. However, so far this is not (yet) the case in high art events like classical concerts. For instance, the fact that members of the symphony orchestra wear tuxedos is appreciated by many visitors and for them it is a precious object. If an orchestra would decide to stop wearing gowns many visitors would feel disappointment and would complain.

However, for an increasing number of people the gowns have become a funny folklore to be enjoyed once but not another time. Or, worse, the gowns and the whole ceremony puts them off. For them such ceremonies are not of this time. They make them feel uncomfortable. This is also what happened to Thomas's nephew in the illustration. And it is conformed in case of youngsters by research done in the US and Britain In the press announcement it says: "Young people turn their back to classical concerts. 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."¹¹

[Next paragraphs will be made shorter]It is true that fifty or hundred years ago there were far more ceremonies than at present. Very established institutions tend to lag behind general developments in society. Symbols of the long history and thus the continuity of the institution are important. But there comes a moment that also for the members themselves certain symbols start to be funny or even irritating. For them they can no longer be emblems of the high value of an institution that wants to be alive and wants to continue to be alive in the future. This must have been the reason why university professors stopped wearing gowns while teaching. This is not to say that gown have altogether disappeared. They are still worn in ceremonies like inaugurations and foundation days. There the protocol airs seriousness, while at the same time the folkloristic aspect is recognized and appreciated

¹⁰ Coll. *

¹¹ Kolb (2001)

as folklore by the participants. These are irregular events and most participants find them rather pleasant.

In classical music however, ceremonies are not limited to special occasions: also the regular concerts, which are the core business of the institution, are still very much ceremonies. One may wonder why: is it because Art is more sacred than Science? Or are the sciences more oriented on the future and do they sooner want to express this in their symbols of membership than the arts and most of all classical music? Or does the protocol still serve some practical purposes, which are so important that the benefits outweigh the costs? There is probably some truth in all three options.

Apart from their contribution to the ceremony as such and thus to the general excitement brought about by a ceremony that is alive, parts of a protocol usually have or had some functionality. This certainly applies to the stillness rule in the protocol of the classical concert, which I will discuss in the next section. But the usefulness of other prescriptions has gone down with time. Gowns as worn by professors were functional in a period in which many rights (and obligations) were tied to professions and social positions. They mattered in social encounters. In for instance encounters in public spaces of an employee and his boss or a commoner and an established burger or a student and a professor the other person's position was clear from his outfit and this way people knew how to behave. This phenomenon has not altogether disappeared but the signs have become more subtle and the differences in behavior have become much smaller. However, gowns or other clear emblems could still have some practicality. People entering a class room would immediately see who is the professor, also when he is young, and who is not, and so an occasional embarrassing misunderstanding would have been prevented. This would be practical and thus a benefit, but evidently it does not outweigh the costs of the gown being an unwanted sign of superiority and the institution being old-fashioned. (In modern society open and clear signs of superiority are taboo.¹²)

The same as in the case of the distinction between popular art events and high-and-serious art events on the basis of the art-as-symbol criterion, the criterion of formalism and ceremoniousness for art events to be a high art event is an absolute criterion. If art events in which behavior is formal and which are ceremonies would stop to exist, there would be no more high art events. But also the same as with the other criterion a grey zone exists between high art events and serious art events. Presently, most contemporary visual art events are serious art events and no longer high art events, while many contemporary theatre and dance performances and contemporary classical concerts hold in-between positions.

In this context it matters that for art events to be high art events the event being a ceremony is not enough. Art must also be a symbol of membership. Therefore, even though there is a strict protocol in folk art events, these are generally no high art events, but popular art events. In such events art is not an important symbol of membership (and overall behavior is usually not particularly subdued). In this respect it is quite well possible that in the future the ceremonial aspect in part of the classical concerts will remain, but only as folklore. Overall behavior will have become relatively informal and the folklore rather than art has become the foremost symbol of membership. That would imply that those classical concerts will then be popular art or entertainment events rather than high or serious art events.

6. Stillness during Classical Concerts

Among art performances the demand of stillness and a taboo on a noticeable bodily response to the performance is strongest in classical concerts. It evidently curbs the rhythmic entrainment which could contribute to the intensity of the concert. This raises the question if in such events a "natural" inclination to move is suppressed. This is what Peter Gay suggests: "Undivided silent attention to a

¹² Wouters (2007). However, Wouters also speculates on the possibility that with a further increase in informalization and thus controlled decontrolling expressions of superiority may become more common again.

musical performance does violence to basic human impulses, among the most devout listeners as among the unlettered.even educated listeners, are tempted to hum along with the tune or sway to the beat, tap their feet or drum their fingers, shake their head or conduct the orchestra from their seat, to say nothing of gratifying the itch to explain their ineffable responses to whoever sits next to them. Listening awakens the urge to mimic marked rhythms, marchlike sonorities, stirring crescendos.”¹³

However, I wonder if Gay is right when he maintains that even educated listeners are tempted to hum along or sway to the beat. I think that the majority of the audience of classical concerts is not tempted to do this. After socialization at young age, there is little natural about human behavior. At best one could argue that, given our long evolutionary history certain behavior is less unnatural than other behavior. But many of the more open forms of rhythmic entrainment are cultural and can appear pretty artificial to an outsider. Listening in to the almost obligatory rhythmically attuned laughter at the start of a party in Japan makes the westerner feel uneasy, but over there it is normal and often successful in the sense that this synchronized bodily activity promotes a shared mood and gets the party going.

However, because an inclination to be still and communicate as little as possible is certainly cultural and not natural, it has to be attained and once attained it has to be protected. This is one reason why in high art performances, most of all in classical concerts not only subdued behavior but also stillness is a precious object. As part of the protocol stillness is a particular intense symbol of membership, which is charged with much emotional energy. People who would move their heads close to one another and would whisper during a loud *passage[transition??] in the music, could well argue that they do not or do hardly distract others, but audience members still see this type of behavior as a threat to the concert and art in general. Because it is so important for the present audiences the stillness rule is part of the protocol and not negotiable. Trespassers should be ashamed of themselves and may well one way or another be shamed. And indeed Thomas in the illustration felt ashamed after people had called him to account on his drawing activity.

However, the functionality of rules in a protocol which can easily turn into symbols of membership, like the stillness rule, can go beyond a mere symbolic contribution to the success of the event. Presently the practical usefulness of the wearing of tuxedos is almost zero, it is merely ceremonial. But the same does not apply to stillness. As an input in the event stillness makes it for the audience easier to focus on the performance. The focus will sooner become mutual, there will be a stronger shared mood, more feelings of solidarity and therefore the event will be more successful in the sense that it brings the individual participant vitality. (That is for the present audiences. For others, especially youngsters, stillness can also make it more difficult to focus.)

There are two additional advantages. First, stillness makes it easier to follow minor details in the music, play or dance for those who, for whatever reason, want to do so. And second, when people are still it is easier to imagine that one is alone with the work of art. Thus, this way it is easier to “subtract” the others and so be able to get in touch with the core of a work. (One could argue that people who want to do so would have been better off listening at home to a CD or watching television. As noted in the *previous chapter, this is generally not true; the being-alone-together experience can add considerably to the positive feelings people get out of the event.

For many lovers of classical music distractions can be visible as well as audible. For people sitting some rows behind somebody who quite markedly moves his head, it is the visual distraction that is annoying (the same as in the case of Thomas drawing the musicians). And even though people generally do not have a frontal view of each others faces, even the showing of emotions on one's face

¹³ Gay (1995), 22. For discussions later on in this book the missing intermediate part of the citation is interesting as well. “That is why the clamor for uncompromising sublimation of the urge to become actively involved proved all the more difficult to enforce: it ran directly counter to a fundamental, very enjoyable experience. Just as many visitors to a museum cannot resist the itch to run their fingers over paintings and sculptures —Freud once said that looking is a substitute for touching— listeners to music, even educated listeners.....”

can be distracting. This is because at such moments the muscular movements in the face almost always extend to head and shoulders. Moreover, the breathing of the “emotional” person can become irregular as well.¹⁴

In the case of high art events it is impossible to separate the distraction caused by the movements and sounds from the distraction caused by the knowledge that people are not sticking to the protocol. And as far as the latter is concerned, it is again difficult to distinguish irritation about the “breach of contract” from vicarious shame. (Usually Thomas is not easily distracted and does not care much about etiquette; nevertheless, seeing people whisper during a loud passage in the music in a classical concert annoys him: “Why do you do this? You should know that it irritates people.” Because other may get irritated, he gets irritated as well.)

What matters in this context is that the functionality of rules of conduct can differ for different social groups and can change over time. What is functional for one group may be dysfunctional for another. An audience that is not that still does not need to be distracting for everybody. Moreover, it can be functional as well. In many popular art events intentional movements and sounds made by the audience are indispensable ingredients for a successful event. For most participants moving to the music or occasional whistling or dancing is not distracting; on the contrary, such behavior helps the awareness of the mutual focus and contributes to the shared mood and thus to the intensity of the event. There is no a-priori reason why this could not be the same in classical concerts. For instance, in some classical concerts applauding after the first notes of classical evergreens may well help certain audiences to focus.

Though functional, the absolute stillness demand has benefits and costs, just like any other part of a protocol. It is well possible that over time the cost for audiences are increasing while the benefits are decreasing. As noted in the *previous chapter, younger generations are less easily distracted, while for them the continuous holding back of emotions does not come naturally anymore; an effort has to be made. In a more informal society with relationships being less hierarchical the mere “must” of having to stick to a rule under all circumstances is hard; it is irritating and thus an energy drain. Youngsters are used to judge by themselves when certain behavior is called for and when not and if necessary they will negotiate among themselves. Whether this implies that with time the attendance of high-and-serious art events art events and even serious cannot but continue to go down, still has to be seen. (Data showing that attendance has gone down over the last decades are presented in Box * on page *.)

In principal parallel concerts with different etiquettes could enable different audiences to feel comfortable. But in many countries this is not (yet) an option. The stillness is such an important precious object and symbol of membership that less stillness in parallel concerts is already experienced as a threat to the symbol and all means are used to discredit and so prevent such concerts.

7. High, Serous and Popular Works of Art

In this chapter I only discussed high, serious and popular art *events* and avoided talking about works of art in order to bypass complicated discussions about which works are high (or serious) and which are popular art. But art events and works of art are necessarily interrelated. I would argue that if for some time a certain type of work of art has primarily been consumed during high art events it is likely to be called high art. Or the other way round: if a certain type of work of art has been called high art for a while, it will be primarily consumed during high art events. Mutatis mutandis the same applies to popular art. This conclusion allows for some delay. If a certain type of artwork was primarily

¹⁴ At the same time however, as noted, it is only due to minor physical changes in body temperature, breathing, erectness etcetera that people develop some awareness of one another's focus and so develop a shared mood, but these changes are shared and hardly consciously noticed and are therefore not distracting.

consumed during popular art events, but is now primarily consumed during high art events, it will sooner or later be called high art and the other way round. Or if a certain type of work of art was primarily consumed during high art events, but is now primarily consumed during popular art events, it will sooner or later be called popular art and the other way round.

Within the approach of this book high works of art can be consumed during popular art events, like Mozart pieces being played during the concerts of André Rieu, and popular works can be consumed during high art events, like hip-hop dance pieces being performed in theatres in which the audience is still and behavior is subdued. Such events can, first, be incidents or, second, represent a more or less permanent situation or, third, represent the beginning of a transition. An example of the second case is the performance of Mozart pieces in concerts of, among others, André Rieu. Already for a long time Mozart pieces have been performed in popular art events and this practice is likely to continue, but, at least for the time being these events are a minority of all Mozart concerts. An example of the third case is that of a part of jazz which in a gradual process in the first half of the twentieth century became high art. Somewhat earlier the same happened to opera and in the years to come the same may happen to part of hip-hop dance.

Art events and works of art can cross the line between high-and-serious on the one hand and popular or low on the other. They move from one domain to the other. It is worth noting that the line cannot only be crossed; it can also shift and the intensity of the line can change, that is, it can become more or less important. For instance, with respect to the degree in which behavior is subdued the line is shifting. As said, behavior during high and serious art events is now far more informal than 50 years ago. But as long as the relative difference continues to exist the shift does not by itself have to imply that there are presently less high and serious art events and works of art than before. At the same time it is well possible that at present the line between high and popular is fading a little. This will be discussed in the last chapter.

If art events and works of art can cross the line between high-and-serious and popular with some delay, this raises the question what comes first: the event or the work of art. Ultimately this question makes no sense and the same applies to the notion of a delay. After all, when people call some art high and other art popular, they do so in conversations, which are art events, be it small scale art events. Nevertheless, with respect to full-scale art events the question makes sense. In this context it is also interesting to find out who takes the lead in the small-scale events. Were the conversations and meetings of art-historians most important or those of the entrepreneurs who finance full-scale art events for a paying audience or those of various groups of artists (or of another stakeholder group)?

A related question is why certain popular art gradually turns into high art and other popular art does not and vice versa? Are their (changing) qualities of works of art, which make some more fit for a transition than others? In this context it is important to realize that the occasional movement of works of art into the other domain may set a process in motion in which the qualities of the works of art also change. At first hip-hop dance in established theatres may have been incidental experiments. But after some time the dance itself has probably changed. Very likely the qualities changed in such ways that the performances became less inviting for the audience to become rhythmically involved and therefore the audience would be less tempted to move along. The same certainly applies to the areas of pop music which are turning into serious art.

This may well imply that due to certain qualities of works of art some are more likely to be consumed in high-and-serious art events and to be called high or serious art and others are more likely to be consumed in popular art events and to be called popular art. In this context it is possible to think in terms of more or less complexity or of works of art being more or less layered or of works of art promoting more or less openly rhythmical entrainment etcetera. Whether such and other qualities really exist and matter is hard to answer. If they do matter, their importance for the way people distinguish high-and-serious art and popular art will anyway change over time. In Chapter * I will try to say a bit more on this issue.

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