1 The dynamics of culture – towards governance of cultural space[1]

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The dynamics of cultural (policy) discourse

Introduction

Some time ago, when I was doing a survey of local cultural policy in the Netherlands, an alderman of a small provincial town said something that stuck in my mind.[2] Asked about the public relevance of cultural life, he said: "Well, I'm not quite sure, but I think the main thing culture does, is show us that *things could be different*". He went on to tell me about his parents who, despite their humble education and circumstances, had firmly held on to the simple conviction that it is a life-obligation to educate oneself to the broader world.

It stuck in my mind, not only because it somehow rang true, but also because it contrasted with what other local politicians had said about the relevance of culture: "It brings people together", or "It makes life pleasant" or "It makes our town an attractive place".[3] The contrast touched – I felt – not only on practical policy goals and implications, but also upon some deeper level, although I could not yet put my finger on what that might be.

Shifting to the current European discourse and "rhetorics"[4] gravitating around the legitimisation of public cultural policy, it is clear that some serious crisis is going on. Since the 1980s, traditional foundations of public cultural policy have corroded.[5] Calls for new, more encompassing views on the meaning and value of culture are sounding, as well as calls for new practical policy goals and outcome-evaluation tools.[6] Clearly, a wider dissatisfaction with (or contention of) the "deficit model" of cultural policy is growing in strength and a new "democratic" case for the meaning and value of culture, inclusiveness, new audiences, multiculturality, cultural capabilities and local ecosystems is emerging (e.g. Porto Santo Charter: EU 2021; Rome Charter: UCLG 2020).

These developments may be seen against a strained and complex backdrop, where "culture" emerges as a designated theme for global democracy and sustainability (e.g. Kagan 2011; UNESCO 2022a), social media and networked societies add new urgency and depth to the question *what it entails to*

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live together, and "culture" is being presented as a "public good" (UNESCO 2022a) in times of global crises.

In this transitional policy-landscape, the core concepts (culture, the arts, democracy, policy) have started drifting. In policy documents,[7] the term "culture" may, for example, mean way of life, civilisation, identity-set, value-set, expressions, the arts or a combination of those. "The arts" may indicate artefacts, disciplines, artistic practice, expressions, creativity and creative industry. "Democracy" (in a cultural context) may refer to: representation, deliberation, participation, pluriformity, diversity, inclusiveness or cultural struggle. "Policy" may indicate the dimension of governance, policy or politics. To complicate things further, arguments tend to switch back and forth between individual, group and societal perspectives; between local, regional, national, international and supra-national perspectives; between intrinsic and instrumental (economic, social, wellbeing, education, creativity, sustainability) perspectives *and* between legitimisation, strategy and effectiveness dimensions.

There are, of course, practical reasons for these entanglements to persist: within the daily pragmatics of politics and *realpolitik*, culture is typically a "weak" portfolio, charged with contested images; rhetorics that succeed in "making the case" prevail over the "muddy waters" of conceptual discourse. These pragmatics occur in local politics, but also in national and European policy arenas – each with their specific vocabulary. Moreover, the concept of culture itself has always been (and indeed, increasingly *is*) a tool for powerful and purposeful ideological rhetorics (ranging from e.g. populist nationalists to neo-conservatives to neo-Marxists) that seem to feed on political, market and sector interests and ideologies. Specific conceptions of culture have thus become entangled in ideological and political discourse and positioning. I will come back to that later in this chapter.

But there is also a deeper issue at work. This has to do with circularities that have irreversibly become part of any cultural policy debate, since sociology and multi-cultural society have established the awareness that any judgement on cultural expressions, values or identities is inextricably bound to *cultural* bias. "*Who is talking?*" is now the first question that is put forward in any debate on cultural policy. With this "rhetorical axe", the debate on cultural policy is now irreversibly split along *cultural* fault lines of history, identity and power – and catapulted into the hall of mirrors of (postcolonial and tribal) stratifications, historic identities, cultural rights, appropriation and critique.

The lay of the (rhetorical) land

How can cultural governance, in this charged, complex, opportunistic, cluttered, fragmented and circular debate find a modern orientation, a new compass? And what does a policy look like that may effectively underpin and facilitate such governance? To find answers we may first take a step back to

look at the lay of the land in which these rhetorics find their intricate positions. We may then make a more educated assessment of where we are.

There are many fine general studies available on the rhetorics of cultural policy.[8] And, in different contexts, Bourdieu (1984), Foucault (1990), Habermas (1989), Geertz (1973), Bhabha (1994), Rancière (2000, 2010), Baecker (2012), Huizinga (1938), Nussbaum (2013) and many others have each made convincing analyses of the intricate interactions between power, language, society, politics and culture. It is not my aim to discuss these authors in detail or to suggest any sort of synthesis of their work. For the purpose of this chapter, it may however be helpful to introduce a short overview of the way culture and cultural policy are intertwined. When appropriate I will refer to relevant authors (See also: Drion, 2022b.)

So how did we get to this place? No doubt, in post-war Europe cultural policy found its wings in the ideals of progress, civilisation, universal humanities and feelings of opportunity and optimism. *Culture* meant civilisation, humanism, the aspiration of bettering oneself and society, building new infrastructure and aiming for excellence, in skills and great artefacts for everyone to see and aspire to.[9] It is fair to say that the grand projects of the EU and the UN were not only built upon the wish to avoid devastating conflicts and to facilitate mutual profitable trade, but also upon this cultural optimism of elevation and hope: of culture as the *"we" of universal human civilisation*: culture as project of elevation for mankind, with the fine arts as its pinnacle.

In present day, the rhetoric of culture as universal civilisation is far from dead, as it lives on in the ideal of cultural "bildung", education and capability (e.g. Rome Charter, UCLG 2020), but it is, as an ideal at least, seriously weakened by the rhetorics of cultural relativism and cultural identity.

The rise of cultural relativism is linked to the objectivation of culture as (anthropologically objectifiable) "way of life" – among many other, equally valuable ways of life.[10] *Perspective* enters the picture and undercuts the universal value claim of the project of civilisation. Cultural relativism can be seen as the *rhetoric of value diversity* (Eagleton, 2000). It has been very influential in UNESCO and the EU and also within European countries in legitimising immigrant-policies (e.g. the Netherlands in the 1960s and 1970s). In the present day, cultural relativism is very much alive in branches of cultural identity politics. In turn, cultural relativism is blamed by cultural nationalists for the "degradation" of values, excellence and traditions.

From the 1960s onwards, the public discourse on values and culture has become increasingly identity-driven, segmented and *personal*, no doubt facilitated by the rise of political self-awareness of the growing middle class, mass media, critical discourse and deconstruction of "bourgeois normality", with the subsequent rise of subcultures and countercultures (and their markets) (Volont et al. 2022). Subsequently, in the new millennium the "echo chambers" of social media have become an exponential accelerator of this politicised cultural identity-boom.

As it is, there seem to be two distinct branches in this identity-generating process. On the one hand, there is an ongoing segmentation of cultural identity in ever more personalised compartments of identity-images and history. *Who am I? What is my "we"? Who is talking?* The sharp debates on appropriation of black language and the compartmentalisation of gender identities are stark examples. However, there is also a more subdued variant in play, in the more or less romantic notion of indigenous wisdom and "truths" found in traditional cultures – as an alternative for the modernist reduction of health and wellbeing to objectifiable knowledge.

In the meanwhile, at the flip side of identity culture, a rise in nationalist tribalism and identity-supremacy emerges, claiming "true" historical, racial or place-based cultural pride, against the "corrupting" forces of the elites, globalism and its systems – and perhaps even more so against the "rot from within": relativism, critique, hypocrisy, wokism, sexual "aberrations", conceptual arts and other "perversions" undermining the "true stories" and the "true strength" of *us, normal people*.

The rhetoric of identity culture is very influential in current cultural policies within Europe – in *both* of its (highly conflicting) versions. In its populist and nationalist frame, the policy of identity culture promotes national or tribal symbols, pride and heritage, connecting collective experiences. In its personal, post-colonial identity-frame, the policy of identity culture aims at subcultural pride and expression, diversity, inclusiveness, participation and representation.

In the light of the current global crises of climate, energy, economy, pandemic and sustainability, identity culture may gain extra momentum, as it provides a sentiment of cultural strength and safety that political rhetoric and social media may eagerly tap into.

Dynamics and trends

These rhetorics are (in varying combinations and sub-species) linked to powerful forcefields of political traditions, movements and ideals, such as conservatism-protectionism, democratic-liberalism, socialist-emancipation, dialectics-change, tribalism-populism and neoliberalism-market. This adds to the dynamics and complexity of the discourse, charging the rhetorics with political energy, (op)positioning and stakes.

In recent years, these entanglements led to remarkable shifts of argumentation in cultural policy discourse. Not claiming any completeness or universality, it may be useful to sketch the most significant developments, as these interact with perspectives on new cultural policy and governance:

- One such development is the way culture as an "aspiration towards civilisation" has started drifting from the social-democratic camp towards the conservative camp. (High) culture is now championed by a special brand of conservative elitists and conservative, reactionary (or even neo-fascist)

populists, propagating "classical" education and "proper" (non-conceptual!) art as *our civilisation*, that needs to be protected from the corrupting forces of cultural relativism.

- On the left, sociological deconstruction of taste and the critique of cultural power reproduction – in combination with post-colonial cultural critique – has shifted the rhetorics away from cultural civilisation and the elevation of the working class towards cultural diversity and participation politics, and the representation of the unrepresented in the cultural "system". Equality of cultural opportunity has now increasingly become: equality of cultural representation.
- In Christian Democratic cultural policy, a drift towards preservation of rural traditions and values seems to gain momentum, arming against the ongoing urbanisation and diversification of cultural life. Traditional festivities and skills, rural amateur arts and local heritage and celebrations are now perhaps more at the heart of denominational cultural agendas than ever.[11]
- In a different vein, freedom of expression (as a cultural theme) has drifted from liberal side to a more right-wing populist rhetoric, in an opposition-dynamic against "threatening religious fundamentalisms" (such as Islam). This strand feeds on "enlightenment-superiority" rhetorics that at the same time seem to legitimise the use of radical and discriminatory statements.[12]
- In neoliberal rhetoric, culture is framed as market, ruled by free (deconstructed!) individualised taste, pushing the sector towards creative industry, cultural entrepreneurship and the subsequent marketing of creativity, popular culture and cultural niche.
- At the same time, public spending on culture has been rationalised in terms of output and outcome, instrumentalising cultural activity for economic, creative or societal impact, giving rise to new impact rhetorics by the sector as it tries to legitimise public spending by adopting efficiency newspeak.[13]
- Partly in answer to this, the arts as autonomous field of expertise and excellence (and the institutions that promote and facilitate this field) have shifted their rhetoric towards creativity, innovation and industry on the one hand – and empowerment, cultural identity, participation strategies and social bonding and bridging on the other.
- As a result, arts policy is drifting from "the best of humanity" towards "something for everyone", in ever smaller compartments of cultural identity-markets and activity.
- The amusement industry and commercial producers, playing into this, argue for inclusion in the public cultural policy field (and public funding that goes with it), claiming that pop music, dance-events, circus, festivals and all kinds of commercial activities, competitions and celebrations represent just as much "excellence" or "heritage" as any established "discipline" and therefore deserve a place at the policy table.

Politics, market and sector[14]

It is clear that these powerful and contested rhetorics are intertwined with – and fuelled by – the dynamics of a combination of political struggle, market forces and sector-survival. Or, put in other words: that politics, market and sector each have their own rhetorical stakes and interests. These have been documented elsewhere,[15] and this is not the place to go into that specific branch of dynamics. It is important however to mark that the gridlock of "rhetorical space" is actively maintained by three "actor-groups", each with their own agenda's (see Figure 1.1).

As illustrated above, in this rhetorical "space" (I will come back to the concept of "space" later), the goals of public cultural policy have become blurred. It is also clear that in these dynamics, the term "culture" is not so much a substantive term but a rhetorical instrument, continuously shape-shifting between the broader definition of shared (or contested) values and meanings, identities and instrumental goals, on the one hand, and the narrower definition of aesthetic expressions and artefacts, whether or not as a function of contested positions, identities, values or meanings, on the other.

Although these rhetorics and forcefields surely differ from country to country (and within countries probably from region to region and again from city to city and from community to community), I think it is safe to say that they permeate the public discourse on culture in Europe in a generic way.

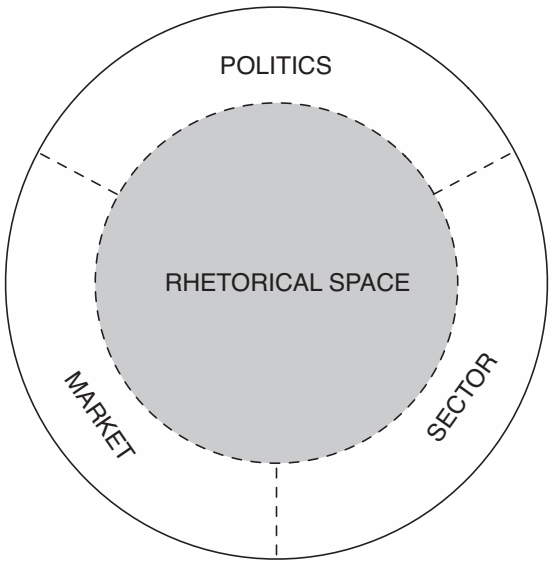

Figure 1.1 Rhetorical space and its three actor groups.
Source: Author.

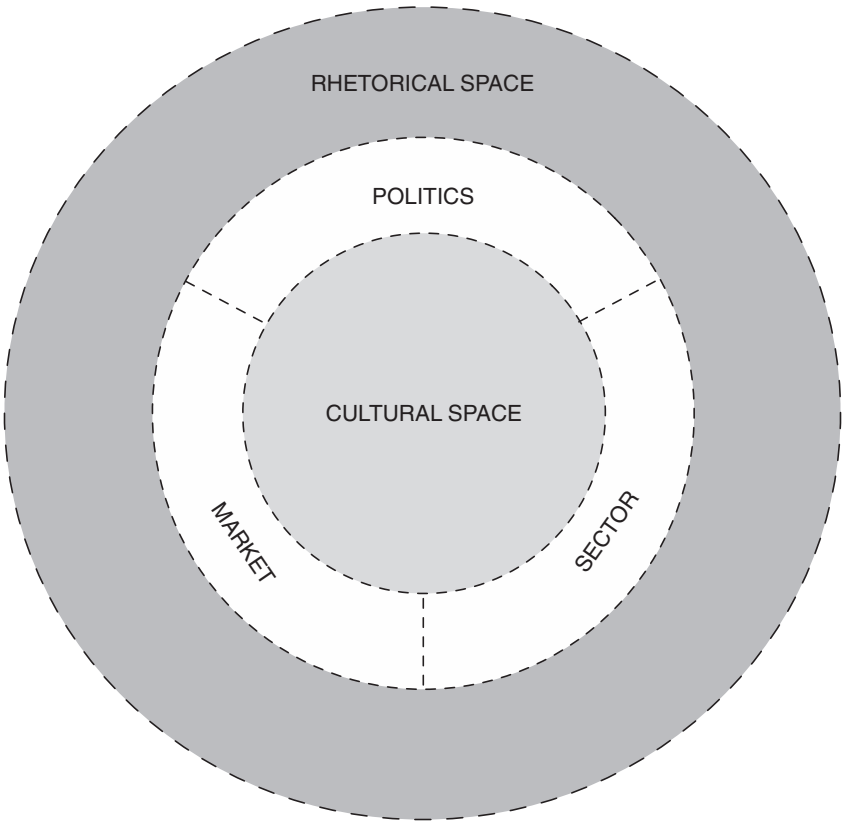

Figure 1.2 Separating cultural space from rhetorical space.
Source: Author.

When thinking about new cultural policy in Europe, in the face of current crises, it seems important to clear this ground, separate rhetorical space from cultural space and take a new look at what the aim of EU cultural policy and governance may be (see Figure 1.2).

The multiplicity of governance

How could cultural space offer a new foothold for cultural governance? Before addressing this question, a few thoughts need to be attended to the multiplicity of governance – in relation to the rhetorics and policy dynamics portrayed above.

As described elsewhere in this volume (e.g. Schmitt, Wilson and Gross), the understanding of "governance" in relation to "government" and "management" is anything but straightforward. To start with, a clear distinction

must be made between *institutional* cultural governance (i.e. governance of cultural institutions) and *public* cultural governance (i.e. governance of the cultural sector), although these are obviously strongly interconnected (see King and Schramme; Isar and Landry in this volume). Also, as Schmitt points out in this volume, the focus of governance may vary between a direct governance of cultural goods (expressions, artefacts and their availability) and the governance of the cultural sector (as the producers and disseminators of these goods). Moreover, in European context "cultural governance" has increasingly become associated with "deepening the integration of culture into the public policy agenda by coordinating cultural policies with other sectoral policies" (Council of the European Union 2012, p. 2; see also: Wilson and Gross and Theodoulou Charalambous in this volume).

In the current chapter, the focus is redirected at the actual cultural interactions between people. In doing so, it aims to give proper "substance" to what UNESCO (2022a, 2022b) seems to indicate with culture as a "public good", i.e.: the freedom to *culturally interact*. (See also Isar and Wilson and Gross in this volume.)

The dynamics of culture

Conceptualising cultural space

So, what are these interactions? What is *happening* in cultural space? It is interesting to note that the concept of space in relation to culture has, in recent years, been theorised through several (more or less interrelated) strands of thought. In Germany, the concept of culture as communicative space has been described by Dirk Baecker, who speaks of a *Tertium Datur*, where societal "binaries" lose their compelling oppositioning dynamics, and meanings, symbols and values may remain undefined and undecided (Baecker 2012, p. 106; Laermans 2011). Although formulated in a different, multi-cultural context, this concept of undecidedness has interesting parallels with Homi Bhabha's influential concept of *Third Space* (Bhabha 1994): a space where (in a colonial context), dominant cultural expressions, identities and clichés are paraphrased, ridiculed and transformed.

This in turn has similarities with Victor Turner's (anthropological) concept of *liminality* as a (ritual) phase of *becoming*, between an old and a new equilibrium, state or identity (Turner 1982), that "illuminates the symbolic realm in human life in which possibility and the ambiguous – the simultaneous presence of the familiar and unfamiliar, the existing and new – not only prevail, but are heightened" (Turner in Howard-Grenville et al. 2011). Liminality and "liminal space" have taken flight in a broad field of applications and concepts, ranging from personal development to city planning, virtuality and system theory.

In relation to the *arts*, "space" has been conceptualised as a communicative mode that opens up in performative "subjunctive" settings (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 2009; McConachie 2015), when communication switches from

Figure 1.3 La trahison des images (René Magritte, 1928–1929). Photothèque R. Magritte/Adagp Images, Paris. Copyright: Pictoright Amsterdam 2023.

"is" to "were"; from reality to *make-believe*. The initialising of such a switch from "reality" to a mode of purposeful "non-reality" is famously thematised by Magritte with his inscription *Ceçi n'est pas une pipe*, which points to the self-evident difference between literal and imaginative interpretation[16] (see Figure 1.3).

Essential for such a setting is, of course, the element of *play* and playfulness (see e.g. Dissanayake 1974, 2012). In that regard, it is interesting that "space" has indeed been associated with a playful mode of interacting, opening ambiguity and imagining (e.g. Bateson 2000; Mitchell 1991; Schechner and Schuman 1976) – to be distinguished from the closed and purposeful setting of *gaming* (Larsen 2015).

Last – but not least – Edward Soja's influential concept of *Thirdspace* must be mentioned: a space of "limitless options", where a radical openness to "otherness" emerges, differences are mediated and cultural *margins* may find a voice. Soja relates Thirdspace not only to openness but translates this to new, diverse concepts of place, architecture and urban environment (Soja 1996).

These concepts of "space" have, in a more general frame, been theorised in the term *hybridity* (Werbner 2015), referring to a mode of (conscious or unconscious) cultural *development*. Cultures (and thus: people) "evolve historically through largely unreflective borrowings, mimetic appropriations, exchanges and inventions" (Werbner 2015, p. 4), creating hybrids that "are pregnant with potential for new world views" (ibid., p. 5). Thus hybridity implies "that the production of new meanings occurs *on the boundaries between us and them, self and other, culture and foreign culture*" (Kostogriz, 2005, p. 196, emphasis of the author).

Elsewhere (Drion 2022a, 2022b) I have brought these strands together, suggesting that it may be helpful to "heuristically" differentiate between the use of culture as a *noun* (i.e. the sets of meaning, values and artefacts that we call "culture") and culture as a *verb*, referring to the communicative interactions that bring meaning, values and artefacts *to life*, i.e. come ambiguously into play, are mediated, become "hybrid" and change.[17]

I have argued that cultural space may then be conceptualised as the locus of cultural communication: (Drion 2022b) that special interaction (communication-mode) that springs to life *between* people when shared sense-making and imagining are happening, i.e.: when values, meaning and identities are playfully suspended in an imaginative play with form (e.g. Dissanayake 1974).

It is important to emphasise that the interactional processes of shared sense-making and shared imagining are meant here as complementary: shared sense-making is seen as the social actualisation of shared meanings and values (actualising intricate sets of symbols and identities), and shared imagining is seen as the process of bringing meaning and values into imaginative play – by creating shared, ambiguous forms. Cultural communication is thus the combined communicative process of actualisation *and* suspension of shared sense through shared imaginative interaction. *It creates the space where "things could be different".*

Notes

Before going into the intricacies of governance of cultural space, three additional remarks must be made. First, as pointed out elsewhere (Drion 2022b), there are deep waters here when theorising the keywords: meaning, sense, imagining, sharing, communication, interaction – and the terrain is certainly not without problems and territorial issues. However, converging "lines" are emerging:

- The element of *sense* as a relational quality has been theorised extensively by branches of communication theory[18] and has powerful crosslinks (although not quite congruent) with semiotics and biosemiotics[19] and theories of cognition.[20]
- The element of imaginative play as shared process (and as shared performativity) has been theorised in a broad front, ranging from developmental psychology to theatre studies and culture.[21]
- In a conceptual sense, a process-conception of cultural space may be relevant and topical in its association with modern strands of thinking about society and policy (networked society, post-colonialism, post-humanism, communication theory, systems-theory, play-theory and new theories of place and space).
- Also, it seems to sit well with major strands of new cultural policy (although not with every one of those) that are currently theorising *cultural democracy* (see below).

Second, attention is needed for the positioning of the arts. Much of the obvious crises in the legitimisation of arts policy have to do with the one-sided positioning of art in relation to culture. If we open this up in relation to cultural space, this one-sidedness has two distinct appearances: the *equating of arts with sense* and *equating of arts with imagining*.

The equating of the arts with sense causes two related policy problems: (1) the weighing of privatised or subcultural sense and (2) the weighing of the transgression of the arts into societal critique. Both cause wicked policy problems.

The weighing of privatised or subcultural sense causes conceptual problems as well as practical problems. The conceptual problems have to do with the question of the public responsibility for private or subcultural sense or enjoyments: *if it all comes down to the enactment of private tastes and sense, a public responsibility is not immediately clear*. This translates immediately to problems of prioritisation: *on what grounds could one private sense, value or taste be prioritised above another?*

The weighing of societal critique comes to light in the problematic relation between public policy and conceptual arts: is it "art" just because it ambiguously addresses societal issues, or paraphrases itself? Should it be publicly endorsed for that reason alone? I want to add to this, that although aesthetic jest and cultural prank are no doubt important communicative manifestations within cultural space, they are however not artistic for that reason alone.[22]

The equating of arts with imagining is not the answer either, because it produces two separate policy problems of its own. The first is that there are, obviously, many expressions of imagination, and that calling them all "art" does not solve anything. Nor does the equating of art with "creativity": it puts art and artists in the precarious position of broadening their field of work to creative processes (or industries), at the expense of both their artistry and the position of art in the policy field (as is shown elsewhere in this volume). A second problem of equating arts with imagining is that it obscures the fact that imagining in cultural space is obviously not confined "art-world arts" alone, including fields of practice such as storytelling, persiflage, fashion, comedy, irony, heritage and "subculture", be it "live" or virtual in digital media.

So, what is the place of the arts within cultural space? If, as it seems, it is neither possible to satisfactorily equate art with sense-making nor with imagining alone, what could then be a foothold for art policy? Paraphrasing Nick Wilson (Wilson 2020), who conceptualised art as "in-between", I would suggest that the artistic process cannot be separated from a conception of *form*. As such, art seeks to present form as enduring vessel for ambiguous meaning – oscillating between sense and imagining.[23] In that sense, to quote Pascal Gielen (Gielen et al. 2014) on an important note – art is *qualitate qua* cultural "dis-measure", as it does *not* comply with cultural expectations but instead invites playful confrontation with those expectations.[24,25] On balance,

this may be taken as an argument for the autonomy of the arts as a prerequisite for its value within cultural space. It is important however to remember that a playful ambiguous interaction (simultaneous sense-making and imagining) is *not the exclusive field of the arts*. It is presented here as the (process) definition of cultural space, as such (see Figure 1.4).

To round these sidenotes off, the dynamics of *culture as (re)production of identity* needs to be highlighted. This is a particular second-order dynamic that must not be confused with the dynamics of cultural space. It has been described by Gregory Bateson[26] as a mechanism of *cultural opposition*. Bateson shows that, although shared sense may remain mostly "invisible" for anyone "inside" it, it will become urgently aware of itself when confronted with *other* repertoires of sense-making. Consequently, it will tend to *define itself in terms of this otherness*. Bateson (in Schechner and Schuman 1976) sees this as a natural function of human society.[27]

Viewed in this way, shared sense-making (inevitably, by definition) produces its own boundaries, its own inside and outside – by reacting to difference. Put differently: the confrontation of one sense constellation with another creates cultural identity *as difference*. Of course, we see this happening

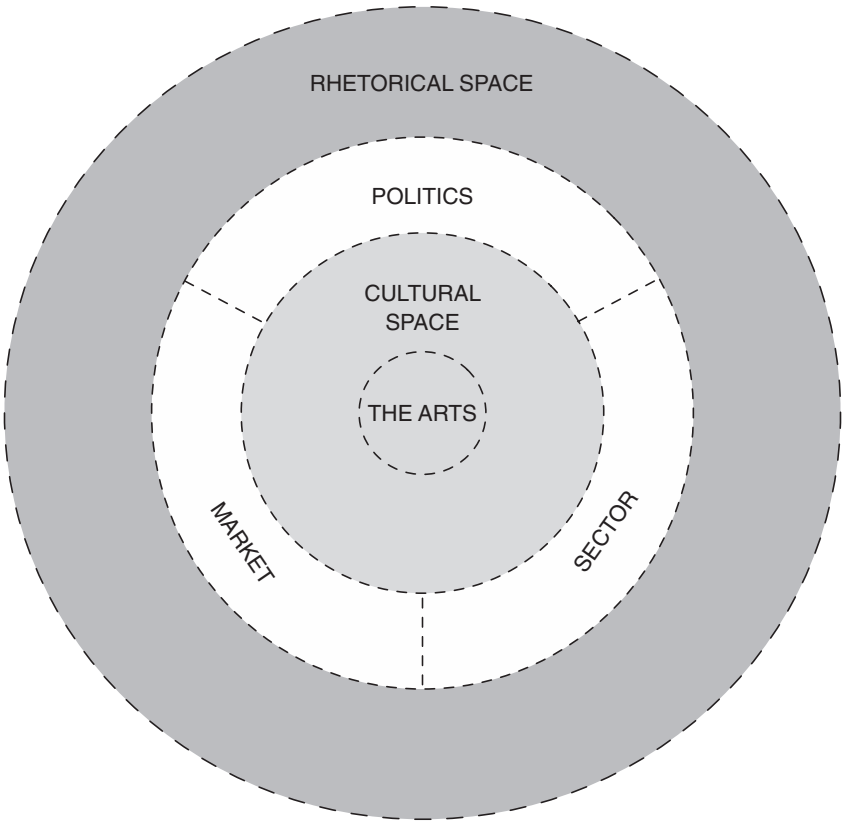

Figure 1.4 Positioning the arts within cultural space.

Source: Author.

everywhere, all the time. Or, paraphrasing Zygmunt Bauman (in Werbner, p. 46): "All groups produce strangers, but each kind of group produces its own kind of strangers, and produces them in its own inimitable way".[28]

Bourdieu, Foucault and many others in their footsteps have turned these second-order dynamics back upon itself in the form of *critique*: as descriptive analysis of power-relations, "stratification" and the way these reproduce. Ever since, the concepts of *dominance and taste* have been inextricably bound to the term culture. This is of course where the subversive question "Who is talking?" comes into being, stalemating the discourse on cultural policy.

However, seen through this particular lens, the constitutive mechanism of (auto-systemic)[29] boundaries does raise profound issues with the policy concept of cultural inclusivity and cultural participation: if culture defines itself through the construction of difference, how could cultural inclusiveness work, other than through dominance, total assimilation – or the opposite: separate, parallel worlds? *Inclusiveness into what*? is the question. Participation in what: dominant culture? Who is talking? At this point sociological critique seems to fall into the two-sidedness of its own sword: by conjuring up culture *as* identity, it generates an endless row of self-aware identity representations. In that (very real) policy sense, cultural inclusiveness is an empty term, leading cultural policy into a regression of resources in ever smaller compartments,[30] *unless* it goes hand in hand with a policy of cultural space, where cultural identities are brought into play.

Belonging and becoming

That brings us back to the question of *change*. Eviatar Zerubavel has, I think elegantly and convincingly, shown how sets of meaning and value are inextricably ingrained in every communication: indeed, communications *can only exist* against the background of conventional presumptions ("marking patterns") that have a tacit, inevitable grip on our minds. To illustrate this, Zerubavel coined the term "asymmetry" illustrating that any communicative act functions (communicates) in relation to an unspoken background of "normalcy" (which is "taken for granted" – Zerubavel 2018). This mechanism remains hidden until it is forced to the surface by an act of *foregrounding*: a political, academic, artistic or comic act of mirroring. "*To whom have you disclosed your heterosexual tendencies? How did they react?*". Zerubavel's work shows an abundance of these examples[31] (see Figure 1.5).

So, is cultural space *qualitate qua* a space of change? Not by definition, because the outcome of any ambiguous communication is (can only be): open. It *could* play out as self-affirmation, in the shared experience of "belonging" – as many communications obviously do. But cultural space (as explained here) is the space of cultural encounter, and as such a prerequisite for any change – and thus for the open future of society and democracy. In its deepest level, cultural space is about connecting sense *and* imagining: belonging *and*

"Do you have any books on the white-male experience?"

Figure 1.5 Comic "foregrounding". Copyright: Cameron Harvey/The New Yorker Collection/The Cartoon Bank.

becoming – a humus onto which the individual and societal awareness may grow that things *could*, indeed, be different.

Summary

Recapitulating, in the first part of this chapter, I have illustrated that the charged rhetorical dynamics of cultural discourse have obscured the focus of cultural policy and have cluttered its core concepts. I proposed to "separate" rhetorical space (as the locus of discourse *about* culture) from cultural space (as the locus where cultural interactions actually happen).

In the second part, I have conceptualised cultural space as a dedicated interactional space (between people) that comes into being when people *interact ambiguously*, i.e., when shared sense-making and shared imagining simultaneously come into play, positioning this in relation to modern lines of thought. I have then positioned the arts within cultural space, arguing that the arts seek to create an *enduring form* as interactional vessel for ambiguous meaning, inherently creating cultural "dis-measure".

The process-concept of culture and arts differs from the traditional (rhetorically charged and cluttered) use of the terms, which have come to refer to *either* shared meaning (value, identity) *or* shared imaginings or artefacts

(cultural products, symbols, artworks) causing wicked problems in policy design and implementation. These problems are intensified by the potent "second order" dynamics of cultural identity and critique.

All of this does not mean that cultural space *by definition* is a space of change: cultural communication functions both as belonging (shared backgrounding) and as becoming (shared foregrounding). It is however, a space of *encounter* and, as such, of human democratic *possibility*. We can now address the question how this may inform new concepts of cultural governance.

Governance of cultural space

Towards governance of cultural space

What would governance of cultural space look like? How does it change the perspective of policy and governance?

A first (and most obvious) change in perspective would be that a policy and governance of cultural space would not be grounded in, or (primarily) aimed at the conservation, production and dissemination of specific values, identities or artefacts – as traditional cultural policy is.[32] Instead, it will be grounded in, and aiming at the communication processes through which values, identities or artefacts *come to life*. In that sense, such a policy is *democratic* in the deep layer that it is not primarily directed at representation (although representation is certainly a prerequisite – see below) of identities or values in the public sphere, but at the imaginative processes through which identities or values may mediate, liquify and change – essential for an open society (Zerubavel 2018; Ignatieff and Roch 2018). By grounding in this deeper democratic layer, cultural policy may find a way out of the circular "legitimacy stalemate" pointed out in Paragraph 1, as it can no longer be instrumentalised or "hijacked" by cultural identity rhetorics.

A second change in perspective concerns the role of artists and the arts. It has often been said that artists or the arts should not claim exclusivity for the societal enhancement of creativity and imagination (or, for that matter, for cultural participation, or for social "bonding" and "bridging"),[33] as there are many other processes in society that may bring about these qualities in people's lives. The concept of cultural space may help to put the issues concerning the role and significance of artists and the arts in a wider and deeper perspective. If we see cultural space as the domain of ambiguous communication, the role of arts and artists may come to light as a specific *depth* in this communication mode. Artists and artworks renew and update the expressive vocabulary ("form-languages")[34] in and of society, creating inspiring, provocative or wonderous signposts in cultural space. To be able to do so, artists must also be the keepers and disseminators of the specialist vocabulary of their discipline and the sets (passed down *and* continuously developing) of integrated skills that may bring that vocabulary to life.

From this vantage point, artists can more confidently unfold their role and position in society, and transparently balance the necessity of their artistic

skills and autonomy with the necessity of their communicative embeddedness; confident of the fact that their work will find full significance in the playful context[35] of cultural communication and cultural encounter.

Combining these two observations, cultural policy design may gain a new perspective. Two dimensions can then be functionally distinguished: the dimension of the width and the dimension of depth of cultural communication.

- For the maintenance and facilitation of the *width* of cultural communication, policy can be directed towards the capability[36] in and of society to arrange cultural encounters past the cultural "walls" of identity and power reproduction.
- For the maintenance and facilitation of the *depth* of cultural communication, policy can be directed towards the capability in and of society to arrange cultural encounters beyond the vested vocabularies (form-languages).

This "third way" of policy formation may have far-reaching implications, to be discussed and explored.

In the next paragraph, some preliminary findings of a trial setup in the Netherlands are presented, serving as a prelude to such explorations and discussions. In anticipation, a key finding of this trial may be mentioned: *traditional policy elements (input, output, outcome) will have to be re-designed*. In a midsized "new-town" in the Netherlands, this policy re-design was democratically rolled out with the participation of the entire cultural field, triggered by the collectively shared (owned) challenge *to facilitate cultural encounters for everyone*.[37] This yielded a new collective agenda for cultural policy for a period of eight years, along with major revisions of funding and collaboration. In the paragraph below, some further remarks are made on the development of specific tools for policy design and collaboration.[38]

Operationalising governance of cultural space

As a matter of experiment, policy strategies were discussed in a trial setup in the Netherlands in 2020–2021 as part of a project aimed at finding new methods for arranging *cultural encounters* as the "basic unit" of new process-oriented governance.[39] As a preliminary outcome, *six elements for governance of cultural encounter* were identified: vocabulary, self-assessment, collaboration (ecosystems), arrangements, evaluation and pre-requisites.

Vocabulary

As this chapter set out to illustrate, the rhetorical vocabulary contextualising cultural policy and governance is charged with political stakes and fraught with pitfalls, loops and semantic cluttering. The practical downside of this is that the development of any new collaborative vocabulary takes time and effort, dealing with ingrained semantics and misunderstandings. The upside is that many policymakers, cultural organisations and practitioners may be

eager to break rhetorical deadlocks and find new words for their shared goals and collaborations.

An effort to break rhetorical deadlocks and find new words for goals and collaborations would probably sit very well with the democratic agenda of the EU, as it could bring diversity, citizenship and culture into a single powerful frame (see last paragraph).

Self-assessment

As highlighted in other chapters in this volume, most cultural organisations are firmly trapped in the rhetorical struggle for survival – to make ends meet in the strategic battle for recognition and support. Societal goals and outcomes are (still) very hard to substantiate and making the case for the intrinsic value of culture and the arts is even harder. This leaves the sector (and policy) vulnerable for critique and populist deconstruction. It is important that cultural organisations are aided in redefining their societal contributions in other terms.

As it is, new cultural leadership, adaptivity, networks and new professionalism are already established practices for many cultural organisations in Europe. What is missing is not so much impetus or motivation but a basic method and shared vocabulary that enables new forms of impact-assessment that enable trust, stability, transparency and commitment. Several such tools have already been tried in the Netherlands (Drion 2022a, 2022b).

This might be well in line with the current EU agenda to support new impact of cultural and artistic expressions and mindsets.

Collaboration / ecosystems

Cultural ecosystems (Gross and Wilson 2020; Holden 2015) are currently at the forefront of the discourse on cultural governance, participation and democracy. It is important to note that the term appears in two conceptually different strands: a representational and a participatory strand.

In the representational strand, cultural ecosystems are conceptualised at institutional level, as a set of more or less formal facilities that need to be opened for democratic representation of all cultural groups, both formally (as diversity) and in their programming and modus operandi (as inclusiveness). The Porto Santo Charter is an example of this variant (EU 2021).

In the participatory strand, cultural ecosystems are seen as a democratic process-approach to inequality and exclusion. It is interesting to note that two variants of this strand are emerging: *cultural commons* and *cultural capability*.

Commons or "commoning" is being developed in relation to culture and the arts in Belgium by Pascal Gielen and others (DeBruyne and Gielen 2011; Volont et al. 2022). Its origins can be traced to political theory of power and exclusion along the lines of Gramsci, Castells, Mouffe and Rancière. Commoning is inherently *political* in the sense that it puts feelings of discontent at the heart of the common, as a driver for people to come together and create

a participatory social space (and place) that is appropriated by sharing ideas, resources and symbols and creating new shared meaning and ownership.

Cultural capability is being developed in the UK by Nick Wilson and others (Gross and Wilson 2020; Wilson et al. 2017; Wilson and Gross 2018). Its concept can be traced to the work of Martha Nussbaum (2013) and Amartya Sen. It theorises cultural democracy as a living system that facilitates cultural capabilities for all of its participants and conceptualises cultural care and cultural ecosystems as strategies for cultural citizenship and development (see also Wilson and Gross in this volume). *Supported autonomy* in cultural expression is the key term for this approach. Cultural capability is linked to the idea that people and society as a whole benefit from cultural capabilities. The Rome Charter (UCLG 2020) is an EU-example of this line of argument.

In a governance of cultural space, these eco-systemic strands of democratic thinking may have a prominent place, as dedicated strategies to facilitate and engage cultural encounters. It is important to mention, however, that the conception of cultural space (as presented in this chapter) differs in a deep democratic sense from the ecosystem strands mentioned above. As cultural space is conceptualised as the living system of cultural interactions, the actors in the ecology of cultural space are not organisations, but *people*. The cultural sector could then organise itself to facilitate (engage and enrich) these interactions, aligning with energies and initiatives that occur in social reality and through market-dynamics. To be able to do so, the sector must find ways to engage with society through a shared view of cultural space, its energies and facilitators. This would then be the main focus of cultural governance. I think such an approach would sit well with the EU's ambitions to promote cultural citizenship.

Arrangements

Through governance of cultural space, traditional (economic) frames for demand and supply, entrepreneurship and programming within the cultural sector will be challenged by the permeating question: *how does this contribute to cultural encounter?* Programming will then become a more horizontal affair, aimed at coherently arranging cultural encounters – for everyone. Through a dedicated vocabulary and method, cultural encounters can be opened for assessment and evaluation. This method is being developed in the Netherlands (*Cultureel Vermogen*, Drion et al. 2018; Drion 2022a) and is still in a test-phase. It is important to add that the arts and artists play an important role here, as they are guides and keepers of the ingrained and embodied languages of imagination, *and* guides and developers of new imagined forms and forms of imagining.

Evaluation

In the last decades, a vigorous debate has surged about the sense (or nonsense) of measuring the "value" and the "impact" of culture and the arts.

The debate is vigorous, because it hooks into the legitimisation of public support for culture and the arts, *and* because it rhetorically frames the debate itself: if no impact can be measured, what could be the value?

A special dimension in this debate is the issue of intrinsic versus instrumental value: are culture and the arts of value "by and of" themselves, or should we look for its value elsewhere (economy, wellbeing, health, innovation, resilience, sustainability)? It is probably fair to say that during the last decades the intrinsic argument has lost most of its rhetorical ground, but may now be on the rise again. One reason for this may be a new tendency towards overarching humanist vistas of the world and its predicaments, perhaps combined with a more qualitative approach to society, management and evaluation.

It is interesting to note that the evaluation of cultural space and "cultural encounter" would be directed not so much at impact but at *process*. This implies a more generic approach to evaluation, posing the question *"Is the process continuing?"* rather than *"What has changed?"* Implicitly, this is a move towards the "intrinsic side" of the debate, leaving other societal sectors to judge the value of the encounter in *their own* vocabulary.

Pre-requisites

In the backdrop to all of this looms the question of the dynamics of governance itself. As has been put forward by many authors (e.g. Van Meerkerk and Van den Hoogen 2018, pp. 272–275), any policy creates its own "systemic" vocabulary and blind spots, ultimately leading to an intricate play of *make belief* between policy and the sector, freezing the sector in place. So, could the term "governance of cultural space" be a contradiction in terms?

The democratic answer to that question must be that, indeed, only in an autocratic or dictatorial regime would the *content* of cultural space be a subject to policy and governance. But that does not entail that governance of cultural space would be futile or useless. As sketched above, governance of cultural space is aimed at the *conditions for cultural space* i.e. at the maintaining of cultural space by creating and sustaining the critical conditions for cultural interactions. Above, five of these conditions (vocabulary, assessment, ecosystem, arrangements and evaluation) were described from the perspective of governance of cultural space. Together these represent a substantial policy agenda and a substantial governance challenge.

Such an agenda would however not be effective if (local and national) government would not also look at its own role and modus operandi. Processes of cultural space may easily be frustrated by red tape, disregard, compartmentalisation or inconsistencies in policy, funding and government. It is worthwhile to bring these into the open. This may in turn not come about without the purposeful construction of pay-offs in rhetorical space, which may entice the political arena. It is at this point that the EU may make a significant or even decisive difference.

EU governance of cultural space: towards a unifying vocabulary

As this volume substantiates, the EU perspective on cultural policy may perhaps best be explained as a continuous pragmatic search for some unified agenda, on a subject that is as problematically elusive as it is pervasive, contentious and foundational. In this chapter, the volatile dynamics of the general discourse on culture and cultural policy were related to the dynamics of culture itself. Exploring these double dynamics, a new orientation for cultural policy was suggested: the governance of cultural space, as the locus of cultural interaction, i.e. what people do when meaning, values and identities are brought into imaginative play. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to investigate how such a process-conception of culture may sit within the current EU policy agenda – as indeed some of the subsequent chapters in this volume do, albeit from different perspectives. However, a few preliminary remarks may be made.

A first such remark must be that a process-conception of culture (and the concept of cultural space as the locus of that process) may provide substance and perspective to culture (as a verb) as a *public good* in and of itself. As such, it sheds new light on the problematic discourse on intrinsic and instrumental value of culture and the "judgement issues" surrounding this debate.

A second remark must be that a process-conception of culture may open a new perspective on the relation between culture, democracy and citizenship – beyond the rhetorical entanglements and stalemates of representation, identity politics and critique. If cultural space is indeed the locus of ambiguity and open outcomes, it is also a breeding ground for undecidedness: the open future of society. This idea lies close to the "unity in diversity" heart of the European project, while also giving it a practical agenda beyond heritage and representation alone, i.e.: the agenda to facilitate a space where identities and heritage interact, diversity *comes to life* and democratic cultural citizenship (Stevenson 1999) takes shape.[40]

Third, a process-conception of culture may shed a new light on the promotion of the "transversal nature" of culture in the European (sustainability) agenda. As I have argued, using a policy directed at culture as meaning, identity or value as instrument for social change is problematic. Social change can however be substantiated by a policy directed at culture as open process of bringing meaning, identity and value into imaginative play. But this process is, in its essence, open-ended, and as such it is not susceptible to the direct promotion of ulterior goals or agendas. It is, however, very relevant as societal space for change in a general sense. (This is, of course, why ambiguity, art, irony and comedy are restricted or banned in totalitarian regimes.) In that – indirect – sense, cultural space may indeed be indispensable for social dynamics; it will however also include the playful, imaginative denial, undermining or ridiculing of "progressive" sustainability measures and agendas – something the more idealist promotors of culture-as-agent-of-change may not quite have in mind. This, at the end of the day, is the paradox of any cultural policy: it must leave outcomes open – or be political.

Fourth, to round off, this chapter put forward several focal points for facilitating governance of cultural space: (1) building a shared vocabulary for governance of cultural space; (2) developing new methods for self-assessment; (3) facilitating the growth of cultural ecosystems; (4) developing methods for arranging cultural encounters; (5) developing tools for generative evaluation and (6) providing pre-requisites such as abolishing red tape and facilitating a governance of trust. Together, these comprise a substantial agenda that may have innovative crosslinks with EU's long-term needs and ambitions for cultural diversity, sustainability and citizenship. As for the impact on its Member States, I think the EU – although bound by the principle of subsidiarity laid down in the Treaty of Maastricht – may have a decisive role to play as *advocate and initiator of a unifying vocabulary for cultural governance*, consciously influencing the pay-offs of new cultural governance in the rhetorical arenas within and between its Member States; purposefully scaffolding the inherent fragility of cultural governance in the mixed day-to-day dynamics to which it must, inevitably, relate.

This chapter may be read as an exploration of how such a new and unifying vocabulary could be grounded, what its essential elements could be – and how these could inform a new horizon for the governance of culture in these complex times.

Notes

1 Some parts of this chapter have been previously published in Drion (2022b).
2 Survey for the Wiardi Beckman Foundation, the Netherlands (2012).
3 The findings of the survey indicated that no clear denominator or shared policy ideal or "profile" could be found among the 17 interviewed governors, although they all represented the same political party.
4 I have borrowed the term "rhetorics" from Brian Sutton-Smith: "a persuasive discourse or an implicit narrative, wittingly or unwittingly adopted by members of a particular affiliation to persuade others of the veracity and worthwhileness of their beliefs" (Sutton-Smith 1997, p. 8).
5 Due to (e.g.) sociological deconstruction, diversification, neoliberal strands in government and populist rhetoric – in combination with societal changes such as digitalisation, globalisation, segregation and austerity. These factors and their dynamics are not discussed here but, for the purpose of this chapter, taken as a starting point.
6 For a discussion of this, see (e.g.): Holden (2006), Belfiore and Bennet (2008), Van den Hoogen (2012), Stevenson (2016), Hadley and Belfiore (2018), O'Brien (2018).
7 Listed here as exemplary findings by the author.
8 Eagleton (2000), Belfiore (2014), Gielen et al. (2014), Bauman (1999, 2011), Baricco (2013) to name a few, have all written extensively and convincingly about the subject, each from their own perspective.
9 For an overview of the development of the EU positioning on culture, see Theodoulou Charalambous in this volume.
10 See (e.g.) Finkielkraut (1987) for a discussion of cultural relativism.
11 Based on personal observation. Although there are differences between Catholic, Lutheran and Protestant veins, some common orientation may be assumed.

See (e.g.) https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/publications/epp-group-position-paper-on-culture (Accessed on 15/07/23).

12 As e.g. the Dutch politicians Pim Fortuyn and Geert Wilders have shown.
13 See Belfiore and Bennett (2008) for a taxonomy of these impact-rhetorics.
14 The term "sector" indicates the cultural field professionally (or otherwise as active part of a network) involved in the conservation, creation or dissemination of cultural expressions and artefacts.
15 See for example the Dutch situation: Van Meerkerk and Van den Hoogen (2018). More general discussion in Adorno (1991) or, on a different note: Brook et al. (2020).
16 Ever since the arrival of abstract and conceptual art (like the ready-mades of Duchamp or Warhol's *Brillo Boxes,* 1964) this distinction between the real and the imaginary has been irreversibly established – and consequently been thematised ("re-entered") in art.
17 See also: Bakhtin (1981), Lotman (1990), Kostogriz, in Hall et al. (eds.) (2005 pp. 196–198).
18 E.g: Bateson (2000), Luhmann (2000, 2013), Baecker (2012), Laermans (2002, 2007).
19 E.g.: Maturana and Varela (1984), Deacon (1998), Hoffmeyer (2008), Eco (1978, 1988), Lotman (2011), Wheeler (2015).
20 E.g.: Donald (1991), Damasio (2018), Van Heusden (2009).
21 E.g.: Winnicott (1971), Gadamer (1987), Sutton-Smith (1997), Fisher-Lichte (2008, 2009), Lotman (2011), Vygotsky (1996), Dissanayake (1974, 2012), Henricks (2015), McConachie (2015), Larsen (2015), Damasio (2018), Upton (2021), see also Drion (2022b).
22 I would not want to be drawn into the ontology of art, but I want to uphold that there is *more* to art (as process) than societal jest, self-referential paraphrasings, or the thematising of societal issues and symbols. I explored this tension in Drion (2003, 2013) (both in Dutch). Needless to say, the "art-world" (Van Maanen 2005) operates with its own, self-defining set of distinctions.
23 See Drion (2022b) for a theoretical positioning, referring to the communication theory of Luhmann (Luhmann 1987, 2000), annotating on his use of Spencer-Brown's *Logic of Form*.
24 Although this does not mean that art is defined by cultural dis-measure alone, as argued above.
25 See also the next paragraph on the subject of change: "Belonging and becoming".
26 Bateson (1904–1980), anthropologist, semiotician and cyberneticist. It is interesting to note that Bateson's work extends to cybernetics and self-organising *systems* (where it remains of huge influence in the work of (e.g.) Maturana, Varela and Luhmann – and through them on many others). Bateson introduced the term *schismogenesis* for the mechanism of cultural opposition (Bateson, 1935).
27 There seems indeed compelling evidence from psychology, anthropology and evolution research that this oppositioning mechanism (us-them) is hardwired into the human species, as the flipside of (specifically human) sociality and social coordination that is essential for living together (e.g. Tomasello 2000, 2021).
28 In original: "group" is "society".
29 The term system in relation to culture is contentious. See Drion (2022b) and Baecker (2012) for a discussion.
30 It may be interesting to note here that the *market* may also be a factor in the mechanism of cultural compartmentation: "At the worst, an open society becomes one which encourages (…) a multitude of closed cultures, which the pluralist ideology of capitalism can then celebrate as a rich diversity of life-forms" (Eagleton 2000, pp. 129–130).
31 In terms of this chapter, Zerubavel's comic and artistic "foregrounding" share the same source: the ambiguous mode of communicating that makes cultural space

spring to life. In contrast, although political and academic foregrounding do indeed feed back into the repertoire of meaning and as such influence what takes place in cultural space, the way this comes about belongs to the "binary world" of discourse and rhetorics.

32 See Van Meerkerk and Van den Hoogen (2018) on the Dutch *Cultural Policy Act* as an example.

33 See e.g. Otte (2015) for a field study on the relationship between art, policy and social cohesion.

34 Form-language is meant here as the cumulative resource of cultural space: the repertoire that makes cultural communication possible. This repertoire may be casual as in lifestyle or fashion, as well as deeply ingrained in artistic disciplines such as ballet or music. See Drion (2022b).

35 See also: Gadamer (1987).

36 See: Nussbaum (2013). Nussbaum's *capability approach* relates to the freedom people have *to do and be what one has reason to value*. In relation to culture and democracy this has been adapted by Wilson and Gross towards *cultural capability*: the freedom people have *to recognise and explore what they have reason to value*. For Drion et al. (2018) cultural capability relates to the capability in and of society to culturally communicate. See also: Drion (2022a).

37 Gemeente Zoetermeer (2019–2020); the "catchphrase" put forward was this: "Hoe kunnen we samen nog beter uitdagende culturele ontmoetingen arrangeren voor iedereen?" (*How can we enhance our shared effective capability to arrange vital cultural encounters for everyone in our community?*) This catchphrase worked very well as a trigger for the design of shared goals and practices. It resulted in a collective long-term policy framework built on a shared process-vocabulary of cultural encounter.

38 Developed in the trail setup "Vier Proeftuinen Cultureel Vermogen" in the Netherlands, 2019–2021. See: https://www.lkca.nl/categorie/thema/cultureelvermogen/ (in Dutch).

39 Ibid.

40 "Cultural citizenship, as we have seen, is the contested desire to foster a communicative society" (Stevenson 1999, p. 151).

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