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Chapter Fourteen

Embedded in the Dutch Art World

Judith Thissen

When the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research invited me in 2006 to develop an art-science project about the commercialization of culture, I had no concrete idea what form such a collaborative project would possibly take, except that I wanted us to critically investigate the market ideology that over the last decades has infiltrated almost all aspects of everyday life in the Netherlands. From the 1990s onwards, large sectors of the welfare state system – notably health-care insurance, communication services and public transport – have been privatized. Education has yet been spared, but most schools and universities are nevertheless managed as a business and marketed as high-performance cars for top-talented students. Culture itself is increasingly supplied by (semi)private firms and appropriated by corporate capital, produced for a profit under the conditions of market exchange. In the arts, which have benefited from extensive government support since the 1950s, the Dutch have witnessed a remarkably rapid shift towards commercial practices and a discourse of cultural entrepreneurship. Artists are encouraged to turn themselves into brands in order to increase their revenue-earning capacity. Museums sell these brand names to cultural consumers and advertise the attendance figures of blockbuster shows (“over 50,000 visitors in the opening month”) as if they were movie theatres operating within a Hollywood-controlled distribution system.¹

What interests me as a social historian in this ongoing process of commercialization is its political economy. What are the underlying social dynamics and power struggles that restructure the transformation of the cultural field in the Netherlands? Does the “new order” of market economics in the non-for-profit sector challenge existing social hierarchies and power relations or does commercialization reinforce the position of the vested cultural elites? Before discussing the insights gained by our art-science exploration, which offers only the beginnings of a systemic understanding of the complex dynamics at work, let me explicate the central concerns of my research by giving a rough draft of the commercial tendencies in the not-for-profit segment of the cultural field, taking as an

example the nation's major museums for modern art and centres for contemporary art. As it draws merely the contours of the commercialization process, my composite sketch will inevitably be a simplification of the actual situation, but it hints at the key issues at stake.

Most players in the not-for-profit segment of the cultural field continue to adhere to the seemingly disinterested principle of "art for art's sake" or a contemporary "art-for-society" version of this ideology whereby art's rationale is still positioned as fundamentally different from the capitalist rationality at work in the economic field. It comes as no surprise then that they frequently complain about neoliberal politics and the concomitant economization of the arts. The "market" is criticized time and again but at the same time its practices are widely embraced for institutional advertising and self-promotion. The latter seems in particular the case with those players who manage the circulation of art, artists and audiences in the public domain. Their habitus is intimately tied to the logic of the market and the media.

Much like art dealers, not-for-profit mediators between producers and consumers are well aware that media exposure boosts their prestige and expands their playground. Hence museum directors and curators play the visibility game. They not only define, consecrate, distribute and promote art but also sell themselves, whereby some take on a semi-star status, which facilitates the career of their protégés as well as their own rise in the (inter)national art scene. Exhibits often function as vehicles for upcoming curatorial and artistic talent. With the help of publicity campaigns and the media, solo shows of famous and not-yet-famous artists and artistic movement are marketed as must-see events. Ideally, the museum itself develops into a global brand name, like Guggenheim. While the Disneyfication of culture is fiercely criticized, the Guggenheimization of the international museum scene encounters less opposition. The "Bilbao effect" is much sought after, not only by the museum management but also by ambitious local officials as museum branding and city marketing go hand in hand.²

It goes without saying that curatorial practices do not focus solely on mainstream museum audiences, which are primarily composed of highly educated Dutch citizens as well as international tourists.³ Special events and workshops for new audiences, in particular teens and tweens as well as second- and third-generation immigrants, aim at broadening the potential public for art and legitimize the museum's social function as well as state support. The "specialists" (notably curators, artists and cultural theorists) are well served by the centres for contemporary art, which have earned a reputation of arrogance towards the general public.⁴ In almost all cases, privileged treatment is given to private and corporate sponsors in order to ensure their financial loyalty and offer them in return a means to build up symbolic and social capital. Museums and art centres

regularly organize exclusive get-togethers for their “friends” and “patrons” (prosperous friends), such as private previews in the presence of the artist(s), personal newsletters from the artistic director and exclusive art excursions.⁵ For the next generation of patrons, some of the leading museums for modern and contemporary art helped to develop the course *My First Art Collection*, a private initiative which introduces people in the 30-45 age group (especially social climbers from immigrant milieus) to the practice of buying art, with visits to art schools and art fairs, information on fiscal advantages for art collectors and a mock auction.⁶

While exhibiting art remains the core business of the museums, a wide range of ancillary services and events inscribes museum visits firmly within a dispositive of entertainment and shopping. *Vernissages* and *finissages* draw attention to the opening and closing nights of many exhibits, a practice adopted from the world of commercial art galleries. For instance, in November 2006, a “special evening” marked the end of *Street: Behind the Cliché* at Witte de With in Rotterdam and the opening of *If I Can't Dance I Don't Want to Be Part of Your Revolution* at De Appel in Amsterdam. The programme started at Witte de With with a short tour of the exhibition by curator Renske Janssen. Participants then took a karaoke bus to Amsterdam where they attended the *vernissage* at De Appel. During the bus trip, Canadian artist Gareth Moore discussed his month-long stay in Rotterdam and the work he created for the *Street* exhibition. Although opening and closing parties are usually open to the wider public, they primarily serve the in-crowd because personal invitations are distributed only within a limited circle. There is no such thing as a free lunch for the average taxpayers who fund these parties. However, museum cafés are open to all who want to indulge themselves in the hipness of the contemporary art scene, evoked by design furniture and trendy cooking. In the Flavours Museum Café in Eindhoven, one enjoys “creative food concepts” in a setting of “innovative architecture”.⁷ The Groningen Museum proudly draws attention to the fact that the interior of its restaurant is designed by Maarten Baas. “The tables, chairs, and settees are made from synthetic clay and designed by hand. Every piece in the MendiniRestaurant [sic] is thus unique”.⁸ Typically, the museum store operates along similar lines as the museum café. Both are independent destinations that can be accessed without buying a ticket to the museum. These days the store no longer sells merely art books, posters and postcards of the collection and temporary shows, but also a selection of museum merchandise, gadgets, toys, design objects and designer fashion.

Even within the walls of the exhibition space itself, the boundaries between art and commerce, between aesthetic experience and entertainment are blurred. In 2010, the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen offered “visitors a unique opportunity to spend a night in the museum”.⁹ For €275 to €450 for two people (including dinner and breakfast), guests could book the installation *Revolving Hotel Room* by artist Carsten Höller. For those who hesitated, the publicity cam-

paign pointed out that “the Guggenheim Museum in New York exhibited the hotel room last year with great success”. Conforming to the logic of Hollywood’s distribution system, the second run of the show was cheaper than the premiere in New York City, where prices ranged from \$259 (student rate on Monday evenings) to \$799 on holiday weekends. On both sides of the Atlantic, the happening was an instant hit and sold out almost overnight. For the final night in Rotterdam, which was auctioned off by Boijmans van Beuningen, an anonymous buyer paid €2,010.

Of course, the proliferation of commercial discourses and practices in the not-for-profit part of the cultural field is not specific to the Netherlands, neither is the aestheticization of the economy, which is the flipside of this conspicuous convergence between culture and the economy.¹⁰ Moreover, it is not a phenomenon without a history. Since the early modern period, culture has been supplied in the form of goods and services produced under the conditions of market exchange. It was only in the nineteenth century that the notion of an “autonomous” artistic field emerged, which was positioned against the commercial orientation of large-scale cultural industries.¹¹ Since then, according to Bourdieu, the opposition between pure art (symbolically dominant but economically dominated) and commercial art (economically dominant but symbolically dominated) has figured as the artistic and ideological benchmark of the cultural field. Its new logic thereby reproduced, as Bourdieu points out, the opposition between art and money that characterizes the field of power, in which

the intellectuals, rich in cultural capital and (relatively) poor in economic capital, and the owners of industry and business, rich in economic capital but (relatively) poor in cultural capital are in opposition: on the one hand, a maximal independence with regards to the demands of the market and exaltation of values of disinterestedness; on the other, direct dependence rewarded with immediate success.¹²

However, in the closing decades of the twentieth century, the gap between the cultural field’s founding dogma and the objective practices of those who are involved in it, has widened considerably. The boundaries between the cultural field and the economic field are more and more blurred. Yet, the present-day constellation of the cultural field is not a mere return to pre-Romantic notions and patterns of cultural production. For one, the laws of today’s global economy entail a homogenization of culture and standardization of taste that are unprecedented in scope and scale. The centripetal forces of commercialization, bolstered by new communication technologies and global media networks, are evident in all segments of the cultural field, including the field of restricted production (“high art”). For another, in most countries which are governed by neo-liberal

economic politics, public support for the arts is still largely based upon the field's presupposed internal dialectic and principles of distinction between pure art and commercial art, despite a growing emphasis on the "self-earning capacity" of cultural institutions and artists. Hence, the latter find themselves in a rather schizophrenic situation: they are prompted to become more "commercial" but at the same time they derive their public funding from their position in the field of restricted production, which is defined by its refusal of the "commercial".¹³ However, in the end, every single decision to act in one way or another is a matter of personal choice and ethics. Significantly, it suits the field as a whole to regard the internalization of economic discourse and practices simply as a consequence of pressures from the outside, as if agents and institutions have no agency at all.

What makes the Netherlands a particularly interesting case to research this complex and ongoing process of cultural change is its social and political explosiveness, which came to the surface after the populist Freedom Party (PVV) led by Geert Wilders won the parliamentary elections in 2010. This watershed in Dutch politics resulted in a minority government of Liberals (VVD) and Christian Democrats (CDA), which introduced unprecedented budget cuts in the realm of high art and artistic experimentation to gain the support of the PVV and satisfy its populist agenda.¹⁴ While Wilders prided himself that the "left-wing hobbies" of the cultural and intellectual elite would no longer be publicly funded in the near future, prominent figures in the field of contemporary art called for a response against the "Dutch coup d'état in art and culture". During the news coverage of the *March for Civilization* to The Hague (26-27 June 2011), a protest movement organized by "artists and art lovers", a new type of Dutch citizen was born in the media: the "cultural activist".¹⁵ Clearly, the term connotes the radical activism of the environmental movement and hints at a fundamental shift in the position of the arts within Dutch society: public funding for the arts is no longer self-evident.

When I started to develop the art-science project *Something's Brewing* in close collaboration with multimedia artist Edith Abeyta, the widespread populist resentment towards Art and Culture was still buried under a thick layer of traditional Dutch consensus politics. It was by doing this art project that I got a first sense of the internal forces that fuelled the mechanisms and tendencies that I sketched above and the disruptive potential of the field's in-group dynamics for society at large. Our project started off with a more playful than overtly political approach to the theme of cultural entrepreneurship and the commercialization of everyday life. But rather unexpectedly, we hit a raw nerve. To get a better grip on what was happening, we adjusted the academic objectives of our art-science collaboration: *Something's Brewing* became an anthropological investigation into the political economy of the Dutch art world.

The project

Edith Abeyta was the artist whose name came almost immediately to my mind when I began to think about a possible partner for the art-science project. We had briefly met in Los Angeles in 2004 when I visited Simon Rodia's *Watts Towers*. Unlike Disneyland's magic castle, the *Watts Towers* captured my imagination: seventeen structures of steel and mortar decorated with pieces of broken tile, pottery, china, glass, bottles and scrap metal, built by an Italian immigrant construction worker in his spare time over a period of more than thirty years (1921-1954). A work of vernacular architecture made of consumer trash, some of the green glass elements still bearing the logos of 7 Up and other soft drink brands. An exhibition at the nearby Watts Towers Arts Center featured some of Edith Abeyta's art – works made with present-day post-consumer cast-offs. I was inspired by her installations, which, like the Watts Towers, remind us of “the failure of consumer capitalism to satisfy, despite the impressions of abundance that it creates”, as she puts it. I was also struck by the similarities between her projects and my own research, even though we work in very different contexts. The gap between the precarious living and working conditions of a radical artist and the security of a tenured position at university is enormous and yet in our work we pose similar questions about the commercialization of everyday life. The main difference is that I seek to understand its political and social effects from a historical and sociological perspective, while Edith Abeyta is seeking to formulate alternatives to a life that is determined by market forces, looking for ways “to soothe the pain produced by consumer capitalism”.

What we had in mind with *Something's Brewing* was a kind of a crossover between Guerrilla Girls and Negativland. The first is a group of women who fight sexism, racism and corruption in politics and art “with facts, humor and outrageous visuals”, trying with their interventions in the public domain to disclose the “understory, the subtext, the overlooked, and the downright unfair”.¹⁶ Negativland is a group of creative anti-corporate activists, who create music, books and visual art using appropriated sound, image and text. Mixing original materials with bits and pieces taken from corporately owned mass culture, they re-arrange “these found bits and pieces to make them say and suggest things that they never intended to”.¹⁷ Combining these two models of artistic activism, we decided to infiltrate the Dutch market with our own art beer, turning the product's generic name in Dutch into a brand name. Free BIER would be provided at cultural events in exchange for promotional display and opportunities for conversations with the public about subjects ranging from the privatization of culture to the homogenization of taste.¹⁸

Like previous projects by Edith Abeyta, *Something's Brewing* included collaborative elements with other artists and the public. Edith Abeyta designed the first

label for BIER, a hand-sewed brown-bag slipover for a standard 33 cl/12 oz beer bottle. In January 2007, an open call was launched to artists, scholars and the wider public to design a label for BIER using the slipover format. Within a few weeks, we received over fifty designs (see figure 17).¹⁹ Abeyta and her husband Robert Tower, who is an experienced home brewer, arrived from Los Angeles in April 2007 to work and live in an artist-in-residency centre in the north of the Netherlands. Three different types of beer were brewed and bottled on location. In total, we produced 780 bottles. Each of them was covered with a machine-sewed paper slipover. We used different designs for the same beer, which greatly confused the public, drawing in a simple manner their attention to the standardization practices of corporate brewers.

On 9 June 2007, BIER premiered in Amsterdam at Imagine IC – a centre for the visual representation of migration and cultures, after an impressive programme about African roots and cultural identity (see figure 18). Two elderly women congratulated us with the results of our first batch and told us their stories about home brewing in Suriname. Others asked lots of questions about the artists who had collaborated with their designs, treasuring already their slipover as a little art work and souvenir. Many were surprised that one could make one's own beer and that it tasted so much better than the standard commercial fare they bought in the supermarket. After Amsterdam, BIER toured the Netherlands by bike, bus, boat and train. On the island of Terschelling, we sponsored two concerts of the Dutch band De Kift during the Oerol theatre festival (see figure 19). De Kift's anarchic fanfare music went very well with our *Festbier*. The band and their fans expressed their frustrations about the commercialization of the alternative music scene but they also shared visions of a society in which DIY-approaches would prevail. Time and again, BIER opened up new horizons. Students, staff and faculty of Utrecht University met in unexpected ways at an open studio and tasting event at the Faculty of the Humanities. Something similar happened a few days later when our Irish Red Ale accompanied a reading of Pete Jordan's book *Dishwasher* at the ABC Treehouse in Amsterdam. Thanks to BIER, tempers calmed down at the CO-OPs conference in Utrecht after a heated debate about the growing emphasis on competition, profitability, and visibility in the Dutch art world (see figure 20). Finally, we set up a Mobile Research Centre for Beer Culture at the group exhibition *Inter-territorial Explorations in Art and Science* at the Scheltema Complex in Leiden (29 October 2007 to 20 January 2008), which marked the end of the NWO art-science programme.

Edith Abeyta's installation and my contribution to the book that accompanied the final group show were our first efforts to understand the trajectory we had made with *Something's Brewing*.²⁰ Because what had started as a playful, participatory exploration of the ways in which the Dutch think about the commercialization of everyday life in general and culture, in particular, turned into a

startling discovery of the hidden commercial forces at work in the Dutch art world. Having lived for years in Los Angeles, one of the most ambitious, competitive cities in the United States, Edith Abeyta was struck by the constant struggles we had to engage in to maintain control over our project. She had not expected such a fierce resistance to her artistic practice in a country where the arts are so generously sponsored by the state. With the advantage of hindsight, I will try to decipher in this essay why our ideas, practices and position-takings clashed with the prevailing norms of production and the expectations of the field, exasperating the people with whom we worked.

“When Hegemony Just Won’t Do!”

Initially, the CO-OPs curator and communications advisor (hereafter: the management team) who were charged with the fundraising, PR and day-to-day management of the art-science programme on behalf of the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research supported *Something’s Brewing* with great enthusiasm. At Utrecht University, our art-science project was received with a similar kind of eagerness, which surprised me somewhat because of the small amount of the grant, the financial and PR-risks involved (de facto we were running an illegal brewery) and the uncertainty of its scholarly outcome. But my academic and practical concerns were superseded by the project’s potential promotional value. Abeyta and I found the over-enthusiastic reception rather amusing and overlooked its deeper implications, namely, that media exposure was a major issue for the cultural and academic institutions involved in the CO-OPs programme. For NWO and the universities, the art-science projects created opportunities to offer the broader public a more tangible and accessible image of humanities research. This is a legitimate PR investment as long as it does not come into conflict with fundamental values of intellectual freedom and academic integrity. We encountered no problems on this front, except for one serious incident which involved the programme’s academic director (see below). By contrast, we had several conflicts with the management of the CO-OPs programme and the director-curator of the arts centre that hosted our project. I will single out two moments of crisis, using Bourdieu’s sociological framework to understand the dynamics at work during these struggles. As Bourdieu points out, in moments of crisis, “the objective reality of each of the positions [in the field] and their relationship is unveiled and the values which do the veiling are reaffirmed”.²¹ It goes without saying that my analysis is not necessarily shared by the other parties involved.

The first moment of crisis I want to discuss relates to a major disagreement with the curator and communications advisor for the CO-OPs programme. It occurred in an early stage of the project and concerned the issue of corporate

sponsorship. When we had worked out our initial concept, I was invited to discuss the sponsoring of the overall art-science programme by Heineken. Our project was to serve as the bait for this big fish. We found it rather naïve of the management team to expect that Heineken, a company known for its obsession with “illegal” appropriations of its brand identity, would be interested in sponsoring a project that appropriated the cultural practices of corporate beer brewers via parody and pastiche. Moreover, colleagues at Utrecht University had warned me that in the past Heineken had shown little respect for academic freedom and corporate interests prevailed over the benefits of sharing knowledge. Abeyta was very concerned:

In no way should our project be altered, influenced or affected because one of the largest corporate brewers in the world is going to sponsor the event. I don't expect Heineken to be keeping tabs on us as we are a microscopic organism but I also don't want to be asked or feel pressure to pander or not have a critique of them because they are providing free beer ... Our strength as a project/ team is that we are small, resourceful, flexible and can move and make decisions quickly as well as being inclusive, participatory and delicious. Maybe it is because of my punk rock roots and particular political leanings and influences but to be crass, “screw” the beer sponsor. One constantly has to negotiate the corporatization of one's life. Sometimes we have to give them our money but in most cases they can be circumvented, ignored and sabotaged. I want our project to be defined by us not in response to the organizers or a beer sponsor.²²

On the other hand, working with a large corporate brewer could be an interesting experience, in particular from an academic perspective, considering that the final aim of *Something's Brewing* was to gain a better insight into the process of commercialization.

Instead of carefully weighing the pros and cons of getting Heineken involved, the CO-OPs management team expected us to comply in advance to whatever “reasonable” requests the company would make: serve their beer during public events, use the Heineken logo on publicity materials, or organize a party exclusively for the benefit of the sponsor and its guests. It was kindly suggested that we also conceal our critique of corporate capitalism from the company's view. As this case suggests, the collective disavowal of economic interests, which remains a strong governing principle in the artistic field, no longer automatically entails the exaltation of artistic autonomy and maximum independence from the demands of the market. Tellingly, the CO-OPs curator and communications advisor rejected outright our condition for sponsorship by any brewer: the donation of a few thousands non-labelled bottles to be used for BIER. Such sponsorship in kind would considerably reduce our production costs and it would be

environment-friendly because these standard bottles could be recycled via the supermarket return system. Our request was considered “unreasonable” because it would allegedly block any fundraising activity within the beer industry. Why exactly our request created an unworkable situation was never explained. It was a “matter of common sense”. However, as Gramsci has taught us, common-sense values should never be taken for granted. What seems “natural” is often a consent resulting from hegemonic efforts on the part of those in power. Dominant groups in society seek to prevent systemic change by persuading subordinate groups to identify their own good with the good of those in power. Thus the status quo is maintained.

In the end, the ill-considered fundraising plan turned out to be merely wishful thinking. Nonetheless, the conflict revealed to us that public funding is no safeguard against capitalist thinking. The CO-OPs management team swiftly discarded prevailing notions of autonomy in order to get additional financing and media exposure, which a big corporate sponsor like Heineken would obviously generate. All in all, the discussion about sponsorship was more about logos and brand identities than about art or science. Disregarding the participatory and DIY quality of our project, the director-curator of our host institution even suggested we abandon the idea of different labels for BIER and stick to a single “hip design” in order to reinforce its brand image and identity. Thus BIER would be in a better position to attract public attention and compete with Heineken during CO-OPs events. Perhaps even more revealing about the field’s political economy than the commercial logic of our not-for-profit partners was the fact that during the discussion about Heineken’s potential sponsorship, it turned out that Edith Abeyta and I would have no input into the use of these extra funds. All the money would have gone directly into the “general budget” for promotional and curatorial activities rather than being distributed among the art-science teams according to their needs, as we suggested. In sum, the political economy was fully in favour of the “middlemen” – to use a term from Bourdieu’s analysis of the cultural field.

Inside knowledge of funding schemes for the arts and the ensuing control over the CO-OPs funds constituted the power base of the programme’s managers rather than recognized expertise in the realm of curatorship or PR communications for the arts. According to figures provided by NWO, the total cost of the CO-OPs programme amounted to €474,054. Half of this sum came from external parties: private foundations (€71,500) and public sponsors (€167,500).²³ NWO allocated 60% of the working budget directly to the seven research teams, each of which received €42,000. The remaining €180,000 covered the fees for the management team and the cost of their promotional activities for the overall programme, such as the website, exhibition catalogue, launch and closing events. Despite their seemingly disinterested commitment to the arts, these figures suggest that middlemen working in not-for-profit contexts operate very

much like their commercial counterparts. The distribution of budget allows them to impose their own interests, potentially securing considerable symbolic profits if not economic benefits for themselves.

After our refusal to collaborate on the corporate sponsorship scheme, Edith Abeyta and I were at best casted as uncooperative or subversive, but more often we were simply ignored. As Bourdieu points out, “those in dominant positions operate essentially defensive strategies, designed to perpetuate the status quo by maintaining themselves and the principles on which their dominance is based ... The dominant are drawn toward silence, discretion and secrecy”.²⁴ From the perspective of the curator and communications advisor, we were obviously not willing to play by the rules. More accurately: as outsiders to the tightly-knit, closed system of the subsidized contemporary art field in the Netherlands, we did not know the local subtleties of the game.²⁵ Yet, we learned them the hard way.

When hegemony works

A summary of the material conditions under which Edith Abeyta had to work during her art residency is necessary to understand in what context we began to grasp the range of veiling mechanisms and deceptive practices that can be brought into play to protect the modus operandi in the field of subsidized art and rectify what Bourdieu called “the heresies of the newcomers”.²⁶

The project was hosted by an artist-run residency and exhibition space situated in a geographically rather isolated provincial town, some 90 km from Utrecht. We had preferred a more central location, but it was hard to find a place which could also accommodate the brewery. Abeyta agreed to the location suggested by the CO-OPs curator on the proviso that the foundation would help her integrate the project in the local community – a vital proviso because she meant to involve the general public in her art making. However, shortly before the residency started, we were informed that the director-curator of the centre would be abroad for several months. One day per week, an unpaid intern with no curatorial or management experience was replacing her. This was the beginning of a series of unpleasant surprises. We discovered that the residency deal, which was made with the CO-OPs curator, stipulated a so-called “bilateral payment” construction, in which we were invoiced €2,000 for using the accommodation in exchange for receiving a €2,000 working budget to be used for an exhibition on the site.²⁷ We never saw any of that money. More importantly, the studios were not at all equipped for artists working with traditional materials. The arts centre lacked tools, facilities and financial resources to buy art supplies. Finally, Edith Abeyta and Robert Tower knew they had to share the large complex for several weeks with a dozen art students from the Gerrit Rietveld Academie for

fine arts and design. However, no space was designated for our project and upon arrival they had to figure out themselves where they could work and install the brewery.

Abeyta set up a public studio in the adjacent exhibition space (see figure 21). Thus, people could come in to discuss the project and participate in the art making for the installation event that would mark the end of her residency. After a rather frustrating start, the project began to work out as we expected. We benefited from the kindness of the intern, who spent a lot of her own time on the project, and two students who were willing to give a hand whenever needed. Then, out of the blue, the residents were notified that the building with the exception of the exhibition space had to be vacated within five days for long-planned demolition and renovation works. It turned out that the foundation was involved in a bitter conflict with the public housing association which owned the building and that the future of the arts centre was at stake. I don't think that the artists-in-residence were deliberately used as a kind of human shield in this battle against the demolishers but there is no doubt that our project had been knowingly put at risk.

We saw no other option than to relocate everything to Utrecht University (see figure 22). However, when we arrived to pack and move our possessions, the doors were blocked. The director-curator of the arts centre had flown in overnight from the Caribbean (money seemed no longer an issue) to prevent us from accessing our intellectual property, claiming that the beer and the art for the exhibition belonged legally to the foundation. We were also told that by cancelling the exhibition we were jeopardizing the centre's existence. Little by little the mystery behind this overreaction unravelled. Without informing us, the foundation had applied for a grant for *Something's Brewing*. One of the conditions for the grant was a local exhibition. The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research, which had fully funded our project, was threatened by the centre's director-curator with a financial claim of several thousand Euros.²⁸ After hours of negotiation, Edith Abeyta and I were finally granted access to the building to pick up personal belongings, the brewery equipment, art supplies and art. Most of the beer would be picked up later because it could not yet be transported (that would ruin the fermentation process). To liberate our property, we donated 100 bottles of BIER to the art centre and Abeyta consented to the one-day use of a 10-m-wide banner reading "When Hegemony Just Won't Do!", which she had made in response to the earlier conflict about sponsorship. Pressed by the circumstances, we also reluctantly agreed that to fulfil the grant requirements, the centre could organize a public presentation of our project and serve our beer but without using the BIER slipover labels.

A fake exhibition about our project was skilfully arranged by the centre's director-curator, who is an artist herself. In addition to the banner, the show

included all the beer cases that had been left on location and a video installation running an interview with Abeyta and her husband made a few weeks earlier by interns of the programme's communications advisor (see figure 23). Both the beer and the images of the interview were used without our consent. Worse yet, the short statement which we had written to explain to the audience why we had refused to put on an exhibition was used to mislead the public and suggest that the show was Abeyta's work after all. This set-up was strengthened by the participation of the academic director of the CO-OPs programme, an art history professor. He had agreed to open the show despite his detailed knowledge of the situation. Considering the specialist position that art historians occupy in the cultural field, his very presence at the opening event produced an effect of consecration and thus helped to hush up the actual state of affairs for the sponsors of the foundation. But there was more to it. After having read our statement, the professor converted the opening event into a work of art, by explaining that provocation and confusion is what art is all about. At the same time, our statement was projected on the wall of the exhibition space and thus visually integrated into the installation by the director-curator-artist. Radical attempts at subversion are part of avant-garde practices since Duchamp. However, in this case, it was a rather extreme form of symbolic violence used against an artist who refused to play the game.

The fake exhibition was staged for just one afternoon: long enough to take the photographs needed to justify the grant. A few relatives, friends, and students from the Rietveld Academy were part of the cover-up operation. They figured as extras amidst the beer cases, video screens and other props (as if it were a scene in a Hollywood B-movie). Altogether, the show and the beer attracted about 20 people. A freelance journalist, whom we had paid, covered the afternoon for the sake of evidence. Edith Abeyta observed everything in silence and incognito, as she neither presented herself nor was introduced to the public (a deliberate choice on both sides). For insiders, her presence might have added to the confusion.

The group show which marked the end of the art-science programme replicated the fake exhibition in several respects, although this time the setting was a premiere arts venue in a major city and the exhibition ran for almost two months. There was no apparent curatorial investment from the CO-OPs curator or the host institution. As a team, we were merely assigned a number of square metres in the exhibition space. We did not have the slightest idea of the show's overall concept. Correspondence about our contribution regarded practicalities or publicity. Fulfilling the visibility requirement stipulated by most external sponsors of the CO-OPs programme seemed the main rationale behind this exhibition. Alternatively, one could see the show as a pretext to publish a catalogue, thus offering the scholars a platform to turn their investment into a legitimate

academic output. The potential or intended audience for either undertaking remained unclear. It was certainly not an issue for discussion or reflection. At the festive opening night, the show seemed a success. However, insiders knew only too well that the space was primarily crowded with friends and colleagues of the participating artists and academics. A professional photographer documented the *vernissage* in detail. In the weeks after the opening, neither the press nor the general public showed much interest. According to a guard, a total of less than five visitors per day was the rule.

By way of conclusion

While we planned with *Something's Brewing* to offer a playful alternative to the logic of corporate capitalism, our project ultimately was perceived as an attempt to question the rules of the Dutch art field. In the end, however, this is not what was really at stake and all parties involved (including ourselves) unconsciously understood that only too well. Edith Abeyta's art not merely questions the rules of the game which is played in the field of contemporary art. Rather, she questions with her do-it-yourself and participatory approach the game itself and the belief system that supports it. As Bourdieu points out, "this is the one unforgivable transgression".²⁹ The field of restricted cultural production operates like a church. You are either in or out. There is no room for disbelievers.

The question has to be raised how representative this case is for what is going on in the Dutch art scene. I have no clear-cut answer. The not-for-profit segment of the cultural field stands out for its lack of transparency (especially as finances are concerned), self-congratulatory practices and coercive strategies aimed at concealing the objective reality. Hence, further anthropological fieldwork is necessary in order to get a better grip on the working of the field. Still, most artists with whom we talked recognized our struggles. Of course, they are no innocent victims but rather "partners in crime", which many of them realize and some openly admitted. At the same time, it is striking that other players in the field typically dismissed the conflicts we had as incidents or called the credibility of our account into question. Because I was actively involved in the project and not a distant academic observer, the present analysis too can easily be discarded as a subjective exaggeration. As a colleague from art history put it: "Don't you think that it was first and foremost a concurrence of unfortunate circumstances and matter of bad management?" No, I do not. This may have been an extreme case. However, there is no doubt that the field as a whole – that is, including academics engaged in studying contemporary art – benefits from minimizing the importance of our case and similar "incidents". Moreover, if a thick description of a Balinese cock fight can help us to understand social relations in Balinese society, a close analysis of what happened to the *Something's Brewing* project may just as

well serve as a first step towards a better insight into the political economy of the contemporary art field in the Netherlands.³⁰

On her blog, Edith Abeyta summarized her experience with the art residency as follows:

Now arts organizations and institutions no longer need artists, well, that's probably not exactly correct, they need the artist's C.V. and documentation of the artist's work to write their grant. But they don't need them to produce work. It's such a hassle to work with artists, anyway, especially if they are still operating in the archaic realm of object making, this requires tools, materials, and a space to work, can't you all just give up these luxuries – any mediocre, temporary, solution will suffice as long as it is on camera.

In response, Merry-Beth Noble, an American artist who contributed to *Something's Brewing*, commented in equally pronounced terms:

As artists, we must be aware that our images and creative products are frequently hijacked by unsavoury people and companies who use this work as a meal ticket, as prestige or as validation to receive money. The misuse of our creative product ranges from the labelling of warehouses as “artist lofts” or “arts districts” in real estate, to securing government grant money with proposals for mysterious non-existent events. This falsification at the artist's expense seems to be becoming more and more common. Someone is making money in all this madness, and it usually isn't the artist.

These two comments, individually and taken together, raise a number of issues which go well beyond the individual case of our project. On the one hand, they call our attention to the fact that the destabilization of the artist's position in the field of restricted production is profoundly intertwined with the mediatization and commercialization of social life. Media exposure – or more precisely the accumulation of media capital – is a key factor to understanding the transformation of the cultural field and its political effects. Interdisciplinary research into this process is much needed, whereby media scholars, cultural sociologists and art historians work together. On the other hand, however, contemporary art is becoming so deeply contaminated with other models of consumption, as Noble points out, that we have to consider to what extent it remains theoretically fertile and historically justifiable to differentiate between the field of restricted production and the field of large-scale cultural production. Hence, research into the contemporary political economy of the artistic field has to focus more on structural homologies between the cultural field and the economic field. To consider the question of power struggles in the field of restricted production from the

aspect of media exposure, as both Abeyta and Noble do, is especially important in the light of rethinking the growing resentment against the contemporary art scene in the Netherlands. The devalorization of the artist and his/her work implies a devalorization of the public. The arrogance towards the general public – as audiences and taxpayers – shows structural resemblances with the disguising practices in the financial world. The credit crunch of 2008-2009 was caused by bankers who repacked subprime mortgages into mortgage-backed securities to hide their subprime quality. When the virtual values turned out to be fake, the banks started to collapse. What I propose then is to invigorate the Bourdieusan theoretical framework with a new set of economic concepts derived notably from recent analyses of the burst of the real estate bubble, the credit crunch and the subsequent market meltdown and bank crisis. Put differently, I suggest that we investigate the bubble economy in the cultural field and its tendency towards virtual capitalization with the tools from economics.

Within academia and the art world, there is much hesitancy to discuss the political economy of the not-for-profit segment of the cultural field. In most settings, calling the disinterestedness of curators, advisors for public funding and other intermediate figures between the artists and the public into question would be a risky venture. It suits almost all players, including the artists, not to ask questions about decision-making and money-spending. The field as a whole holds on to the disguising discourse of autonomy, which serves as “opium for the artists”, who are indeed exploited by the mediators but also fail to organize themselves collectively in order to systematically analyze the field’s capitalist logic and develop radical alternatives. Meanwhile, the ongoing commercialization of social life, including the arts, seems to many academics in the humanities (especially those on the left) such a self-evident object of social critique that they do not recognize the need to investigate these processes empirically and hence only discuss them from a meta-theoretical perspective. For too long, the humanities have shown a disdain for economics and the material conditions under which culture is produced. Obviously, the current political climate in the Netherlands is not in favour of any research into this direction as the outcomes can be easily used to serve the populist agenda. And yet, we do have to address the hidden political economy of the cultural field, especially if we want to provide an answer to the populist resentment against Art.

Notes

1. "De tentoonstelling loopt storm! Een maand na de opening bezochten al 50.000 kunstliefhebbers het museum." Newsletter regarding the Kees van Dongen exhibit in 2010-2011 at the Boijmans van Beuningen, <http://boijmans.nl/nl/116/nieuwsbrief/newsletteritem/469>, accessed 14 May 2011. See also the press release "Top jaar voor Boijmans van Beuningen", 30 December 2010, <http://www.boijmans.nl/nl/10/press/pressitem/214>, accessed 14 May 2011.
2. The term refers to the urban revitalization of Bilbao after the opening of the local Guggenheim branch – a landmark building by the American architect Frank Gehry. See Beatriz Plaza, "The Bilbao Effect", *Museum News* 86.5 (2007): 13-15. For recent uses in the Dutch press, see "Breng je stad onder de aandacht, pronk met een Guggenheim Niet gelukte Guggenheims", *De Volkskrant*, 20 January 2011; "Ijlbunker kan Ijmuider allure geven", *Ijmuider Courant*, 15 January 2011; "Het MAS is een kolos, maar geen onaangename kolos. Antwerpen doet 'n Guggenheimpje", *Dagblad De Pers*, 13 May 2011; "Chic Antwerpen", *NRC Handelsblad*, 14 May 2011.
3. Andries van den Hoek, Jos de Haan and Frank Huysmans, *Cultuurbewonderaars en cultuurbewoefenaars. Trends in cultuurparticipatie en mediagebruik* (Den Haag: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2009), 22.
4. See, for instance, "Kunst zonder context: Lucette ter Borg over het onvermogen om de bezoeker te vertellen waar hij naar kijkt", *NRC Handelsblad*, 3 December 2010, and responses: Ann Demeester, "Kritiek zonder de context: Zijn musea te gesloten? Twee directeurs reageren op de discussie over het duiden van hedendaagse kunst", *NRC Handelsblad*, 10 December 2010; "Lezers en oud-directeur over de toegankelijkheid van musea. Kunst moet je democratiseren, niet populariseren", *NRC Handelsblad*, 17 December 2010. See also "Naakten tekenen als aanzet tot kunstdiscussie: Kunstinstelling de Appel wil met cursus en expositie de vervagende grens tussen kunstenaar en amateur onderzoeken", *NRC Handelsblad*, 26 August 2011.
5. For instance, Witte de With promises future patrons that "you, your family and business relations will always receive a warm welcome at all the exhibitions, debates and lectures organized by Witte de With" and assures that the centre "will be proud to publicly acknowledge all its Patrons", www.wdw.nl/project.php, accessed 15 June 2011.
6. www.myfirstartcollection.com, accessed 15 June and 12 October 2011.
7. www.flavours.nu/home and www.vanabbemuseum.nl/en/about-us/museum-cafe, accessed 15 June and 7 November 2011. Initially, the programme aimed in particular at people from multiethnic backgrounds.
8. www.groningermuseum.nl/en/mendinirestaurant, accessed 10 June 2011.
9. www.boijmans.nl/en/10/press/pressitem/129, accessed 10 June 2011.
10. Scott Lash and John Urry, *Economies of Signs and Space* (London: Sage, 1994).
11. See, in particular, Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996).

12. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 185.
13. Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 75.
14. Under the motto “more than quality alone”, the new policy for state subsidy puts a much stronger emphasis than before on attendance figures and cultural entrepreneurship. <http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/nieuws/2010/12/06/zijlstra-scherpe-keuzes-nodig-in-cultuursector.html>, accessed 14 May 2011.
15. <http://nos.nl/artikel/251364-cultuuractivisten-trekken-naar-den-haag.html>, accessed 26 June 2011; “Van pannekoeken naar ‘plashuis’ tijdens Mars. Drieduizend deelnemers aan de ‘Mars der Beschaving’”, *NRC Handelsblad*, 27 June 2011.
16. www.guerillagirls.com, accessed 15 June 2011.
17. www.negativland.com, accessed 15 June 2011.
18. The project was funded by a €42,000 grant from NWO and partner sponsors. We spent €40,338. In each case the grant included a fixed €11,000 honorarium for the artist. This was quite an exceptional situation because in the Netherlands artists are rarely paid for their contribution to projects or exhibitions. The same sum was paid to the university to cover the costs of the teaching replacement for the scholar. We spent the material budget (€20,000) primarily on brewing equipment, arts materials, travel expenses and a little catalogue, which we published ourselves via Lulu. Because of the project’s do-it-yourself approach, the cost of external advisors and services amounted to less than 10% of our material budget or 4.5% of the total budget. The main expense in this category was the fee paid to artists Oleg Buryan and Peter Kirusha for designing the BIER catalogue.
19. Most of the designs can be consulted online in our digital archives at somethingsbrewing.wordpress.com.
20. Judith Thissen, “The BIER Story: When Hegemony Just Won’t Do!”, in *CO-OPs: Interterritoriale verkenningen in kunst en wetenschap/Exploring New Territories in Art and Science*, eds. Kitty Zijlmans, Robert Zwijnenberg and Krien Clevis (Amsterdam: De Buitenkant, 2007), 232-273.
21. Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 79.
22. Email from Edith Abeyta to Judith Thissen, 28 January 2007.
23. The details are as follows: Mondriaan Stichting (€82,500), Gemeente Utrecht (€25,000), Amsterdams Fonds voor de Kunst (€35,000), Provincie Gelderland (€20,000), VSB Fonds (€26,000), Van Bijlevestichting (€10,000), Pauw Hof Fonds (€25,000), Gemeente Nijmegen (€5,000) and SNS Real Fonds (€10,500). Figures provided by NWO.
24. Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 83.
25. As Bourdieu points out, the rules vary “from one period and one country to another”. Hence, an American artist may well understand the overall workings of the cultural field, but not the specific local dynamics and subtleties (*The Field of Cultural Production*, 47).
26. Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 83.
27. Email from Daniëlle van Zuijlen to Krien Clevis, Judith Thissen, Antje Melissen and Paula van Zijl, 5 April 2007.

28. To get the full picture of the deal, I contacted the municipality that had given the grant to find out about the exact terms of the funding agreements but they were not willing to share this information with us. Clearly, they did not want to account for how this public money is spent. In fact, all efforts were aimed at preventing us from gaining insight into the ways the local art funding operated.
29. Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 81.
30. Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight", *Daedalus* 101.1 (1972): 1-37.