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### Government Policy

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## 2. GOVERNMENT POLICY

### THE LONG ARM OF ELCO BRINKMAN

Nowhere is the shift that occurred in the cultural policy of the period 1985 to 2018 more apparent than in media art. If initially only video art is concerned, later the terrain is expanded to include (electronic) media art, also often referred to as new media art. Up to that point, the stipulations at policy level roughly follow those of the professional field, yet subsequently the government first made media art part of the e-culture and only relatively recently a part of the creative industry sector. In 1985, the first year considered in this book, Minister Elco Brinkman (of the Christian Democratic Appeal party (CDA)) had been minister for over two years of a new department, namely Welfare, Public Health and Culture.<sup>5</sup> When he takes office, at the end of 1982, the discussion about video art as a new category is still in full swing.<sup>6</sup> Two years earlier, it was decided that video art should be subsidised, but the substantive discussion on that matter had not progressed much further in 1985. The Council for the Arts took advice on a number of occasions from workgroups of experts recruited from the art world and not, as is more common, by an already existing committee or a new committee to be established. In retrospect, it can be concluded that this did not really benefit decision-making. Another problem is the observation that subsidising video as a visual art category is at odds with the much more pluralistic image that the application of video has in the field itself. Questions that arise are: Is it sound to maintain this distance from the work field and should video art be pushed into the old box of art, as was the case with photography? In 1984, the third committee, which is more broadly composed of experts from the world of film and television, raises the question regarding the positioning of video art.<sup>7</sup> And again

<sup>5</sup> In April 2011, the Council for Culture writes: 'e-culture is at the heart of the creative industry.' Council for Culture Advice on Culture Cuts 2013–2016.

<sup>6</sup> Terreehorst 1991 (see note 2), 32.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 37.

the conclusion is that video art is part of the visual arts and that an alternative term such as 'media art' has undesired associations with mass media and should therefore be avoided. It is clear that the pressure from the field itself and the critical discussions that take place within it do not encourage greater decisiveness. In the meantime, funds are becoming available, not only for projects of artists and institutions – which were already available in the 1970s – but now also for institutions as such. At the end of 1983, MonteVideo, Time Based Arts, Meatball and Kijkhuis receive the good news that they are granted financial support from the central government; one year later Mediamatic is included in this list.<sup>8</sup> In 1985, Minister Brinkman approves a number of development grant applications. The one for MonteVideo totals almost four hundred thousand guilders and comes with the promise that further support will be provided for three years. This development is very much against the opinion of the Council, which believes that the institutions are too concerned with similar issues and address too small an audience. The audience, moreover, is limited to professionals. At the same time, in 1985, the Council still aims to support a large number of institutions. Since the Council's advice was ignored by the Minister, the Council decides to give up its advisory duties.<sup>9</sup> The dispute is settled a few months later, but the promise to continue the development grants is not upheld. All that remains is a tail-off subsidy for MonteVideo and a discount on the subsidy for Time Based Arts.<sup>10</sup> However, the Council does take an important new step by asking Time Based Arts to develop a plan for distribution, mediation, screening and documentation, which should form the basis of a future, central institution. This is a first step towards the Great Advice, as it is then referred to behind the scenes. A merger of the two most noted institutions, MonteVideo and Time Based Arts, is out of the question since they both consider each other competitors. Rather, the Council is thinking of an institution that will do on a larger scale what Time Based Arts is already doing on a smaller scale. Although the Minister and the Council disagree on many points, their attitude still largely reflects typical Dutch framework policy-making.<sup>11</sup>

Brinkman's policy is not met with enthusiastic responses, certainly in comparison with those of his predecessors. Surely, there is much at stake: the break with the broader welfare policy, which until then included the cultural policy, the abolition of the Beeldende Kunstenaars Regeling (BKR) (Visual Artists Regulation), the introduction of market mechanisms (profit principle) in the cultural sector and the promotion of 'top art'. All of these points are important, but the abolition of the BKR by Minister Brinkman and the State Secretary for Social Affairs, which governs the regulation, has major consequences and

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 35. More about the background and identity of these institutions in Chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>9</sup> The choice to financially support many small institutions is later seen as inherent to Dutch cultural policy. See *Second Opinion: Over beeldende kunstsubsidie in Nederland* (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> Terreehorst 1991 (see note 2), 37.

<sup>11</sup> Roel Pots, 'De Nederlandse overheid en de beeldende kunsten in historisch perspectief', in *Second Opinion: Over beeldende kunstsubsidie in Nederland*, Lex ter Braak, Gitta Luiten, Taco de Neef and Steven van Teeseling, eds. (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2007), 238–248.

causes a lot of turmoil: not only with the artists who use it and are provided with a basic income, but also in terms of the arts and culture policy as a whole. The funds that are freed up are transferred to the Ministry of Welfare, Public Health and Culture. Brinkman's predecessor in 1965 disposed of a lean budget of 0.6 million euros (converted), yet this grew, at the time when he took office, to 2.8 million and after the end of the BKR it increased to a level of 36 million in a few years' time.<sup>12</sup> The scale on which cultural policy is to operate from this time onward changes drastically.

The Cultural Policy Memorandum dates from 1985, and is considered by Brinkman himself as a course correction on the *Kunst en kunstbeleid* memorandum (Art and Art Policy) from 1976.<sup>13</sup> If, initially, the emphasis was placed on 'innovation', then the attention should now rather be turned toward quality. From now on, the quality assessment is no longer just a matter for experts and based on 'supply' or 'production' – terms that emerge for the first time – but must be reflected in the 'uptake', consumption or participation – in short, the public interest in what is offered. Whereas in the past policymakers mainly thought in terms of distribution as a sound democratic principle, Brinkman now focuses primarily on a functional policy, with a coherent system of provisions at national, provincial and municipal level; there is talk of territorial decentralisation. The idea of a national institute for video art under the direct responsibility of the Ministry fits well into this policy.

The next step will be taken in May 1986 with a commitment for an activity subsidy for which Time Based Arts is asked to develop a programme. At the same time, other subsidies are withdrawn and Time Based Arts remains the only subsidised institution, be it with little surplus.<sup>14</sup> When it presents a plan and budget in April of 1987 – another step towards the Great Advice – the amount appears to be too high and a recalculation is requested. This phase of the Great Advice does not deserve a beauty prize, yet things will not get any better. A broadly composed group of experts is set up in the autumn of 1987, this time without any ties to media art institutions, and is asked to evaluate the Council's plans. Among them is the media theorist Ernie Tee, who sets to work and publishes two successive reports. In 1988 *Videokunst en video-instellingen* (Video Art and Video Institutions), in which he defines the task of a 'national institute for electronic media art', and a year later *Electronische mediakunst: Archiveren, stimuleren* (Electronic Media Art: Archiving, Stimulating). A closer look at the state of affairs has revealed that developments in media art have not stood still, and that its history requires better archiving. New technical resources have been added, and this also raises the question

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 244.

<sup>13</sup> Roel Pots, *Cultuur, koningen en democraten: Overheid & cultuur in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2010), 235 et seq.

<sup>14</sup> Terreehorst 1991 (see note 2), 37.

of what prospects they offer, not only in terms of preservation, but also with regards to future presentations (see Gaby Wijers' contribution in this volume). This is one of the key issues of the second report. The other issue addresses stimulation, in other words: capturing the public's interest and providing sufficient art-historical information to get the audience to understand the discipline. It should be noted that, in the meantime, the naming of the discipline has undergone some changes. In the earlier report from 1988, Tee already stated that video art had become electronic media art and could hardly be seen as a separate art discipline, yet now, in 1989, he is taking a clear step by using the words 'electronic media art' for the first time in the title of an official report. At a policy level, 'video art' is out. Not coincidentally at a moment when the broad use of the video projector has brought the projection of video and film closer together. Nor is it a coincidence that this is a statement from a media theorist and not someone from the visual arts sector. In the media theorist domain, discussions about the new media already began in the late 1960s, and its influence is increasingly being felt in the art world in the course of the 1980s. Prominent voices, apart from Tee's, are those of Pauline Terreehorst, who at that time, as art editor at *de Volkskrant*, writes a lot about film, video, photography and fashion, and architect and visual artist Maurice Nio. All three have an eye for a medium that refuses to be pigeonholed and that roams from the visual arts to film, television, music and the performing arts. This is a paradoxical situation: precisely the domain that is most concerned with theorisation has the clearest view of the fact that the medium escapes definition. It is considered wrong to look for intrinsic, medium-specific properties in a modernist-essentialist sense, something that some art critics are still apt to do in those days.<sup>15</sup>

If we compare what is going on in the media art field with Brinkman's plea for top art, then matters are still *worlds apart*. While on the one hand the Minister is working on a solid foundation for electronic media art, he is, on the other hand, promoting a climate that is favourable to the art market and 'stable' media, that is, more marketable painting and sculpture. It is also during this time that more stable exponents such as video sculpture emerge. This situation compels the field once again to learn how to pull its own weight, which is done with verve in the form of the creation of festivals. The traditional idea of festivals as an event of interested people also applies to the media festivals, but certainly in the first decades after 1985, the festivals will have multiple functions. More on this later.

<sup>15</sup> Kletter mentions Rob Perrée in Kletter 2016 (see note 3), 29.

## A DUTCH MEDIA ART INSTITUTE IS IN THE WORKS!

Anyone who expected that the appointment of PvdA (Labour Party) Minister Hedy d'Ancona in 1989 would be reflected in a different political course is sorely disappointed. As Pots concludes already in 2001, Brinkman's restructuring has survived his own legislature. He even calls Brinkman the architect of D'Ancona's *Wet op het specifiek cultuurbeleid* (Specific Cultural Policy Act).<sup>16</sup> For her, too, it is all about market forces and audience reach, as is clear from the *Nota Cultuurbeleid 1993–1996* (Cultural Policy Document 1993–1996).<sup>17</sup> However, two new areas of attention are added, for which a lot of money is being made available: cultural preservation and cultural policy in an international perspective, which will later also be adopted by her successors. Also dating from her tenure is the *Deltaplan voor het cultuurbehoud* (1992) (Delta Plan for Cultural Preservation), from which later the Collectie Nederland (Netherlands Collection) will emerge. New instruments are introduced that make it possible for artists to present themselves abroad and build an international network. Both the Minister and some of her officials have put their mark on the policy more than ever before, and the funds are given a greater role as well: *Fonds voor Beeldende Kunsten, Vormgeving en Bouwkunst* (Fonds BKVB) (Fund for Visual Arts, Design and Architecture), which was set up just before her arrival, and a new fund: the Mondriaan Foundation. D'Ancona ensures that the targets of both funds are properly geared to each other. She also unites the various Councils, including the Art Council, into a new council, the Culture Council, which can, according to Pots, no longer present itself as an 'action group'.<sup>18</sup> With these and other initiatives, D'Ancona shows that she, like her predecessor, aims for more *efficiency*. The phrase 'top art' disappears and is replaced, if one could call it that, by 'centres of excellence'. And although not officially designated as a centre of excellence, during her tenure, a national media art institute is finally set up, the *Nederlands Instituut voor Mediakunst, MonteVideo/Time Based Arts* (NIMk) (Netherlands Media Art Institute, MonteVideo/Time Based Arts). Is this what has been worked on all this time? It does not seem like it. The initiative comes from the two rivals MonteVideo and Time Based Arts themselves. The cleverly chosen name, in 1993 – *Nederlands Instituut voor Mediakunst* (Netherlands Media Art Institute) – refers to the old plans of the Council and the Ministry. There are no longer obstacles to subsidising the initiative on a more permanent basis and that is exactly what happens up until 2011.

<sup>16</sup> Pots 2010 (see note 11), 324.

<sup>17</sup> Pots 2010 (see note 11), 330.

<sup>18</sup> Pots 2010 (see note 11), 321.

## MEDIA ART: PART AND INSTRUMENT OF E-CULTURE

D'Ancona's party colleague Aad Nuis has undoubtedly been the most important minister for media art (1994–1998). During his tenure, the name of the ministry is changed once again. It is now called the Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschappen (OCW) (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science). A new cultural policy document is published, known under the telling title *Pantser of ruggegraat* (Armor or Spine). It is brought to the attention of the House of Representatives as if it were a phased operation. First, an *Uitgangspuntennotitie* (Principle Memorandum) appears, followed by the voluminous advice from the Council entitled *Een cultuur van verandering: Advies Cultuurnota 1997–2000* (1996) (A Culture of Change: Advice Culture Memorandum 1997–2000) and ultimately the policy note itself: *Pantser of ruggegraat: Cultuurnota 1997–2000* (1996) (Armor or Spine: Culture Note 1997–2000). The answer to the question contained in the title of the note becomes clear upon the first reading: culture must not arm itself against the outside world; what is needed is cultural awareness. This forms a solid backbone, necessary for an open attitude to society.<sup>19</sup> A term that recalls notes from the 1970s immediately stands out: cultural dissemination. And also Nuis' picture of the Netherlands as 'international cultural free haven' and 'a multicultural society' reminds us of the image of the Netherlands in the 1960s and 1970s. It is the first time that the attention for electronic media fits seamlessly into the more broadly conceived and education-oriented cultural policy. The discussion about video and media art, defined in 1981 as 'every expression of art that is created through the medium of video', has, it seems, grown silent. E-culture – electronic culture – is the new term; it encompasses everything from the digitisation of archives to artistic applications and the media-savviness of ordinary citizens. It is a Dutch term (abroad it is often referred to as 'media literacy'), which the Council for Culture chooses to use in 2005 and which is defined as the knowledge, skills and attitude that the general public acquires through its own efforts with regards to the mediated world. Cultural education, also in the form of a new subject in schools, is one of the key points in this note. Aside from this, there are art education institutions active in various cities and *mediatheken* (media libraries) are introduced in libraries.

In 1995, one year after Nuis took office, and before the publication of the culture note, Virtueel Platform (Virtual Platform) is set up through the initiative of the Dutch government, an institution that is intended to become the focal point of e-culture.<sup>20</sup> It is also therefore

<sup>19</sup> Pots 2010 (see note 11), 333.

<sup>20</sup> It is remarkable that it takes until 2008 before an e-culture sector is established and the ministry appoints Virtueel Platform as a supporting body. In *Kunst van leven* (2007) and *Basisinfrastructuur 1.0* (2008) it is ultimately presented as a sector institute.

the case that Virtueel Platform asks various organisations (NIMk, V2\_, STEIM, Backbone, the Vormgevingsinstituut, employees of the OCW, of the Arts Directorate, of the Media, Letters, Libraries department) to collaborate on the policy plan that must be submitted within the year, since Nuis will use it for his cultural policy note. The policy plan of Virtueel Platform adopts a historical perspective which is reflected in the title *From Dada to DATA* (1996). Data refers to the impact of technology on Dutch society; Dada not only stands for a ground-breaking art movement, but also symbolises the central role that art, as a bridge between art and life, must play. The policy plan opts for a concept of art that is broader than the traditional one and aims to refer, with its choice of the word Dada, to the idea that the medium is not only the carrier, but above all a substantive framework. What is striking is that Nuis and those involved in Virtueel Platform present, at least for the time being, the idea of a double-edged sword: new media brings more people into contact with art and culture, and media art in turn provides more knowledge, insight and skills in digital media and information technology; it stimulates and promotes media literacy and thus opens up views. Herein transpires an optimistic view of the role of new technology, it sees itself as fulfilling an intermediary role: between government institutions and subsidy structures and self-organising, more location-based groups, and jointly responsible for the infrastructure. Although the emphasis lies on new opportunities, Virtueel Platform is also aware that the work area can quickly be occupied by the economy and the market. It aligns itself with the arts field, which is looking for a humane and socially useful application of new technology. As important as this art aspect may be, it does not inhibit the pursuit of multidisciplinary and interactive research, to which Virtueel Platform will contribute in the years that follow.

## E-CULTURE IN THE FIRST BIS ERA

After Nuis, Rick van der Ploeg, again a PvdA (Labour Party) minister, takes up the position of State Secretary in 1998. His name is mainly linked to his commitment to 'cultural diversity'. On his desk he finds Nuis' note on cultural policy; it has been agreed that he will continue to implement this bill. The extra funds that he can spend from 1999 onwards also benefit goals that tie in with the cultural memoranda of his predecessors, including the conservation of audiovisual collections, providing support to young artists and innovative art forms and the development of new media. A number of policy and discussion memoranda, or documents that are soon to function as such, appear in rapid succession



in 1998 and 1999 and take as their starting point *Cultuur als Confrontatie: Uitgangspunten voor het cultuurbeleid 2001–2004* (1999) (Culture as Confrontation: Principles for Cultural Policy 2001–2004). The Minister asks Michiel Schwarz (1999) to write an essay about digital media in technological culture for the benefit of his own instruction and that of the public. It leads to one of the more perceptive formulations of the place of what Schwarz calls ‘digital media/arts in e-culture’, which reveals the influence of the then popular Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells (author of the trilogy *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture* (1996)).<sup>21</sup> Van der Ploeg also instructs a group of people in the field, including Hermineke van Bockxmeer of the Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research (TNO), Dick Rijken (VPRO digital) and Ed Tan (University of Amsterdam), to write an internal memorandum for the ministry. In this document, *Druk op Start* (2001) (Press Start), the authors argue that e-culture should not only be viewed in a technical sense, but that the digital landscape should be seen as a new infrastructure for expression, reflection and exchange in society. After the calm years of his two predecessors, much discussion erupts around his memorandums. The fact that there is now an economist at the Ministry of Culture does not go unnoticed, but it is mainly the emphasis on cultural diversity and what this will mean in practice in terms of quality judgements and the distribution of funds and resources that causes unrest. It is hardly noticeable that he too continues on the broader cultural policy that started with Brinkman and to which Nuis already added the attention for cultural diversity. Upon his initiative, a committee will be set up to explore the implications of digitisation in the cultural field. In June of 2003 – Van der Ploeg is no longer state secretary then – this committee presents the advice *eCultuur: Van i naar e* (2003) (eCulture: From I to E), in which the ‘i’ stands for computerisation and ‘e’ for e-culture. Two key words that stand out in this piece of advice and that will return repeatedly are ‘crossovers’ and ‘integrated perspective on e-culture’. The latter is reminiscent of the plea for ‘decompartmentalisation’, which we will later regularly come across as a term. In line with this, the committee recommends that the government itself also opts for an integrated approach and creates space for crossovers at both an individual and institutional level. Virtueel Platform is mentioned remarkably sparingly, which is partly due to the undesirability of ‘a new (large) knowledge institute ... that is putting up new walls’, and to the fact that Virtueel Platform has now become a closed consortium of a handful of institutions, while the sector around it is growing explosively.<sup>22</sup> Some time earlier, V2\_ ran into problems. In Rotterdam there are plans for a large cultural institution for Visual Culture of which V2\_

<sup>21</sup> Manuel Castells describes ‘De Digitale Stad’ (an Amsterdam based virtual community with free access to the Internet founded by Marleen Stikker in 1993) in his book *The Internet Galaxy* as an important example for the development of ‘citizen networks’. See Manuel Castells, *The Internet Galaxy: Reflections on the Internet, Business, and Society* (Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>22</sup> Raad voor Cultuur 2003, ‘E-cultuur’, 37.

<sup>23</sup> In *Pantser of ruggegraat: Cultuurnota 1997–2000* (1996) Nuis, following on from his *Uitgangspuntennotitie*, again homes in on the new media for art and culture. In addition to the important achievement of the establishment of Virtueel Platform, he also points to the pioneering role of V2\_ as an interdisciplinary centre with a laboratory function aimed at a broad and mainly young audience. He also mentions MonteVideo/TBA, and the large-scale conferences Doors of Perception organised by the Vormgevingsinstituut (Design Institute) and Mediamatic.

is to become part: Las Palmas. This plan fails and V2\_ threatens to go under with it. In the years before, V2\_ had become one of the most seminal institutions in the field of art and technology and had been honoured as such by Nuis. The Council brings the problem to the attention of the ministry after an ad hoc committee prepared a recommendation.<sup>23</sup> V2\_ is saved.<sup>24</sup>

What happens in the following years? By far the most decisive step is undoubtedly the establishment of the Culturele Basisinfrastructuur (BIS) (Basic Cultural Infrastructure). More important than the question of who its architect is, is the question ‘what did they have in mind and what did it turn out to be?’ With her memorandum *Vershil maken: Herijking van de cultuurnotasytematiek* (2005) (Making a Difference: Review of the Culture Policy System) Medy van der Laan of the Democrats 66 (D66) party and State Secretary for Culture and Media (2003–2006) plants the seed for this new subsidy instrument; her minister, Maria van der Hoeven (2002–2007) of the CDA party takes over after D66 has withdrawn its support to the second cabinet of Balkenende and Van der Laan is forced to leave the cabinet.<sup>25</sup> But it is mainly the Council for Culture that concentrates on the further development of ideas and starting points, and secondarily to the concrete elaboration thereof. This definitely applies to the ‘Van der Hoeven’ period, when the Council presents its recommendation in *Innoveren, participeren!* (Innovate, Participate!), but also in 2008, when the BIS is put into operation under Minister Ronald Plasterk of the PvdA party. Plasterk and the Council present it as one large coherent project. It is clear from the memorandum *Basisinfrastructuur 1.0* (Basic Infrastructure 1.0), presented in May 2008, for example, that the ‘hoofdlijnen’ (main points) were developed by Van der Laan, while the Council itself provided the context of the structure with *Innoveren, participeren!* (2007) and that Plasterk’s ‘hoofdlijnennotitie’ *Kunst van Leven* (2007) (main points memorandum Art of Life), in which he explicitly responds to this memorandum, has perfected the contours.<sup>26</sup> But while the Council in 2007 sees the basic infrastructure as a whole of functions – what we would now call ‘services’ – that are necessary for a rapidly changing society, in 2008, the Council again reverts to ‘institutional policy’. Indeed, the basis for its elaboration is made up of three hundred or so proposals that the Council has received in February 2008, all made by existing, executive cultural institutions, cultural funds and already existing sectoral institutions. Monitor interviews were conducted with a number of those institutions. Much haste was made which is perhaps why it went unnoticed that the aforementioned substantive interpretation of the concept of ‘basic infrastructure’ changes in quite a short time. An evaluation of the question whether

<sup>24</sup> Council of the Arts Letter to the State Secretary Rick Van der Ploeg of 26 March 2002 (subject: Recommendation V2\_ organization).

<sup>25</sup> This was preceded by the *Cultuurnota 2005–2008: Meer dan de som*. As the subtitle indicates, *Vershil maken* aims to effectuate a (major) revision of the subsidy flows in the future: a greater role for assessment by funds and visitation committees, while a limited number of large institutions must be assessed by the Culture Council.

<sup>26</sup> Council of the Arts’ *Vershil maken: Herijking cultuurnotasytematiek* (September 2005); *Basisinfrastructuur 1.0* (December 2007) and *Aanvullend advies Basisinfrastructuur: Innoveren, participeren!* (March 2007) and Plasterk’s *Kunst van Leven: Hoofdlijnen cultuurbeleid* (part 1 June 2007; part 2 September 2007).

the desired functions are fulfilled in the best possible way cannot be found in the memorandum. The fact that the introduction of the BIS goes relatively unnoticed is not only due to the vigour of the ministers and the Council, but also to the general unease about the current state of the cultural system.<sup>27</sup> The impression exists that it is prone to unbridled proliferation. Critical voices emerge from within the art world itself, as is evident from *All that Dutch* (2005), a publication of SICA, the centre for international cooperation, and *Second Opinion* (2007), a joint publication of the Fonds BKVB and the Mondriaan Foundation. However, the discontent is not univocal and it seems that the various opinions of the Council meet different needs. A clearer structure will be set up, which will offer certainty to institutions for a period of four years, but which will above all provide insight into who the main players in the various cultural sectors are, while putting pressure on improving quality and the public reach of the institutions. In addition, a clearer picture regarding the categories to which the institutions should be included is being worked on.

The BIS is obviously not the only subsidy instrument. The role of other governments and funds is also considered. Thought also goes into computerisation, digitisation and globalisation of culture in its entirety and is addressed extensively in *Innoveren, participeren!* and to a lesser degree in *Basisinfrastructuur 1.0*. Although there is no explicit reference to what Virtueel Platform has turned its attention to since its inception, we see the same focus on issues related to the globalisation of culture, including cultural citizenship, the redefinition of the preconditions of the public domain and the need for media literacy.<sup>28</sup> When reading the 2008 advice texts of the Culture Council against the background of the history as it is now described, one will clearly see the influence of Nuis' initiatives and ideas, but also the pursuit of efficiency, previously advocated by three ministers: Brinkman, D'Ancona and Van der Ploeg. The Council presents 'the circuit board for a new structure', a possible subsequent BIS 2.0 could expectedly become the 'network in which cultural policy and practice will be connected more efficiently and effectively'.<sup>29</sup> With these different aspects of the new cultural policy, the Council and the ministry serve several masters.

### TOP YEAR 2008: NINE MEDIA ART INSTITUTIONS IN THE BIS

E-culture pervades *Basisinfrastructuur 1.0*. Almost nothing can escape the e-culture benchmark. This is already apparent from the involvement of the E-culture Committee

<sup>27</sup> Later, in 2011, the DSP group is asked to write an evaluation (*Verschil maken, een terugblik: Evaluatie subsidiesystematiek OCW*).

<sup>28</sup> Raad voor Cultuur, *Basisinfrastructuur 1.0: Advies vierjaarlijkse cultuursubsidies voor instellingen, sectorinstituten en fondsen in de Basisinfrastructuur* (The Hague, 2008), 5. See also Levien Nordeman, 'Mediawijsheden en de e-cultuursector. Naar nieuwe vormen van expressieve en reflectieve mediawijsheden', internship research (University of Utrecht, 2007).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 5–6.

with many applications; e-culture is repeatedly mentioned as a policy component in the institution descriptions. But the most important gain for media art is the fact that out of a total of twelve examined applications, initially eight, and later nine institutions are eligible for the BIS. Considered within a wider perspective that would for instance include Cinekid, the number of grants is even higher. The accepted applications include NIMk as a supporting institution, Digitaal Erfgoed Nederland (DEN) (the Netherlands Knowledge Institute for Digitization in the Cultural Sector), Mediamatic, Submarine, STEIM, V2\_, Waag and Worm, all as development institutions, De Appel as a presentation institution and Virtueel Platform as a sectorial institution. What the BIS conceals are old, never satisfactorily conducted discussions about media art. It is, of course, wonderful that Nuis, but also these advice papers many years later, assigns a pioneering role to media art: media art as an instrument for e-culture, and that it states: 'The art and culture sector is regularly referred to as "the research and development department of society"', or 'E-culture is called an important exponent of innovation of artistic and cross-cultural projects', but in practice the new structure appears to be shaky.

For institutions such as the NIMk, there are some quiet years ahead, as it almost slides unperceivably from the old subsidy structure into this new BIS structure. The city of Amsterdam follows the governmental decision to subsidise the NIMk.<sup>30</sup> There is, however, a formidable competitor, Virtueel Platform, which has already been mentioned several times – yet during this period it is more tangible on paper than it is in practice. It is true that there is a desire to set up a large new (sectoral) institute for e-culture that reaches out to 'the media', that is, television first and foremost, yet when the assessment of the functioning of Virtueel Platform is not all that positive, while the NIMk itself receives good assessments, little comes of it.

### THE OCTOPUS LOSES A COUPLE OF ARMS UNDER HALBE ZIJLSTRA

In the 2003–2010 government periods, e-culture has grown to the proportions of an octopus. Its intelligent arms reach into all corners of society. E-culture is the culture of the twenty-first century, this much is clear. The *Netwerken van Betekenis* (Networks of Significance) of the Council for Culture (2010) on e-culture distinguishes and defines different types of research in the sector: from experimental/artistic formal research to unambiguous society-oriented 'transformation research'. The report provides a framework for the further development of e-culture, both artistically and in relation

<sup>30</sup> Pots 2010 (see note 11) reports that it is immediately noticeable that there is hardly any discussion on 'incidental subsidy matters' in the House of Representatives.

to society and is enthusiastically received by the sector. However, it appears at a difficult time and ultimately has little or no effect on policy. The last Balkenende cabinet falls in 2010 and a minority centre-right cabinet of VVD (People's Party for Freedom and Democracy) and CDA, the Rutte I cabinet, is established with the support of the PVV (Party for Freedom). Marja van Bijsterveldt-Vliegenthart (CDA) is appointed as Minister of Education, Culture and Science, but it is her State Secretary, Halbe Zijlstra of the VVD party, who will leave historical marks on the cultural field. In June 2011, he presents his memorandum *Meer dan kwaliteit* (2011) (More than Quality) to the House of Representatives. Large headlines appear in the newspapers as it immediately becomes clear that he has bypassed the Council for Culture, and quite obvious that the cuts will be drastic and will be felt for many years to come. Most striking is the anti-cultural attitude of the State Secretary, which is a novelty in Dutch politics. The BIS is cut to half its size. Architecture, design and e-culture are scrapped. The NIMk, which was included in the BIS as a supporting institution, presented as an additional qualification in the 2008 note, is, together with all the other supporting institutions, a victim of the disappearance of this category in the basic cultural infrastructure. In 2012, it is forced to close its doors. Other institutions that form part of the e-culture sector also see their subsidy being cut in whole or in part. With the removal of e-culture from the Council for Culture, the associated institutions are transferred to the Stimuleringsfonds voor de Creatieve Industrie (Creative Industries Fund NL) and are forced to swallow a 40 per cent cut on the available budget. Far-reaching reorganisations ensue. V2\_ for example, must make a restart with a small team and, as a laboratory, turn its attention to the realisation of complex artists' projects. STEIM has to scale down and is forced to postpone plans for digitising its own archives. Sectoral institutions consolidate, so it appears as if a number of institutions have been saved, but in fact the whole idea of 'sectoral institution' is deteriorating. This applies in particular to Het Nieuwe Instituut (HNI) that arose from a merger; many in the field no longer feel represented. In his response shortly after the resignation of Zijlstra, Merijn Oudenampsen fiercely lashed out at *de Volkskrant* and all those who thought that a 'reformer' was needed: they contributed to 'tendentious imaging'.<sup>31</sup> Zijlstra himself is primarily responsible for this tendentious image, creating the impression that the cultural sector has always lacked efficiency, an ability to create greater audience reach and entrepreneurship. In view of what was said earlier about the cultural policy of the successive ministries, this view can be disputed. His predecessor, Plasterk, had even initiated a Commissie Cultuurprofit (Culture Profit Committee).

<sup>31</sup> Merijn Oudenampsen, from Oudenampsen's website, 2012. See [merijnoudenampsen.org/2013/04/15/de-giftige-erfenis-van-halbe-zijlstra/](http://merijnoudenampsen.org/2013/04/15/de-giftige-erfenis-van-halbe-zijlstra/). A year later he writes: 'It's a rather uncommon spectacle: a State Secretary of Culture who publicly flaunts his disdain for culture. ... Known amongst artists as "Halbe the Wrecker", he has become the embodiment of the anti-aesthetic and anti-intellectual sentiment in the Netherlands.' Authors' translation, from [merijnoudenampsen.org/2013/02/21/dutch-culture-wars-on-the-politics-of-gutting-the-arts/](http://merijnoudenampsen.org/2013/02/21/dutch-culture-wars-on-the-politics-of-gutting-the-arts/).

Yet there are more occurrences in those years. On 1 January 2012, Fonds BKVB and the Mondriaan Foundation are united into the Mondriaan Fund. The merger has been prepared for years and although it is not inconceivable that it will intensify the existing unrest, it eventually does not appear to be the case. The funds are a stable factor, even though the pressure on the funds is increasing and the overall share has to be divided amongst many more institutions.

After the departure of Zijlstra at the end of 2012, the tide turns in terms of his successors' attitude to art and culture, yet the damage is irreparable and can be felt for the rest of the decade. When, three years later, representatives of the three disciplines that have been removed from the BIS send two 'brandbrieven' (urgent letters) to the Minister, it is clear how bad the situation still is, or rather how much it has deteriorated.<sup>32</sup> One of these disciplines is e-culture, which is now part of creative industry. According to many, this has reduced the social, technological, innovative and educational significance of e-culture and other disciplines to that of a domain with mainly economic value. Since Zijlstra has removed architecture, design and e-culture from the BIS, the Council no longer needs to advise on these disciplines. The signatories of the second urgent letter make it clear that they have moved against their will to what they call a 'no man's land'.<sup>33</sup> What else is noticeable? First of all, that the financial situation is dire. The letters make clear that 'the signatories' have fallen victim to Zijlstra's intervention, but also that hardly anything has been reversed, and certainly not at a more fundamental level. At the same time, cynics can read the letters as fear of a new policy. It requires clarification as to why there have been proponents in our own circle of closer ties with the creative industry. In 2007, the founder and director of V2\_, Alex Adriaansens clearly states that the way in which the 'creative industries' have set their own agendas and have aligned themselves with several ministries can serve as an example for the art and culture sector.<sup>34</sup> In 'the urgent letters', however, the signatories refer to 'art' as that which traditionally has united them. 'Architecture, design and e-culture are art disciplines like any other', states the second urgent letter. More than anything else, the clutching at this straw makes clear how far the consequences of the changed cultural policy actually reach. Precisely in a field where for decades partitions have been removed, where the concept of art has been profoundly worked on, where attempts have been made with varying success to provide insight into the cohesion within the field of e-culture, where everything revolved around inter-disciplinarity and crossovers, where dynamics and innovation were common practice,

<sup>32</sup> *Brandbrief Scheefgroei in de kunsten* (Amsterdam: Waag Interface, 26 November 2015); Drie maatregelen om het creatief potentieel van Nederland beter te benutten. Tweede brandbrief aan politiek en beleidsmakers (dated 28 June 2016 and signed by 50 authorities in the field of media art). See [waag.org/sites/waag/files/media/publicaties/brandbrief-ii-25-miljoen-cultuur-en-innovatie.pdf](http://waag.org/sites/waag/files/media/publicaties/brandbrief-ii-25-miljoen-cultuur-en-innovatie.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Alex Adriaansens, *Second Opinion: Over beeldende kunstsubsidie in Nederland*, Lex ter Braak, Gitta Luiten, Taco de Neef and Steven van Teeseling, eds. (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2007), 220–226. See Arie Altena's contribution in this volume for the way in which this was further considered in V2\_ circles.



the writers revert to an old vocabulary in the vain hope of reaching the addressees, and certainly not only the Minister. While these letters are being written behind closed doors, the involved actors realise that, just as in the 1980s, it is not wise for art in general and certainly for the more innovative forms of art, such as media art, to wait for 'The Hague' (the seat of the government of the Netherlands) for too long. Inasmuch as they still exist, the platforms continue to develop plans. From now on, LIMA will concentrate on talent and market development, along with preservation and archiving.<sup>35</sup> Institutions such as Mediamatic, STEIM, V2\_ and Waag see a role for themselves in the field of extracurricular education, and while still 'having their fingers on the pulse of the times'. Under the heading of *Critical Making*, new initiatives by artists emerge (maker spaces), but also within the field of art education. In around 2007, the Amsterdam Institute of Network Cultures (INC) already points out the forthcoming strategies – in other words, years before the developments in 2011.

The platform that already served as the most important stage for the development of video and media art in the 1980s, and which has contributed much to the visibility of media art produced in the Netherlands in international networks, namely the festival, is still proving its usefulness. The following chapter deals with the multiple impacts of the festivals but also with the changing identity of the festivals over time.

<sup>35</sup> Institute founded by the experts from the former NIMK in 2013.