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A Case Study in Discourse Analysis of "Community Arts" in Cultural Policy and the Press

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Abstract: In their article "A Case Study in Discourse Analysis of 'Community Arts' in Cultural Policy and the Press" An De bisschop, Kris Rutten, and Ronald Soetaert explore theoretical and applied aspects of the phenomenon of community arts. Community arts in Flanders have developed into a professional practice during the past few years and have received increased recognition from policy makers, scholars, and critics. This attention has caused a growing need to define the nature of a practice diverse in form, goal, and process. De bisschop, Rutten, and Soetaert discuss the problematics of community arts projects in comparative discourse analysis in order to interpret "situated" meanings in the practice of community arts, thereby shifting the question from "what is community arts?" to "how is meaning constructed about the notion and practice of community arts?" In doing so, they compare two geographical contexts (Flanders, Belgium and the Western Cape, South Africa) and two institutional contexts (cultural policy and the press).

An DE BISSCHOP, Kris RUTTEN, and Ronald SOETAERT

A Case Study in Discourse Analysis of "Community Arts" in Cultural Policy and the Press

Community arts in Flanders have developed into a professional practice during the past few years, but only recently have received increased recognition from cultural policy makers, scholars, and art critics. This increased attention has caused a growing need to pin down and define the essential nature of a practice that is diverse in form, goal, and process: for example, as a form of art that emphasizes the relationship between art and social context, as a form of social work that emphasizes the social functions of art, and as a form of empowerment that gives voice to those who are excluded from mainstream society. In this article, we problematize this search for the essential nature of community arts and apply comparative discourse analysis to understand the different "situated" meanings that are assigned to its practice, thereby shifting the question "what is community arts?" to the question "how is meaning constructed about the notion and practice of community arts?"

This said shift can be related to Chris Barker's rephrasing of the question of "what is cultural studies?" to "how do we talk about cultural studies and for what purposes?" (2). Indeed, cultural studies is an eclectic field of scholarship that has different forms, goals and processes. Starting from a Marxist-based critical perspective on culture as "ordinary" (Williams), cultural studies introduced the study of popular culture because "it produces the narratives, metaphors, and images for constructing and exercising a powerful pedagogical force over how people think of themselves and their relationship to Others" (Giroux qtd. in Kellner 233). However, this also confronted cultural studies with the question "how different cultural and social groups are portrayed in the different forms of cultural inscription: in the discourse and images through which a culture represents the social world" (da Silva 9). This implied the need for a focus on the relationship between culture, society and politics. Cultural studies focuses on a multiplicity of "cultural inscriptions" and "discourses" by studying not only on what is said but also by whom and to whom. This implies that we do not only focus on the language that is used to talk and write about community arts, but also that we pay attention to the social context in which this language is situated. We concur with Barker who argues that cultural studies should balance between the study of texts and subject positions or "the utterances of persons in social contexts, thereby giving our attention to the relation between language and action" (15). For Barker, crucial aspects of "culture" can be understood in terms of performances and this metaphor implies that every speaker in a discourse has his or her own role to play (the journalist, the scholar, the policy maker). From this perspective, the practice of "community arts" can be understood as a collection of different "meanings" that are assigned to it trough a specific use of language. Therefore, in order to understand how meaning is constructed about community arts, we need to focus on the different roles of the different stakeholders within a discourse.

Because cultural studies — and the humanities and social sciences — are increasingly part of a "globalized" context, the study of culture ought to be comparative (on this, see, e.g., Pinxten; Tötösy de Zepetnek; Tötösy de Zepetnek and Vasvári). To be able to deconstruct and problematize the contextual nature of the meaning making processes around community arts, we have set up our research in two different institutional contexts: cultural policy and the press and two different cultural and geographical contexts: Flanders and the Western Cape in South Africa. In what follows, we introduce the comparative design and methodology of the larger empirical research by An De bisschop which form the background to this article. Discourse analysis as a methodological framework for cultural studies is applicable because it offers an analytic lens beyond a linguistic analysis in the strict sense by also focusing on the social context of language (see Barker and Galaszinski). Within the broad range of approaches in discourse analytic we use for the framework of "interpretative repertoires" developed by Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell. Originating in discursive psychology, interpretative repertoires have been defined as "systematically related sets of terms, often used with stylistic and grammatical coherence, and often organized around one or more central metaphors (see Billig). They are historically developed and make up an important part of the common sense of a culture; although some may be specific to certain institutional domains" (Potter 131).

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From the perspective of comparative cultural studies (i.e., Pinxten; Tötösy de Zepetnek), Potter's and Wetherell's framework is relevant for several reasons. Firs, it allows us to look in our data for specific interpretative repertories that people use when they talk and write about community arts and how these repertoires work and function within the discourse itself. Second, the framework of interpretative repertoires also pays attention to the relation between the language that people use and the position from which they speak and, moreover, the function that a specific repertoire has for a specific person in a specific position (Harré; Potter and Wetherell). Third, by thematizing the relationship between language and position or between language and action, we can also pay attention to the degree of freedom that people have and use to construct meaning in a specific discourse (see, e.g., Bakhtin; Parker). This implies we can pay attention to both the structural and the systemic patterns of discourse and we can also look for variations in the ways people talk and write about community arts.

For our data we cross-tabulated the geographical contexts of Flanders and South Africa and the institutional contexts of cultural policy and the press in two phases: 1) the collection and analysis of policy documents and newspaper articles and 2) the collection and analysis of qualitative interviews. For collecting the policy documents we looked both at general policy documents and documents which are related to community arts. For the Flemish policy context we also used specific documents of evaluation from the subcommittee that decides on funding for community arts. For analyzing the press discourse, we collected both for Flanders and for South Africa articles from newspapers (in Flanders *De Morgen* and *De Standaard*; in South Africa *Mail & Guardian*), as well as articles from popular newspapers (in Flanders *Het Nieuwsblad*; in South Africa *Cape Time* and *Cape Argus*). Based on a first textual analysis of these articles and policy documents, we interviewed in the second phase a selected number of journalists and policy makers. The goal of these expert interviews (see Meuser and Nagel) was to check and clear out our initial interpretations and to focus on the role of the actor in the discourse.

Because we needed a systemic approach for our comparative discourse analysis, we developed a specific analytical scheme based on the following subsequent steps: exploration, specification, and integration of the analysis and the interpretation of the texts and interviews. In the "exploration phase," the domain specific texts are read and reduced to "sensitizing concepts" (see Blumer): these are categories of significance that emerge from the data which are flexible (they can change) and that offer a first indication of "looking at" the data. These concepts are used to structure the data without interpreting them as such (however, this first step can also be seen as an interpretative act). In the "specification phase," these sensitizing concepts are structured and coded according to a limited set of linguistic and rhetorical features. We start from three of such features essential for the way meaning is constructed through language: binary oppositions (see Saussure; Lévi-Strauss), metaphors (see Jacobson and Halle; Lakoff and Johnson) and positioning (see Billig; Harré). This last feature helps us to focus on the larger argumentative space in which a text is situated. This iterative coding scheme was applied to all texts and interviews within a specific discourse domain and two independent coders repeated this analysis (inter-rater reliability). With the analytical software tool atlas.ti, the codes and categories were analyzed on the basis of frequency and patterns. In the final "integration phase," the different codes and categories are integrated into a limited number of "interpretative repertoires" which reflect the larger logics, both formal and in terms of content, and that are used to construct meaning about the notions and practice of community arts through language. Within the scope of the present article it is not possible to report in detail on each of these three steps or to present a complete discussion of all the different repertoires we extracted from our comparative discourse analysis (for this we refer to Ph.D. dissertation of De bisschop). We will focus on a concise discussion of the repertoires per research context that will be a basis for further discussion.

Policy discourse in Flanders is influenced by a number of specific structural characteristics and the attention to community arts is a recent phenomenon, roughly since 2000. This attention is related to cultural policy in general and the so-called "Arts Decree" in particular. This decree (Kunstendecreet) is executed by the agency for Arts and Heritage of the Flemish government and forms the background for decisions on funding community arts by a commission of experts and based on specific criteria for evaluation. A first important repertoire in this discourse is that of the "mirror of the arts": the repertoire mirrors the logics of the regular art forms and these frames are used to argue whether

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something is "good" or "bad." Strategically, the repertoire resists the connotation that community arts are the little brother of the arts. Opposed to this, we have a second repertoire of "the other art" in which meaning is assigned to community arts by emphasizing the differences between "art" and "community arts." In this repertoire, community arts are seen as a different form of art in that it brings forward different symbols and applies different artistic codes. From this perspective, community arts are evaluated in terms of "expression" and "credibility."

A third repertoire does not focus on the possible opposition between the social and the artistic, but is centered on the notion of the "right to culture." With frequent allusions to the right to culture as a basic human right, this repertoire problematizes the limited access to regular arts and confronts this with the "active" cultural production in community arts. By giving voice to participants and by transforming their stories into a creative product, these projects have an emancipatory value. From this perspective, the artistic meaning of the projects is a derivative of their social function. In turn, this can be related to the repertoire of "inclusion and positive diversity" in which the social aspect is elaborated upon by emphasizing the importance of "equality." Inclusivity becomes the central criterion for evaluating this practice and the diversity that is inevitably a part of our globalized societies is seen as a "chance" and not as a "problem." This repertoire pleads for an integrated position of community arts within the regular arts sector instead of its current position as a "separate" form of art.

The fourth repertoire of "the (other) social work" frames the debate from an opposite direction. Starting again from the opposition between the social and the artistic, this repertoire views the fact that community arts are embedded in the arts decree as negative because it inevitably moves the attention away from a focus on the artistic as a means (process) instead as a goal (product). Because of its historical connection to methods in social work, the element of process is the central criterion in the evaluation. At the same time, however, this repertoire also means that community arts are different from regular social work because it has a focus on capacity and competence building from a pedagogical perspective rather than a strict focus on problem solving. Finally, in the repertoire of "constructive society" the transformative potential of community arts is related to social issues and its practice is seen as leverage for a better society. This repertoire is dominant in the discourse of general policy documents and it has an effect on the decisions for funding by emphasizing that community arts need to be socially engaged. The quality criteria in this repertoire focus on long-term processes and possibilities for participants to grow.

Press discourse in Flanders around community arts is relatively recent as it is related to the moment when the term entered policy discourse (i.e., starting around 2000). From a structural perspective, this discourse is characterized by the fact that there are a large number of articles on community arts, both in quality press as in the popular press. The news coverage is dominated by reviews found in the arts and culture pages of the newspapers, mostly written by art critics, which of course has an influence on the discourse used. Related to the above mentioned repertoire of the "mirror of the arts," there is the repertoire of "inferior to the arts" and the repertoire of "universal art." Both of these repertoires start from criteria that are more akin to regular arts, but each in its own specific way. In the repertoire of "inferior to the arts" one seems to expect "less" from community arts from an artistic point of view. For example, participants in these projects are not "real" actors, dancers, or sculptors. The consequence is that the product is "not the same," or "not perfect," but that this is "not surprising." Often, such projects are described by criteria such as "sympathetic," "intimate," "charming" are not related to "the regular arts." In the repertoire of "universal art," the focus is on the potentiality of "good" community arts to create universal symbols by transcending the anecdotal and the therapeutic and by giving autobiographical elements for a universal appeal.

In the related repertoires of "art of the people" and "socially engaged art" emphasis is on the relationship between art and the human aspect in community arts: community arts as art produced by people and for the community. The repertoire of socially engaged art adds to this a dimension of social context. Art is seen, not as a "mirror of life," but as leverage for social transformation. Both these repertoires emphasize that art should make itself relevant and necessary again by re-attaching itself to social reality. In this repertoire, community arts create art out of a "necessity," sometimes as a "complaint," and they can be a "catalyst" for social problems. These repertoires are critical for the lack of social engagement in the regular art scene, but at the same time they also criticize cultural policy

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for "overemphasizing" social engagement with the result that community arts become an excuse for this lack of social engagement in "the other art."

In press discourse, there is also a repertoire of "the other social work" referring to the historical background of community arts in social work. Similar to policy discourse, this repertoire focuses on the specific pedagogical aspect of community arts and presents this as an added value to the "mere" problem solving focus of traditional social work. Journalists make clear that they evaluate these projects with "a different code" including such as the background of the participants, the impact on the participants, and the attention for the process which become criteria for quality. Further, the repertoire of "representation" focuses on how community arts problematize stereotypical representations. In this repertoire, the metaphor of "the gaze" holds a central place and journalists reflect on their role in the construction of a specific representation.

Policy discourse in the Western Cape is influenced by few specific structural characteristics. First of all, the discourse constructed around community arts is a discourse influenced by the history of apartheid. Historically, community arts — emerging in the 1960s and 1970s — referred to "Black art" and the elitarian arts referred to Western, "White art." This history becomes more complex because of the different traditions in community arts: on the one hand, there was a tradition of community arts that was supported by the apartheid regime and on the other hand, there was a tradition of community arts initiated by a group of independent and engaged artists who were criticizing apartheid. Today, after apartheid, community arts in the Western Cape belong to different policy departments: the Department of Social Development, the Department of Economic Development & Tourism, the Department of Health, and the Department of Arts & Culture. The reason for this multiplication is that community arts are largely inscribed in two transversal policy goals: poverty reduction and the creation of jobs. The consequence of this spread of community arts over different policy domains is that the discourse is less univocal.

The repertoire of "unequal opportunities in the arts" focuses on three historical mechanisms of exclusion: 1) social exclusion, 2) economic exclusion, and 3) exclusion from traditional arts education during apartheid. In this repertoire, the difference between community arts and regular arts is not framed in terms of difference in quality, but in terms of difference in access to formal arts education, difference in access to financial means to be able to create, and difference in access to the socio-political stage. The repertoire of "habitual art" also focuses on these differences, but emphasizes the difference between Native art and the so-called professional arts. From this perspective, community arts are referred to as "habitual art," art related to tradition and that can be found in the public sphere and in the villages and that is not presented in museums, exhibitions, or theaters. This repertoire problematizes "craft" as the tradition of figurative art that largely has an economic connotation. From a Western perspective, "craft" was used to differentiate the "crafts" from the "arts," but in this repertoire crafts and community arts are used both to assess quality and social relevance.

In the repertoire of "culture as part of development" the focus is not on the relative artistic status of the projects, but on the contribution of the projects to development. Just as art and culture were "used" in apartheid, they can now be used for social purposes. Art and culture become "tools," and this is specifically the case for community arts: the use of art as a tool for "healing," "reconciliation," "moral regeneration," and "poverty reduction." South African policy discourse encompasses two repertoires that motivate culture as development from a specific frame of interpretation. The first repertoire is that of Ubuntu, which gives meaning to community arts based on the Ubuntu framework of the Khoi-San. Ubuntu means "human kind" and "humanity" and refers to the idea that a person is only a person in relation to other people. Starting from this "unifying" philosophy, community arts are seen as inclusive projects. They start from the fundamental equality of all people and contribute to the development of identity and self-awareness, to a sense of community, and a positive attitude towards diversity. The frequently used rhetoric of policy is that the government tries to create a "home for all" fits within this frame and community arts play an important role in this.

A second specific frame of reference within this lager framework of "culture as development" is the repertoire that looks at community arts from the perspective of their economic potential. Art is not seen as a "luxury," but is approached from a down-to-earth economic logic: art creates opportunities to "make money." From this perspective, community arts are only durable when they also create job opportunities for people and in that sense these projects are seen as the engines for meaningful socio-

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economic transformation. This economic frame of interpretation has consequences for the meanings ascribed to community arts: not only the traditional target groups as such, but also the different "support services" (catering, media, transport, etc.) are seen as "target group" and the educational aspect is broadened from arts education to technical skills and even management skills and the division of means should happen square and fair amongst all those involved. This repertoire also produces a new terminology to talk about these projects and to argue for its qualities: they are measured according to their "management frameworks," "human resource capacity," "market driven production," "commodity work," "self-sustainability," etc.

The repertoire of "political and social transformation" separates itself from the above discussed repertoires because it does not ascribe a specific function to community arts as such. Community arts are seen as potentially important for the social and political transformation of South Africa, precisely because it focuses on the relation between art and context. This repertoire also produces some broader meanings: not only economically disadvantaged people, but also the "more well off communities" should be seen as target audience, because in the post-apartheid situation the more well off do not participate in community arts. There is a plea for more partnerships between government arts institutions and independent community arts in order to succeed in the democratic transformation of arts and cultural institutions.

Press discourse in the Western Cape is characterized by a relative lack of coverage of community arts despite the long tradition of community arts in South Africa. Most of the coverage is found in the culture and arts pages of newspapers and the articles are characterized by a critical and often also a humorous style. The repertoire of "mainstream art" focuses on the perception that community arts are not fundamentally different from mainstream art products and that they therefore do not need to be judged and valued differently. Here, the criterion of quality is that community arts also have found a market that generates profit: a market oriented, popular interpretation of art forms the basis for assessment and not quality. Community arts first of all have to "entertain," have to be "light," "fashionable," "humoristic" if they want to be found good in the press repertoire. In the repertoire of "unequal opportunities in the arts," this unilateral focus is criticized and focuses on the fundamental differences in commercial opportunities between community arts and mainstream arts. This repertoire refers back to the historical disadvantages of apartheid.

The repertoire of "Native art" elaborates on the above discussed difference, but focuses on the "other aesthetics" that is part of "habitual art" and the aesthetics of community arts are confronted with mainstream (elite) aesthetics. The difference in quality is mostly related to the different functions ascribed to art. For Native art to be embedded in social structures is of great importance and thus the repertoire focuses on art for the "common" people, on "common subjects," on "traditional forms of art," and on a connection between art and life itself. In the repertoire of "culture as development" the focus is on community arts as a form of artistic agency that serves and is useful in the function of development. Reviews in newspaper often refer to community development programs of which community arts are a part: art should be used for specific goals such as nation building, anti-crime action, rehabilitation, job creation etc. In the Ubuntu repertoire community arts are connected to an ethics of the collective. This is exemplified by the presence of references in the press of community arts which refer to this ethics such as "Ubuntu Production House." The focus is on how community arts are related to community building activities without neglecting the individual and diversity is seen as an added value to society. Last, the repertoire of "representation" focuses on how community arts can challenge the stereotypical representation of certain people or groups. By changing "the gaze" of the audience, community arts can lift the self-esteem of its participants and therefore can be a leverage for empowerment.

As seen above, the South African context is different from that of Flanders for several reasons. During apartheid, the South African government saw it as their duty to keep the "culture" of the population alive by offering recreational possibilities and these efforts were aimed at countering criticism against apartheid: there was a tradition of community arts that emerged in the 1970s under the influence of independent artists who wanted to make arts education available for "Black" people who were not allowed in the art schools. Apart from this historical perspective, there are the specific social, economic, and political features of South Africa. During apartheid, as well as today there is large economic inequality between Blacks and Whites. However, today's discourse in Flanders and in

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the Western Cape show some similarities, as well as differences. It is, for example, notable that policy discourse has an engaging rhetoric of words that are in danger of becoming "overused" and thereby loose their specific meaning. Examples of this are "a home for all," "partnership," and "needs" in the Western Cape and "participation" and "diversity" in Flanders. It is also notable that the policy discourse around community arts in both cases is subordinate to higher policy structures that restrict and limit the freedom to construct a specific meaning around community arts. For example, the Arts Decree in Flanders in that sense has the same function as the Reconstruction and Development Program and the Investment in Culture Program in the Western Cape. These resemblances are less clear in press discourse, but there are some formal similarities such as the format of the review used for discussing community arts and the continuous "struggle" to be able to give room to community arts in newspapers.

Despite the fact that discourse is structured in a similar way as outlined above, there are specific differences with regard to content. The most notable difference is the dominance in interpretative repertoires centered on art in Flanders versus repertoires centered on social issues in the Western Cape. In Flemish policy discourse there are a large number of the repertoires of the "mirror of the arts" and "the other art." The repertoire of "cultural rights" can be seen as a sort of social addendum to a discourse mostly centered on art and culture. In the discourse of the Flemish press the repertoire of the "mirror of the arts" is divided in the repertoires of "the lesser of the arts" and "universal art" and the repertoire of "the other art" is split up in the repertoires of "human art" and "socially engaged art." This gives us a total of four repertoires specifically aimed at the arts. In Flemish policy and press discourse there is much argumentation about the relative value of community arts: "art that is engaged, is no longer art," "art that serves a social goal, is instrumental art and therefore not art as such," etc. In short, the process versus product debate is central in relation to community arts and this debate is locked up in the cultural sector itself and does not refer to other social sectors.

If we confront the above described with the Western Cape repertoires, we see that policy discourse does not have a specific interpretative repertoire focused on art. Instead, we find a repertoire of "unequal opportunities in the arts," but in this repertoire the artistic argument is related to a social argument. What is notable is the larger diversity of repertoires in which art and development are more or less inseparable from each other: the repertoires "culture as development," Ubuntu, "economic potentiality," and "social and political transformation" in the policy discourse and the repertoires of "culture as development" and Ubuntu in the press discourse. In the Western Cape it appears there is agreement over the question that art can have social purposes. In the past, it was a means for political transformation while today it is an agency that has become "evident" in social development. Poverty reduction and the creation of jobs are from this point of view legitimate goals for community arts and this is reflected in interpretative repertoires. Specifically in a socio-economic context in which unemployment rates are high, the social function becomes important and these social functions are not opposed to artistic development. On the contrary, it is believed that community arts assist in "negotiating" both perspectives. What is really at stake in the debate is not whether there is an opposition between art and social function, but how the connection between art and society can be made and how the social relevance of art can be used. The difference between the two discourse contexts is notable because the history of community arts in Flanders is to situated in the struggle for poverty reduction and its history in South Africa is situated in the development of the arts, specifically of arts education.

In Flanders, the repertoire of the "right to culture" forms the symbolic basis for legitimizing community arts. However, from our reconstruction of the interpretative repertoires it becomes clear that the recognition of this right to culture is not legitimized in relation to other social factors or sectors. The opposite seems to be happening: it gives rise to a "separation" of the right to culture, as if it were a right that is cut loose of the social reality in which this right needs to hold. This separation of the right to culture can be related to the fact that cultural policy is increasingly professionalized and developed in relation to the sector itself, rather than in relation to society at large. Our claim is that this self-referential way of thinking and acting around culture and art is turning the attention away from the possible functions that community arts have and could have for society at large. Western Cape discourse is centered on community arts is an example of a transversal discourse: it crosses many sectors and connects art and culture to social issues, economy, transport, etc. This becomes

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mostly clear in the policy discourse itself, but also in the press discourse: the criterion for quality of community arts is the economic power of these projects: is there enough audience? Is the income high enough? Do the performers make enough to live from? From this perspective, community arts in the Western Cape are explicitly framed within a social and economic logic. In Flanders these economic or explicitly social arguments around community arts are mostly missing. Therefore, discourse in Flanders is restricted by frames of thinking and argumentation related to the relatively high standard of living. Further, the arts and culture sector has a self-referential logic and focuses less on its relation to other social sectors, precisely because such a positioning is possible in a prosperous society. Of course, this offers opportunities for taking its artistic practice more seriously, but for community arts — whose activities are aimed specifically at empowering the economically disadvantaged in society — this frame of reference has the danger to take the attention away from its core objectives.

In conclusion, because our comparison of the "situated" meaning of the practice of community arts is based on specific datasets and a systemic and contextual methodological approach, we claim that the study of different contexts helps us to look differently at our own context and thus it assists also to take account of the limitations of the discourse of which we are part ourselves. The approach we subscribe to is to apply and act on the postulate that "comparative consciousness [is] about one's biases and about the alternative which is dominant in other cultural knowledge traditions" (Pinxten 98; see also Nader). At the same time, we also need to take the inevitable bias of every "situated" discourse into account. Thus, comparative and contextual thinking offers a perspective in which inclusive rather than essentialist thinking forms the point of departure in the humanities and social sciences including practice and with which we act, among others, against the paradox of globalization versus localization (see Tötösy de Zepetnek and Vasvári).

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