

# FULL DISCLOSURE: processes of corporatization in the public eye

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# TRANSCRIPT MEETING 4

## BOARDROOM, 26.9.2016

Milou van Vlijmen How're you feeling?

Beatrix Ruf Good! Should I be nervous?

Van Vlijmen No! Not at all.

Ruf So Eungie, how was the meeting with the municipal council?

Eungie Joo Oh, everyone we talked to seemed very excited! They're happy to hear about our research partnership and funding plans.

Emily Pethick Talking to those different departments was very informative as well, and immediately gave some good leads on options for cultural real estate redevelopment.

Notes are based on publicly available information. All translations from Dutch are the author's own.

## I. TENDENCIES IN DUTCH CULTURAL POLICY<sup>1</sup> AND THE NEOLIBERAL MUSEUM MODEL: A SELECTED REPORT (1999–2017) ON THE COMMERCIALIZATION OF PUBLIC MUSEUMS AND THE PRIVATISATION OF THE STEDELIJK MUSEUM AMSTERDAM

In 1999, Rick van der Ploeg, the Dutch State Secretary for Culture and Media, introduced the term *cultureel ondernemerschap*, or cultural entrepreneurship, to Dutch politics and cultural policy.<sup>2</sup> For public institutions, this notion indicated a political demand for an increased effort to generate more private funds and become less dependent on state and/or municipal subsidies. Although the term is ambiguous and precise criteria for institutional management remained unclear at the time, it fit Van der Ploeg's policy agenda for the culture sector, allowing in market forces within the publicly funded culture sector and prompting museums to learn how to make use of the market's mechanisms as to increase museums' economic viability.<sup>3</sup> In order to justify their existence and their use of public money, the task of public museums is now determined more than ever by the tangible quantification of audiences, collection accessibility, marketing strategies and fundraising. New managerial conditions such as the professionalization of public relations have urged museums to redirect their emphasis from the traditional tasks of collecting, research and restoration, to the development of exhibitions and activities that places central their service to the visitor and passers-by. At the same time, museums are forced to reach out to private collectors and wealthy patrons in order to acquire the additional financial resources to survive. This double pull has brought public museums in a constrained position that challenges their foundational values, exhibition policy and organisational structure.

On 1 January 2006 the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, the Netherlands' leading museum of modern and contemporary art, was privatised through a process of *verzelfstandiging* (a Dutch term which suggests 'becoming independent' or 'autonomous', but what is, in fact, *corporatization*), transforming the formerly municipal institution into a private foundation. In English-speaking countries this is what would be called a 'quango' (quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisation),

1 Dutch social democrat politician, statistician and typographer Emanuel Boekman (1889-1940) wrote the first historical study on public policy in the field of arts in the Netherlands. His dissertation *Overheid en kunst in Nederland* (Government and art in the Netherlands) (Amsterdam, 1939)

investigated the history of Dutch cultural policy in the 19th and 20th century, and advocated Boekman's ideas for an active cultural policy by the state, e.g. through the dissemination of art among the general (working class) population and providing art commissions in new building construction projects by the state and municipalities. His writing was of important influence on the government's relationship with art and culture in post-war cultural policy. Boekman was the Amsterdam alderman for Education and Culture in Amsterdam from 1931-1933 and 1935-1940, and as such also politically responsible for the municipal museums such as the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. See: <http://resources.huylgens.knaw.nl/bwn1880-2000/lemmata/bwn4/boekman> [Accessed 21 Dec. 2017]

2 Rick van der Ploeg became State Secretary for Culture and Media in the cabinet-Kok II in 1998, a coalition government between VVD, PvdA and D66. Van der Ploeg is an economist and served as an MP and spokesperson for finances of the PvdA in the House of Representatives for four years before starting as State Secretary. The term *cultureel ondernemerschap* was borrowed from Giep Hagoort, a pioneer in art management. See: Dos Elshout, 'III. Erfgoed, educatie en culturele diversiteit', 5. Rick van der Ploeg: publieksbereik en markt', in: *De moderne museumwereld in Nederland: Sociale dynamiek in beleid, erfgoed, markt, wetenschap en media*, (2016), p. 447. Available at: <https://dare.uva.nl/search?identifier=74c906f4-f260-4ad0-bed0-e70b4380c32a> [Accessed 9 Dec. 2017]

3 Van der Ploeg posited that the 'aristocracy of culture' must come to an end and needs to be replaced by a 'democracy of culture'. He saw a growing dichotomy between the subsidised world of 'traditional' art for the elite and the commercial culture for the masses, and thinks of art and culture as being "too important to leave only to the elite". The resulting policies would place the public central in the justification of art and culture. Van der Ploeg worked on new conditions for museums in order to be eligible for funding their acquisitions, pleading for public outreach, education, and an increased *collectiemobiliteit* (collection mobility) that aimed for collaboration and easier exchange of loan objects between Dutch museums. He also wanted to further increase the 'returns on cultural assets' through corporate lending of museum collections. "Why wouldn't airports, train stations, post offices, schools, hospitals, colleges and universities be able to lease museum objects?" This also opened up new possibilities for the *ontzamen* (deaccessioning) of artworks from museum collections, in order to increase budgets for improving the collection profiles. See: idem., p. 422–472.

Sophie Goltz The culture alderman seemed surprised to learn about our ambitions.

Joo I wondered again, though, what is the status with Europe and cultural institutions? Why are these people in public administration so invested in art?

Goltz Well, up until recently most of the museums in Europe were regarded as state-supported institutions.

Pethick Funded either through national or municipal subsidies.

Ruf Right, it's only been some 15 years since they've started converting into independent organisations. The culture policies used to protect these museums, to demonstrate the state's care for social inclusion, but that's not really the case anymore under the neoliberal regime. 4

which is a model containing elements of both NGOs and public sector bodies. This hybrid form of organisation is typically an institution to which a government has devolved power, but which is still partly controlled and/or financed by government bodies. In the case of the Stedelijk, although operationally privatised, the municipality of Amsterdam owns both the museum's collections as well as its building. This public property is operated and managed by the *Stichting Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam*, an independent foundation led by an artistic director and a managing director who report to a supervisory board, without representatives from the municipal executive board. Since the museum's corporatization the municipal executives keep themselves informed through annual reports and financial statements, but no longer have any direct control over the directorship, policies and operations of the museum. At the same time, the municipality remains the primary funder of the Stedelijk's annual budget through the *Kunstenplan* (Arts plan), the four-year funding period for arts and culture as advised by the *Amsterdamse Kunstraad* (AKr, or Arts council). Although officially no longer responsible for the Stedelijk, the municipality remains the museum's primary stakeholder and financier. This enables the municipality to retain a certain degree of influence and control, for example when cases of incidental administrative turmoil arise. The particular economic context in which the museum operates offers an example of how the governmental politics are askew. While the municipality is still willing to invest in its public cultural institutions, it does only as much as is needed to compensate for a lack of the market. This two-faced modality has had a persistent influence on the publicly owned but privately run museum's organisational model ever since its corporatization, to the point that its mismanagement has put public assets at risk of becoming compromised by private parties.

Further significant changes to the Dutch culture sector and its institutional field were most recently effectuated through the reduction of public funding as part of austerity policy. In 2010 the Dutch general election was won by the conservative-liberal VVD, who formed a minority government in coalition with the centre-right CDA and additional parliamentary support of the right-wing nationalist PVV. The government led by Prime Minister Mark Rutte ensured austerity measures amid the European debt crisis, the effects of which hit all parts of the public sector, including health care, education and culture. Halbe Zijlstra of the VVD, who was appointed State Secretary at the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, initiated harsh budget cuts in the culture sector: the former expenditures of 900 million euros was reduced by 200 million, almost one quarter of the budget. Zijlstra admitted to have neither experience

nor affinity with the arts.<sup>4</sup> Two demonstrations protesting against Zijlstra's policy rallied almost 100,000 people, gaining national media attention, but failing to bring any change to the cuts.<sup>5</sup> In Zijlstra's policy report titled *Meer dan kwaliteit: een nieuwe visie op cultuurbeleid* (More than quality: a new vision on cultural policy) from 2011, the chapter on visual arts states that the government will concentrate on "stimulating entrepreneurship, strengthening market forces, a better connection between production and presentation, and increasing public outreach."<sup>6</sup> The policies of the VVD were implemented further in their second term from 2012 to 2017, in coalition with the social-democratic PvdA.

The consequences of corporatization for the Stedelijk Museum have become topical in public debate in the months leading up to the writing of this text. On the Tuesday-morning of 17 October 2017 the Dutch financial newspaper *Het Financieele Dagblad* reported the resignation of Stedelijk Museum director Beatrix Ruf, a decision that had been reached by the museum's supervisory board the night before.<sup>7</sup> Shortly after, the museum released a statement saying, "Director Beatrix Ruf has decided to resign from her post as

4 Harmen Bockma, *Halbe Zijlstra: Er zit pijn in de bezuinigingen, dat klopt*, *De Volkskrant* (2011, June 11). Available at: <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2824/Politiek/article/detail/2444187/2011/06/11/Halbe-Zijlstra-Er-zit-pijn-in-de-bezuinigingen-dat-klopt.dhtml> [Accessed 2017, April 3]

5 *Schreeuw om cultuur klinkt op 20 november*, *Het Parool*, (2010, Nov. 5). Available at: <https://www.parool.nl/binnenland/schreeuw-om-cultuur-klinkt-op-20-november-a1046255/> [Accessed 12 Dec. 2017]

6 Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, *Meer dan kwaliteit: een nieuwe visie op cultuurbeleid*, (2011, Jun. 10), p. 24. Available at: <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/binaries/rijksoverheid/documenten/beleidsnota-s/2011/06/10/meer-dan-kwaliteit-een-nieuwe-visie-op-cultuurbeleid/bijl-a-nieuwe-visie-cultuurbeleid.pdf> [Accessed 12 Dec. 2017]

7 It is noteworthy that the *FD*, primarily covering finance and business, was the first media outlet to bring out this news. It set the tone of the framework through which part of the public opinion has scoped the event: top-level managers of public institutions that are only in it for the money. See: Louis Hoeks, *Directeur Ruf van het Stedelijk Museum stapte op*, *Het Financieele Dagblad*, (2017, Oct. 17). Available at: <https://fd.nl/ondernemen/1222900/directeur-ruf-van-het-stedelijk-museum-stapte-op> [Accessed 2017, Nov. 21]

Goltz Public funding  
is way down.

Joo Well, the 20th  
century is over, you  
know...

Goltz And policy in  
the Netherlands and  
Germany basically  
pushes for the  
museums to interact  
with the market.

Pethick You'll find the  
"American" model  
anywhere these  
days.

Ruf That's why we're  
so lucky to have you  
at the table, Milou!

director of the Stedelijk Museum with immediate effect. Following speculations in the media over the past weeks that may have an impact on the Stedelijk's reputation, Ruf feels that her resignation is in the best interests of the museum."<sup>8</sup>

The weeks before, Dutch left liberal newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* had published several investigative articles on Ruf and the Stedelijk involving allegations of a possible conflict of interest and causing a public controversy on Ruf's directorship. One article discussed her many side activities, including her private art consultancy, the revenues of which amounted for more than double the income that she earned from her directorship at the Stedelijk. Another article raised questions about a recent "donation" of 600 artworks by German art collector Thomas Borgmann, which was revealed to be conditional on 1.5 million euros of art purchases. On the day of Ruf's resignation *NRC* published varying responses from the field. Benno Tempel, director of the Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, said: "That things went wrong with one museum says nothing about the corporatization of the other major museums. The move towards professionalization has been very successful in recent years (...)", while Peter van den Brink, director of the Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum in Aachen, Germany, said: "She used her position as director as an asset, and abused it. It's a scandal."<sup>9</sup> As public response considered Ruf's actions mainly as an incidental evil on local scale, the increased entanglement of the public and private sectors initially remained largely undiscussed.

Olav Velthuis published an article in Dutch centrist newspaper *De Volkskrant*, proclaiming that the Ruf debacle is part of a greater tendency.<sup>10</sup> He posits that the former director belongs to an art world that is undergoing a major transformation, due to a continually withdrawing government on the one hand, and a wealthy, international upper class, revelling in art, on the other. The influence of the art market in general and the wealthy individual collector in particular is already commonplace in fully privatised museums, like most museums in the United States, where art patrons donate funds, artworks or substantial parts of their collections. Velthuis puts forward some of the paradoxes of today's public museum: the museum is tasked by the government to lure in more private money, but its public status does not allow for the direct influence of private parties. While some public museums still strive for international stature, their budgets are simply no longer sufficient to acquire and collect important works of contemporary art on the international art market. In addition, it is considered unethical for museums to expropriate their publicly owned collections, and as such they cannot bring their artworks to auction.<sup>11</sup> Velthuis warns that the increase of private money comes at a price: prestige, power, control, influence, or

insider knowledge.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the American museum model, quite frankly, undermines the democratic control of taxpayers' money through the perverse role of the government. In the United States, charitable donations of individuals to museums can, for the most part, be deducted from income tax. Because of this, the government loses tax income, which for economists is the same thing as indirect subsidy. Velthuis says, "Compared to direct subsidies, it is not Parliament or a city council that decides where the tax money goes (as is the case with direct subsidies), but a small group of predominantly wealthy donors. This is inconsistent with the public institutions that museums are expected to be."<sup>13</sup>

As such, with the gradual Americanization of cultural policy and an influx of private donors, the risk of a conflict of interest extends from museums directly into the public sphere itself, as public assets become instrumentalised, and therefore politicised, for the donor's private interest. The trend of Americanization and its effects on public institutions has been protested by artists, such as American artist Andrea Fraser in 2011. She writes, "Rather than turning to collectors to subsidize the acquisition of art works at grotesquely inflated prices, European museums should turn away from the art market and the art and artists valorized in it. If this means that public museums contract and collectors create their own privately controlled institutions, so be it. Let these private institutions be the treasure vaults and theme-park spectacles and economic freak shows that many already are."<sup>14</sup> Fraser, like Velthuis, is wary of the thin line between public institutions and the interests of private parties, and pleas for us to be mindful of it too, as the market mechanisms will inevitably have significant effect on the organisational structure of the museums, as well as their role in society.

8 Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, *Director Beatrix Ruf resigns with immediate effect as Director of the Stedelijk Museum*, (2017, Oct. 17) Available at: <https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/news/director-beatrix-ruf-resigns-with-immediate-effect-as-director-of-the-stedelijk-museum-2> [Accessed 7 Jan. 2018]

9 Arjen Ribbens, *Reacties: Het Stedelijk Museum was onder Ruf geen stedelijk museum*, NRC Handelsblad, (2017, Oct. 17). Available at: <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2017/10/17/reacties-het-stedelijk-museum-was-onder-ruf-geen-stedelijk-museum-13533594-a1577595> [Accessed 2017, Nov. 21]

10 Velthuis is Professor of Sociology at the University of Amsterdam, specializing in economic and cultural sociology, and sociology of the arts. See: Olav Velthuis, *Het gevaarlijke spel van artistieke smaak, groot geld en brute macht in de kunstwereld*, De Volkskrant, (2017, Oct. 20). Available at: <https://www.volkskrant.nl/opinie/het-gevaarlijke-spel-van-artistieke-smaak-groot-geld-en-brute-macht-in-de-kunstwereld~a4522610/> [Accessed 13 Nov. 2017]

11 Two recent cases of deaccessioning artworks from public collections in The Netherlands gained national attention. In 2011 MuseumGouda auctioned *The Schoolboys*, a work by the influential South African born painter Marlene Dumas, at British auction house Christie's for 950.000 pounds (over 1 million euros), without informing the artist or her gallery. MuseumGouda had acquired the work for 18.000 Dutch guilders (roughly less than 8.000 euros today) with public money in 1988. The auctioning was part of a deal with the municipality of Gouda to retain the museum's public funding. Many organisations have criticized MuseumGouda for its actions. In Rotterdam, director Stanley Bremer of the Wereldmuseum sold off thousands of objects from its Africa and Asia collections in his effort to drastically reorganise the museum's finances between 2013-2014. Bremer stepped down after critical investigations by progressive left-wing Dutch news magazine *De Groene Amsterdammer* and a report by former Mondriaan Stichting director Gitta Luiten, commissioned by the Rotterdam municipal council. See: Harmen Bockma, *Marlene Dumas is ontzet over stiekeme veiling door Gouds museum*, De Volkskrant, (2011, Sep. 2). Available at: <https://www.volkskrant.nl/beeldende-kunst/marlene-dumas-is-ontzet-over-stiekeme-veiling-door-gouds-museum~a2883784/> [Accessed 2 Jan. 2018]; Sjors van Beek, *Ondernemen is geen kunst*, De Groene Amsterdammer, (2015, Jul. 15). Available at: <https://www.groene.nl/artikel/ondernemen-is-geen-kunst> [Accessed 2 Jan. 2018]

12 Olav Velthuis, *Het gevaarlijke spel van artistieke smaak, groot geld en brute macht in de kunstwereld*, De Volkskrant, (2017, Oct. 20).

13 Olav Velthuis, *Amerikaanse Toestanden: de particuliere greep op het museum*, Metropolis M, no. 3 (2008, Jun/Jul), p. 70-73. Available at: <https://dare.uva.nl/search?identifier=8fe6251c-e44b-41bd-8d37-734065045670> [Accessed 10 Dec. 2017]

14 Andrea Fraser, *L'1%, C'est moi*, Texte zur Kunst 83, p. 114-127, (2011, Sep.) Available at: <https://monoskop.org/log/?p=3824> [Accessed 12 Dec. 2017]

Joo Ammodo does fund quite a lot within the Netherlands, correct?

Van Vlijmen This might sound old-fashioned, but we believe these kinds of values can be redefined through private initiatives. Local support is really important to us.

Goltz You mean as opposed to the state or municipality?

Van Vlijmen Yeah, exactly.

Joo Can't say I disagree. In the end it's so much more efficient.

Ruf Well, these past decades public museums had no choice but to change and expand their functions. It's our economic reality. We'll have to adapt to the conditions that we're living and working in. It is what it is.



## II. CORPORATE LEADERSHIP AT THE STEDELIJK MUSEUM AND THE ETHICS OF ITS GOVERNANCE IN QUESTION

In the case of the Stedelijk, the effects of the systemic entanglement of public and private interests can be traced by reconstructing policy choices made by the museum's recent directorate. At the end of 2002 the municipal executive board appointed a committee to advise on the upcoming renovation process of the Stedelijk Museum and its future organisational structure.<sup>15</sup> Martijn Sanders, then director of the Royal Concertgebouw and an art collector, led the committee. The other members were leading Dutch economist Victor Halberstadt of the Dutch Social-Economic Council and British art historian John Leighton, then director of the Van Gogh Museum.

On 21 June 2003 the Sanders-committee presented their report *Het Stedelijk Museum: Terug naar de top* (The Stedelijk Museum: Back to the top), which proposed a highly ambitious plan to redevelop the Stedelijk in order to put it in line with the MoMA, Tate Modern and Centre Pompidou.<sup>16</sup> The plan needed far more money than the municipality wanted to spend on the museum, and thus advised the museum to corporatize.<sup>17</sup> The committee also reasoned that an independent museum has more opportunities to attract private funds, arguing that "Having the final responsibility within governmental politics cannot be combined with a museum's artistic policy. Sponsors do not like to do business with the government."<sup>18</sup> The city council was attracted to the idea of decreasing government spending in the future.<sup>19</sup> In the end, the municipal executive board agreed to take responsibility for financing the museum's renovation and extension, of which it remained the owner, while the Stedelijk would bear financial responsibility for its future operations.<sup>20</sup> A committee evaluating the building process came to the conclusion, in 2013, that the corporatization of the museum did not change the actual interaction between the municipality and the Stedelijk, nor the museum's legal dependency.<sup>21</sup> The most recent Stedelijk financial report of 2016 mentions €18,269,422 of subsidies, which still amounts for 58% of the total Stedelijk budget of 2016.<sup>22</sup>

In 2004 the corporatization process of the Stedelijk started with the creation of the museum's first supervisory board. Rijkman Groenink, CEO of Dutch bank ABN AMRO and an art collector, was appointed as its first chairman by the municipality and nominated six other members.<sup>23</sup> Later that year ABN AMRO became main sponsor and 'partner' of the museum, initiating what the Stedelijk press release called an "intensive collaboration."<sup>24</sup> Dutch left-wing magazine *Vrij Nederland* gained access to some details of the sponsor contract as requested through the *Wet Openbaarheid van Bestuur* (Freedom of Information Law), obliging

- 15 *Commissie voor Stedelijk benoemd*, NRC Handelsblad, (2002, Dec. 18). Available at: <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2002/12/18/commissie-voor-stedelijk-benoemd-7618919-a117053> [Accessed 9 Dec. 2017]
- 16 Rutger Pontzen, *Stedelijk alleen met extra geld naar de top*, De Volkskrant, (2003, Jun. 25). Available at: <https://www.volkskrant.nl/recensies/stedelijk-alleen-met-extra-geld-naar-de-top~a756232/> [Accessed 9 Dec. 2017]
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Rob Rombouts, *Wij hadden als Stedelijk wat minder braaf moeten zijn*, Het Parool, (2002, Dec. 16).
- 20 Evaluatiecommissie Bouwproces Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, *Hang naar verstillings, Drang naar spektakel: Eindrapport Evaluatiecommissie Bouwproces* (2013, Nov. 8), p. 12. Available at: [http://www.lysiasgroup.com/app/uploads/2016/09/Hang\\_naar\\_verstillings\\_-\\_Drang\\_naar\\_spektakel\\_8\\_nov\\_2013.pdf](http://www.lysiasgroup.com/app/uploads/2016/09/Hang_naar_verstillings_-_Drang_naar_spektakel_8_nov_2013.pdf) [Accessed 9 Dec. 2017]
- 21 Ibid., p. 122.
- 22 The sum of municipal subsidies consists of €11,639,400 from the *Kunstenplan*, €12,846 from cultural investments, and €6,270,690 from rental subsidies (as to pay for the building's rent, let by the municipality). See: Stichting Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, *Financieel verslag 2016*, (2017, Apr. 23). Available at: [https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/production-static-stedelijk/images/\\_museum/Jaarverslagen/2016/4.%20SMA%20Financieel%20verslag%202016.pdf](https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/production-static-stedelijk/images/_museum/Jaarverslagen/2016/4.%20SMA%20Financieel%20verslag%202016.pdf) [Accessed 7 Jan. 2018]
- 23 The other board members included Yoeri Albrecht (1967), historian and critical editor; Hans Andersson (1946), sociologist, organisation expert and partner at Andersson Eiffers Felix BV; Jacobina Brinkman (1966), partner at KPMG Accountants; canonical artist Jan Dibbets (1941); Marry de Gaay Fortman (1965), lawyer and partner at Houthoff Buruma; Mária Hlavajová (1971), culture scientist, artistic director at BAK, Utrecht; Els van der Plas (1960), art historian, director of the Prince Claus Fund. See: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, *Raad van toezicht benoemd*, (2004, Jan. 6). Available at: <https://www.stedelijk.nl/nl/nieuws/raad-van-toezicht-benoemd> [Accessed 2 Jan. 2018]
- 24 Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, *ABN AMRO partner Stedelijk Museum*, (2004, Oct. 13). Available at: <https://www.stedelijk.nl/nl/nieuws/abn-amro-partner-stedelijk-museum> [Accessed 2 Jan. 2018]

Goltz I see many European museums that are increasingly absorbed in attracting sponsors and donors to compensate for the lack of public money.

Ruf Surely, art and the world would look very different without banks and private collectors!

Goltz Well, some say that the extent to which private money enters the public museum has become proportionate with the control it loses over its own policy.

Pethick You think the Stedelijk embodies this economic transformation of the public museum as well?

Ruf Our institution is still only coming to terms with this reality.

the municipality to provide information while the Stedelijk was still a public institution.<sup>25</sup> They revealed how beneficial an international exhibition tour which the Stedelijk was organising at the time would be for ABN AMRO. Next to “dominant positioning” prioritizing the bank’s brand over others, all exhibitions were required to include several masterpieces of the museum collection, supplemented by some works from the bank’s own art collection, the ABN Amro Art Foundation, of which Groenink was also chairman.<sup>26</sup> In 2006, when the sponsor contract was made public, it turned out that the bank was also able to utilize the Stedelijk Museum’s curators and conservators for their own art collection, free of charge.<sup>27</sup>

When ABN AMRO was acquired in 2007 by a consortium consisting of Banco Santander, Fortis, and Royal Bank of Scotland, Groenink lost his job as CEO. Right before the bank takeover, Groenink transferred the bank’s art collection into a new foundation, *Stichting ABN Amro Kunstverzameling*, appointing himself as its new chairman.<sup>28</sup> Should the new owners of ABN AMRO decide to liquidate or divide up the art collection, Groenink retained the right to sell the whole collection to the Stedelijk for €1. In addition, he donated 250 artworks from the foundation to the Stedelijk, while being chairman of both parties. Groenink’s position of power within the institution became such a problem that sponsors, such as the Bankgiro Loterij, refused to do business with the museum as long as Groenink was involved in its organisation.<sup>29</sup> After pressure from the municipal executive council on the Stedelijk’s supervisory board, Groenink resigned as chairman on 1 January 2009. The members of the supervisory board then appointed Alexander Ribbink, former COO of navigation technology company TomTom, as new chairman starting 15 April 2009.<sup>30</sup>

On 3 June 2009, the supervisory board of the Stedelijk announced that Ann Goldstein would be appointed general and artistic director, starting 1 January 2010.<sup>31</sup> Goldstein, the first international director in the history of the Stedelijk, had acted as the senior curator at The Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) in Los Angeles, and is experienced with the American style of fundraising. Shortly after the museum’s long-awaited reopening in September 2012, Karin van Gilst, an experienced commercial manager, joined the Stedelijk as general director on 1 January 2013.<sup>32</sup> She took on joint directorship alongside Goldstein, focussing on the further development of the museum’s business strategy and finances. Goldstein’s function changed to being just artistic director.<sup>33</sup>

Not even a year after the museum’s reopening Goldstein announced that she would be stepping down as director, effective 1 December 2013.<sup>34</sup> Goldstein had trouble adapting to the public nature of the museum, and remained timid with the Dutch press, who criticized her for not representing

25 Lucette ter Borg, Hella Rottenberg, *Hoe het Stedelijk zich uitlevert aan ABN Amro*, Vrij Nederland, (2005, Jul. 2). Available at: <https://www.vn.nl/hoe-het-stedelijk-zich-uitlevert-aan-abn-amro/> [Accessed 2 Jan. 2018]

26 Ibid.

27 Olav Velthuis, *Amerikaanse Toestanden: de particuliere greep op het museum*, Metropolis M, no. 3 (2008, Jun/Jul), p. 70-73.

28 *Rijkman Groenink weg bij Stedelijk*, NRC Handelsblad, (2008, Nov. 11) Available at: <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2008/11/11/rijkman-groenink-weg-bij-stedelijk-11638131-a1208123> [Accessed 2 Jan. 2018]

29 Bas Soetenhorst, Hugo Logtenberg, *De aftocht van topbankier Rijkman Groenink*, Het Parool, (2011, Nov. 25) Available at: <https://www.parool.nl/binnenland/de-aftocht-van-topbankier-rijkman-groenink~a3541414/> [Accessed 2 Jan. 2018]

30 Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, *Alexander Ribbink nieuwe voorzitter Raad van Toezicht Stedelijk Museum, ZKH Prins Constantijn nieuw lid Raad van Toezicht Stedelijk Museum*, (2009, Mar. 31) Available at: <https://www.stedelijk.nl/nl/nieuws/alexander-ribbink-nieuwe-voorzitter-raad-van-toezicht-stedelijk-museum-zkh-prins-constantijn-nieuw-lid-raad-van-toezicht-stedelijk-museum> [Accessed 2 Jan. 2018]

31 Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, *Ann Goldstein new Director Stedelijk Museum*, (2009, Jun. 3) Available at: <https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/news/ann-goldstein-new-director-stedelijk-museum> [Accessed 28 Dec. 2017]

32 Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, *Karin van Gilst nieuwe Algemeen Directeur Stedelijk*, (2012, Dec. 19) Available at: <https://www.stedelijk.nl/nl/nieuws/karin-van-gilst-nieuwe-algemeen-directeur-stedelijk> [Accessed 28 Dec. 2017]

33 Marije Willems, *Nieuwe directeur voor Stedelijk - takenpakket Goldstein kleiner*, NRC Handelsblad, (2012, Dec. 19). Available at: <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2012/12/19/nieuwe-directeur-voor-stedelijk-museum-takenpakket-goldstein-kleiner-a1438914> [Accessed 28 Dec. 2017]

34 Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, *Ann Goldstein resigns as Director of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam*, (2013, Aug. 28) Available at: <https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/news/ann-goldstein-resigns-as-director-of-the-stedelijk-museum-amsterdam> [Accessed 28 Dec. 2017]

the Stedelijk well enough in the public sphere.<sup>35</sup> In an interview published just three months before announcing her resignation, Goldstein said: “The public was denied their museum for almost nine years while it was undergoing renovation and expansion. This was probably one of the most affecting things to me, to come into a closed museum: how people missed it, and they were angry and demoralized by it.”<sup>36</sup> With the resignation of the Stedelijk’s first international director, the further implementation of the American museum model proved not to go down without difficulty.

In the process of finding a new artistic director, the Stedelijk supervisory board appointed British art historian John Leighton as an external expert to advise in the last phase of interviewing new director candidates. Leighton, now director of The National Galleries of Scotland, was part of the Sanders-committee who advised the municipal executive board on corporatizing the Stedelijk in their 2003 report *Terug naar de top* (Back to the top).<sup>37</sup> On 8 April 2014, international curator Beatrix Ruf was appointed as the new director of the Stedelijk. Ruf had previously been director of the Kunsthalle Zurich since 2001, and was known as one of the most powerful actors in the international contemporary art world. London-based international contemporary art magazine *ArtReview* listed Ruf at number seven in its ‘Power Top 100’ in both 2012 and 2013.<sup>38</sup> Alexander Ribbink, chairman of the supervisory board, said Ruf to be the best choice for the Stedelijk Museum and its visitors, stating: “She shows a unique ability to connect the museum to artists, collectors, the private and public sector, and the city.”<sup>39</sup> Karin van Gilst exclaimed, “We got her!” rejoicing as she introduced Ruf during her first press conference.<sup>40</sup>

In September 2014 the Stedelijk established a new foundation, *Stichting Stedelijk Museum Fonds*, in order to collect money from private individuals. Starting at €15,000 annually for five years, donors would become ‘Fellows’ of the Stedelijk’s International Collector Circle, receiving perquisites and privileges such as opportunity to travel abroad with curators; tours at Art Basel (the world’s biggest contemporary art fair) by director Ruf; exclusive dinners; meetings with artists and dealers; and access to the insider knowledge and expertise of the Stedelijk curators.<sup>41</sup> Although the foundation’s operations are independent of the Stedelijk, its board, when first established, had two members that also functioned in the supervisory board of the museum itself: chairman Alexander Ribbink, and member and patron Rob Defares. Other board members include collector Bob (Robert) Drake, and art dealers Jörg Grimm (owner Grimm Gallery, Amsterdam and New York) and Hanna Schouwink (senior partner at David Zwirner, New York).<sup>42</sup> Shortly after the announcement of the Stedelijk’s new foundation, Dutch art collector Jan Christiaan Braun published four full-page

critical ads in several Dutch newspapers (*NRC Handelsblad*, *De Volkskrant* and local newspaper *Het Parool*) in which he warned museums about potential conflicts of interest, signing them by Museum OverHolland, Braun’s former private museum.<sup>43</sup> Braun’s ads described a number of ethically conflicting positions existing within the Stedelijk organisational structure and denounced its lack of transparency.<sup>44</sup> He argued that the board

35 Rutger Pontzen, *Combinatie Goldstein-Stedelijk was vanaf het begin geen gelukkige*, *De Volkskrant*, (2013, Aug. 28). Available at: <https://www.volkskrant.nl/beeldende-kunst/combinatie-goldstein-stedelijk-was-vanaf-het-begin-geen-gelukkige~a3499791/> [Accessed 7 Jan. 2018]

36 *A discussion between Ann Goldstein (Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam) and Philipp Kaiser (Museum Ludwig, Cologne)*, *Cahier* no 19, (2013, Apr-Jun). Available at: <http://www.cahier-online.de/news/cahier19-news.html> [Accessed 8 Dec. 2017]

37 Rutger Pontzen, *Expert geeft Stedelijk raad over directeur*, *De Volkskrant*, (2014, Jan. 25). Available at: <https://www.volkskrant.nl/archief/expert-geeft-stedelijk-raad-over-directeur~a3583547/> [Accessed 30 Dec. 2017]

38 See: [https://artreview.com/power\\_100/beatrix\\_ruf/](https://artreview.com/power_100/beatrix_ruf/) [Accessed 30 Dec. 2017]

39 Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, *Beatrix Ruf new Director Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam*, (2014, Apr. 8) Available at: <https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/news/beatrix-ruf-new-director-stedelijk-museum-amsterdam-2> [Accessed 30 Dec. 2017]

40 Sandra Smallenburg, *Er waait een frisse wind in het Stedelijk*, *NRC Handelsblad*, (2014, Apr. 17). Available at: <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2014/04/17/er-waait-een-frisse-wind-in-het-stedelijk-1367862-a50841> [Accessed 30 Dec. 2017]

41 Daan van Lent, *Stedelijk Museum Fonds zal gulle gevers belonen met privileges*, *NRC Handelsblad*, (2014, Jun. 7). Available at: <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2014/06/07/stedelijk-museum-fonds-zal-gulle-gevers-belonen-met-privileges-a1424480> [Accessed 30 Dec. 2017]

42 Ibid.

43 Museum OverHolland was situated near the Stedelijk between 1987-1990.

44 See: *Advertentie tegen Stedelijk*, *NRC Handelsblad* (2014, Sep. 5). Available at: <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2014/09/05/advertentie-tegen-stedelijk-1418334-a191050> [Accessed 9 Dec. 2017]

of the *Stedelijk Museum Fonds* should not consist of people who are also members of the supervisory board of the museum, or collectors themselves. He also states that Ruf should abandon her outside advisory activities connected to commercial parties (which were approved of by the supervisory board upon her appointment), such as her ties with Swiss publisher and collector Michael Ringier and reinsurance company Swiss Re, who have been Ruf's clients for many years. Braun, a member of the Trustee Committee of MoMA in New York, has himself strongly advocated for Dutch museums to adopt the American museum model and initiate stronger ties with donors and sponsors. In 2001 he was invited by then director Rudi Fuchs to act as a guest curator for the Stedelijk. Disappointed with the available budget, Braun raised additional funds from other private collectors and included their art loans to put together his exhibition at the Stedelijk, which was a unique organisational move at the time.<sup>45</sup> Already in 2002 he argued that the Stedelijk should be run by a private foundation, led by a board of trustees that is bound by a strict ethical code of conduct that aims to guarantee the museum's interests, without any political interference from the municipality.<sup>46</sup>

Three years after Braun's critical ads, *NRC* reported the departure of Stedelijk managing director Karin van Gilst on 29 August 2017.<sup>47</sup> According to the Stedelijk press statement, Van Gilst was instrumental in professionalizing the Stedelijk's operations since the museum's reopening.<sup>48</sup> In between the directorships of Goldstein and Ruf, Van Gilst was responsible for the production of the blockbuster show *The Oasis of Matisse*, which was the most visited exhibition in the history of the museum. On 5 October, *NRC* published an extensive article about alleged "years of quarrel" between Ruf and Van Gilst, labelling the conflicting visions of their directorships a "public secret."<sup>49</sup> The article poses: "What kind of museum does the Stedelijk want to be? A diversely operating institution, targeting as many visitors as possible, and striving for the highest possible revenues? Or a museum in which visitor numbers are subordinate to a pioneering role in the field of new international art?"<sup>50</sup> Anonymous staff members confirm the contradictory positions, saying "The Stedelijk is a large institution in which sometimes varying visions are in conflict. If you manage to bring them in line, you can have the best of both and take more risks in order to achieve greater things. But the sustainability of such a construction is quite limited."<sup>51</sup> The article mentions that since Ruf's appointment as artistic director the visitor numbers have decreased by 20%, from 816,000 in 2014 to 656,000 in 2015. Its conversion to revenues decreased by 22%. Opinions of staff members vary, with some seeing a direct link between these figures and the museum's artistic policy, while others see them as relative to the enormous boost

after the museum's reopening. Ruf is known to prioritize innovative young artists and exhibitions that respond to social and political contexts, over blockbuster shows for larger audiences.<sup>52</sup>

45 Marianne Vermeijden, *Christiaan Braun volgt Beatrix op in Stedelijk Museum*, *NRC Handelsblad* (2001, Jul. 3) Available at: <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2001/07/03/christiaan-braun-volgt-beatrix-op-in-stedelijk-museum-7548294-a1087728> [Accessed 30 Dec. 2017]; Eric van den Berg, *Het ego van J.C.B. Braun*, *De Volkskrant*, (2001, Nov. 1). Available at: <https://www.volkskrant.nl/archief/het-ego-van-j-c-b-braun-a599672/> [Accessed 7 Jan. 2018]

46 Christiaan Braun, *Musea zijn sponsors vooralsnog niet waard*, *NRC Handelsblad*, (2002, Nov. 14) Available at: <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2002/11/14/musea-zijn-sponsors-vooralsnog-niet-waard-7614072-a235195> [Accessed 7 Jan. 2018]

47 Daan van Lent, *Zakelijk directeur Karin van Gilst vertrekt bij Stedelijk Museum*, *NRC Handelsblad*, (2017, Aug. 29). Available at: <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2017/08/29/zakelijk-directeur-karin-van-gilst-vertrekt-bij-stedelijk-museum-12722854-a1571462> [Accessed 10 Dec. 2017]

48 The statement of Van Gilst reads: "This feels like a natural moment to say farewell. The organization is entering a new phase. The artistic direction has now taken shape. In September we celebrate five years since our reopening, and will also unveil our newly refurbished entrance area. A roster of key exhibitions is planned for the years ahead, and Beatrix Ruf is thoroughly familiar with all aspects of the museum. I am confident that I am leaving the museum in capable hands." See: *Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, Managing Director Karin van Gilst leaves the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam*, (2017, Aug. 31). Available at: <https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/news/managing-director-karin-van-gilst-leaves-the-stedelijk-museum-amsterdam-2> [Accessed 7 Jan. 2018]

49 Daan van Lent, Arjen Ribbens, *De twee directeuren van het Stedelijk konden nooit goed met elkaar overweg*, *NRC Handelsblad*, (2017, Oct. 5). Available at: <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2017/10/05/laveren-tussen-avant-garde-en-crowdpleasers-13352497-a1576198> [Accessed 10 Dec. 2017]

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

Ruf As a private foundation the Stedelijk has been operationally independent of the municipality for only 10 years now.

Pethick I've been told the process was a drag.

Ruf Just the fact that the campaigning of such a fantastic museum to fund its new building only managed to reach some 80 million is kind of astounding, isn't it?

Joo In San Francisco, the SFMOMA fundraised over 600 million for their new extension that just opened this summer.

Goltz Well...

Pethick It's hard to compare, really.

Ruf It is! We've come a long way.

In their response to the newspaper's questions Ruf and Van Gilst denied to have had any personal conflicts. Ruf explained: "The collaboration between an artistic director and a general director will always oscillate between ambition and top-performance on the one hand, and resources and limitations on the other."<sup>53</sup> Van Gilst stated, "In cases of disagreement, it was decided with the supervisory board that the artistic director takes the lead. Should we not find a solution, we could turn to the board. To my knowledge this has never happened." An article on *NRC*'s website stated that the supervisory board has yet to decide whether there would be a successor, and is seeking advice on whether a managing director is still necessary.<sup>54</sup> A member of the municipal council said in the same article that a single-person directorship would be in conflict with the agreements made between the municipality and the Stedelijk in 2014. In a council meeting, city alderman Ollongren said she would wait for the supervisory board to decide on whether Ruf could lead the directorship by herself, before she would be able to discuss whether the conditions for municipal subsidies still apply.<sup>55</sup>

The day after its first report, *NRC* published yet another critical article on the Stedelijk, its headline reading "Gratis kunst die stiekem toch 1,5 miljoen kost" ("Free art that secretly costs 1.5 million"), accusing the museum of a conflict of interest.<sup>56</sup> A year earlier, the Stedelijk had announced that German collector Thomas Borgmann would be donating over 600 works to the museum and loaning a group of 10 installations by the influential and prolific German artists Isa Genzken (b. 1948) and Martin Kippenberger (1953-1997).<sup>57</sup> *NRC* began an investigation after receiving messages regarding high costs associated with the donation. The Stedelijk initially said that the Borgmann donation would only involve the regular costs, such as transport and insurance, denying rumours that the donation was linked to a purchase. But after inspection of the contracts this seems to have been a false claim, as the donation was revealed to be conditional on the purchase of six works by German painter Michael Krebber (b. 1954), acquired for €125,000 each, as well as a large installation work by American-Venezuelan artist Matt Mullican (b. 1951), acquired for €750,000. The article in *NRC* pointed out that that these prices are remarkably high, as only one Krebber work was ever auctioned for over €125,000, and Mullican's highest auction was only €32,000.<sup>58</sup>

Additionally, these acquisition figures did not appear in the annual report of 2016, which was then corrected by the Stedelijk after *NRC* requested to see them.<sup>59</sup> The contract with Borgmann also included some pressuring clauses: the donation was fully conditional on the purchases and all works had to be shown in a dedicated exhibition starting during Amsterdam Art Weekend, with a

catalogue featuring all 600 works. Furthermore, the contracts were only signed by Borgmann and Ruf, not managing director Van Gilst.<sup>60</sup> *NRC* also reported that the initial annual report of 2016 had no mention of Ruf's outside activities in addition to her position as artistic director of the Stedelijk. These twenty different jobs ranged from being jury panellist of the Turner Prize and Frieze Artist Award to executive and advisory functions for art collections of both private estates and corporations, such as American bank Goldman Sachs.<sup>61</sup>

53 Ibid.

54 Daan van Lent, Arjen Ribbens, *Interne strijd tussen twee directeuren Stedelijk Museum*, *NRC Handelsblad*, (2017, Oct. 5). Available at: <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2017/10/05/interne-strijd-tussen-twee-directeuren-stedelijk-museum-13353789-a1576234> [Accessed 10 Dec. 2017]

55 Ibid.

56 Daan van Lent, Arjen Ribbens, *Gratis kunst die stiekem toch 1,5 miljoen kost*, *NRC Handelsblad*, (2017, Oct. 5). Available at: <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2017/10/06/gratis-kunst-die-stiekem-toch-15-miljoen-kost-13365402-a1576353> [Accessed 2017, Dec. 10]

57 Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, *Stedelijk receives a major donation from German collector Thomas Borgmann*, (2016, Jun. 29). Available at: <https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/news/stedelijk-receives-a-major-donation-from-german-collector-thomas-borgmann> [Accessed 7 Jan. 2018]

58 Daan van Lent, Arjen Ribbens, *Gratis kunst die stiekem toch 1,5 miljoen kost*, *NRC Handelsblad*, (2017, Oct. 5).

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

61 This was also corrected. See: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, *Bijlagen Jaarverslag 2016*. Available at: [https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/production-static-stedelijk/images/museum/Jaarverslagen/2016/JAARVERSLAG\\_SMA\\_2016\\_BIJLAGEN\\_13-12-2017.pdf](https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/production-static-stedelijk/images/museum/Jaarverslagen/2016/JAARVERSLAG_SMA_2016_BIJLAGEN_13-12-2017.pdf) [Accessed 7 Jan. 2018]

Ruf It would have been impossible to show a work like Jordan Wolfson's Colored Sculpture at the time the Stedelijk was still a municipal institution!

Van Vlijmen Ammodo is excited to make these presentations possible. The public is going to love Jordan's robots later this year!

Goltz So how much did David Zwirner invest to realize that show of him?

The headline of another online article of the same day read "Het Stedelijk schond afspraken en ethische codes" ("The Stedelijk violated agreements and ethical codes").<sup>62</sup> In a response, the Stedelijk claimed its organisation was acting in accordance with the *Governance Code Cultuur*, a local code of ethics for arts professionals and institutions in the Netherlands, also with respect to loans and acquisitions. That the purchase of the Krebber and Mullican works were not listed in the annual accounts was due to the external tax auditor, and happened because the ownership of the works did not pass to the Stedelijk for another three years, when the three instalments totalling 1.5 million euros are paid off.

On 12 October 2017 *NRC* publishes another article outlining Ruf's private art consultancy, Currentmatters B.V., which she runs parallel to her museum directorship and brought in €437,306 profit in 2015.<sup>63</sup> Even after revising the Stedelijk's annual report to show it to *NRC*, Currentmatters was still missing from the director's annotated external activities. As director, Ruf's annual salary was a maximum of €181,000, in accordance with the *Wet Normering Topinkomens* (Dutch Executives' Pay Standards Act) for the top public and semi-public sector. Several of the private parties that Ruf advises have regularly acted as lenders for works that were shown in exhibitions at the Stedelijk, despite the fact that former chair of the supervisory board, Alexander Ribbink, agreed with Ruf in 2014 that she could only continue her outside jobs if they remained outside her full-time position as director.<sup>64</sup> Ferdinand Grapperhaus, the new chairman of the supervisory board since October, states in the *NRC* article that he will evaluate the agreement between Ruf and his predecessor regarding her outside jobs, and investigate the way in which they have been ratified.<sup>65</sup> Before he had the chance, however, Ruf resigned as director on 17 October.<sup>66</sup> On the day of her resignation, the supervisory board of the Stedelijk also announced two investigations. The first would be an investigation into the governance of the supervisory board and the process of appointing Beatrix Ruf as director, and the second investigation would assess whether the museum acted in accordance with the pay standards act.<sup>67</sup> *NRC* claimed on 18 October that many more institutions have been subpar in their organisational transparency. The report "Research Governance Code Cultuur 2017" by the Dutch non-profit organisation *Cultuur+Ondernemen* (Culture+Entrepreneurship), which established the *Governance Code Cultuur* for Dutch cultural institutions, concluded the same thing.<sup>68</sup> A week after Ruf's resignation the Stedelijk supervisory board appointed Jan Willem Sieburgh, who had been managing director of the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam from 2001-2010.<sup>69</sup> In the years prior he had successfully acted as interim director



for the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, working through a museum merger with a budget deficit after losing public funding, and the Wereldmuseum in Rotterdam, which dealt with an organisational crisis after former director Stanley Bremer's failing business models and deaccessioning practice of the museum's collection.<sup>70</sup>

In an article published by the *New York Times* on 7 November 2017, Ruf gave her first statements since her resignation, calling the controversy a misunderstanding and insisting that all of her side activities had been approved by the Stedelijk prior to her acceptance of the job.<sup>71</sup> "Many people wrongly assumed these profits came from side activities conducted in 2015 while I was artistic director of the Stedelijk Museum," she said, defending her outside income. "In fact, this profit statement reflects legitimate income from activities conducted before 2015, primarily a parting bonus for past work from the Ringier Collection in the amount of 1 million Swiss Francs."<sup>72</sup>

Jo Houben, director of *Cultuur+Ondernemen* (Culture+Entrepreneurship), said that any side activities that benefit an individual rather than the institution they work for is not consistent with the code's principles. He says, "If you work [for the Stedelijk] you have to be aware that you work with public money and behind the public money are public values, and that means you work for the public and not for your private interest."<sup>73</sup> Mijntje Lückers-Rovers, a professor of Corporate Governance at Tilburg University and the chairman of the committee that redrafted the *Governance Code Cultuur* in 2013, concluded similarly, saying, "Transparency is lacking here and that's the most important thing, especially because you're working with public money."<sup>74</sup>

62 Daan van Lent, Arjen Ribbens, *Het Stedelijk schond afspraken en ethische codes*, NRC Handelsblad, (2017, Oct. 5). Available at: <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2017/10/06/het-stedelijk-schond-afspraken-en-ethische-codes-13366837-a1576365> [Accessed 2017, Dec. 10]

63 Daan van Lent, Arjen Ribbens, *Stedelijk onderzoekt nevenactiviteiten directeur Beatrix Ruf*, NRC Handelsblad, (2017, Oct. 12). Available at: <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2017/10/12/stedelijk-onderzoekt-nevenactiviteiten-directeur-13472490-a1577104> [Accessed 2017, Dec. 10]

64 Ibid.

65 Ferdinand Grapperhaus' function as chairman of the Stedelijk supervisory board was only short-lived, as he was appointed as Minister of Justice and Security in the Third Rutte Cabinet on 26 October 2017.

66 Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, *Director Beatrix Ruf resigns with immediate effect as Director of the Stedelijk Museum*, (2017, Oct. 17) Available at: <https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/news/director-beatrix-ruf-resigns-with-immediate-effect-as-director-of-the-stedelijk-museum-2> [Accessed 7 Jan. 2018]

67 Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, *Stedelijk announces external experts*, (2017, Oct. 20) Available at: <https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/news/stedelijk-announces> [Accessed 7 Jan. 2018]

68 Daan van Lent, Arjen Ribbens, *Culturele instellingen schieten tekort bij verantwoorden beleid*, NRC Handelsblad, (2017, Oct. 18) Available at: <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2017/10/18/culturele-instellingen-schieten-tekort-bij-verantwoorden-beleid-13565172-a1577733> [Accessed 2017, Nov. 21]

69 Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, *Jan Willem Sieburgh appointed as interim managing director*, (2017, Oct. 25) Available at: <https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/news/jan-willem-sieburgh-appointed-as-interim-managing-director> [Accessed 30 Dec. 2017]

70 Anna van Leeuwen, *'Erkend puinruimer' Sieburgh moet orde op zaken stellen bij stuurloos Stedelijk*, De Volkskrant, (2017, Oct. 25). Available at: <https://www.volkskrant.nl/beeldende-kunst/-erkend-puinruimer-sieburgh-moet-orde-op-zaken-stellen-bij-stuurloos-stedelijk~a4523446/> [Accessed 31 Dec. 2017]

71 Nina Siegal, *Museum Leader Who Resigned Calls Controversy a 'Misunderstanding'*, The New York Times, (2017, Nov. 7). Available at: <https://nyti.ms/2hNlqPD> [Accessed 10 Dec. 2017]

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid.

Ruf [laughs] Sophie! What are you on about?

Van Vlijmen So, about the peripheral opportunities then?

Ruf Yes, could you explain Ammodo's interest in the periphery, Milou?

Van Vlijmen Well, for one, we look forward to embed the new space into challenging local contexts.

Ruf Yes?

Van Vlijmen Areas that can get energized from new cultural activity, with further opportunities for activity development.

Pethick Would your foundation also finance other institutions within the project?

### III. DUBIOUS INSTITUTIONAL REDEVELOPMENT OF SMBA AND THE DISAVOWAL OF LOCAL ARTS INFRASTRUCTURE

The Ruf controversy caused growing concerns about the supervisory board's ability to govern the Stedelijk Museum with adequate transparency. On 2 November 2017, municipal council member Marcel van den Heuvel of liberal party D66 raised questions within the municipal executive board meeting about the Stedelijk's violation of agreements with the municipality.<sup>75</sup> As all parties in the municipal council expressed doubt on the independence of the two investigations already commissioned by the Stedelijk itself, the executive board requested the AKr Arts council to conduct yet another investigation into the Stedelijk.<sup>76</sup> Council members of the municipality have also suggested evaluating the museum's corporatization in 2006, and taking a closer look at the museum's dichotomous vision on whether to follow an 'avant-garde' or 'commercial' course.<sup>77</sup>

As part of their investigation into the Stedelijk, the AKr Arts council organised a public discussion on the future of the Stedelijk Museum on 10 December 2017, in collaboration with debate centre De Balie.<sup>78</sup> Felix Rottenberg, co-founder of De Balie and current chairman of the AKr, moderated the debate, and announced in his introduction that the AKr was planning to present their findings to the municipal council in March of 2018. The public discussion at De Balie was intended to give art professionals and the general public the opportunity to share their thoughts. The debate itself consisted of three small panels of local art institution executives and artists.

The first panel consisted of Annet Zondervan, director of CBK Zuidoost and curator Niels van Tomme, director of De Appel. CBK Zuidoost is an intercultural art centre with a modest collection and residency program in the Bijlmer neighbourhood, a high-rise Amsterdam enclave with inhabitants of over 130 nationalities. De Appel is a contemporary arts institute with an international reputation, which recently relocated from their premises in the city centre to the peripheral Broedplaats Lely in Amsterdam West after a crisis between the former director and executive board.<sup>79</sup>

Zondervan pleaded for an arts infrastructure with equal and mutually valued partnerships. She encouraged the Stedelijk to improve its relationship with the global perspectives of culturally diverse groups in both the city's centre and its periphery. Ideally, she would like to see a new institution in the Zuidoost district that situates itself as a flexible hull where other institutions such as the Amsterdam Museum, Stedelijk and Tropenmuseum, can realise periodical programming that connect to the specific location and context of Zuidoost, that is, a migration society with an Afro-Caribbean identity. Van Tomme proposed three focal points for a future Stedelijk,

75 The report is available at: [https://www.kunstraad.nl/user-files/uploads/2017/11/1307\\_17\\_schriftelijke\\_vragen\\_van\\_den\\_heuvel\\_schenking\\_en\\_verantwoording\\_van\\_kunstwerken\\_aan\\_stedelij.pdf](https://www.kunstraad.nl/user-files/uploads/2017/11/1307_17_schriftelijke_vragen_van_den_heuvel_schenking_en_verantwoording_van_kunstwerken_aan_stedelij.pdf) [Accessed 30 Dec. 2017]

76 Daan van Lent, *Gemeente laat Kunstraad derde onderzoek naar Stedelijk doen*, NRC Handelsblad, (2017, Nov. 2). Available at: <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2017/11/02/stedelijk-museum-amsterdam-derde-onderzoek-bij-het-stedelijk-van-de-kunstraad-naar-de-toekomst-13815046-a1579677> [Accessed 30 Dec. 2017]

77 One could argue that Ruf's curatorial direction—what the press has been frequently calling "avant-garde", but is in fact an interest in a young generation of artists—is actually more *commercial* because Ruf is so firmly embedded in the contemporary art market. Inversely, what the press calls the "commercial" direction—characterized by blockbuster shows, typically focusing on famous early-twentieth-century modern artists and attracting larger audiences, as was preferred by Van Gilst—are art-historically usually defined as the *avant-garde*. This confusion of terms doesn't help the museum's troubles with transparency, and shrouds the more complex aspects of the museum's mismanagement.

78 *De toekomst van het Stedelijk Museum in de stad en in de wereld* (The future of the Stedelijk Museum in the city and in the world) at De Balie, (2017, Dec. 10). Full video registration available at: <https://vimeo.com/246671414>

79 De Appel had to endure a managerial crisis in 2015/2016 following the dismissal of former director Lorenzo Benedetti over a conflicting vision with the institution's board, who foresaw a bigger and more commercial direction for De Appel's future. With the ensuing outrage of protests and petitions from the art community, the team of tutors at the De Appel's curatorial program (i.a. Charles Esche, Beatrix Ruf) demanded the board of De Appel to resign. After political disapproval of the situation, De Appel lost their funding from the *national culturele basisinfrastructuur* funding plan 2017-2020 and the board stepped down. With new director Niels van Tomme and a new board, De Appel left its spacious premises in the city centre's Prins Hendrikkade and relocated to the modest Broedplaats Lely in Amsterdam West in February 2017 to redevelop their institution.

Van Vlijmen Possibly, yes. It's Ammodo's intention to distribute investments as widely as possible, we're trying to diversify our portfolio of recipients.

Goltz A number of stakeholders in Oost encouraged us to have the space co-host other institutions, as to extend their own programming. It could potentially function as a shell for other institutions to take over temporarily.

Joo It's a good incentive for sponsors, as long as the institutions are professional.

Ruf Rijksakademie and Pakt already form a kind of Oost-hub here, which definitely could be enriched and extended.

Pethick Yeah, and there's also a couple of smaller artist-run spaces in the surrounding area as well.

formulated by his team, admittedly describing them as part of a “somewhat conservative model.” Firstly, the Stedelijk would have to actively continue and work on its canonization, rewriting and adjusting the canon’s past ideologies. Secondly, the Stedelijk would need to distinguish itself internationally by producing exhibitions that are specific to its context and location (the exhibition *Seth Siegelaub: Beyond Conceptual Art* in 2015-2016 is given as an example). Thirdly, keeping its collection central to the Stedelijk’s thinking would allow the museum to reflect on its own history, and give it the tools to translate that history into a renewed vision on today’s context and the contemporary city. Van Tomme contrasts this proposed model with the Stedelijk’s recent programming by Beatrix Ruf, which he likens to that of an internationally operating *Kunsthalle*. He also recognized the museum’s inability to “formulate an ethical and deontological code of conduct, after switching from an art system that is 100% sponsored by public money, to one that is partly publicly sponsored, and partly sponsored by private money.”<sup>80</sup>

Artist Jan Dibbets was invited to give a speech in between the panels. Dibbets, born in 1941, is an influential Dutch conceptual artist whose work represents an important part of the Dutch contemporary art canon. He was part of the seminal exhibition *Op Losse Schroeven* at the Stedelijk in 1969 and took part in documenta 5, 6 and 7 (1972/1977/1982). He was a member of the first supervisory board of the Stedelijk at the time of the museum’s corporatization in 2006. In his talk at De Balie, Dibbets criticised what was the beginning of the Stedelijk’s change in organisational structure, *Terug naar de top* (Back to the top), the 2003 report by the Sanders-committee, who advised the municipal executive board to appoint an ambition to reinstate the Stedelijk as part of an international museum league directly under the then world-top of MoMA, Tate Modern and Centre Pompidou.<sup>81</sup> Dibbets called the 2003 report “nothing but a nostalgic assertion that appeared pronounced, but which was no longer consistent with reality.”<sup>82</sup> Dibbets also questioned whether the Stedelijk is actually better off with its current organisational structure, that is, having a supervisory board without representatives of the municipal council.

Participants of a second panel were artists Barbara Visser (b. 1966) and Charl Landvreugd (b. 1971). Visser is a Dutch conceptual artist whose films, photography, performances and installations are part of various collections, amongst which the Stedelijk. Visser was director of the International Documentary Filmfestival Amsterdam (IDFA) in 2017 and former chairman of the *Akademie van Kunsten* [Society of Arts], part of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences. Landvreugd is a Dutch artist, curator and writer of Surinamese descent whose research deals

with visual strategies of Dutch Afro artists with a focus on the production of cultural citizenship. In conversation with moderator Rottenberg, Visser suggested that the Stedelijk has been overly demanding and had too many ambitions since reopening in 2012. Landvreugd acknowledged this point, and posed a way for the Stedelijk to return to core activities. By establishing relations with other art spaces and expertise (such as CBK Zuidoost), it would allow the Stedelijk to choose a more specific direction for itself while outsourcing more experimental presentations. On globalism and inclusiveness, Landvreugd said: “What most museums seem to forget is that global internationalism is also happening within our very own European borders (...) We will have to move collectively towards this internationalism.”<sup>83</sup> In case the Stedelijk does not want to be a part of this, an alternative proposed by Landvreugd would be for the Stedelijk to simply recognise its place in history and historicise itself explicitly as a cathedral of Modernism. In the third panel Meier Boersma of the entry-level Gallery Vriend van Bavink praised the Stedelijk’s recent programming, but expressed his worries on whether the museum still offers enough space for experimental presentations of young local artists. Xander Karskens, director of the Cobra Museum in Amstelveen, believed it should be of primary concern to the Stedelijk’s stakeholders that the museum does not turn into a consumption machine: “Is it about the visitor numbers, or is it about the art? And are the stakeholders prepared

80 As mentioned during the debate at De Balie.

81 Evaluatiecommissie Bouwproces Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, *Hang naar verstilling, Drang naar spektakel: Eindrapport Evaluatiecommissie Bouwproces* (2013, Nov. 8), p. 9.

82 As mentioned during the debate at De Balie. Dibbets goes on by saying: “600.000 visitors (...) is an absolutely absurd figure. No city in the world comparable in scale, or even twice the scale of Amsterdam, even approximates such figures for a museum that is primarily oriented towards contemporary art. Not Cologne, Düsseldorf, Frankfurt, Munich, Copenhagen, Hamburg, Brussel, Lyon, Barcelona, Turin, Milan and Rome, nor San Francisco, Houston, and Minneapolis or San Diego. Yet today, the Stedelijk does manage to achieve those 600.000 visitors, and yet everyone is disappointed, because when it reopened there were a million. Why time and again this pointless comparison with Tate Modern, Centre Pompidou and MoMA, with budgets twenty-five times as large as that of Stedelijk? Why would the Stedelijk aspire to compare itself with this league of museums?”

83 As mentioned during the debate at De Balie.

to give an ideologically motivated judgement on this?”<sup>84</sup> As all panellists have explained in their own ways, the museum policy of the Stedelijk under Ruf’s directorship might have been operating in an institutional vacuum, lacking an actively networked function within the city.

At the end of the debate, moderator Rottenberg turned directly to Stedelijk interim director Jan Willem Sieburgh, who was seated in the audience, and asked about the release status of the Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam (SMBA) research report. The SMBA was the museum’s off-site project space, founded in 1993 in an area with many other art galleries and functioned as a platform for up-and-coming artists. Its programming was highly appreciated for its experimental and engaging attitude, especially during the eight years the Stedelijk was closed for renovation. At the end of 2015, the Stedelijk announced the upcoming closure and repositioning of SMBA.<sup>85</sup> According to the Stedelijk annual report, the cultural landscape had “radically changed,” and the “physical and financial contexts of SMBA were due for review.”<sup>86</sup> It also stated that the Stedelijk “aims to provide an answer to what is currently lacking, and needed, in the city.” There was no mention of what this lack might be, nor any reflection on how the hasty closure of SMBA would affect the art infrastructure in the city. During the summer of 2016 a research team investigated opportunities to develop a new art institution as a successor to SMBA, the report of which has yet to be made public.

The undisclosed status of the SMBA report was referred to several times during the debate at De Balie, as it represents a key element in how the Stedelijk could reinvent itself in the near future. In response to Rottenberg’s question, Sieburgh declared: “I haven’t even read the report myself yet. (...) I have spoken to both Ammodo and the municipal council about the plans. At this time, Ammodo has put it on hold, but that doesn’t mean it’s all over. I am going to read the report carefully.” Rottenberg: “So the report will become publicly available in due time?” Sieburgh: “Very likely so. It is a public institution, after all.”<sup>87</sup>

The research partner Ammodo (the Italian word for *respectable* or *reputable*) is a funding institute that according to its website, “initiates, develops and supports projects in the visual arts, performing arts and sciences.”<sup>88</sup> Ammodo had already been financially supporting SMBA’s two final exhibitions, many exhibitions at the Stedelijk, and many other major cultural institutions in the Netherlands. Ammodo became active in 2011 when it announced that it would spend 15 million euros on culture—just before the Dutch government announced its austerity measures and cultural budget cuts—making it instantaneously one of the biggest charities for culture in the Netherlands.<sup>89</sup> The independent journalist platform *Follow the Money* has reported extensively on how Ammodo

was established using a dubiously accumulated capital of over 1 billion euros, through the sale of a profitable Rotterdam port workers’ pension fund.<sup>90</sup> Insurance firm Aegon bought the pension fund in 2007, bringing in 1.55 billion euros of profit for the independent foundation managing the pension fund’s capital. By discreetly changing the articles of association, this foundation was free to then distribute the money as it pleased. After protest and lawsuits by the port workers, the parties settled for over 500 million euros in 2010. This money was added to the workers pensions, slightly increasing their future retirement income. The remaining fortune of 1 billion euros would then become the Ammodo charities fund. In response to questions by *Follow the Money* journalists, the Stedelijk declared in 2014 that it adheres to the International Council of Museums’ (ICOM) guidelines, which does not allow unethical or unlawful action in relation to accepting private gifts.<sup>91</sup>

The closure of SMBA, though significant, did not stand on its own. In Amsterdam, NIMk (Netherlands Media Art Institute) and SKOR (Foundation Art and Public Space) were both

84 As mentioned during the debate at De Balie.

85 Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, *Stedelijk Museum is planning to reposition Stedelijk Bureau Amsterdam*, (2015, Dec. 15). Available at: <https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/news/stedelijk-museum-is-planning-to-reposition-stedelijk-bureau-amsterdam> [Accessed 7 Jan. 2018]

86 Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, *Annual Report 2016*, (2016, Jun. 6). Available at: [https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/production-static-stedelijk/images/\\_museum/Jaarverslagen/English/2016/Annual\\_report\\_SMA\\_2016\\_EN\\_upload06062017.pdf](https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/production-static-stedelijk/images/_museum/Jaarverslagen/English/2016/Annual_report_SMA_2016_EN_upload06062017.pdf) [Accessed 7 Jan. 2017]

87 As mentioned during the debate at De Balie.

88 Statement on: <https://www.ammodo.org/en/>

89 *Nieuw fonds geeft 15 miljoen aan cultuur*, De Volkskrant (2011, May 25) Available at: <https://www.volkskrant.nl/recensies/nieuw-fonds-geeft-15-miljoen-aan-cultuur~a2436979/> [Accessed 4 Dec. 2017]

90 Eric Smit, *Onfrisse filantropen*, (2014, May 5). Available at: <https://www.ftm.nl/artikelen/onfrisse-filantropen> [Accessed 4 Dec. 2017]

91 Eric Smit, *‘Besmet’ geld van cultuurfonds Ammodo: aannemen of niet?*, (2014, May 8). Available at: <https://www.ftm.nl/artikelen/besmet-geld-van-cultuurfonds-ammodo-aannemen-niet> [Accessed 4 Dec. 2017]

discontinued in 2012. SMART Project Space and De ServiceGarage closed its doors in 2013 and 2014, respectively. Nationally, the number of publicly funded art institutes decreased from nine to six immediately following the government's austerity measures in 2012.<sup>92</sup> At the same time, Rijksakademie and De Ateliers, the post-academic institutes in Amsterdam for artist-in-residence programs, lost most of their state subsidies. In 2015-2016, De Appel, in a managerial crisis, lost its entitlement to subsidies as well. Within this context SMBA's closure caused widespread condemnation in the local art scene, which saw it as a last bastion of project spaces. Its disappearance has been described as creating a definite gap between the smaller, often more precarious art spaces and the prestigious museums.<sup>93</sup> Mid-scale art spaces such as SMBA are essential to the diversification in the arts infrastructure and development of young artists' work.<sup>94</sup>

Absurdly, when announcing SMBA's repositioning at the end of 2015, Ruf claimed that emerging artists have enough opportunities to present their work in Amsterdam, while it is precisely the decline of these midscale art spaces that has made it increasingly difficult for young artists to show their work and to see that of their peers.<sup>95</sup> Contrary to their action in closing SMBA, Stedelijk's annual report of 2014 states that "the large number of activities realized in 2014 reflects the role of SMBA as a socially-engaged platform for contemporary art in Amsterdam and beyond (...) is still urgently needed in Amsterdam, despite the cultural cutbacks implemented in the visual arts sector in the previous year."<sup>96</sup> Moreover, in a mid-term evaluation of its municipal funding plan, exactly one year before SMBA's closure, the Stedelijk was still praised for the complementary programming of SMBA as "fuelling experiment and debate."<sup>97</sup> Thus it is still unclear why the satellite space was closed when nearly all evidence indicates its integral role to the local art community.

SMBA functioned as a semi-autonomous institution, funded through the *Kunstenplan* (Arts plan), the four-year municipal funding period for arts and culture as advised by the AKr Arts council. Back in 2004, the AKr's advice for the *Kunstenplan* 2005-2008 was to raise SMBA's budget from a previous €169,130 yearly to the newly requested €224,500. This acknowledged its relative autonomy in making the institute open and accessible to the public, while its relation with the Stedelijk would still provide the exhibiting artists a certain prestige.<sup>98</sup> The next *Kunstenplan* 2009-2012 also recognized SMBA's continued quality as a small and flexible organisation.<sup>99</sup> During the economic crisis, a preliminary report by the municipal executive board to the AKr for the *Kunstenplan* 2013-2016 declared its intent to terminate SMBA's separate funding and appoint all financial responsibility of the SMBA to the Stedelijk.<sup>100</sup>

92 Sacha Bronwasser, Anna van Leeuwen, *Expositieruimtes sluiten, maar fel protest blijft uit*, *De Volkskrant* (2016, Jun. 24) Available at: <https://www.volkskrant.nl/beeldende-kunst/expositieruimtes-sluiten-maar-fel-protest-blijft-uit~a4326462/> [Accessed 3 Dec. 2017]

93 For example: Vincent van Velsen, *Weerwoord #16 Schaduwen in de woestijn bij de sluiting van SMBA*, Platform BK, (2016, Jul. 8). Available at: <http://www.platformbk.nl/2016/07/ww16-schaduwen-in-de-woestijn-bij-de-sluiting-van-smba/> [Accessed 3 Dec. 2017]

94 Ibid.

95 The press release quotes Ruf saying: "When SMBA was launched over twenty years ago, emerging artists had few opportunities to present their work in Amsterdam. Now, that's no longer the case." See: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, *Stedelijk Museum is planning to reposition Stedelijk Bureau Amsterdam*, (2015, Dec. 15).

96 Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, *Annual Report 2014*. Available at: <http://www.stedelijk.nl/upload/Jaarverslagen/2014/Annual%20Report%20SMA%202014%20English.pdf> [Accessed 1 Dec. 2017]

97 Amsterdamse Kunstraad, *Adviezen Tussentijdse Evaluatie Kunstenplan 2013-2016*, (2015, Jul. 7) Available at: <https://www.kunstraad.nl/user-files/uploads/2015/07/adviezen-tussentijdse-evaluatie-kp-2013-2016.pdf> [Accessed 2 Dec. 2017]

98 Amsterdamse Kunstraad, *Adviezen ter voorbereiding van het Amsterdams Kunstenplan 2005 t/m 2008*, (2005, May 1). Available at: [https://www.kunstraad.nl/user-files/uploads/2017/05/AKR\\_2005\\_2008-geheel-advies.pdf](https://www.kunstraad.nl/user-files/uploads/2017/05/AKR_2005_2008-geheel-advies.pdf) [Accessed 3 Dec. 2017]

99 Amsterdamse Kunstraad, *Adviezen ter voorbereiding van het Amsterdams Kunstenplan 2009 t/m 2012*, (2008, Apr. 18). Available at: <https://www.kunstraad.nl/user-files/uploads/2008/04/Integrale-advies-kp2009-2012.pdf> [Accessed 3 Dec. 2017]

100 Gemeente Amsterdam, *'Voor de stad en de kunst' Hoofdlijnen kunst en cultuur 2013-2016*, (2011, Dec. 2). Available at: <http://decentrale.regelgeving.overheid.nl/cvdr/images/Amsterdam/i268405.pdf> [Accessed 3 Dec. 2017]

Van Vlijmen Some local infrastructure does sound like a good opportunity for investment.

Goltz A little further east, on Zeeburger-eiland, there are these three big concrete silos up for redevelopment.

Pethick I've seen them! This young curator I spoke to at an opening the other week showed me some pictures. It reminded me of the 1857 gallery in Oslo, even a bit like the SESC Pompéia by Lina Bo Bardi. Here, see?

Joo Quite spectacular!

Goltz Are you familiar with the Gasometer in Oberhausen? That one is much, much bigger of course, but these silos might have a similar potential.



With this measure, SMBA lost its former autonomous position and became effectively a part of the Stedelijk's overall programming, putting additional pressure on its budget expenditure. For the *Kunstenplan* 2013-2016, the Stedelijk filed a funding application of €15,589,122, of which the AKr Arts council made available a much smaller budget of €11,639,400, leaving a yearly gap of 4 million euros.<sup>101</sup> In a critical response to the application, the AKr blamed the Stedelijk for not taking account of the city council's ruling to cut back on all cultural organisations as part of general austerity measures. On average, the major cultural institutions in Amsterdam (such as the Amsterdam Museum, the Dutch National Opera & Ballet and Stadsschouwburg theater) needed to cut their spending by around 13%.<sup>102</sup> However, for unspecified reasons the Stedelijk budget instead asked for 3 million euros more than it received from the previous plan—increasing their budget by about 15%, something the arts council thought of as inexcusable. The Stedelijk budget deficit brought necessary reconsideration of the museum's financials. In October 2012 the Stedelijk announced that 28 staff employees would lose their jobs.<sup>103</sup> It also had its effects on SMBA later that year, as the annual report states: "Starting 1 May 2013, SMBA was forced to close for an extra day and, for the first time ever, the space had no other option than to close its doors during the summer, at the height of the tourist season. This had an impact on visitor numbers."<sup>104</sup> Three years later, on 1 July 2016, the Stedelijk closed SMBA's doors at the Rozenstraat premises entirely.

Two weeks before its closing, SMBA hosted a public debate organised by Dutch art journal *Kunstlicht* to discuss the discontinuation of SMBA in its current form. A panel of academics, artists and curators were particularly critical of the Stedelijk's unclear and abrupt decision to evaluate SMBA's operations. Many attendants felt disenfranchised, as it was only unilaterally decided that it was necessary to seek a new function for SMBA, in a new space.<sup>105</sup> To first close down the space and only consider its possible continuation afterwards seemed untimely.<sup>106</sup> Another issue raised was that ever since the Stedelijk cancelled the premises' rent, the property owner had already raised the (relatively low) rent of € 15,000 yearly to roughly € 50,000. As such, rather than considering any options of transferring the rental contract to another party, the Stedelijk was instead contributing to an already increasingly unaffordable and exclusive city center. Concerns were also expressed about moving the museum's project space to a peripheral part of the city, such as Amsterdam Zuidoost or Noord, which would go hand in hand with political motives of upgrading these areas and triggering harmful processes of gentrification. Several of the Stedelijk's curators attending the debate propagated bigger (but

unexplained) ambitions, using fewer funds, which were deemed by both the panel and the public as delusional. What the successor of SMBA might actually look like, and how it would differentiate from its earlier form, remained completely unclear.

Later that week, the Stedelijk organised a public presentation on the repositioning of SMBA (excitingly dubbed a "kick-off"). The museum had already announced a research period for developing a structure and form of the new art institute, for which it teamed up with 'funding partner' Ammodo.<sup>107</sup> International curators

101 The Stedelijk requested the largest sum of all the major municipal cultural institutes in Amsterdam and as such its budget was also cut most, relative to the other filed applications. See: Gemeente Amsterdam, *Kunstenplan 2013-2016*, 'De stad en de kunst', (2012, Nov. 8). Available at: [https://www.amsterdam.nl/publish/pages/471812/dmo\\_kunstenplan\\_2013-2016\\_25juli2013\\_v2.pdf](https://www.amsterdam.nl/publish/pages/471812/dmo_kunstenplan_2013-2016_25juli2013_v2.pdf) [Accessed 12 Dec. 2017]

102 Harmen Bockma, *Harde kritiek Amsterdamse Kunstraad op Stedelijk Museum*, *De Volkskrant* (2012, May 8). Available at: <https://www.volkskrant.nl/beeldende-kunst/harde-kritiek-amsterdamse-kunstraad-op-stedelijk-museum~a3252445/> [Accessed 2 Dec. 2017]

103 Rutger Pontzen, *Stedelijk Museum focust op fondsenwerving*, *De Volkskrant*, (2012, Dec. 11). Available at: <https://www.volkskrant.nl/archief/stedelijk-museum-focust-op-fondsenwerving~a3361369/> [Accessed 3 Jan. 2018]

104 Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, *Annual Report 2013*. Available at: <http://www.stedelijk.nl/upload/over-het-stedelijk/jaarverslag/jaarverslag-eng/Stedelijk%20Museum%20Amsterdam%20Annual%20Report%202013.pdf> [Accessed 3 Dec. 2017]

105 Rune Peitersen, *De noodzaak van Transparantie*, Platform BK (2016, Jun. 22) Available at: <http://www.platformbk.nl/2016/06/de-noodzaak-van-transparantie/> [Accessed 3 Dec. 2017]

106 Sanneke Huisman, 'Er is geen consensus' – *Debat over sluiting SMBA (deel 1)*, *Metropolis M* (2016, Jun. 18). Available at: [http://www.metropolism.com/nl/reviews/24161\\_er\\_is\\_geen\\_consensus](http://www.metropolism.com/nl/reviews/24161_er_is_geen_consensus) [Accessed 3 Dec. 2017]

107 Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, *Research new art venue*, (2016, May 19). Available at: <http://www.stedelijk.nl/en/press-releases/research-new-art-venue> [Accessed 4 Dec. 2017]

Goltz The island is a former military terrain and water purification plant. The silos are the only remaining landmarks.

Pethick Interesting! Reappropriating industrial culture has always been successful in Amsterdam.

Joo Like with the Westergas area, right?

Van Vlijmen It's just the type of thing we've been interested in.

Sophie Goltz, Eungie Joo and Emily Pethick, were appointed to lead a work group conducting a survey with local art professionals. In her opening words, director Beatrix Ruf said that the Stedelijk made the choice “to seriously invest in the satellite institution.”<sup>108</sup> In line with the previously mentioned “bigger ambitions”, the closing of SMBA was now framed as an investment, rather than succumbing to budgeting problems or out of artistic urgency. To what extent this investment is an artistic, economic, or political one, remains to be clarified. In contrast to her statement six months earlier, Ruf now unexpectedly claimed that the Stedelijk is “not blind to the shortage of studio space, presentation locations and development centers.”<sup>109</sup>

The need for a diverse arts infrastructure was precisely the topic of a first panel discussion at the public presentation, for which the Stedelijk invited staff members from a range of smaller and midscale institutes (P/////AKT, Tolhuistuin, Stichting NDSM-werf, W139, CBK Zuidoost, Framer Framed, TAAK) to discuss the field's status quo. The panel questioned which parties were actually supposed to take up responsibility for the city's wider ecology of art institutes. Was it the Stedelijk, as largest recipient of public funds, or the more flexible, smaller institutes themselves? It was also suggested that the research results could potentially open up the possibility for a new institution that functions outside of the policies and operations of the Stedelijk.<sup>110</sup> This was also hinted at in the research announcement, as the team would “consider the legitimacy of a new institution”. However, a review of the event by Dutch art journal *Metropolis M* quotes Stedelijk senior curator Martijn van Nieuwenhuyzen saying that the museum will be using a two-track policy in the future, whereby the programming of both the museum and the new venue will be “complementary and overlapping”.<sup>111</sup>

Curiously, a preparatory advice for the latest *Kunstenplan 2017-2020* was published by the AKr Arts council just earlier that week, stating that the Stedelijk declared to have incorporated the functions of SMBA into its own museum programming<sup>112</sup>, as well as to explore possibilities for not one but two new annex spaces, focusing on contemporary arts and design, respectively.<sup>113</sup> Apparently, the Stedelijk had already formulated their assumptions of the city's needs before even commencing with their research. The museum staff persistently avoided answering any of the questions related these two new spaces mentioned in the *Kunstenplan 2017-2020*. With no information on why the Stedelijk developed their aspirations on a new institution or how they plan to accomplish them, and without a clear analysis of SMBA's shortcomings on the table, it seems nearly impossible to have a productive discussion. Rather than involving the public in situating urgent issues within the local art field, the event was mainly used to construct the *impression* of engagement.

According to the Stedelijk annual report of 2016, the research team (Goltz, Joo, and Pethick, together with Stedelijk chief curator Bart van der Heide, senior curator Martijn van Nieuwenhuyzen and programme manager Milou van Vlijmen of Ammodo) spent the summer consulting other art institutes and field representatives in Amsterdam, followed by three closed but “diversely attended” workshops with professionals from the Dutch cultural sector.<sup>114</sup> Although the Stedelijk originally intended to publish the research recommendations by the end of 2016 and announce the new venue’s location in 2017, so far nothing has been made public about the status of their research ever since its “kick-off”. In an open letter to the Stedelijk published in September 2017, Joram Kraaijeveld, former assistant curator of SMBA and content director of artists interest group *Platform BK*, reminded Ruf of her promise and pointed out that should the Stedelijk wait any longer with publishing its results, the research done might already lose its relevance as the conditions and infrastructure of the art field are constantly subject to change.<sup>115</sup>

108 Opening speech Beatrix Ruf, *SMBA & Beyond: Public Kick-Off* (2016, June 21). Available at: <https://journal.stedelijk.nl/en/speech-beatrix-ruf/> [Accessed 2 Dec. 2017]

109 Ibid.

110 Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, video recording of *SMBA & Beyond* (2016, June 19). Available at: <https://vimeo.com/172866648> [Accessed 3 Dec. 2017]

111 Alix de Massiac, *De dag die je wist dat zou komen – Debat over sluiting SMBA (deel 2)*, *Metropolis M* (2016, Jun. 24). Available at: [http://www.metropolism.com/nl/reviews/24166\\_de\\_dag\\_die\\_je\\_wist\\_dat\\_zou\\_komen](http://www.metropolism.com/nl/reviews/24166_de_dag_die_je_wist_dat_zou_komen) [Accessed 3 Dec. 2017]

112 SMBA’s *Global Collaborations* program and *Project 1975* possibly served as inspirations for the migration-themed show *I am a native foreigner*, which opened at the Stedelijk in September 2017, although SMBA’s extensive research is not actively reflected upon in the show.

113 Amsterdamse Kunstraad, *‘Zo mooi anders’ Advies ter voorbereiding van het Amsterdamse Kunstenplan 2017-2020*, (2016, Jun. 15). Available at: [https://www.kunstraad.nl/user-files/uploads/2017/03/AKr\\_Advies-A-Bis\\_Kunstenplan-2017-2020.compressed.pdf](https://www.kunstraad.nl/user-files/uploads/2017/03/AKr_Advies-A-Bis_Kunstenplan-2017-2020.compressed.pdf) [Accessed 3 Dec. 2017]

114 Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, *Annual Report 2016*, (2016, Jun. 6). Available at: [https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/production-static-stedelijk/images/\\_museum/Jaarverslagen/English/2016/Annual\\_report\\_SMA\\_2016\\_EN\\_upload06062017.pdf](https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/production-static-stedelijk/images/_museum/Jaarverslagen/English/2016/Annual_report_SMA_2016_EN_upload06062017.pdf) [Accessed 7 Jan. 2017]

115 Joram Kraaijeveld, *Open brief aan het Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam*, *Platform BK* (2017, Sep. 11). Available at: <http://www.platformbk.nl/2017/09/open-brief-aan-het-stedelijk-museum-amsterdam/> [Accessed 3 Dec. 2017]

Joo It definitely sounds like a great opportunity to show installations on a larger scale, think Tate's Turbine Hall.

Van Vlijmen How are the demographics?

Pethick It's east of Zeeburg, connecting the Indische Buurt to IJburg, which range from the city's poorest to the relatively wealthy. This condition is quite rare within Amsterdam. The city is planning high-rise construction for the area.

Van Vlijmen What other city areas are on your agenda?

Joo So, we still have... the Houthavens, north of Westerpark, which is one big construction site with new apartment tower blocks rising everyday. In Noord there is the NDSM wharf, its warehouse events flock great amounts of people. <sup>28</sup>

Pethick South of the Amstel station is the Bijlmerbajes prison complex, which was permanently closed just three months ago. The site goes on sale later this year, and will be turned into a completely new residential area of the city.

Joo It'll bridge the city with the Bijlmer neighborhood in the southeast.

Van Vlijmen Very promising!

Pethick There's also the Hembrug site? It's a former industrial and military complex bordering Westpoort and Zaandam, not too far north from Sloterdijk.

Joo It's still untouched as of yet, but it'll go on sale next year as well. In regards to Westpoort, the city is preparing construction for a new residential area the size of Haarlem there.

The extent to which private sponsors, whether banks, wealthy collectors, or charitable institutions such as Ammodo gain control over the policy-making of the public museum and the culture sector as a whole for their own political-economic interests needs to be called into question. This is a question of what it means for an institution to be considered *public*. In the case of the Stedelijk, this should be seen as a shared responsibility of its supervisory board and museum staff, the city's municipal executive board, the AKr Arts council, the arts community and the general public, as all are equally entitled to access and shape publicly owned culture. The future directorship of the Stedelijk must therefore consider the complicated task of bringing together what is best for art with what is best for the *public* status of the museum.

According to the statement of interim director Sieburgh in De Balie on 10 December 2017 (see page 22), the Stedelijk has virtually lost control over the development and continuation of its own satellite space, effectively being kept hostage by its sponsor (again). Given still clouded motivation for closing SMBA, it is ambiguous to what extent the Stedelijk and its directorate have been sovereign in developing the ambitions for its successor. With regards to the establishment of a new public arts institution in Amsterdam it is of great importance to be critical of all developments that are not in the utmost favour of the public—especially considering the prestige that comes with the (re)development of real estate, which is currently rampant in the city's peripheral zones. As the principal financier of the Stedelijk, the municipality must be held responsible in preventing its public assets from being compromised by private parties.

In order for the public art museum to maintain its position as a relevant partaker in society and an agent of social inclusion, it must be confronted with the socioeconomic conditions underlying today's public institutions as a whole, and must allow itself to act reflexively upon the premises of these conditions, in full disclosure. As such, questions about the origin of donations and the moral legitimacy of funds should be central to public institutions, as they reflect the moral legitimacy of society at large.

In the culture of money and global capitalism that has become the dominant ideology of our daily reality, public institutions can be the places where people share and cherish those aspects of culture that bind them, opposing those places that alienate people from each other. Pending the three investigations into the Stedelijk—its governance and ethical code, the legal legitimacy of the directorate's financial relations with private parties, and the effects of corporatization—we can only hope that the city's diverse communities will find common ground and join forces to counter the institutionalised privatization by corporations and wealthy individuals within the rest of public society.

Timo Demollin  
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