

## **Summary: Media Culture: Media Literacy through Contemporary Art | Emiel Heijnen**

*International Conference on the Arts in Society, Venice, 2009*

**Stream:** *Teaching and Learning the Arts*

**Presentation Type:** *30 minute Paper Presentation in English*

The partners in the project MediaCulture advocate an artistic approach to media education and media literacy. Contemporary art is not only often made WITH new media, it also often REFLECTS on the role that media play in today's society. By analyzing, making and discussing media art, children learn about the complexity and opportunities of today's 'medialised' society in an attractive and challenging way.

In this project seven Dutch media/art institutes work together with three Academies of Fine Art, dept. of Art Education. Together they develop artistic media literacy lessons for secondary schools, which will be available via the website [mediacultuur.net](http://mediacultuur.net) in November 2009. This approach of media literacy is unique because of the mixture of artistic and instrumental goals, and also because of the use of collections of media/art institutes as sources for media education. The learning effects of Project MediaCulture amongst teenagers are currently being researched by the University of Amsterdam and The Amsterdam School of the Arts.

Partners in the Project MediaCulture are:

Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, Museum of Communication, V2, Dutch Institute of Image and Sound, Montevideo/Time base Arts, Museum of Photography and Waag Society.

Academies: Amsterdam School of the Arts, ArtEZ Arnhem and Willem de Kooning Academy Rotterdam.

# **Media Culture: Media Literacy through Contemporary Art**

Emiel Heijnen, Amsterdam School of the Arts

Talk at the *International Conference on the Arts in Society, Venice, 30 July 2009*

1. Opening slide: My presentation is about the connection between art education and media-education, and the project Media Culture that I initiated in which these two fields are combined.
2. Presentation overview: The presentation consists of three parts:
  - historical sketch of the developments in media and art education;
  - framework of project MediaCulture;
  - 7 'media literate' themes in art as used in project MediaCulture
3. Media use their own language formed by a combination of images, sound and texts. The medium is never neutral, it intervenes and provides us with selective versions of the world. It uses it's own symbolic language. The teaching and learning of this symbolic language is called media education. The outcome of that process is called media literacy or

media wisdom, as they call it in the Netherlands.

4. The history of Media education is comparable in many countries. Media-education is often seen as means to redeem children of the bad influences of mass media.

Starting in the 1930s media education had merely a cultural defensive approach: Youngsters had to be taught that the mass media were shallow and cheap and that the only cultural products that really mattered were to be found in the high arts. In later times media-studies became popular and media education became either *politically defensive*: the public had to learn that the mass media contained ideologies of dominant groups in society – or *morally defensive*: mass media had a bad influence on our behavior, especially when it concerned sex, consumerism and violence. In some of today's media education initiatives you still can see this defensive approach towards media-education. Research has shown that these defensive forces develop every time a new medium is introduced. In that sense there is no great difference between the introduction of the first book in print and the introduction of the public Internet.

5. Traditional media education is mostly based on *deconstruction*. Learning takes place by looking at and analyzing media images. In the education system media education mainly dealt with mainly in Social Studies or Languages.

Audiovisual education has developed in parallel with media education. It is a type of art education that revolves around the *construction* of media: students create works of their own, mainly using photographic, video or film equipment as image tools. In the education system audiovisual education is usually found among Art subjects.

6. Since the 1990s one can see a new development in media education: Media education is being acknowledged as an increasingly important area, as media is increasingly taken for granted as part of society.

- The protectionist approach to media education is now regarded as outdated for the pro-active 'zap generation' (viewers moreover turn out not to be passive, unwitting victims, and good taste is not imposed from above);

- Creative media *construction* is regarded as an important tool, alongside media *deconstruction*, to provide people with insight into how media work.

- Media education in the 21st century is not only for young people but for everyone, and asks for a much more reflexive way of teaching in which teachers pose questions instead of issuing warnings.

This new approach seems to call for a new name, not only on the subject area but on the desired learning outcomes.

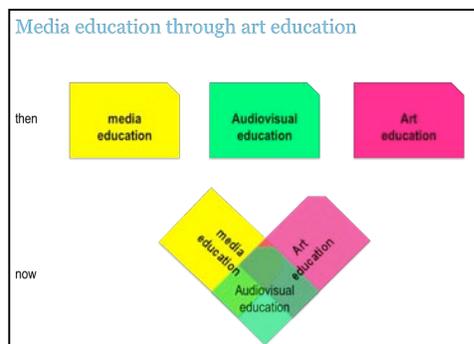
Thus the term *Medienkompetenz* (media skills) has found favour in Germany, along with 'media literacy' in many Anglo-Saxon countries. In the Netherlands this has resulted in the introduction of the term 'media wisdom' (mediawi-

jsheid), which is defined as *'the set of knowledge, skills and mentality that enables people to operate consciously, critically and actively in a complex, changeable and fundamentally medialized world'*

7. There have been developments in the visual arts and art education in relationship to media education:

*Media as an artistic tool.* New media are playing an increasing role in today's visual arts and design (as a tool). Visual artists and designers nowadays regard digital and audiovisual media as a standard part of their toolkit. Art teachers wishing to keep their subject up-to-date will incorporate 'new' media such as photography, video and ICT in their teaching. This development is increasingly transforming the old art rooms into 'media studios', the ideal place for students to gain experience in the process of creating media products, from idea to end-result.

8. *Art as a platform for media reflection:* Art and culture have traditionally reflected trends in society, often in the form of a critical commentary, and this has not changed with the advent and influence of the mass media. Not only do contemporary artists and designers make intensive use of new media technologies, they also reflect on them a good deal in their work. Art historian Maartje van den Heuvel describes a trend for art to mirror visual culture: *'It is mainly photographers, film makers and video artists who have actually been reflecting on the use of image in the media in recent decades – not by writing about it but by creating their own images.'* A good way for teachers to let their students reflect on both the form and meaning of media is by looking at and analysing the present-day work of artists and image makers. As the works of these artists are seldom unambiguous, students are encouraged to look critically, reflect and debate with one another.



9. The trends I discussed boil down to the fact that new ideas on media education seem to be enlarging the common ground between media education and art education. The area of 'audiovisual education' functions as cement: both contemporary art educators as media educators use more and more audiovisual media to construct images, sounds and texts. From this perspective I initiated the project MediaCulture.

10. The educational project Media Culture wants to contribute to the media literacy of Dutch secondary school students by developing lessons in which contemporary (media) art is thematically analyzed, produced and discussed. To reach this goal a collaboration is set up between educational departments of art academies, prominent dutch art & media institutes and secondary schools around the country. The project has a layered structure with multiple targets.

**The first target** is the upcoming generation of art teachers. When you want to combine media literacy with art education, then teachers should be trained in how to deal with this concept. Dutch bachelor students are reasonably well trained in the production of their own artistic media, but often don't know how to transfer these skills to their teaching practice. A lot of these student create cutting edge media productions, but tend to fall back on traditional concepts and materials when stepping into the role of the teacher. In MediaCulture these students take a course 'pedagogy of MediaCulture' in their third year. As a final test they design a thematic series of lessons that are based on contemporary art and innovative teaching strategies.

**The second** targets are Dutch secondary school art teachers. A lot of these teachers want to integrate media literacy in their art lessons, but face the same problems as the student teachers. Some of them find it extra difficult, because they feel they lack the practical media skills of younger generations. During MediaCulture a selection of teachers execute the lessons that are designed by the bachelor students. In that way the teachers can train themselves and at the same time put the lessons to the test. After this test period, the best series of lessons are edited, and published on a national website for Dutch art teachers.

**The third** target in MediaCulture are secondary school students (they really are the main target of course!). These pupils enjoy lessons that consist of the following elements:

11. A Media Culture lesson series consist of the following learning activities:

**Reception:** viewing 'media literate' art

- Art that reflects on media in society
- Art that is made with new media

**Production:** making 'media literate' art

- Mediatheme as content of a production
- New Media as artistic tool
- New media as searching tool
- New media as presentation tool

**Reflection:**

- Reflection upon your own work and that of peers
- Reflection upon the work of media professionals and artists

12 partners in Media Culture:

### Art & media institutes

- Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam
- V2\_Institute for the Unstable Media
- Netherlands Media Art Institute (Montevideo/Time Based Arts)
- Dutch Fotomuseum
- Institute for Image & Sound
- Museum for Communication
- Graphic Design Museum

Select relevant media literate art works from their collection to be used in the MediaCulture lessons

### Academies of fine art in education

- Amsterdam School of the Arts
- ArtEZ Institute of the Arts (Arnhem, Zwolle)
- Willem de Kooning Academy (Rotterdam)
- Utrecht School of the Arts

Offer courses 'didactics of Media Culture' in their bachelor curriculum.

### Research partners

- University of Amsterdam
- Researchgroup arts education, Amsterdam School of the Arts
- University of Groningen

Research the results of the project Amongst partners, teachers and Secondary school students.

### 13 The future of Media Culture?

- *Didactics in MediaCulture* is a regular part of the curriculum of Dutch bachelor academies of fine art in education
- More (international) institutes of media & art participate
- Broad international debate about the concept of MediaCulture through scientific research.

### 14 7 'media literate' themes in art.

These themes are defined by a panel of experts, as part of the project MediaCulture. The themes are used to select and 'tag' artworks from the collections of the participating art & media institutes. They offer the designers and users of MediaCulture lessons the possibility to work within a themes that link contemporary developments in societies with developments in contemporary art & design.



**Media & Interculturality** The image of countries and cultures is highly defined by the media and influences locals and foreigners. In addition subcultures and communities emerge and disappear in high speed. Does globalisation make our world smaller, or does it alienate us from each other?

Example: Renzo Martens – *Enjoy Poverty*, 2008



**Media & Body** In what way do media influence our ideal of beauty? The representation of woman and men in the media is subject to trends. If everything and everyone can be made beautiful with Photoshop, what meaning does the word beauty hold? How relevant is our physical appearance?

Example: Anonymous (Adbusters) – Guerilla art on posters of pop singers, London Tube 2009



**Media & Identity** We build identities online. We present ourselves in networks or play a role in games on the web. We have different identities: on a homepage, in Facebook, on Second Life, in World of Warcraft or Everquest? What is the relationship between our offline and online identities? What is the role of MSN, SMS in the ‘always accessible culture?’

Example: Robbie Cooper - Alter Ego, 2007



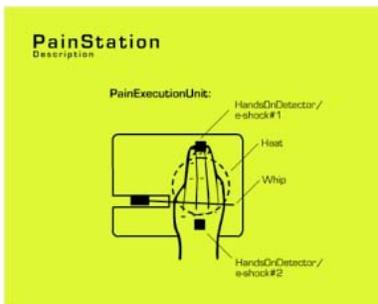
**Media & Privacy** None of your footsteps are the web is anonymous. Google knows everything about you. Even in public spaces it’s often hard to remain unnoticed: security camera’s are everywhere, people are traced and tracked with FRID-chips for instance. Iris scans and facial recognition open doors or keep them shut. Do we live in a society of control?

Example: Ed van der Elsken – Couple making love, Edam, 1970



**Media & Hypes** Media are an important source of our daily conversations. Trends and hypes come and go rapidly. How do industrials and politicians use the media to deliver their messages? New media seem to offer us more freedom and choice, but who determines what is new, special, beautiful or right?

Example: Copper Greene – iRaq, 10.000 volts in your pocket, guilty or innocent, 2007



**Media & Playing** New media offer us new forms of entertainment. Dreams become true. Computer games have become a dominant part of our culture. There are more gamers than movie spectators in the world. Are serious games the educational tools of the future, or should we beware of the society of the spectacle?

Example: Volker Morawe en Tilman Reiff - Pain Station, 2001



**Media & The Medium** Media technology is ever changing and influences our behaviour and sense of aesthetics. Artists and designers do plenty of experiments with new media. In the mean time the traditional role of producer

and consumer is turned upside down: prosumers mix sounds, texts and images into new forms. Who is the author, and who gets paid? What are original or unique concepts still worth of?

*Example: Oliver Laric - Versions, 2009*

- End of the presentation -