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The Feeling of Being Oneself

Blockmans, W.P.; Blockmans W.P., Janse A.

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The Feeling of Being Oneself

WIM BLOCKMANS

This volume is based on the premise that human communication has real and symbolic dimensions that constantly complement one another. People philosophize about their place in society and try to give some meaning to it. This leads to approval and justification of a position of authority or dreams of a better, or even ideal, world¹ — depending on the particular situation. Social hierarchies, which are to be found in all communities, are, of course, not permanent. In the course of time they are influenced by general economic, social and political evolution and take on other forms. Certain groups may win or lose their wealth, influence or standing, this may have dramatic consequences for some individuals, while others may see it as their chance for social advancement. The more dynamic a society, the more opportunities it offers to redefine the position of a category, a group or a person. This can result in tensions between groups and individuals who undergo a loss of status and those who rise. These processes take place in an emotionally-charged atmosphere, for they touch the deepest feelings of self-respect. The upwardly-mobile try to achieve the high position which they so passionately desire, while those on the way down cling to what they believe is their inalienable right. Moreover, the processes of social mobility may not occur simultaneously in all directions, although people assume that prestige will be acquired and lost together with material riches and power.² Rival groups and individuals encounter one another and show the need for a most powerful expression of their ambitions.

¹ H. Pleij *Dromen van Cognac* (Amsterdam 1997) 373-430, 470 2

² For a general appreciation of these processes from a social historian's viewpoint, see R. Mousnier *Les hiérarchies sociales depuis 1450 à nos jours* (Paris 1969)

This very aspiration to standing, to the recognition by the community of high position, demands a continual display of superiority. To maintain status, however, a subtle variety in forms of expression is required. For this reason, the study of social relations should not be limited to the so-called objective criteria — wealth and the exercise of power — that determine a person's status. More subjective sources, some of which belong in the fields of art and literature, are necessary to the study of social status. After all, at any one time, people use a number of codes to express their position in relation to others. It is the task of the researcher to recognize and translate the language of symbols used and implicitly understood by contemporaries in particular contexts.

In addition to practical actions (I buy bread), everybody performs acts where the symbolic quality is consciously felt to be greater than the material (I put on a red hat). But whether or not we are aware of it, every act has a symbolic meaning. Even the purchase of our daily bread marks a social distinction because white bread is more refined and expensive than brown. In everyday life, clothes have a differentiating effect through the price of the materials, the quality of the cloth and the originality of the design — something which drove late medieval governments to issue regulations dealing with the permitted number of pearls and rings, embroidery and fur linings, and the plunge of a neckline.³

Our learned disciplines were organized in accordance with the different codes by which a society lived. Specialists in literature, architecture, painting, costume history, etc. are much keener on identifying and decoding the global meaning of the message than on fully understanding it. However, the actions of the people we are trying to understand often straddle a real world and diverse fictional worlds, material and immaterial. This volume assumes that it is only through linking all these forms of expression that their meaning can be fully revealed. Consequently we have endeavoured to:

1. consider systematically the symbolic significance of human actions;
2. study diverse media in their primary social context;
3. verify which of the social distinctions felt were expressed symbolically;
and:
4. clarify the relationship between 'fictional' representations of social relations and those expressed in 'non-fictional' sources.

³ Ch. de la Roncière, 'La vie privée des notables toscans à la veille de la renaissance', in: Ph. Ariès & G. Duby (eds.), *Histoire de la vie privée*, vol. 2 (Paris 1985) 262; see also the article by Van Uytven, further in this volume.

This last question contains the implicit concept that fictional sources express coherent views on social positions. How should we interpret these sources? First, we must take into account their original functions within the environment of primary reception. Only then will we be able to look at them as our informants with regard to the expression of emotions, values and perceptions. More specifically, did the shifting and affirmation of norms for specific, social categories or problems take place through artistic means, not directly concerned with reality? Did fiction provide a functional alternative to real social tensions?

The collaboration of specialists in diverse aspects of medieval social history, literary history and art history, has enabled us to bring together diverse perspectives on social reality via the different facets through which contemporaries experienced them. General, social and legal historians have much to gain from this exchange of data, and especially of ways of thinking, because it gives them a greater insight into the awareness of social differences. The student of literary and visual works will find the precise statement of social categories from the legal and administrative sources very helpful. A number of contributors have ventured into questions and even into the source material of an adjacent discipline.

This interest in the role of works of art in their social context is what brings all the subdisciplines together. Form and content of the work of art are examined in the light of their significance to particular target groups. The distinctive terms art, artwork, and artist were not yet used in the Low Countries of the fourteenth to early sixteenth centuries, the period and region with which most of these contributions deal. There was as yet no distinction made, in the institutional sense, between crafts, decorative crafts and art,⁴ nor did the accounts of the princes' courts provide sections for expenditures which we would call artistic or symbolic. The function of the product, therefore, will have to be the decisive criterion in ascertaining the value and role it fulfilled for specific groups, and what the content of the symbolic communication that passed through that medium was.

⁴ M P J Martens, *Artistic Patronage in Bruges Institutions ca 1440-1482* (diss. Univ. California 1992), W. Blockmans, 'The Creative Environment: Incentives to and Functions of Bruges Art Production', in M W Ainsworth (ed.), *Petrus Christus in Renaissance Bruges: An Interdisciplinary Approach* (New York/Turnhout 1995) 11-20, on the professionalization of artistic production; B. Kempers, *Kunst, macht en mecenaat: Het beroep van schilder in sociale verhoudingen 1250-1600* (Amsterdam 1987) 184-7, 231-47, 341-3.

Predecessors and Developments

The terrain onto which we have ventured has been explored from different directions by others. A recent special issue of the *Annales* on literature and history showed how one of Molière's comedies, which presented a peasant's behaviour as ridiculous, could transmit a message in a performance before the court of Versailles that was very different to the message carried to a bourgeois audience in Paris.

Un personnage qui parle des modes de construction de l'identité, de l'impossible changement de condition, des mécanismes qui règlent le classement social [...] En ce second XVII^e siècle, la mobilité d'un état à l'autre est le plus souvent pensée comme un désordre qui bouscule les hiérarchies naturelles, qui brouille les relations établies, qui menace l'ordre politique lui-même.⁵

Such a statement about 1668 can help us to avoid drawing incautious conclusions from medieval studies on changes in norms. On the literary-historical side changes in literary fashion are now explicitly linked to social changes.⁶ The French cultural historian, Robert Muchembled, has recently stressed the importance of studying emotions on the basis of expressive sources such as court registers, literature and pictures. Several publications have carried on his line of thinking.⁷ Several workshops have recently been devoted to the transdisciplinary study of social behaviour and material life. Referring to the *Lancelot* of Chrétien de Troyes, Anita Guerreau-Jalabert has remarked that in literature — as in a harmless experimental field — changes in the system of values precede those of society. In her view, the romance discussed fundamentally the Church's norms and values, and a positive recognition of physical beauty, sexual love in and outside marriage and female superiority became central themes. Unrestrained chivalric

⁵ Roger Chartier, 'George Dandin, ou le social en représentation', *Annales Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 49/2 (1994) 277-309, quotations on 305 and 309

⁶ D Régner-Bohler (ed.), *Splendeurs de la cour de Bourgogne Récits et chroniques* (Paris 1995) xxiii-xxix

⁷ Robert Muchembled, *L'invention de l'homme moderne. Sensibilités en France du XVIII^e siècle* (Paris 1994²) i-xxiii, S Dauchy (ed.), *L'historien face aux sources juridiques* (Iuris scripta historica VII) (Brussels 1994), Marc Boone, 'Sources juridiques, sources littéraires reflets de la vie politique et sociale dans le comté de Flandre à l'époque bourguignonne', in E Rassart-Eeckhout et al (eds), *La vie matérielle au Moyen Âge L'apport des sources littéraires, normatives et de la pratique* (Louvain-la-Neuve/Turnhout 1997) 11-28

action had to yield to social stability represented by the ties of matrimony.⁸ A group of American historians and historians of literature explored the ‘intersections’ of their disciplines with regard to fifteenth-century England. They put an emphasis on the practices cutting across the realms of the symbolic and the economic. Any antagonism between historical ‘evidence’ and ‘value-laden interpretations’ in literary texts is refuted on the basis that ‘experience is itself produced only within structure.’⁹

Similar analyses of theatrical works are not unknown in Dutch medieval studies.¹⁰ The collective, public nature of the performances give these works a potentially wider social reach than written texts, quite apart from the limitations imposed by the necessity for reading skills. It is possible, therefore, to see theatrical productions as the most suitable source for the observation of widely-shared social opinions. It is still essential, however, not to accept the opinions expressed there as being universal. We need independent sources to establish to what extent situations found in literature were also found in real life, how frequently that was the case, and how the statement of the fictional situation lies in relation to that of a testament, public ordinance or judicial decision. In other words, the question we should pose here is: to what extent did literary texts function as norm-shifting or norm-setting when those norms could still vary according to social category?

⁸ A Guerreau-Jalabert, ‘Traitement narratif et signification sociale de l’amour courtois dans le *Lancelot* de Chrétien de Troyes’, in D Quéuel (ed.), *Amour et chevalerie dans les romans de Chrétien de Troyes* (Paris 1995) 247-59, esp. 252-3, 258-9.

⁹ Paul Strohm, ‘What Happens at Intersections’, in Barbara A Hanawalt & David Wallace (eds.), *Bodies and Disciplines: Intersections of Literature and History in Fifteenth-Century England* (Minneapolis/London 1996) 227-31.

¹⁰ Marc Boone, Thérèse de Hemptinne & Walter Prevenier, ‘Fictie en historische realiteit Colijn van Rijssseles “De Spiegel der Minnen”’, ook een spiegel van sociale spanningen in de Nederlanden der late middeleeuwen?, *Jaarboek van de Koninklijke Soevereine Hoofdkamer van Retorica “De Fonteyne” te Gent XXXIV* (1984) 9-33 (see the first author’s interesting self-criticism in his article quoted above in n 7), Annelies van Gijzen, *Liefde, kosmos en verbeelding: mens- en wereldbeeld in Colijn van Rijssseles “Spiegel der Minnen”* (Groningen 1989), eadem, ‘Katherine Sheermertens, Margrieta van Lymborch, and Margaret of Austria: Literary and Historical Backgrounds in Colijn van Rijssseles “Spiegel der Minnen”’, *Publication du Centre européen d’études bourguignonnes XIVe-XVIe siècle* 31 (1991) 165-74, see also her contribution to this volume, M de Roos, ‘A la recherche du théâtre perdu: Théâtre et spectacles aux anciens Pays-Bas bourguignons (XIVe-XVIe siècles)’ *ibid.*, 27-36.

This certainly does not mean that literary genres other than the theatre should be disregarded. Didactic works such as the Flemish *Boek van Zeden* ('Book of Morality') were already in use in schools in Maerlant's time (c. 1235-c. 1299) in a sober version, while more luxurious editions found their way into the hands of the high nobility.¹¹ For many centuries they were so widespread that their normative effect must be considered very real. A doctrine of morality compiled in the sixth century by Martinus of Braga, which belonged to the canon of medieval education, due in part to its attribution to Seneca, and which now survives in more than 200 manuscripts, was also incorporated by Maerlant in his *Spiegel Historiae*, a Flemish version of Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum Historiale*. This makes us ask again how far a literary author could diverge from prevailing norms and values.¹²

In his dissertation, Geert Warnar examined the extent to which the rules of conduct and a criticism of social position, which a monk from Brabant dedicated to a Brussels aristocrat in his *Ridderboec* ('Book of Chivalry') of about 1410, could be validated as a reflection of the views of a wider social category.¹³ In his contribution to this volume, the author observes that the famous mystic Jan van Ruusbroec, while preaching the value of the *vita apostolica*, enjoyed the material and spiritual support of the Brussels patricians. The texts belonging to this prolific religious movement were generated and read by people from various social backgrounds. Gerritsen's study of the meaning of the word *hovescheit* ('courtesy') in various source types is still exemplary. 'a code of behaviour which aims at allowing individuals to live together in harmony by respecting each other's private lives, negatively by avoiding irritations, positively by observing strict rules of social intercourse'.¹⁴ A fascinating shift of meaning in the public domain occurred in the late Middle Ages. In the accounts of princes and towns *hovescheit* had the usual meaning of a gift or favour to a guest or relation whom one wanted to treat well. From there it was but a small step to a

¹¹ Theo Meder, 'Gepast Gedrag Ethiek en ethische motivaties in de "Boeken van Zeden"', in J. Reynaert (ed.), *Wat is Wysheid? Lekenethiek in de Middelnederlandse letterkunde* (Amsterdam 1994) 86-100, esp. 88-9.

¹² F. van Oostrom, *Maerlants wereld* (Amsterdam 1996) 251-64, 280-3.

¹³ Geert Warnar, *Het Ridderboec. Over Middelnederlandse literatuur en lekenvroomheid* (Amsterdam 1995) 77-104.

¹⁴ W. P. Gerritsen, 'Wat is hooftseid? Contouren van een middeleeuws cultuurverschijnsel', in R. E. V. Stuip & C. Vellekoop (eds.), *Hoofse Cultuur. Studies over een aspect van de middeleeuwse cultuur* (Utrecht 1983) 25-50, quotation on 39-40.

temporary or permanent relationship of patronage where influence could be exercised, and the term entered the sphere of corruption.¹⁵

It is extremely valuable to look at the recognition given to particular social positions and relations in a literary genre, art form or author. At the same time we must take into account the specific literary tradition in which the work is placed. The challenge facing us now is whether we can go any further. In this volume Danielle Quérue! demonstrates this in literature in a most sensitive way, as does Christian Klamt for sculpture. Works did not have to reflect purely and simply the vision of the patron or the artist because they existed already in a relationship of mutual tensions; possibly they aimed to give form to expressions of other tensions. On the historical side some strategies have recently been explored. Raymond van Uytven has shown the possibilities that titles of address and the size and quality of gifts offered provide for revealing levels of social recognition. Now he surveys a wide range of practical and artistic sources to glean information on matters of taste in aesthetic and gastronomic areas.¹⁶ With his meticulous study of a diversity of details about people in administrative and legal sources from the sixteen parishes in the Land van Heusden, Peter Hoppenbrouwers has been able to show the realities of social mobility and the complicated

¹⁵ A few examples DEH de Boer, DJ Faber & HPH Jansen (eds), *De Rekeningen van de Grafelykheid van Holland uit de Beierse periode Serie II De rekeningen van de rentmeeesters der domeinen, 1393-1396* (The Hague 1983) 312, A Derville, 'Pots-de-vin, cadeaux, racket, patronage Essai sur les mécanismes de décision dan l'Etat bourgignon', *Revue du Nord* LVI (1974) 341-64, id, 'Les pots-de-vin dans le dernier tiers du XIVe siècle (d'après les comptes de Lille et de Saint-Omer)', in W.P Blockmans (ed), *1477 Le privilège général et les privilèges régionaux de Marie de Bourgogne pour les Pays-Bas Ancien Pays et Assemblées d'Etats LXXX* (Heule-Kortrijk 1985) 449-69, Wim Blockmans, 'Patronage, Brokerage and Corruption as Symptoms of Incipient State Formation in the Burgundian-Habsburg Netherlands', in A Maczak (ed), *Klientelsysteme im Europa der Fruhen Neuzeit* (Munich 1988) 117-26, id, 1477, 131 art 7 'zonder leeninghen, biantaiten of hoosscheden daeraf te nemene', Marc Boone, *Geld en macht De Gentse stadsfinancien en de Bourgondische staatsvorming (1384-1453)* (Ghent 1990) 92-4, id, 'Dons et pots-de-vin, aspects de la sociabilité urbaine au bas Moyen Age Le cas gantois pendant la période bourguignonne', *Revue du Nord* LXX (1988) 471-87.

¹⁶ Raymond van Uytven, 'Veis un autre colloque hiérarchies sociales et prestige au moyen âge et aux temps modernes', in W Prevenier, R van Uytven & E van Cauwenberghe (eds), *Sociale structuur en topografie van armoede en rijkdom in de 14de en 15de eeuw Methodologische aspecten en resultaten van recent onderzoek* (Ghent 1986) 157-75 The author published a book on the latter subject *De zinnelyke Middeleeuwen* (Leuven 1998)

relationship among social positions. From legal proceedings he could see the delineation of privileges working in practice, and at the same time ascertain that the sharp edges of economic exploitation were blunted by the heterogeneity of the rank of 'gentleman'.¹⁷ In his contribution to this volume the author shows clearly that the self-expression characteristic of the rebellious peasant communities of North Holland should not be understood in the context of a political or legal context only, but that a cultural distinction lay at the root of it as well.

In his *Sneeuwpoppen van 1511* Herman Pleij took another important step forward by using a great diversity of sources — 'historical', visual and literary — in the wide context of a large town over many decennia. Until now it has been this book that has examined in the greatest depth the experience of a whole complex of social relations. Naturally enough, this has given rise to far-ranging discussion. His concept of a cultural offensive convinced few historians. They felt the need for a more sophisticated division of social categories. The question of the function of sharply aggressive satire thus remains unanswered.¹⁸

While discussions between historians and literary historians are well under way, with specialists in the visual arts they are just in the early stages. If I restrict myself to our chosen period, 1300-1550, it seems to me that in reference to the art of painting, including miniatures, the question of the social context of patrons and public is at present the most discussed. Maximiliaan Martens was able to go a long way in identifying the patrons of the vast body of work of Hans Memling, and the social environment in which the paintings were hung. Out of a total of 94 known works 23 have been ascribed with reasonable certainty to a patron, while the destination of another 21 can be indicated. Almost half of the works, then, can be placed: 27 had foreign destinations, notably seventeen with Italian merchants and eight with Spanish. Burgers of Bruges commissioned at least nine of the paintings, local clerics and their institutions, eight. It is interesting that patrons of all ranks had themselves painted full-length, while the portrait

¹⁷ Peter Hoppenbrouwers, *Een middeleeuwse samenleving Het Land van Heusden, ca 1360- ca 1515* (Wageningen 1992) 173-91, 617-43

¹⁸ H Pleij, *De sneeuwpoppen van 1511 Literatuur en stadscultuur tussen middeleeuwen en moderne tijd* (Amsterdam/Leuven 1988), E Dhanens, M de Roos, H de Ridder-Symoens & W P Blockmans, 'Literatuur en stadscultuur tussen middeleeuwen en nieuwe tijd', *Bydragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 106 (1991) 421-50

pure and simple was commissioned mainly by Italians ¹⁹ In his contribution to this volume Martens examines the status of the artist both in a material sense and in the context of his own self-expression

New Challenges

It is possible, however, to make more links between social relations and their figurative representation Pictures of specific social categories have already been explored with respect to peasants, craftsmen, women, the sick and the poor ²⁰ Yet description of and the search for development in conventions and genres is still the most important aspect, while the relationship to real social attitudes remains vague or absent A further step could be the deciphering of 'Flemish realism', separating iconographic topoi and idealization from the representation of reality Discussions on the interpretations of the work of Hieronymus Bosch show the enormous difficulties awaiting us ²¹ In the end it is a matter of finding the values, norms and social relations expressed in the pictures Very few have felt called to undertake a task of such immense proportions As a result of the size of the task such initiatives are still schematic, derived from partial theories and, not infrequently, ideologically charged, but no less interesting for all that ²² Hanneke de Bruin, in her contribution, throws light on the popularization of imagery in the Low Countries through a systematic, socio-historic analysis of woodcuts ²³

¹⁹ This count is based on Maximiliaan P J Martens, 'De opdrachtgevers van Hans Memling', in Dirk De Vos (ed.), *Hans Memling Essays* (Bruges 1994) 14-29

²⁰ R Mellinkoff, *Outcasts Signs of Otherness in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages*, 2 vols (Berkeley 1993), P Basing *Trades and Crafts in Medieval Manuscripts* (London 1990), P Vandenbroeck 'Vrouwenhaat, mannenpraat', in J Van der Stock (ed.), *Stad in Vlaanderen Cultuur en maatschappij 1477-1787* (Brussels 1991) 109-26, see also the contribution by H-J Raupp in this volume

²¹ See for example P Vandenbroeck, *Jeroen Bosch, tussen volksleven en stadscultuur* (Berchem 1987)

²² P Vandenbroeck, 'Stadscultuur tussen bovengrondse eenheid en onderhuidse strijd', in Van der Stock, *Stad in Vlaanderen*, 77-92

²³ J Van der Stock *Printing Images in Antwerp The Introduction of Printmaking in a City Fifteenth Century to 1585* (Rotterdam 1998) was published after the finalization of this volume

Traditionally, there has always been a wide gap between those who undertake research into sources labelled as works of art in themselves, and those who believe that social reality is revealed in authentic and documentary (mostly administrative) sources. Now it is widely understood that every record of a small piece of reality is made from a selection on the basis of beliefs and values: ultimately, on a world view. In this sense there are no 'realistic' sources because, by definition, they are all based on assumptions and constantly and implicitly refer to symbolic constructions. 'Realistic' sources have become less faithful to reality from our modern-day perspective; they shed a softer, and certainly less adequate, light on historical society than was often taken for granted. They also appear eminently suited to clarifying questions concerning perceptions of experiences: official documents provide insight into social hierarchies and the recognition given them.

On the other hand it has also become clear that works of art should not first be placed in the framework of the researcher's interpretation; their significance is borrowed from the context in which they functioned primarily. This implies, thus, a reference to the real environment from which the work of art borrowed elements and with which it interacted in some way or other. These relations are certainly neither simple nor unequivocal, which makes research into the function of works of art in a society such a delicate matter. The interpretation is constantly in danger of hesitating between trivial conclusions such as 'identification of a (high) position' and 'functions in noble circles or in the upper bourgeoisie'. Nor does the social context of commission, the conditions for the creation and use of works of art, 'explain' their specificity, though it does add a dimension to it.²⁴

We may not stop at such obvious conclusions. It appears essential that people not only avail themselves of 'real' communication in their relations, but that they can also deal with symbolic means of communication. Both systems overlap to some extent and are not separated in daily use. It is this very interactive character that lends its system-affirming or system-contesting function to symbolic communication.²⁵ The following dialogue is

²⁴ See the fundamental contributions collected by Xavier Barral i Altet, *Artistes, artisans et production artistique au moyen âge*, 3 vols (Paris 1986-90)

²⁵ Innovative research on this topic has been undertaken for the early Middle Ages by Gerd Althoff. See for example 'Demonstration und Inszenierung Spielregeln der Kommunikation in mittelalterlicher Öffentlichkeit', *Fruhmittelalterliche Studien* 27 (1993) 27-50, and 'Empörung, Tränen, Zerknirschung "Emotionen" in der öffentlichen Kommunikation des Mittelalters', *ibid.* 30 (1996) 60-79

an example of 'real' communication 'Give me a loaf of bread weighing one pound' — 'that will cost two pennies' The symbolic dimension of this transaction is already present in the buyer's acceptance of one sort of bread and not another, usually bought by strangers Bread can be prepared in any number of ways, as a basic food it is also an excellent means of identification through which a community can set itself apart from the rest of the world In a cosmopolitan city like Venice, in 1471, of the 35 bakers counted by the authorities 32 were 'German'²⁶ This large number shows that the preference for (south) German bread stretched far beyond the commercial colony in the *Fondaco dei Tedeschi*, furthermore, the *pasticieri* would have sold other, local, grain products In the multicultural context of Venice, heart of an extensive, colonial empire, there was room for choice and an evident readiness to accommodate or expand preferences of taste

The measure of openness to variety, to the new and unknown, could well be taken as the defining characteristic of higher civilizations It depends on the presence of, as well as positive interaction between, culturally diverse groups The ability to cope with this diversity cannot be taken for granted it requires the intellectual capacity not only to accept the existence of the other but also to acknowledge that it has value in the same way as the self Danielle Quérue! in her contribution, considers the relativization of the noble lifestyle in literature written specifically for the nobility It seems well worthwhile to make a study of the circumstances in which a similar relativization of values could take place As a hypothesis I should like to suggest the following conditions a concentrated community of diverse groups (in an unspecified relationship of tensions and numbers) in a situation where the fulfilment of primary needs is not a major problem To formulate this idea as an object for study, we must then establish where a transfer of culture has been most successful Under what social conditions did it occur? Every social environment can then be defined in its interaction with other groups and strata Symbolic communication, after all, presupposes people to whom the message can be addressed, and by whom the message is stimulated

In this way almost every action is given a symbolic dimension whereby people take up a position, as an individual or group, in relation to others In fact man uses methods of cultural expression to do what is continually being done in the animal world claiming and confirming roles (leadership and submission) and territory, mating, offering protection Meaning comes

²⁶ Oral communication by Professor Philippe Braunstein Paris, May 1996

from the context originality is decided by deviation from the current situation inside a given communication circuit. Something attracts attention because it interferes with another message, thus making a first step towards the desired effect. At this point we must verify which symbolic and real interaction is involved, and by what means it is achieved. Why were some messages also — or even, specially — communicated by symbolic means? Does symbolism presuppose a higher degree of articulation? Is it for that reason especially suited to delivering the most subtle and sensitive messages? Did literature, and later illustrations in books, lend itself to mental experimentation with sexual relations, as Annelies van Gijzen and Hanneke de Bruin suggest?

Princes could choose to a certain extent whether their infighting would take place on the field of battle, through diplomatic consultation, in economic competition, or by rivalry in the artistic field. From this last point of view Thomas von der Dunk has shown the monumental symbolism of the emperors Charles IV, Maximilian I and Charles VI in a new light.²⁷ These sovereign rulers expressed their political programmes in the language of sculpture, thus entering into a dialogue with their rivals in France and inside the empire itself. The intended purpose of this was to express superiority through its association with the centuries-old prestige of Charlemagne or the Roman emperors, on another, more subtle, plane than real politics could. The use of symbolic means to convince or persuade added an essential dimension to their struggle for power.

What princes could do with their relatively great freedom of choice was copied and repeated endlessly by their underlings in royal households, noble circles, universities and parish churches. Everyone took a position according to the means at his or her disposal and which was meaningful within the framework of their symbolic interaction with others, from the emperor down to the humblest social classes. Monumental architecture is one of the most expensive methods of *Selbstdarstellung*, but because of its primary functionality (everyone needs a roof over his head) it is inescapable and appropriate. Whoever failed to invest in it lost out to the rival who did invest. As soon as one patrician family from Genoa or Venice built a *palazzo* in the town or a *villa rustica* in the country, the others had to do likewise to maintain their status. A guild or brotherhood in Bruges or Ghent which failed to follow the vogue for adorning chapels in local churches

²⁷ Th H von der Dunk *Das Deutsche Denkmal. Ein Abriss in Stein. Die politische Bedeutung des Denkmalkults im deutschen Kulturbereich* (diss. Leiden 1994).

with handsome altar-pieces ran the risk of losing prestige — and thus members, and even political power. They also owed it to their status to dress up in their finest clothes and take part in the processions and parades organized by the town to mark Church festivals or to receive princes.²⁸

Every individual took his place more or less consciously, according to the symbolism inherent in his or her clothing. In late-medieval society, so sensitive to standing, the colour, material and style of clothing were extremely significant and status-defining. In comparison to other European regions, sumptuary laws seem to have been rather scarce and marginal in the Low Countries.²⁹ Nevertheless, city authorities provided their civil servants each year with a robe in a colour and cloth quality befitting their rank and position. A leper was obliged to wrap himself in coarse, grey stuff; a peasant's clothing was short, that of a notable long; the city militia of Ghent were called the 'white bonnets'. During court hearings the magistrates of the *Parlement* of Mechelen wore robes of one colour and *chaperons fourez*, lined hoods. On the days when judgements were pronounced all wore scarlet, while the presidents, *maîtres des requêtes*, clergy and lay councillors were all recognizable from the style of their robe and headgear and the type of fur used. The clergy wore *cloches*, flowing bell-shaped cloaks.³⁰ Every year town councillors were fitted out with official clothing: the quality of the material, and its colour, proclaimed both the honour of the town and the official's position in the hierarchy.³¹

The wearing of *here cledere* (liveries) — in the heraldic colours of the gentleman concerned — had already been banned by count Willem III of Holland in 1308; this ban was followed by many similar regulations. In 1398 a mayor of Dordrecht was convicted of wearing 'des heren couse van

²⁸ P. Trio, *De Gentse broederschappen (1182-1580)* (Ghent 1990); id., *Volksreligie als spiegel van een stedelijke samenleving De broederschappen te Gent in de late middeleeuwen* (Leuven 1993), W. Blockmans, 'Le dialogue imaginaire entre princes et sujets. le Joyeuses Entrées en Brabant en 1494 et 1496', *Publication du Centre européen d'études bourguignonnes XIVe-XVIe siècle* 34 (1994) 37-53

²⁹ Compare Van Uytven's chapter in this volume and R. Jütte & Neithard Bulst (eds.), *Zwischen Sein und Schein Kleidung und Identität in der standischen Gesellschaft*, *Saeculum* 44/1 (1993)

³⁰ J. van Rompaey, *De Grote Raad van de hertogen van Boergondie en het Parlement van Mechelen* (Brussels 1973) 172, 499 art. 17

³¹ J. H. Munro, 'The Medieval Scarlet and the Economics of Sartorial Splendour', in N. B. Harte & K. G. Ponting (eds.), *Cloth and Clothing in Medieval Europe* (London 1983) 13-70, esp. 39-51, M. Boone, *Geld en riacht De Gentse stadsfinancien en de Bourgondische staatsvorming (1384-1453)* (Ghent 1990) 85-8.

Brederode' ('the lord of Brederode's stockings'), in so doing he had clearly taken sides against the count. In a statute of 1401 the magistrate of Dordrecht determined that burghers of the town could not wear 'gheens heren noch vrouwen clederen' ('any liveries of lords or ladies'), with the exception of the *baljuw* (reeve) and *rentmeester* (steward) of South Holland, and further that those who wore fur should be of noble birth or hold a doctorate.³² The bearing of arms and the wearing of liveries of noblemen or heads of families was also banned in Flanders during the fifteenth century.³³ During the political conflicts in Holland the wearing of a red hat showed sympathy for the *Hoekse* party and of a grey one for the *Kabeljauwse*; this political symbolism was repeatedly outlawed and punished.³⁴

The hat appears to have been the chief identifying mark in men's clothing. Every prominent gentleman wore a hat, peasants and labourers are always depicted with their headgear.³⁵ In the official clothing which was worn at certain sessions of the *Parlement* of Mechelen the court's two presidents could only be distinguished from the councillors and *maîtres des requêtes* by their headgear. They wore a *mortier*, a round, black, velvet cap, the *mortier* of the first president was edged with embroidery.³⁶ A bow in salutation to someone of a higher station was generally accompanied by the doffing of the hat. Debasement and (self-) humiliation were made visible to the masses by the subject kneeling down bareheaded, barefoot, clad in a (linen) shirt and begging for mercy from the ruler, in front of an altar or even before a town's governing body. This sort of *eerlucke beteringhe* (honourable amendment) was imposed upon individuals, groups or even entire communities, especially when they had offended against the majesty of the prince by insult or rebellion.³⁷

³² M. van Gent, *Pertijelijke saken' Hoeken en Kabeljauwen in het Bourgondisch-Oostenrijkse tijdperk* (The Hague 1994) 409.

³³ W. P. Blockmans, *De volksvertegenwoordiging in Vlaanderen in de overgang van de middeleeuwen naar de nieuwe tijden (1384-1506)* (Brussels 1978) 460-1.

³⁴ Van Gent, op cit. n. 27, 411-14.

³⁵ See for example Basing, *Trades and Crafts* passim, Mellinkoff, *Outcasts* 57-94.

³⁶ Van Rompaey, *Grote Raad* 172, 499 art. 17.

³⁷ M. Boone & H. Brand, 'Vollersoproeren en collectieve actie in Gent en Leiden in de 14e en 15e eeuw', *Tijdschrift voor Sociale Geschiedenis* 19 (1993) 178-90; M. C. le Bailly, 'Un cas particulier de lèse majesté: les injures verbales contre le Conseil de Hollande en tant que college (1428-1491)', *Revue d'Histoire de Droit* 66 (1998) 97-113, an example of a procession of burghers of Salins who, on 30 September 1477,

In general, in medieval society public rituals formed the perfect means of illustrating group cohesion, social position and exclusion. For this reason they were given extensive coverage in the narrative sources — a feature that previous generations often dismissed as uninteresting. It is, moreover, worthwhile ascertaining when illustrations of rituals were first made. The series of miniatures representing the *ordo* of the French coronation ceremonies in 1250 and 1368 probably belongs to the exceptionally early examples.³⁸ Series of illustrations depicting royal entries do not appear before the 1490s,³⁹ as far as I am aware. Jean-Claude Schmitt has given a clear interpretation of Church rituals up to the twelfth century. The meaning of gestures changed, however, when the Church lost its monopoly on the official language, and others were able to display their values.⁴⁰

This volume is intended to stimulate study and discussion of symbolic communication in late-medieval society. We chose an interdisciplinary approach so that the starting-point was not one particular medium, but a specific, social environment, a problem or a function. To this end many different types of source were used to shed light on the diverse themes. We hope that, as a result of the discussions among the writers, every contribution has been enriched by the viewpoints of the other authors and of other disciplines.

bareheaded and barefoot, carried the relics of St Anatoile to Dôle where they offered the saint the keys of their town, and thus procured the lifting of the siege by the French G Delmarcel & E Duveiger, *Brugge en de tapytkunst* (Bruges 1987) 170-9, a representation of the people of Ghent in their underwear imploring Duke Philip the Good's mercy in 1453 E Dhanens, 'De Blyde Inkomst van Filips de Goede in 1458 en de plastische kunsten te Gent', *Actum Gandavi Academiae Analecta Mededelingen van de Kon Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten van Belgie, Klasse der Schone Kunsten* 48 (1987) 2, 53-89 and 'Het Boek van Privilegien van Gent', *ibid*, 91-112

³⁸ J Le Goff, 'A Coronation Program for the Age of Saint Louis, the *Ordo* of 1250' and J.-C Bonne, 'The Manuscript of the *Ordo* of 1250 and Its Illuminations', in J M Bak (ed), *Coronations Medieval and Early Modern Monarchic Ritual* (Berkeley 1990) 46-57, 58-71, B Motel, *Les joyeux de la Couronne de France* (Paris 1985), W Blockmans, *A History of Power in Europe* (New York/Antwerp 1997) 271-3

³⁹ R Scheller, 'Imperial Themes in Art and Literature of the Early French Renaissance The Period of Charles VIII', *Simulolus* 12 (1981-82) 5-69, esp 46-50, Blockmans, 'Dialogue imaginaire'

⁴⁰ J.-C Schmitt, *La raison des gestes dans l'Occident médiéval* (Paris 1990) 25-7, 250-1, F Garnier, *Le langage de l'image au moyen âge* vol I *Signification et symbolique* (Paris 1982) 111 ff, and vol II *La grammaire des gestes* (Paris 1989), Margaret Bertrand & Christian Hory, eds, *Le geste et les gestes au moyen âge* (Aix-en-Provence 1998)

In these studies we certainly have not succeeded in dealing with all the questions that have arisen, let alone in formulating a coherent answer. We are still very much at the beginning of a new line of research. The foregoing discussion of some of the lines of approach is merely tentative. Fiction and 'reality' lie closer to each other and influence each other more often than we suppose. The very least we can try to do is to recognize and understand the function of symbolic interaction. This presupposes that we want to know the subjects and their real position. Every symbolic statement of position provokes reaction from others who feel attacked or challenged. The process of communication takes place between many groups and categories engaged in a direct or indirect dialogue. The chosen media — and the characteristics of form inherent to them — should not be seen as separate from the process of communication that we have made central. The communication and the very multiplicity of messages had a meaning for listeners and observers that could be understood immediately. Did this serve to alleviate real social tensions or, conversely, to make an issue of them by presenting them in a different way? The topsy-turvy world of carnival is just one opportunity in an almost continuous stream of individual, private and public manifestations of status which marked the desired, expected, imagined or perceived perceptions of individuals and groups in relation to others.