

**2003**

## **The Tower Of Babylon**

All art is elite. Art in the Boijmans- Van Beuningen Museum or in the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra is elite, but graffiti and hip-hop are also elite. With elite I mean that the medium is only understood by the initiated, by subcultures who understand each other's languages and codes, and who are capable of making an educated decision whether the artistic or cultural level is too high or low.

Language is the first and most direct way in which to differentiate yourself from others. By this I do not mean the large variation of languages that caused the downfall of Babylon. Even in our choice of spoken words we try to differentiate ourselves from others, we use it to differentiate, to discriminate and be elite. On the street children speak a 'street talk', a special mix of words and notions that have the ability to exclude others and create 'insiders'. Sometimes a Moroccan tinted vocabulary dominates this form of speech but more often than not, it is Surinamese.

Different social classes, professions, generations or any other collectivity, all speak the their own language, in which they present themselves to their group and following that the group presents itself to the rest. Exactly this need to present yourself and others is the nature of what we call culture. Staying with the language of 'Langs de Lijn van De Toekomst', language creates cultural competitiveness but it also makes the cultural competitiveness visible.

Politics is also one of these languages. We talk about the 'Hague jargon', when we mean that we don't really understand the nonsensical blabbering of politicians, or during forums in the NOVA. Just like in art, most politicians feel that their language is not jargonised, meaning only for the initiated, but that their language is universal and common, meaning that all can understand it.

The hilarious film '*Ali G in da House*' makes fun of this concept. Ali G, the wannabe hip hopper, does his utmost best to speak the language of the street and as graduate he finds himself in the British Parliament. The out of touch and graying ministers and Lords see his language as a new way of getting in touch with the voters. Obviously this experiment fails and Ali G finds himself back in his familiar little provincial town.

The so-called culture reception in contemporary art seems to be a parody on Ali G. Be it hip hoppers in the Boijmans, breakers in the Schouwburg or turntablists in the NAI- they are all blends of different languages that mark the nature of art- to differentiate yourself or as a group from others. Why should we have to go to the Boijmans and to a hip hop event? Why do we have to go to De Doelen and to the appearance of 010-B Boys?

The peer pressured mandatory mixture of languages, artistic practices and cultures, is what really ignores Babel's Tower- confusion of tongues, incomprehension and frustration for all parties involved.

The enormous success of '*Ali G inda House*', also in Rotterdam, could be the cause of our well-meant pursuit of the culture range and public participation. While politicians and culture-makers work on integration and the culture range, the new young generation of people unanimously laugh in a thousand languages at the confused tongues in the old Holland.