

19. ARAB, Rk. 1838, f. 333r° en f 350v°.
20. *Ibid.* f 366r°. Was het een dwergvrouwtje dat uit Tongeren kwam?
21. ARAB, Rk. 1837, f 289r° en ARAB, Rk. 1838, f 160r°. Voor een overzicht van de geweldige sommen die de aartshertogen besteedden aan juwelen en diamanten, zie Joseph Lefèvre, 'Les livres de raison.'
22. ARAB, Rk. 1837, f 289v°.
23. *Ibid.* f 333r° en ARAB, Rk. 1838, f 19r° en *passim*. Cfr. Willem Schrickx. 'Aartshertog Albert van Oostenrijk en het theater in de Spaanse Nederlanden.' In: *Spiegel Historiae* 15 (1980) p. 678-684.
24. A.G.B. Schayes. 'Voyage de Jean-Ernest, duc de Saxe, en France, en Angleterre et en Belgique, en 1613.' In: *Trésor National* (z.j.) p. 231.
25. A. Rodriguez Villa. *Correspondencia*, p. 147.
26. ARAB, Rk. 1837, f 321r°. ARAB, Rk. 1838, f 5v°, f 142r°, f 19v°, f 307v° en f 366r°.
27. ARAB, Rk. 1837, f 144v°. f 324v° en ARAB, Rk. 1838, f 65 v°. f 215r° en f 306v°. 307r°.
28. ARAB, Rk. 1837, f 379v°. ARAB, Rk. 1838, f 227r°, f 226v° en f 269v°.
29. ARAB. Geheime Raad Spaanse periode 1219. Ik bereid een uitgave voor van dit merkwaardig en uniek dossier.

## The influence of economic factors on style

J. MICHAEL MONTIAS

### Introduction

It is surely premature and foolhardy on my part to give a talk about the influence of economic factors on style. Premature, because my research on the economic environment of 17th century Netherlandish art has only revealed the bare contours of the subject, and mainly its qualitative aspects to boot. Foolhardy, because my comparative advantage lies in the more solid, quantitative research I have done, which throws only a raking light on the development of style.

Still, I consider the subject important - if only in justifying an economic approach to art history - and I must give it a try.

For a number of years I have collected evidence on the economic status of the artists in Delft in the Golden Age: the taxes they remitted; the prices they paid for their houses; the gifts their family made to charity after their death. From this evidence I deduced that most guild masters - and guild masters seem to have made up the greater part of the population of artists - were solidly middle-class citizens, more or less on the level of apothecaries and notaries. Their social origin was also above the common lot of men. In keeping with this status, artists were virtually all literate and had at least the rudiments of an education: besides learning how to read and write, they must all have had some instruction in elementary mathematics (arithmetic certainly, geometry probably). Most of them could read and understand books on perspective written for artists and architects, like Vignola's *Due Regule da Perspective*, which was available for sale at a small book dealer's a couple of doors from Vermeer's house in Delft. These stylized facts, 'interesting' as they may be, have only an *indirect* bearing on style. We may infer from them, with some degree of probability, that painters could, if they wished, consult the Bible or Ovid's *Methamorphoses* in painting a 'history' or read Van Mander's *Schilderboeck* for the inspiration and advice it contained. Most of them had the means to travel from town to town in Holland and, when political conditions allowed, to Antwerp and other cities in the Southern Netherlands, and absorb artistic ideas and techniques that might not have been available within the confines of their communities. Some artists went as far as Italy, the found of artistic knowledge in those days, and came back to tell the tale. With the dress and polish of solid burghers, they could, as Professor Scheller has recently remarked, converse and visit with rich patrons of the arts, as common artisans could not. This gave them access to private collections - all there was at the time - and greatly facilitated the intellectual and aesthetic interchange, the pattern of cross-influences, that art historians devote so much of their attention to. How important all this was may be illustrated by the contrary example of a group of artisans - the 'plateel schilders' or decorators on faience - who came from a distinctly lower social and economic status. Most of them, by the way, were *not* guild masters, but were 'knechts', or 'servants'. A careful examination of 17th century representations of animals, warriors, biblical and genre scenes on the tiles

painted by these 'plateel schilders' reveals that the great majority were made after prints or copied from older tiles. Frederick van Frijtom's original landscape plaques were an outstanding, but virtually unique, exception on a somewhat larger scale. Thus the way artists represented their subjects, their imagination and power of creation, may have depended on their background and economic status.

#### *Imitation and Product Differentiations*

To get at the influence of economic factors on *style*, I must first speculate on the extent to which 17th century artists may have responded to economic motives. Was the *homo faber* of that time also *homo economicus*? The evidence is not very strong but it does point in that general direction, at least for men who had to struggle to earn their living. Few artists could afford the luxury of ignoring the desires of their patrons, as Rembrandt is said to have done, at least on occasion. Svetlana Alpers, in her book on Rembrandt's Enterprise puts a great deal of emphasis on this proud independence. But most artists, it seems, painted things that either their patrons or the anonymous market wanted.

If they could not accommodate to the demand sufficiently well to earn a tolerable living, they got out of the business and did something else. One of the more interesting cases I can cite from my research in Delft is that of the flower painter Joris van Lier, some of whose pictures had to be retouched and improved by the more proficient and successful Jacob Vosmaer. Van Lier eventually gave up painting to become a tax collector. When an artist married a rich woman and thereafter neglected his art, as Jacob van Velsen, Ferdinand Bol, and Albert Cuyp did, this suggests to me that the psychological benefits they earned from their craft could not have been a dominant motive in their previous activity. If there were painters who refused to follow fashion and waited for the accolade of posterity while they starved in their garrets, I have yet to hear about them, although I must admit that the evidence we have about the lives and careers of 17th century artists would not necessarily reveal this psychology and behavior if it had actually prevailed. Whatever the empirical merits of the case, I will *assume* henceforward that artists were economically motivated and seriously considered market demand and patronage in their choice of subjects and, as I will try to show, in the way they went about representing those subjects.

Consider an artist with an *average* talent and ability. What would he have done to succeed economically? One option open to him, or to her in the case of the occasional female artist, was to imitate artists with a popular following. This was all the more likely to be a good strategy if he lived in another city than the artist he wished to imitate and he was, to some extent, protected by distance and guild restrictions from direct competition from the artist in question. The highly popular Van Goyen - we can get an idea of his popularity from the large number of paintings attributed to him in the inventories of all major Dutch cities - lived in Leiden but most of his imitators were to be found in Haarlem (Frans van Hulst, Cornelis van der Schalke), The Hague (Anthonie van der Croost, Johannes Schoeff), Delft (Pieter van Asch), and other centers. I do not include in this list

major artists such as Salomon van Ruisdael, whose development paralleled that of Van Goyen in the late 1620s and early 1630s, who were quite capable of striking out on their own.

The seascapes of Jan Porcellis, whose career was spread over several towns of Holland, were imitated all over the United Provinces. He too, to judge from contemporary inventories, was immensely popular. Many more examples will surely occur to you. It may well be that in all this imitation of style there was some borrowing of technique as well, but this is an aspect of the problem that I reserve for the next part of my lecture.

Another strategic option, available even to artists who were not prodigiously talented, was to 'differentiate their product', to use modern economic parlance, that is, to develop a style, or a variant of a successful style, that was clearly recognizable as their own, so that they could gain at least a foothold in the market. I am struck, for example, by the number of attributions to an artist such as Pieter Quast that I have found in Amsterdam inventories. This was a man of limited talent and range but whose drawn and printed work could very easily be recognized, even by notaries and by the barely literate 'uijtdragsters' and 'taxeersers' who assessed inventories that did not contain enough valuable works of art to warrant calling in masterpainters from the guild for an expert evaluation. Jan Jansz. Buesem, who was essentially an imitator of Adriaen van Ostade, also developed a distinct manner of his own which must have been useful in marketing his product. Benjamin Cuyp in Dordrecht and The Hague, Leonaert Bramer in Delft, and Joost van Droochsloot in Utrecht are other examples that come to mind. An artist, in a similar vein, could master a unique specialty, for which he became known and easily recognizable. Aert van der Neer's moonlit landscapes, Frans Post's vignettes of Brazil, many of which were done after his return from South America, and Brekelenkamp's paintings of tailors and cobblers are cases in point. These specialties were so narrow that they did not leave much room for imitators, lacking which they could reap modest monopolist gains in the market. This product differentiation was of course an extreme manifestation of the growing specialization of Dutch art as the 17th century progressed. This growing specialization, as I have argued elsewhere, resulted from the overall expansion of the market for works of art, which was in turn brought about by the economic prosperity of the Netherlands, coupled with the strong inclination of Dutch burghers to furnish their homes with paintings.

#### *Process and Product Innovations*

Economists, when they analyze technical progress in industry, distinguish between 'product' and 'process' innovations. A product innovation introduces a totally new commodity (e.g. a horseless carriage) or changes the outward characteristics of an old one (color TV replacing the old black-and-white one). A process innovation reduces the cost of turning out an existing product (e.g. as where an automatic machine replaces a hand-powered weaving loom). In industry the two types of innovation can often be kept distinct, if only because many process innovations increase the productivity and lower the costs of the machines that

make the products, rather than the products themselves, with no visible impact on the latter. Not so in art, where almost any cost-cutting process innovation will change the appearance of the product. Here the two types of innovation may be thought of as proceeding simultaneously.

Steven Goddard and Lynn Jacobs, in their recent work on Flemish painting and sculpture,<sup>1</sup> discuss a number of productivity-increasing, cost-cutting process innovations that artists introduced in the 16th century. These innovations, which included ready-made patterns and pumices in painting and interchangeable, mechanically made figures and decorative trimmings in carved altarpieces, at least attempted to maintain the overall appearance of the products. Lynn Jacobs reasons convincingly - although she admits her corroborative evidence is thin - that those cost-cutting innovations were applied chiefly to works of art that were meant to be sold on an anonymous market. More costly commissioned works demanded higher standards for which the innovations were frequently inappropriate. Stretching these definitions a bit, one could argue that copies, by apprentices, journeymen and other workshop assistants, of paintings made by prominent masters also lowered the costs of producing these works, or their functional equivalents, and thus qualified as process innovations, especially if they were produced in series, according to easily executed recipes: they were a more or less satisfactory but certainly cheaper substitute for the real thing. I am not an expert on 16th century art, but it is my impression that the art of this period conformed to certain quality standards, which were very obvious to contemporaries: whether a collector commissioned a work or bought it on the open market, the price that he paid reflected these standards. If he bought a cheaper product that had been made more mechanically for the market, he paid less. If he wanted a custom-made table, he paid more. The same applied to tapestries, the landscape parts of which could be made in simplified fashion in series, provided the customer was not too fussy.

In the first half of the 17th century, as I see it, an unprecedented phenomenon occurred: a popular new style developed in painting that *also* happened to reduce the time and effort to execute a work. The innovation was both 'process' and 'product'. I have in mind here the gradual abandonment of the linear, minutely descriptive approach, characteristic of late 16th century 'manneristic' painters, and its replacement by a painterly, broadly evocative style, which reached its culmination in the tonal or 'monochromatic' paintings of the late 1640s. This evolution was perhaps most evident in landscape painting, but it also played a distinct role in still-life, with Pieter Claesz. and Jacques de Claeuw, and in history painting with Rembrandt and Jan Lievens and such lesser lights as Benjamin Cuyp.

In his important contribution to the exhibition 'Geschildert tot Leyden in 1626', Ernst van de Wetering recalled and discussed in depth the anecdote recounted by Hoogstraten, when Francois Knibbergen, Jan van Goyen, and Jan Porcellis, some time in the late 1620s, competed to see who could complete the most beautiful painting in the course of a day. Under the age-old *topoi*, he uncovered the elements of realistic description in the different ways the three painters went about their work. In the case of Knibbergen, 'all that he set down was complete in itself' ('al wat hy ter neer zette gedaan was'). He elaborated one element

of his landscape - the waterfall, the sky, and so forth - after another, much as the mannerists had at the turn of the century, but in a more fluent fashion ('air, distance, trees, mountains and rushing waterfalls flowed from his brush, as the letters from the pen of an accomplished writer'). Van Goyen covered up his entire pannel with paint,

here light, here dark, as a manycolored agathe, and, with skillful touches of the brush, he was able to bring out all sorts of cute things ('koddigheden') that he had come upon, so that there soon appeared a clever view in the distance adorned with peasants' dwellings. His eye, as if he could distinguish shapes that lay hidden in a chaos of mixed colors, led his hand [...] with the effect that one could discern a complete painting before one could figure out what he had in store.

Porcellis went about his work more slowly, almost in a dilatory manner. But it soon became evident that he had the conception of his painting fully formed in his mind from the beginning, and he was able to complete it before evening, as the other two had done. Porcellis won the contest because his mind rather than his hand or his eye guided his work - a principle which was, of course, especially in vogue in the classicizing period in which Hoogstraten was writing. Van de Wetering suggested that Lieven's method could be compared to Van Goyen's, while Rembrandt's emulated Porcellis's in that he *conceived* his entire painting before he dipped his brush in paint. The points that the two artists' techniques had in common seem at least as important to me as the aspects in which they differed. Lievens and Rembrandt, just like Van Goyen, first smeared - 'overzwadderde' - their pannel or canvas with brown paint in uneven layers of lighter and darker tone to block out their composition - the dead-coloring or 'dootverf stage' - leaving some of the underpaint exposed. Knibbergen apparently did not go through this stage but developed his composition 'plane by plane,' much as in the old Mannerist fashion. It is extremely significant in my view that Rembrandt consciously left the *Eendracht van 't lant* of 1641 in the 'dootverf' stage, neglecting to 'work it up'. The monochrome paintings of Van Goyen, Pieter Claesz. and Jacques de Claeuw of the 1640s may also be thought of as dead-colored works that were only partially 'opgemackt', if they were so at all.

I began this discussion of cost-cutting techniques with some observations on quality differences between works of art sold to patrons and to an anonymous market in the 16th century. Were there similar differences in the seventeenth century? Did painters like Van Goyen, who were able to polish off two or three paintings a week, thanks to their more painterly, evocative technique, work up the commissions they received more carefully than the works they sold on the market? Could this extra labor and care be reflected in the much higher prices they got for commissions? I am thinking, for example, of Van Goyen's famous *View of Leiden* for which he was paid 650 gulden in 1651,<sup>2</sup> which was ten to twenty times as much as his ordinary paintings brought at auction or when they were assessed in inventory. It would be instructive to study the techniques he and other artists employed in carrying out commissions and in comparing them with works that they may, more or less plausibly, be said to have sold on the market.

Professor Van de Wetering, in his analysis of 17th century painters' techni-

ques, emphasized the *differences* he sees with the 'moderns', and with Cezanne in particular. But if we go back a bit earlier to the immediate predecessors of Impressionism, we get a striking parallel with the tendency to leave out or truncate the 'opmacken' stage in completing a picture. Albert Boime, in his well-known book on *The Academy and French Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, remarked that Thomas Couture, the master of Manet and Puvis de Chavanne, encouraged his pupils to develop 'spontaneity and immediacy' to the detriment of the traditional 'sketch-finish phases of the atelier routine'.<sup>3</sup> For Couture the 'ebauche', or sketch, was the fundamental stage in executing a painting: any working up should be done, not after the paints applied in the first layer had dried, as had traditionally been thought, but at once, when they were still wet. In the three-way competition between Knibbergen, Van Goyen, and Porcellis, incidentally, each painter was supposed to complete his picture the same day, and actually managed to do so. This implies that there was no time for letting the paints dry. The working up stage must have been done, as it was by the early Impressionists, when the paint was still wet.

To sum up, the fundamental distinction, as Boime saw it, between the Academists and the Impressionists was in the extent to which the 'ebauche' should be covered up and elaborated. For the Impressionists who followed Couture's advice, the 'premier effet' was all: for the Academists, the quality of a painting resided both in its composition and in its 'rendu' or finish.

Now what does all this have to do with the influence of 'economic factors' on style? It is immediately clear that a painter adopting a 'Van Goyen technique' could complete a painting much more quickly than one practicing the elaborate 'Mannerist' technique of a Jan van Bruegel or a Lucas van Valckenborch. Since the expenditure of labor was the dominant element in determining the cost of a painting and, under free entry and competition, its price, we would expect that the more rapidly executed works would bring lower prices. The evidence brought together by Alan Chong<sup>4</sup> and myself suggest that the works of the realistic, 'tonal' school of landscape painting, starting with Esaias van de Velde and going on to Pieter Molijn, Jan van Goyen, and Salomon van Ruysdael, did bring substantially lower prices than those of their Mannerist predecessors (typically 15 to 30 gulden versus 70 to 100 for the older works). With these lower prices they created a demand for original works of art on the part of collectors who, in the past, could only have afforded copies. But their works were fashionable enough that they could also gain access to distinguished collections. For the first time, the products of a cost-cutting innovation were not considered somewhat inferior substitutes for 'top-quality' examples but desirable works of art in and of themselves.

Was it economic or artistic factors that had *motivated* artists to adopt these productivity-enhancing innovations in the first place? I don't think we shall find the answer to this question in the case of the first innovators like Esaias van de Velde, Pieter Claesz. or Van Goyen. But I am fairly sure that the *imitators* of the products of these innovators had no choice: if they wanted to match the relatively low prices that this kind of modern painting brought, they had to paint more quickly and turn out more paintings every week or month to make a tolerable living. What happened, in other words, is that as a result of competition, the be-

neficial effects of the cost-cutting innovation accrued, neither to the innovators nor to their imitators, but to the consumers of the new products who could now more easily afford them.

These ideas suggest an answer to a problem that has long puzzled me. When I was working on 17th century guild regulations in Delft, I sought in vain for any evidence that painters, before they could become masters, had to furnish a 'proef' or master piece, as other crafts in the guild of St. Luke were obliged to do. The glassmakers had to produce a glass with 'ponten', the 'plateelbackers' a salad dish painted all over, and so forth. But the regulations of the guild called for no such proof from the artists - painters: only the 'kladschilders' - the decorators or broad-brush painters - had to copy a painting of an ox, the animal associated with the patron Saint of the guild, to the satisfaction of the masters of the craft. Amsterdam and most other major artistic centers, like Delft, required no masterpiece, were 'proef-vrij' for the artist-painters. Why had the traditional requirement of the master piece, so typical of 15th and 16th century practice, been abandoned for this particular metier and not for the more artisanal crafts? A plausible answer to this question is that an acceptable standard of quality could no longer be defined that would allow the masters of the guild to assess a fledgling master's performance. At this point, a large expenditure of diligent, competent labor and costly ingredients were neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for producing good paintings. 'Painterly' or tonal works, which took much less time to complete than linear, minutely executed ones, were not necessarily inferior to them. The masters in the guild had no self-evident criteria by which they could agree whether an artist was ready to be received as master or not. When an apprentice had successfully completed six years of training with one or more master, he was presumably ready to become a master on his own. The market, rather than arbitrary quality criteria, would determine whether or not he could make a living from his art.

The technique of tonal painting as we have seen, was brought to a high point in the second half of the 1640s. Its very success set in motion tendencies that were eventually to reverse it. Rich collectors were not satisfied to buy paintings by contemporary masters for 20 to 30 gulden. They could, of course, acquire paintings by Rembrandt or Rubens for 500 or more gulden, but for those who wanted works that were less heroic, who preferred the exquisite and the intimate to Baroque grandeur, there was a niche in the market that was waiting to be filled. Gerard Dou and, on a smaller scale, the idiosyncratic Johannes Torrentius began to fill it already in the late 1630s and 1640s. But the new school of 'fine painting' that they founded only came into its own in the late 1650s and 1660s, when Frans van Mieris, Gabriel Metsu, Johannes Vermeer, and Caspar Netscher reached their maturity. Their technique marked a complete reversal of the cost-cutting devices of the tonal school. They painted slowly and meticulously. The touch of their extremely fine brushes was so delicate that their brush strokes could hardly be made out with the naked eye. Dou is said to have spent weeks painting a single broom. Vermeer, according to my calculations, probably completed only two major paintings a year. They consciously diminished the productivity of their labor to achieve a much more refined effect than that which the adepts of the tonal school had striven after. Not surprisingly, they worked main-

ly for rich patrons who could afford to pay 300 or more gulden for a single painting of modest dimensions. It is noteworthy that Gerard Dou, Frans van Mieris, and Vermeer all had patrons who either paid them in advance or, in the case of Vermeer, lent them money to ensure their right of first choice over these artists' current output. Because the 'fijn schilders' produced so few paintings, their works were seldom cited in contemporary inventories, in contrast to the numerous attributions to Van Goyen and his adepts, in Amsterdam and elsewhere. In the case of Vermeer, none of whose paintings has so far cropped up in private Amsterdam inventories and hardly any surfaced even in his native Delft during his life time, this lack of 'publicity' seems to have affected his reputation adversely. In the long run it was not such a good thing that a single collector - his chief patron in Delft named Pieter van Ruijven - was able to buy nearly half of his estimated production in his mature years, since, as a consequence, there were not enough of his works circulating in the market to diffuse his name broadly and carry forward his reputation. So it came to pass that, while the quality of his paintings continued to be recognized by connoisseurs in the eighteenth century, his name gradually fell into near oblivion. It was perhaps because Dou, Van Mieris, and Netscher were working in larger cities and were better connected with the highest circles of society, including foreign princes, that their reputation did not suffer the same fate.

#### *Conclusion*

I should like to conclude my tentative foray into the economics of style on a philosophical note - even though philosophy is even more widely removed from my field than art history. It may well appear to you that in the age-old ideological contest between Marxist materialism and Hegelian spirit - guided theodicy, my speculations on the influence of economic factors on the development of style comes closer to Marx than to Hegel. This was not my intention. Indeed, I do not find this stark dichotomy very helpful. I would be the last to deny that stylistic changes have a dialectic of their own: that artists influence each other and have an impact on collectors as well. But artists must sell the products of their labor, and economics intrudes in the process: for the effective demand of the market will depend not only on the preferences of consumers but on their purchasing power. In the aggregate it will depend also on demographic changes that will determine the number of new collections formed, the breakup and dissemination of collections after their owners' death, and so forth. The dialectic of stylistic change would not have been nearly so rapid in the 17th century if so many new collections had not been created and if existing collections had not so frequently been upgraded through purchases of contemporary works. This constant process of renewal emerges very clearly from the high proportion of attributions to living artists in the inventoried collections of Amsterdam burghers from the 1630s to the 1660s and from the decade-to-decade changes in the percentage composition of these collections by subjects - the market decline in histories coupled with the parallel rise in landscapes that I first observed in Delft and confirmed in Amsterdam inventories. Material conditions, in other words, must be favorable if the

world spirit that breathes life into art is to propel real change.

#### **Notes**

1. Lynn Jacobs. 'The Marketing and Standardization of south Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces: Limits on the Role of the Patrons.' In: *The art bulletin* 71 (1989), pp. 207-229; Steven Goddard. 'Brocade Patterns in the Shop of the Master of Frankfurt: An Accessory to Stylistic Analysis.' In: *The art bulletin* 67(1985), pp.401-417.
2. For this and other commissions, see Alan Chong. 'The Market for Landscape Painting.' In: *Masters of 17th century Dutch Landscape Painting*. Exhibition Catalogue by Peter C.Sutton et al. Rijksmuseum, Museum of Fine Arts (Boston), and Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1987, pp. 104-109 and 115.
3. Phaidon 1971, pp. 71-75.
4. Chong, *op. cit.*, p.110.