Peripheral Performances. The languagecultural practices of the Dutch world star André Rieu.

Irene Stengs
Meertens Instituut, Netherlands

To contribute to an understanding of the interplay between globalization and cultural politics of local identity formation, this research focuses on ‘André Rieu popular culture’, an assembly of linguistic and cultural practices with ‘Andre Rieu’ as topic. André Rieu is both musician of world fame and inhabitant of Maastricht, the capital of the Dutch province of Limburg.

As a cultural phenomenon, ‘André Rieu’ has been a site of contestation from the onset. His success made Rieu both the embodiment of the cultural potential of Limburg, and a commercial impresario producing ‘classical music for those who do not like classical music’. Yet, the sheer magnitude of Rieu’s global presence undermines qualifications of ‘Limburg’ as the cultural and linguistic periphery and ‘Holland’ and its elite as the cultural and linguistic standards of measurement.

Each summer, the centre of Maastricht becomes the stage for André Rieu’s Vrijthof Concerts. Thousands and thousands of people find their way to the Vrijthof: local citizens, other Limburgians, other Dutch and foreigners. The latter find their way to Maastricht in increasing numbers, which seriously alters the performance in various ways.

The Vrijthof Concerts 2013 will be the empirical basis of this presentation. During these concerts, Rieu plays with his identity as an inhabitant of Maastricht/Limburg by using local language, local imagery and local cultural forms. Yet, at the same time he has to take care to remain entertaining and understandable for the much larger foreign (mainly English-speaking) part of the audience. Within this context of continuous language-switching (between local language and English), the use of local language enables Rieu to open up different ways of engaging with Limburgianness, ranging from direct nostalgia to ironic metacommentary on those who mock local language and locate Limburg/Rieu as peripheral.

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