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MEDIA, MORALITY AND POPULAR CULTURE. THE CASE OF THE NETHERLANDS 1870-1965

Frank van Vree

One of the most successful branches of Dutch exports, over the last decades, has been the audiovisual media industry. This may seem quite remarkable for an economic activity that usually depends heavily on language and cultural traditions. However, companies like Endemol do not export actual programs, but ideas and formats, the most spectacular of which has become world-famous: *Big Brother*. The program was a huge financial success for its licensee and, at the same time, as the Dutch were soon to discover, proved an icon of the times during the political turbulences of 2002. These had so many features in common with the television program, like the swinging moods and preferences of the public, the new 'frankness' (or should we say: exhibitionism), the public confessions and ongoing conflicts in front of the camera.

Both *Big Brother* and these political developments may be seen as symptoms of a process of spectacularisation of the public sphere, blurring traditional borders between the public and the private. This applies even more to some programs that were, luckily for those outside the Netherlands, not made for export, like *Sex voor de Buch*, which means something like 'sex ahead', literally 'in front of the bow' - bow, being in Dutch *boeg*, phonetically similar to the surname of the program's host, Menno Buch. The show, broadcasted by a commercial TV station, was fully devoted to sex. The public was invited to participate – a call to which many took with wild enthusiasm, revealing their fantasies, not only in words, but put into practice, right in front of the camera, just after prime time, at about 10.30 pm. The program seemed to aim to demonstrate the literal truth of Jean Baudrillard's famous statement that today media and information have become all-pervasive, even obscene and pornographic.

In contrast to television, the Dutch press is still a paragon of sobriety and sensibility. There is no equivalent of the *The Sun*, the *Daily Mirror* or *Bild Zeitung*. Compared to the yellow press in other countries, *De Telegraaf*, the daily with the widest circulation, although referred to as 'sensationalist' ever since the First World War, is a very moderate, informative and particularly 'decent' newspaper. The same applies to the local and regional press, which manages to keep up a relatively high standard in national and international news, economics and culture.

Admittedly, these papers are going through hard times, struggling for subscribers at the bottom of their markets – youngsters, the lower educated and ethnic-cultural minorities, who all tend to turn away from the written media to television as their primary or even only source of news and information, and by saying television I do not mean documentaries or current affairs programs, but infotainment and varied news magazines.

It may be argued that the relatively high standard of the Dutch newspapers and the absence of a yellow press are primarily a relic of the past. Until the late 1960s the Dutch media were firmly rooted in a society and political culture that were 'pillarized' or, in Dutch, *'verzuild'*. Pillarization (*'verzuiling'*), being defined as the emergence of the socio-political formations or, more precisely, the emergence of integrated complexes of social organisations along religions and ideological lines,[1] strictly separated and turned in upon themselves. At the same time pillarization may be conceived as the Dutch version of modernisation.[2] Each of these 'pillars' or '*zuilen*' had its own media, moulding its identity, organising its cohesion and defending its position within Dutch society; newspapers, magazines and broadcasting associations served its cause and were consequently supported not only by pillarized organisations, but also by its readers and listeners. These bonds of mutual loyalty fixed the position of the media in the market: in the twenties and thirties the number of subscriptions to newspapers amounted to more than 95% of the circulation, which meant that there was almost no vending at newspaper stands or in the street. A yellow press could never have flourished amidst these serious, devoted political or religious newspapers, relying on a readership that considered its paper as 'a friend of the family'.[3]

If the serious and relatively sober character of the newspapers today may be considered as a relic, TV programmes like *Big Brother* and *Sex voor de Buch* should be regarded as antipodal to Dutch culture of the late nineteenth and most of the twentieth century - a culture or public sphere that was fully dominated by Christian and middle class moral values, a culture in which, according to current historiography, there was virtually no room for dissenting voices, for rough emotions, for physical experiences, for the spectacle and sensations that are so characteristic of 'mass culture'. This brings us right to the main theme of this article, the highly problematic position of the emerging popular culture in the Netherlands since the late nineteenth century.

Mass media and popular culture: Some preliminary remarks

Before moving on we should consider, at least for a moment, the nature of our research and its object as well as the terminology we are using. First of all the preliminary, explorative character of this contribution should be stressed. Although Dutch media history has achieved considerable progress over the last decades, very little has been done to develop a more-or-less coherent perspective on the emergence and evolution of popular culture. Press historians, for example, may build on a solid base of institutional, economic and political research as well as works using a more integrated approach or method, such as contextualised content analysis, the development of the public sphere or journalism culture.[4] The same applies to the history of radio and television that hardly existed a few decades ago, but may boom the coming years, now that the archives are being open up and old programmes become available through *streaming video*.

Until now, however, the history of popular culture has not received much attention.[5] Our knowledge in the field of popular film and, even more, music and magazines – to name only three important expressions of popular culture - is fragmentary and consequently this article cannot be more than an exploration. This immediately raises another preliminary question: the problematic status of the term 'mass' in relation to culture and media. There are good reasons to doubt whether one should stick to this expression. 'Mass culture' and 'mass media' invoke images of a vast audience comprising many thousands or even millions of individuals. This, according to John B. Thompson in his powerful study *The media and modernity*, may be an accurate image in the case of some media products, but definitely not all of them, either past or present.[6] The important point in this kind of communication is not the number of recipients, but the availability of its products.

Moreover there is a second objection to the term 'mass' or 'masses', since it bears, as Henk te Velde has already mentioned, strong connotations to traditional criticism in cultural theory as well as the social sciences, steeped in prejudices concerning media and modern life. In this discourse the concept does refer to a social phenomenon, that was at the same time present and a future threat. The idea of 'mass' in relation to media suggests 'that the recipients of media products constitute a vast sea of passive, indifferentiated individuals'.[7] This kind of criticism, based on the idea of an 'almighty media', assumed that the rise of modern media did produce 'a kind of bland and homogenous culture which entertains individuals without challenging them', killing their critical faculties and providing instant gratification.

These kinds of ideas and connotations related to the very concept of 'mass' seem to blur our view of the process that actually underlies all this,

namely the growth of 'mediated interaction' in almost all areas of social life, in politics as well as sports, leisure and culture, a process in which traditional folk culture has been transformed into or even replaced by modern i.e. *mediated* popular culture. For all these reasons I prefer to define the subject of this contribution in terms of media and the rise and repression of modern popular culture. Thus I will confine myself to the period from the late nineteenth century to the 1960s, concentrating on magazines, papers, radio and television, film and music and leaving aside, although not completely ignoring, non-mediated forms of popular culture, like dancing, shopping and life-music. I would like to argue that from the late nineteenth century on, during the growth of the system of pillarization, manifestations of popular culture have been repressed, selectively tolerated and neutralised, at least from the point of view of the dominant religious and political groups within society. Nevertheless, in some areas popular culture did emerge, spreading among various social groups, particularly in cities like Amsterdam and, even more, Rotterdam in the 1920s and 1930s.

Old vices, new vices

In 1908 the city council of Rotterdam decided to put an end to a longstanding and legendary phenomenon: the city's annual fair or *kermis*. This decision was the outcome of a long political struggle, dating back to 1892, when several thousand citizens petitioned for the abolition of the annual fair on the grounds that it had 'such a negative effect on moral and spiritual life, brutalizing the people, provoking prodigal behaviour, undermining people's health, disturbing religiousness, undermining authority and leaving misery everywhere'.[8] There had even been a painstaking enquiry to prove that fluctuations in the number of illegitimate children could be linked to the fair, a correlation that appeared impossible to verify, notwithstanding these efforts. Initially the abolition movement found its adherents mainly in orthodox-protestant circles, but gradually it also received support from some Catholics as well as rightwing liberals, who were initially opposed to a more repressive policy. By 1908, however, political ideas and the balance of parties had shifted and a broad majority now voted in favour of abolition. A similar event took place just a few years later, when the council decided to tear down a whole quarter, famous around the world for its pubs, dancehalls, gambling dens and numerous brothels.[9]

The campaign against traditional 'immoral' popular entertainment was not a typically Rotterdam phenomenon. On the contrary, the harbour city was even late compared to other municipalities such as The Hague, Delft, Groningen and even Amsterdam. Fairs, animal fights, dance halls, rough games were all targets as local authorities everywhere tried to

abolish or at least curb them, as councils became convinced of the idea of a *moral authority*, a moral government, an idea that was propagated by Calvinists and Catholics alike and was central to the formation of their political, social and cultural parties and the organizations that were to make up the orthodox protestant and catholic pillars around 1900. Moral issues appeared to function as an ideal glue, patching up social differences between and within the religious communities.[10] On the other side of the political spectrum, the socialist movement cherished quite different ideals and ambitions, originating from its very different analysis of society, but ultimately it also sided with the religious and conservative parties. The liberation of the working class and the edification of the people required discipline and moral superiority. Alcoholism, moral corruption, gambling, physical and spiritual excesses were the enemy, and socialism had been fighting them since the very beginning of its existence.

As a result an unlikely coalition came into being, opposing traditional 'physically uncontrolled', 'unrestrained' and 'uncivilized' forms of popular culture, the use of alcohol and all kinds of moral excesses, while promoting a strong belief in the edification of the population. Although Catholics, Calvinists and Socialists held different views and even clashed on the nature and the ends of this cultural and moral edification, they could agree on a policy to raise a barrier, not only against the living remnants of a pre-modern working-class culture, but also against the burgeoning modern popular culture. Together they could rely on a vast majority in electoral terms of more than three-quarters of the population, with far reaching consequences that became particularly clear in the interwar period.

Repression and Elevation

The rejection of nearly every aspect of modern popular culture by the dominant political, religious and cultural groups during the interwar years found its expression in various ways, not only in speeches and writings, but also in the emerging social sciences[11] and the social and cultural policy of the period, in their own organizations, and, of course, in the structure and character of the Dutch media. The history of Dutch cinema provides a clear example of this argument.

Viewed as an interesting and exiting but relatively harmless attraction during the first decades after its introduction, the moving image gradually developed into an established and interesting branch of entertainment that might be used for political and ideological ends as well.[12] For almost ten years the Dutch parliament discussed measures to control what was generally referred to as '*het Bioscoopgevaar*', the danger of cinema. Numerous proposals were launched during the ongoing debate,

containing measures to banish children from public screenings, to split up cinemas into two parts, as was common in some churches, putting the men on the left hand side and the women on the right and banning the dimming of the light during the show. Censorship turned out to be at the core of the law that was finally passed in 1926, the *Bioscoopwet* (Cinema Law). A national board was established, consisting of representatives from the main political and religious groups. Its members, being well-known spokesmen of their own group, took their job very seriously. Films with an explicitly erotic or violent character were forbidden, where definitions of 'erotic' and 'violent' were interpreted according to the very narrow standards of those days. Sometimes screening was allowed on the condition that the offensive scenes were edited out. The same happened to films with an undesirable political message; thus the works of all Soviet directors could not be given public screenings. Finally all films that might offend the religious feelings of any group in society were subject to strict censorship. The Netherlands had the most rigid film regime, wrote Hyacinth Hermans, a monk and outstanding member of the national board of censors. In his autobiography he wrote that at an International Catholic Film Conference in Munich the situation in the Netherlands was considered to be a unique example of morality.[13]

Although it may be clear that the government and the political and religious leaders grossly overestimated the influence media might have on its audience, their measures definitely had an immediate impact. Since the Board of Censors appeared to be quite strict with regard to piquant, sensationalist and violent scenes, cinema owners tended to show U-rated films. On account of the criteria used by the Board, American films were more often 'victim' of censorship because of their violent content, whereas many French films could not escape censure because they contained risqué scenes. Even the 'better' German films, generally favoured by the Board over US films, were subject to censure, mainly because of their portrayal of loose morals and improper relations.[14] Yet even this was not enough. At a local level, city councils and mayors continued to impose even stricter rules, as they had done before the national *Bioscoopwet* came into force. In the southern Catholic part of the country, city councils and local priests prescribed a separate inspection by the Catholic Board of Film Censors. In some Protestant areas, screenings on Sundays (or even late Saturday nights) were not allowed.

The mighty arm of censorship stretched overseas as well, as in the Dutch Indies the rules were stricter still. Any scene that might undermine the image and position of Europeans in the eyes of the indigenous population had to be edited out. In 1934, film importers and cinema owners in the colonies sent a petition to the government, complaining that the screening of a large number of films had become virtually impossible.

Due to the drastic number of *cuts* imposed, the audience was no longer able to follow the story line of many films.[15]

The history of Dutch radio resembles that of the cinema in many respects, as does the history of public libraries, education, sports and various branches of entertainment. Following the political rules and conventions of the pillarised nation state, based on pacification, mutual agreement and equal treatment of minorities, both national and local government issued enabling legislation that set the moral and political rules and supplied the judicial instruments to maintain these. In the field of radio broadcasting this policy resulted in a unique system that forms the basis of the Dutch public media to the present day. In 1930, after seven years of struggle between various commercial, political, religious and national interest groups, the *Zendtijdbesluit* (Broadcast Time Order) was issued, awarding the two Dutch radio frequencies to four broadcasting corporations, the orthodox protestant NCRV, the catholic KRO, the socialist VARA and the non-denominational AVRO. Some minorities and special groups, like the liberal Protestants, received airtime varying from a few hours a week down to half-an-hour a month. Thus the radio was organised along the lines of the existing pillarized media landscape. The decree meant a heavy blow to the AVRO, which had developed from a more-or-less commercial station into a 'neutral' corporation, aiming to keep the radio free from politics and religion and calling itself 'truly national' for this very reason. The other corporations heavily challenged the aspirations and claims of the AVRO, arguing that diversity was the most characteristic trait of the Dutch nation, and the AVRO saw its following gradually reduced to the non-orthodox, liberal and conservative middle classes.[16]

At the same time, censorship was introduced. All programmes were to be submitted to a committee that was entitled to prohibit their broadcasting or to demand changes in the text or even the music. According to the rules all programmes that might possibly hurt the feelings of other groups in society or were too political were eligible for banning. The censorship committee used its power thousands of times during the thirties, prohibiting lectures on Spinoza (too atheistic) and Erasmus (ridiculing monks) and thwarting not only programmes that were too political, especially of a socialist origin, but also radio plays and entertainment shows. Although the general rules and infrastructure were set by the government, Catholics and orthodox Protestants as well as socialists tried to repress any expression of immorality and sensationalism within their own pillarised organisations in the field of education, housing, sports, labour unions, women's clubs and, of course, the media, radio, newspapers, magazines as well as publishing houses and film clubs. At the same time the pillars aimed to promote more 'elevating' cultural

practices; Catholics and Protestants because they wanted to fight immorality, socialists because they were convinced that culture would contribute to the emancipation of the working classes. In everyday life, this implied a full exposure to traditional 'high' culture as the real source of true civilization.

However, it gradually became clear that one could not simply stick to this policy of repression and refusal with regard to modern media and popular culture and that film, radio and entertainment or a more accessible style of journalism did not necessarily do any harm to religious feelings or political discipline, but might even be deployed to serve a higher cause, be it the word of God or socialist unity. As a result, Catholics and Protestants started to make movies on their missionary activities and founded cinemas for young people. There were even critics, like Janus van Domburg, once a member of the famous Film Liga, who were arguing that Catholic film makers should follow the aesthetics of the Soviet avant-garde, to improve the quality of the religious cinema.[17] As mentioned above, the dangers of radio were counteracted by the foundation of their own organisations, broadcasting programs that were easy to recognise and were meant to reinforce the solidarity of the pillar. Sports were easier to incorporate: practising sport might contribute to discipline and keep youths away from dancing, street-life and other bad (sexual) habits. At the same time there were numerous notes of warning against 'sport madness' and professional sports.

And so popular culture trickled into Dutch society in a more or less domesticated form – a process that was reflected by the press during the first decades of the twentieth century. An exploratory analysis, based on research of six non-religious newspapers, demonstrated that modern popular culture was almost completely neglected during the first decades of the century.[18] Only sport received some attention, although the reports were very brief yet. Conversely, 'high culture' such as music, literature, painting, opera, theatre and museum exhibitions, appeared to be a natural subject for attention: the editors obviously went along with the elite and the middle class in their pursuit of the moral and cultural edification of its readers. The attention paid to traditional popular theatre, exhibitions, amateur plays and concerts performed by schools, clubs and associations, fits in with this thesis. These activities were considered to be 'healthy' expressions of recreation and a sound base for cultural elevation. In the interwar period new patterns became visible, at least with regard to the attention paid to some particular fields of popular culture. From the 1920s onwards, sport received considerable attention in the press, appearing as a common and generally accepted 'neutral' activity, although Protestant newspapers refused to report on sports played on Sundays and Roman Catholic journals tended to focus exclusively on the achievements of

Catholic clubs and sports that were considered to be popular among the Catholic part of the population, like cycling.

Less innocent, but nevertheless evident in the daily press, with the exception of the Protestant newspapers, was the cinema. The love of film, however, was never unconditional. Roman Catholic papers, for example, openly disapproved of films with an explicit erotic or non-Catholic character and refused advertisements showing unveiled knees or shoulders, while some liberal newspapers opposed popular cinema, propagating the idea of film art instead and paving the way for the famous *Film Liga*, consisting mainly of journalists, artists and filmmakers, including the literary critic and writer Menno ter Braak and film-maker Joris Ivens. Even in the papers that paid ample attention to all kinds of films, one clearly senses an undertone of disapproval with regard to the glitter and glamour around them, or, at least, serious worries on the effect of the 'strong emotions' of the film on children and even adults.[19]

These tendencies may also be discerned in the socialist daily *Het Volk*, which had become the second largest newspaper in the Netherlands in 1931. The attention given to popular culture, particularly sports, radio and cinema, had grown considerably, but socialist ideology never fully disappeared from the reports and reviews. In the way the paper reported on these events and spectacles one may even see an effort to reconcile modern popular culture with both older popular traditions and progressive labour values. Nevertheless the growing attention given to popular culture gave rise to concern, discontent and opposition among some elements within the socialist movement itself. Senior national and local party members especially complained about the 'unaesthetic look' of the heads and the photographs printed in the paper, the sensationalism used by reporters and editors, and the 'amoral' stories. During the annual party congress and at the meetings of the national board of the Social Democratic Labour Party (SDAP), prominent officials complained that the paper was viewed to be 'annoying' for 'decent people', because it was 'too vulgar, too cheap'.[20] Willem Drees, a member of the newspaper's Board of Commissioners, who was to become the legendary postwar prime minister, strongly disapproved of 'the craving to be the first to publish sensational news', the overwhelming attention given to crime and sports, particularly 'a crazy, ridiculous excess like the six-day bicycle race', where the paper had even offered a prize for the winner.[21]

There were other senior party leaders who were worried about the changing character of the socialist press and the rise of popular culture, among them Emanuel Boekman, Alderman of the city of Amsterdam until his suicide on the day after the capitulation of the Netherlands in May 1940, and now viewed as the foremost ideologue of postwar cultural

policy in the Netherlands.[22] Boekman propagated the elevation of the masses through the spread of high culture as a source not only of *aesthetic* but also, above all, of *moral* civilisation. In his publications as well as his political work he advocated government intervention. Fellow socialists like the members of *Kunst aan het Volk,* an association founded in 1904 to uplift the masses through the arts, or the legendary Henri Polak, the 'rabbi of the Jewish proletarians' and founder of modern unionism in The Netherlands at the end of the nineteenth century, did not wait for government action and took numerous initiatives. Polak, for example, deeply embedded the idea of aesthetic education of the working class into the policy, activities and publications of the labour unions and youth organisations he presided over during the first decades of the century.[23]

Although the views of Boekman and Polak on the elevation of the masses were widespread, no formal government policy developed, except at a local level, such as in the social-democratic stronghold of Amsterdam. Particularly the introduction of the eight hour day in 1919-1920 led to new initiatives when the SDAP included in its municipal program a demand for furtherance of 'popular development' (*volksontwikkeling*) by government support for libraries, museum, concerts and sports. Liberals as well as Protestants and Catholics did not consider cultural elevation as a public issue: government intervention should be limited to school education and some support for cultural institutions of national importance, the rest was to be the task of private initiatives. On that level, however, pillarised organisations developed numerous more or less 'safe' activities in the field of education, culture and leisure. [24]

The Rise of Popular Culture

Apart from specific differences of opinion, for example on the role of the government, Dutch politicians, intellectuals and religious leaders of various denominations shared a common belief in the superiority of 'high culture' as well as a certain despair of the future of western civilisation. In the Netherlands, like elsewhere in Europe, Ortega y Gasset's critical observations in *La Rébelon de las masas* were welcomed, and this was even more the case with Johan Huizinga's lengthy essay *In the shadow of tomorrow* that was published in 1935.[25] In this work, subtitled 'diagnosis of the spiritual distemper of our time', popular culture (radio, newspapers, film, and sports) served as a vehicle for the vices of contemporary society. At the time, there were very few people in the Netherlands who openly dared to cast doubt on the analysis of this famous historian.

The first time Huizinga had been confronted with modern popular culture in its full glory had been fifteen years earlier, during his stay in the United States. At that time, he was above all 'surprised' by what he saw

and heard; perhaps he did not realize that the rise of popular culture was an irreversible process that would ultimately reach the Netherlands as well. And it did, despite all the opposition and contempt shown to *le défit américain*. While the assumed corrupting effects of film and radio could be curbed, as we saw, thanks to a strict policy of censorship and regulations - city life turned out to be a tougher battlefield. Rotterdam, for example, assumed the air of a dynamic metropolis, with modern bars, pavements, dance halls and clubs playing jazz, or else cabaret and orchestras; with cineacs, illuminated news and advertisement trailers, more sensationalist newspapers, sporting contests, modern buildings - a modern city that resembles the description given by Vanessa Schwarz in her book *Spectacular realities*,[26] but also a city in which avant-garde and popular culture became closely connected, as was demonstrated three years ago at an interesting exhibition, 'Interbellum Rotterdam, Arts and Culture 1918-1940'.[27]

The intertwining of modernity and popular culture found a clear expression in the Rotterdam press, in printing and book design as well as local magazines and newspapers like the non-partisan *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* and its socialist counterpart *Voorwaarts.* A particularly interesting case is *Groot Rotterdam*, a family magazine founded in 1923 that managed to attract more than 100.000 subscribers within a few years. It contained many illustrations, aerial photographs, pictures of modern buildings and public works, stories, prize contests, women's and children's pages, sports and comics. As a local magazine it showed no signs of nostalgia whatsoever – on the contrary, it clearly expressed its faith in the modern city.

The combination of modern style and more popular forms of journalism turned out to be very succesful. There is no doubt that these successes had a slow but inescapable impact on the press in the country as a whole. In fact, we have already demonstrated this a few pages earlier: the complaints about the socialist daily *Het Volk* in the early thirties were the result of a drastic restyling and reorganisation of this newspaper after the formula of the Rotterdam-based *Voorwaarts.* The operation was led by the director of the Rotterdam paper and appeared to be a overwhelming success. The circulation of *Het Volk* tripled within 18 months to almost 200,000, making it the paper with the second largest circulation. The emergence of modern popular culture proves that wide social circles were receptive to it, at least in main cities like Rotterdam and Amsterdam. On the basis of newspaper readership figures there are good reasons to assume that these circles consisted of non-religious or at least unorthodox elements of the middle and lower classes, including the more pragmatic socialists, but excluding members of the conservative and liberal bourgeoisie. Following this line of reasoning one may conclude that more

than half of the city population, perhaps even 70% was receptive to modern popular culture.

Restoration and Cultural Revolution

The reform movement, drawing its inspiration from a deeply felt reluctance towards pre-war politics and the past experience of the Nazi occupation, and aiming to 'renew' politics and society after political and social lines instead of religious principles did not hold sway for long in the postwar era. Even in 1946, hardly a year after the liberation, pillarised institutions regained their position in society. The widely expected *Doorbraak* (political breakthrough) never took place, and during the late 1940s and 1950s fifties the intensity of pillarization actually grew if measured in terms of the degree of organisation. Yet this was not simply a restoration of the pre-war situation. There was more room for dissenting voices, experiments and renewal, not only in the field of the arts and literature but also in popular culture. The abolition of radio censorship, for example, clearly illustrates that the atmosphere had become at least a little less narrow-minded and oppressive.

Cultural criticism, however, persevered until the very end of the 1950s, partly as a continuation of the mood of decline and despair that already existed before the Second World War, partly as a consequence of past experiences. A rather peculiar form of pessimism was ventilated by some young intellectuals, writers and artists, who felt the war had taken away the very bedrock for morality and belief in progress. Others pointed out that the war experiences, just like the cold war and the atomic bomb, had led to a widespread demoralisation, particularly among the younger generation, which might have a negative effect on national culture.[28]
Yet this was not all, the war experiences were not the only source for cultural criticism and pessimism. Other circumstances, like the emergence of a more aggressive and independent youth culture, the spread of American popular culture, along with the settlement of thousands US-soldiers in Western Europe and the cultural programmes related to the Marshall Plan, had also contributed to the widespread feelings of discontent, raising new objections and leading to new lines of argument, particularly in relation to the 'mass youth' from the concrete jungle which was considered as uprooted, detached, materialistic, even nihilistic. Social scientists, then a newly established profession, trying to prove that this criticism was justified, played an important role in the debate on these issues.

The debate about television, reluctantly introduced by the Dutch government in 1951, and in the face of objections from the four 'pillarized' broadcasting corporations and giving priority to the interests of Philips as an export industry, may be seen as a perfect illustration of widespread opinion on both the 'mass' as well as the media. A few months before the

first programme was broadcast, *futurologist* Fred. L. Polak, a prominent cultural theorist, published an essay, predicting that television would conquer the country as it had done earlier in the US. The invention of this medium should be ranked with that of the printing press, at least when we looked at its impact, because on other points a comparison would turn out in favour of the press. Television, according to Polak, 'literally moves on the surface of the screen and will raise superficial, empty-headed people'. It would lead to addiction and new forms of illiteracy; in short, all the vices of 'mass culture' were projected onto the new medium.[29]

Secretary of State Jo Cals, in his speech on the occasion of the first broadcast, appeared a little more optimistic. Television might even be turned into a positive force and, in capable hands, contribute not to the destruction but to the distribution and advancement of culture.[30] That very month the government decided to install a Television Board to promote these aims. Its task was to report on the social, cultural and educational aspects of the new medium. From the research carried out by the Board and others in the following years it appeared that the impact of the new medium was very limited, due to the fact that initially the number of television sets grew very slowly (from about 3 % in the mid-fifties till 25% in 1960) and that there was only one station, broadcasting a few hours a day, as well as the innocent character of the programmes that consisted mainly of music, drama, news, and children's television. Moreover, social scientists reported that television appeared to reinforce family life instead of disturbing it, and to increase social and political involvement.

It was only in the 1960s that the cultural and political climate was to undergo a dramatic change. However, when Jan de Quay in his first speech as Prime Minister in 1959 announced that it was about time that the newly acquired material wealth should be used to morally and spiritually uplift the nation, the first signs of a radical change were already visible. Since this theme will be discussed elsewhere, I will confine this analysis to pointing out some features of this process, brought about and fostered by developments in and outside the country: (1) the far-reaching innovations within the Roman Catholic church and the new radicalism in the Protestant churches world-wide were developments that struck at the roots of pillarization; (2) the economic progress that paved the way for better education, housing and social welfare, and, more generally, gave rise to a consumer society, creating new opportunities in lifestyle as well as social and cultural mobility; (3) closely connected with this, the emergence of popular culture, particularly among the youth, a process boosted by television and, above all, music. In this episode of cultural, social and political change that began at the end of the 1950s and took off at the end of the 1960s, the blossoming of popular culture played a key role. It is no coincidence that the disintegration of the pillarised

institutions took place more quickly and more dramatically in the very fields of the media, music, youth culture, cinema and sports.

Conclusion

The last remark on the direct relationship between the rise of popular culture and the so-called 'de-pillarization' of Dutch society underlies another important observation. From the analysis given above of the controversies on popular culture in the Netherlands during the years of pillarization it may have become clear that the negative attitudes, opinions and policy towards popular culture were neither by-products of pillarization, nor just rhetoric, nor an expression of disgust of an elite for the masses. From their perspective these writers, cultural critics, politicians, ministers and priests were certainly right when they argued that modern popular culture was threatening social stability and morality. Because of its predominantly mediated character and its orientation on the market and the taste of the consumer, modern popular culture bears an intrinsic a-political and a-religious character. In the case of these pillarised organisations, based on political and religious values, popular culture did constitute a threat because it would indeed create undisciplined and uncontrolled masses of individuals, following their own taste and emotions, and finally destroy their very solid and disciplined religious and ideological basis.

Population, public entertainment, media (1935-1970)
1970=100

	population	radio sets	tv sets	cinema	sports events	professional theatre	concerts	musea pro 1000 inh
1935	65	21						
1940	68	40		140	30	152*	56*	14
1945	71	11		356	59	174	68	37
1950	78	52		265	120	128	108	44
1955	82	74	4*	271	112	130	97	59
1960	88	93	29	225	103	99	73	70
1965	94	95	78	151	106	108	91	86
1970	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

| | | | ** 1956* | | | ** 1941* | ** 1941* | |

NOTES

[1] This definition, formulated by the early theorist of pillarization, J.P. Kruijt, is still very valuable. It refers directly to the most distinctive trait of Dutch society and politics, i.e. the strong and highly integrated social and political formations based on religion. It was not the socialist movement, but the vast and massive Roman Catholic and orthodox Protestant pillars that gave Dutch society, politics and culture its peculiar character. Cf. J.P. Kruijt, *Verzuiling,* (Zaandijk, 1959); S. Stuurman, *Verzuiling, Kapitalisme en Patriarchaat,* (Nijmegen, 1983); Frank van Vree, *De Nederlandse pers en Duitsland 1930-1939. Een studie over de vorming van de publieke opinie,* (Groningen, 1989)

[2] See Janneke Adema, ´Verzuiling als metafoor voor modernisering´, in: Madelon de Keizer, Sophie Tates (eds.), *Moderniteit. Modernisme en massacultuur in Nederland 1914-1940* (Zutphen 2004) pp. 265-283

[3] Van Vree, *De Nederlandse pers*, pp.48ff.

[4] Cf. Jo Bardoel e.a. (eds.), *Journalistieke Cultuur in Nederland,* (Amsterdam, 2002)

[5] After the final version of this article had been prepared, Madelon de Keizer, Sophie Tates (eds.), *Moderniteit. Modernisme en massacultuur in Nederland 1914-1940* (Zutphen 2004) was published. Only a few contributions, however, deal with popular culture.

[6] John B. Thompson, *The Media and Modernity. A Social Theory of the Medi*a. (Cambridge 1995) p.25.

[7] *Ibidem*

[8] 'Rapport van de commissie voor de Kermis-Enquête', February 21 1894, *Verzameling Gedrukte Stukken Gemeenteraad 1894*, pp. 51-98, Rotterdams Gemeente Archief (Municipal Records).

[9] See also my article on the Rotterdam policy of 'civilisation', 'De verlokkingen van de Zandstraat: vertier aan de zelfkant van een stedelijke samenleving' in: D. Kalb, S. Kingma (eds.), *Fragmenten van vermaak. Macht en plezier in de 19de en 20ste eeuw,* (Amsterdam/Atlanta, 1991) pp.25-42.

[10] This is one of the key arguments in Stuurman, *Verzuiling, Kapitalisme en Patriarchaat.*

[11] See, for example, the early social research into leisure, A. Blonk, J.P. Kruijt, *De besteding van de vrije tijd door de Nederlandse arbeider,* (Amsterdam 1936), or the research on the effects of television in the fifties. Cf. L. Heerma van Voss, F. van Holthoon (eds), *Working Class and Popular Culture,* (Amsterdam 1988); A. C. J. de Vrankrijker, *Volksontwikkeling: geschiedenis en problemen van het sociaal-culturele werk in Nederland,* (Assen 1962)

[12] For the early history of Dutch cinema, see K. Dibbets, F. van der Made (eds.), *Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse Film en Bioscoop tot 1940,* (Baarn, 1986); A. van Beusekom , *Kunst en amusement. Reacties op de film als een nieuw medium in Nederland 1895-1940,* (Haarlem, 2001).

[13] H. Hermans, *Van mensen en dingen die mij voorbij gingen,* (Den Haag, 1945) pp.188-189.

[14] J. Berkhout, *Filmkeuring in de jaren dertig. De representatie van maatschappelijke verschillen en de gevolgen voor de Amsterdamse filmvertoning,* (MA Thesis: University of Amsterdam 2004).

[15] *NRC* 14 September 1934, *Het Volk* 22 September 1934

[16] H. Wijfjes, *Radio onder restrictie. Overheidsbemoeiing met radioprogramma's 1919-1941,* (Amsterdam, 1988); H. Wijfjes (ed), *Omroep in Nederland*, (Zwolle, 1994); J.H.J. van den Heuvel, *Nationaal of Verzuild. De strijd om het Nederlandse omroepbestel in de periode 1923-1947,* (Baarn, 1976).

[17] Robbert de Witt, 'De katholieke reconstructie geprojecteerd op het witte doek', in: de Keizer, Tates, *Moderniteit,* p. 300 ff.

[18] The pilot was carried out by MA-assistant drs. Paula van Dijnen, and included three national papers and three regional papers: *De Telegraaf* (non-aligned), *Het Volk* (socialist), *Algemeen Handelsblad* (liberal), *Leeuwarder Courant* (liberal), *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* and *Haagsche Courant* (both non-aligned). The papers were analysed over a full week in March 1900, 1920 and 1935. Additional information was drawn from Frank van Vree, *De Nederlandse Pers.*

[19] See, for example, *Haagsche Courant*, 9 March 1935 and 'Film en opvoeding' in *De Telegraaf*, 3 March 1935.

[20] See, Van Vree, *De Nederlandse Pers,* pp.101ff.

[21] Minutes Council of Commissioners 30 December 1932, inv.nr 2879. Archives of the SDAP, Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, (IISG), Amsterdam

[22] E. Boekman, *Overheid en kunst in Nederland*, (PhD: Amsterdam, 1939); T. Jansen, J. Rogier, *Kunstbeleid in Amsterdam 1920-1940. Dr. E. Boekman en de socialistische gemeentepolitiek*, (Nijmegen, 1983); H. van Dulken, T. Jansen (eds.), *Het leven als leerschool. Portret van Emanuel Boekman*, (Amsterdam, 1989); J. Rogier en T. Jansen, *Kunstbeleid in Amsterdam 1920-1940,* (Amsterdam, 1983); Ministry of Education, Culture and Sciences (ed.) *Cultuurbeleid in Nederland* (2002)

[23] S. Bloemgarten, *Henri Polak, sociaal democraat 1868-1943,* (Amsterdam, 1993).

[24] Lex Heerma van Voss, 'The use of leisure time by male workers after the introduction of the eight hour day' in Heerma et al, *Working Class and Popular Culture*, 173 ff. Cf. Th. Beckers, *Planning voor vrijheid. Een historisch-sociologische studie van de overheidsinterventie in rekreatie en vrije tijd,* (Wageningen 1983)

25 Johan Huizinga, *In the shadow of tomorrow : a diagnosis of the spiritual distemper of our time* (London, 1964)

[26] Vanessa R. Schwartz, *SpectacularRealities. Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-siècle Paris*, (Berkeley CA, 1998)

[27] At the Las Palmas exhibition hall in Rotterdam. Cf. M. Halbertsma, P. van Hulzen (eds.), *Interbellum Rotterdam. Kunst en Cultuur 1918-1940*, (Rotterdam, 2001). A syntheses is presented by Marlite Halbertsma, ´Culturele arrangementen en stedelijke cultuur´, in: de Keizer, Tates, *Moderniteit,* p. 149-164

[28] M.J. Langeveld, *Maatschappelijke verwildering der jeugd,* (Den Haag, 1952); Cf. P. de Rooij, 'Vetkuifje waarheen? Jongeren in Nederland in de jaren vijftig en zestig' , *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 101 (1986) pp.76 ff; H. Galesloot , M. Schrevel (eds.), *In fatsoen hersteld. Zedelijkheid en wederopbouw na de oorlog,* (Amsterdam, 1987); G. Tillekens (ed.), *Nuchterheid en nozems. De opkomst van de jeugdcultuur in de jaren vijftig*, (Muiderberg, 1990).

[29] F.L. Polak, 'Tele-visie en vrije-tijd', *De Gids* CXIV (1951) p.316; cf. J. Bank, 'Televisie verenigt en verdeelt Nederland' in: Wijfjes, *Omroep in Nederland*.

[30] R. Berends, 'Een staatscommissie en een luchtbel. De Televisieraad en de sociaal-culturele aspecten van een nieuw massamedium, 1951-1953', *Jaarboek Mediageschiedenis* 2 (1990) p.135.