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NEGOTIATING TELEVISION’S CULTURAL POTENTIAL
AS COMMERCIAL ASSET
Early experimental commercial television in the Netherlands

1. INTRODUCTION

On 18 March 1948 in a studio in Eindhoven, the hometown of the Dutch world leading industry Philips, the first commercial television broadcast in the Netherlands premiered. It was a special broadcast for Philips management and the board of directors of the Dutch telecom, who gathered around a receiver at the local golf club somewhat outside Eindhoven. They were treated on local news, performances by national artists, local sports, popular science, and commercial entertainment: the art of flower arrangement, presented by the local flower company. After the successful premiere Philips, from 1 April until 10 July 1951, realized a regular commercial television broadcast under the name of Philips Experimental Television (PET), lead by Philips employee and Dutch television pioneer Erik de Vries. PET had no national coverage. Still the commercial experiment that Philips presented can be considered a key event indicating the dynamics involved in television in the making. It played a crucial role in the public debate evolving around the rise and growth of television and its structural embedding in the 1950s. Apart from Philips, two other parties were leading in the debate: the government and the existing broadcasting companies (at the time for radio only), all persistently addressing the relationship between public and commercial television. This relationship was connected to other issues such as the potential role of television in either politicizing or democratizing Dutch society and the mission of television in terms of high or low culture.

This paper focuses on early experimental commercial television (from the late 1940s until the mid 1950s) in the Netherlands and argues how much these experiments could be considered sites where negotiations were carried out in order to gain power over the cultural space that television promised to provide. Eventually, in the 1960s, commercial forces that kept favouring television as an independent cultural space were pushed back in favour of restorative political powers, reflecting the dominant political framework. The political constellation at the time didn’t allow for any commercial television initiative during and after the institutionalization of television. With the new Broadcasting Act effectuated in 1969, advertisements on public channels were allowed,

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however not commercial broadcasting. Only two decades later, in 1989, commercial broadcasting appeared legally, and broke the monopoly of public broadcasting, introducing like in many other countries in Europe a dual broadcasting system. The very slow commercialization of the Dutch broadcasting system, no matter its early experiments, signals how much the debate on commercial broadcasting articulates the powers (and social structures behind these) at play about television’s potential as an economic (profitable) and cultural medium in terms of community and identity formation.

In order to discuss the role of early commercial experiments as sites of negotiations we take a combined approach: firstly a historical-contextual approach, discussing specific moments in the history of television in the Netherlands in the context of contemporary developments; secondly a social constructionist approach. We consider instrumental Latour’s notion of the actor-network to analyse the construction of commercial television experiments as a social discursive process involving clusters of actors that are in an ongoing process of creating meaning so as to (re)affirm and protect their interests. As Bijker, Hughes and Pinch have argued in their theory on the social construction of technology, each technological artefact has different meanings and interpretations for various groups. They point to the most basic relevant groups in terms of the users and the producers of the technological artefact, without disregarding others such as politicians and journalists. The ability of these groups to act with power may determine the construction of the technological artefact after all. This notion is particularly apt to analyze early commercial experiments in the Netherlands; the industry Philips played a crucial role as producer of television sets and, as we will argue, of programmer, whereas politicians and existing broadcasting companies spoke on behalf of users as a constructed or rather imagined group and acted accordingly.

In the following we discuss early commercial television experiments and the consecutive debate involving commercial parties other than the radio and television industry as well as independent individuals and to what extent all parties involved (state, existing broadcasting companies, radio/television industry and other commercial parties) negotiated the making of television. Consequently we analyze television’s role in the process of post-war modernization in the Netherlands, positioning itself in relation to existing (commercial) initiatives in Europe, while at the same time highlighting the unique character of Dutch television. The combined approach would help to conceptualize television as dispositif, exploring the dynamics of the negotiation process as a struggle over the cultural meaning of television in relation to its technological and institutional infrastructure. Moreover it sheds light on the different roles of the actors involved, as well as

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6 To this end the paper is drawing on primary sources, such as written archival material stored in the relevant archives in the Netherlands, stills and contemporary journals as well as on historical academic work, including the author’s monograph on the career of television pioneer Erik de Vries and his work for Philips. See De Leeuw, De man achter het scherm.
2. FROM EXPERIMENTAL TECHNOLOGY TO CULTURAL PRACTICE

There are several indications of how badly Dutch industry Philips wanted to acquire a leading position on the television market already in the 1930s. Despite the observed reluctance of the Dutch government to engage with television in those days, Philips, for commercial reasons (establishing a future secure commercial market for television sets), invested economic capital in television. At the Philips Lab it focused on improving the line standard and thus the quality of the television image. Also it prepared television demonstrations and to this end it produced two mobile television installations (containing recording, transmitting and receiving equipment). This so-called “caravan” travelled across Europe, in the Netherlands, Belgium and on the Balkan in particular, to demonstrate Philips’s quality equipment and the new medium’s capacity of capturing scenes into moving images, a promising cultural practice. Philips had asked their employee Erik de Vries to take the lead of the caravan.

De Vries started at the Philips Lab in 1930, at the radio department, but soon turned to television once Philips started developing the necessary technology. He was involved in testing the technical quality of transmitting and receiving. The engineers focused on the improvement of the line standard and the further development of Philips’s trump card – the cathode ray tube –, thus representing the scientific discourse of technological innovation. De Vries started already thinking about possible applications, thus representing a more popular discourse on technology. He tried to unite these two discourses within the Philips Lab as early as 1934 where he was granted space to explore the future of televisual communication. In September 1935 he made the first television image at the Philips Lab, turning the camera to the courtyard and that same day he captured a football match between engineers. It was at this the moment that he demonstrated how television as a technical medium could be transformed into a cultural medium. De Vries had convinced the commercial and scientific departments that viewers should see scenes rather then lines, by which he meant that the technical quality of television could best be appreciated through a cultural application.

After the Second World War Philips was convinced that it should and could take the lead in television as it had the required technical knowledge and commercial aspirations to turn television into a mass article. It also realized that without television content (programmes) there would not be such mass article, let alone a market. Thereupon between 1946 and 1948 Philips invested substantially in the development and production of television, preliminary by producing a considerable amount of cathode ray tubes and receivers. Philips feared the “not-invented-here-syndrome”, wanting to acquire the

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9 de Vries E., “Herinneringen aan vooroorlogse experimenten in het NatLab” (Memories of pre-war experiments in the Philips Lab), Philips Koerier, 7 October 1976.
10 Proof of which can be found in the Studio that Philips built in 1935 to enable De Vries to experiment with television. Also Philips presented the results of experimenting at the Olympia Show in London, 4 September 1936 and at the Funkmesse in Berlin, 7 September 1936. Philips Company Archive 811.3 and 814.3 Demonstrations Europe (1935-1944).
leading position on the television market. Internationally, especially in Europe, the television market was developing fast and the line standard became the main issue. Philips had to compete with industries in Great Britain, France and Germany, and managed to set a standard of 625 lines, which became leading across Europe from 1965 on except for Great Britain and France.

Whereas the British Broadcasting Company had taken the lead in broadcasting in Europe with a regular service already as of 1936, in the Netherlands television as a communication medium was not as yet welcomed. Post-war beliefs on what the nation needed in terms of entertainment were not as yet clearly defined in governmental and public debates. Rather television’s potential role in entertaining the audiences was feared and discussed in relation to the possible negative effects of modernization, generally addressed in terms of a “cultural crisis”, which the Dutch cultural elites observed after the war. Cultural public uplifting was the political answer to this crisis, the debate centring on whether television could have a role in it. On top of that the national politics of restoration (focusing on housing rather then on “luxury goods”) hampered the national development of television as a potential cultural medium.

3. PHILIPS EXPERIMENTAL TELEVISION (PET)

In order to claim its position Philips planned experimental commercial transmissions by the end of the 1940s without informing either the government or the existing radio broadcasting companies. At this point it is relevant to note that the government was operating in a highly diverse political framework, in which also broadcasting companies were represented. This framework has been discursively phrased as “pillarization”, referring to the segmentation of Dutch society into a plurality of social and religious currents, along which education, politics, sports clubs, newspapers and eventually radio and television were organized. In the 1920s important religious and social currents in the Netherlands (neutral, Catholic, socialist, Protestant), already represented in politics, schools, newspapers etc. took the initiative of founding broadcasting companies. The “pillarized” broadcasting structure in general reflected the Dutch political landscape, and vice versa political parties, whether represented in the ruling government or not, protected the status of pillarized public broadcasting in the public debate, at the time taken care of by radio broadcasting companies. The pillarized structure of Dutch broadcasting has been extensively discussed by many scholars in the Netherlands, especially at the level of institutional and programme developments, however without

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11 As described by Marcel Metze in a biography of Philips director Philips A., Ze zullen weten wie ze voor zich hebben. Amsterdam: Balans, 2004. See also de Wit O., “Televisie en het initiatief van Philips”, in Techniek in Nederland in de Twintigste Eeuw. Deel V Transport en Communicatie, Zwolle: Stichting Historie der Techniek en Walburg Pers, 2002, 231-259. The investment was also supported by the fear for the decrease of radio production already visible in the US.
14 Broadcasting companies have a membership and publish their own weekly radio and television magazines. They are obliged by law to provide a full range of programmes (containing cultural, educational, informative, and entertainment parts in reasonable proportions). Although all of these early-founded companies still exist, they are however no longer exclusively bound up with specific pillars in society.
touching upon commercial and industrial developments, neither upon big players such as Philips\textsuperscript{15}. As we argue here, especially Philips’ commercial television experiments support the notion of television as a site of struggle and as a discursive practice.

For Philips to start transmissions the government had to grant Philips a broadcast license. It did so, because in first instance Philips did not intend to establish a commercial television channel per se. It wanted to explore television’s commercial potential as a mass medium with a regular television service. Philips and Erik de Vries had created a studio at the Philips Lab where experimental television broadcasts were made. In that studio Philips managed to produce 264 transmissions between 1949 and 1951. With the 625-line standard, Philips presented a complete programme on three evenings a week, all scheduled, shot and directed by De Vries. The programming consisted of a flow of news and current affairs, culture and education, which was carefully scheduled by De Vries so as to engage the viewers into a variety of representations. Whereas the news and sports programmes were local (75 receivers were handed out in the southern province of the Netherlands where the Philips studio was based), the cultural and educational programming was national (performances by national established performers, singers and actors) and international (screening feature films)\textsuperscript{16}.

Television’s cultural identity was expressed in the programming developed by De Vries, and included national, regional and international outlooks on the outside world. Television was conceived as an instrument of cultural communication, as a means of creating a community of viewers brought together through a programming that encouraged viewers looking beyond their own (national) borders\textsuperscript{17}. To learn more about how to transfer this cultural notion of television into an operational television service, Erik de Vries and PET colleagues visited the BBC in July 1948 at the television centre in Alexandra Palace in the heart of London. The British broadcaster at the time operated a daily two and a half hours television service with a large amount of so-called spectacles (television adaptations of theatre plays, operettas and revues)\textsuperscript{18}. Philips acknowledged BBC’s leading position in television, yet was convinced to be able to equal the BBC internationally. To that end it officially published information on the experimental television broadcasts regarding both content and technology in four languages (English, German, French and Spanish)\textsuperscript{19}.

Philips Experimental Television was the first commercial TV experiment transmitting news, sports and cultural and educational programmes; also programmes on what would be called nowadays “lifestyle”, sponsored by the local shopkeepers were produced, alternated with highly appreciated theatre performances; basically a full programme.

Erik de Vries paid another visit to the BBC in February 1950, half way PET. The

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{15} An industrial history of Philips Company (until 1970) was published on behalf of the Company in 5 volumes between 1980 and 2002, written by I.J. Blanken, Geschiedenis van de Koninklijke Philips Electronics NV. It presents a history of the company, highlighting its development into an electronic industry. It does not however address the social cultural dimensions of television broadcasting and the networked relationship between relevant actors in the becoming of television as an institutional and cultural medium.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{16} All scripts of Philips Experimental Television transmissions between 18 March 1948 and 10 July 1951 are kept in Philips Company Archives 811.3 and 814.3.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{17} De Vries very much advocated the notion of television as tele-vision; an outside looks into another world, either geographically or culturally distant. See De Leeuw, De man achter het scherm.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{18} As listed in a report on the visit, which lasted from 19 through 26 July 1948. National Archive, file Erik de Vries, 27.1. It was not De Vries’ first visit. Already in 1936 and in 1938 he visited the auc on behalf of Philips, which indicated how far ahead in the Netherlands Philips was regarding the preparation of television.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{19} Philips’ Experimental Television: Studio Experiences. Deel 1 (Part 1). A publication by Philips. Philips Company Archives.}
British broadcaster had confirmed the three weeks visit stating “so that you may be able to study at first hand the problems which arise in connection with the daily operation of a television service”\textsuperscript{20}. This reveals how much Philips explored the possibilities of a regular television service after PET, either commercial or public. The success of PET encouraged Philips indeed to develop a future strategy regarding broadcasting in the Netherlands. Having experienced the commercial potential of television as a future cultural mass medium, Philips intended to establish a national television service “Televisie Holland”, for which it would provide together with Dutch Telecom technical equipment, facilities and personnel (producer, director). In this model the existing broadcasting companies were expected to serve as distributors of programmes. However the notion of a neutral (not pillarized) television service in contrast with the existing pillarized radio service was completely contradictory to the evenly pillarized power politics at the time. As we will demonstrate in the following, the restorative power politics incited resistance among the industry and progressive groups in Dutch society and eventually lead to a second commercial television experiment in the mid 1950s.

4. PHILIPS AS MEDIATOR OF TELEVISION

After the success of PET Philips’ interest was enlarging the market for television sets, which was in turn depending on the implementation of a regular television service. It was convinced the market would best be served with a national – not pillarized – television service. Although the government had not as yet decided about the institutionalization of television, chances for a true national television service were limited due to the pillarized power of politics. Existing broadcasting companies (for radio only at the time) each reflecting a religious or social current and identity in Dutch society, argued for a television broadcasting permit to be able to respond to the moral challenges of the post-war Netherlands. Their argument reflects a cultural pessimism regarding the potential role of television in the process of modernization, such as cultural levelling and passivity. They were convinced modernization was best served with a television service organized in accordance with the existing radio companies, which they said had proven to act as responsible agents in the cultural arena\textsuperscript{21}. The government coalition was made up of pillarized political parties and consequently favoured a continuation of the pillarized public broadcasting system into television. A more hidden reason was that the broadcasting companies and the government feared that the industry (Philips) would take over the cultural space of television and would eventually introduce commercial television. Thereupon the government issued the existing broadcasting companies a two-year permit per 1 October 1951 for experimental public television broadcasting.

Philips, being the only party with expertise in television, was urgently needed to make the experimental broadcasting happen and aligned with the broadcasting companies. Given the governmental decision it was at the time the only opportunity to further strengthen its position in the television market. For the experimental public television broadcast it provided television equipment as well as the expertise. On top of that

\textsuperscript{20} Norman Collins, controller TV BBC (head of BBC TV), to E.K. de Vries, 1 February 1950. National Archive, file Erik de Vries, 22.5.

\textsuperscript{21} “De houding van de Omroepverenigingen t.o.v. Televisi” (The Attitude of the Broadcasting Companies towards Television), by J.W. Rengelink, secretary of public broadcasting Facility Company NTS (Spring 1951), National Archive, file Erik de Vries, 33.1.
Philips’ employee Erik de Vries carried out the experiments. He was charged with the supervision of all transmissions, which were produced by each of the existing broadcasting companies and their own staff. De Vries instructed them on the floor and in offering television courses, but he was, unlike with PET, no longer responsible for the programming. Only he was allowed to direct so-called “national” programmes, programmes not articulating the identity of the existing broadcasting companies; one such example is the transmission of the coronation of Queen Elisabeth II in June 1953, which was brought into the living room through an international network of channels.

Public television broadcasting after the official early experiments was continued per 1 October 1953, supported by the government. After ample deliberation the broadcasting companies were allowed to continue television broadcasting, yet under the (provisional) supervision of the public broadcasting Facility Company representing the existing broadcasting companies. This was to last until the institutional (legal) establishment of television into a new broadcasting structure, expected in the second half of the 1950s. Philips withdrew. Its interest had been purely economic after all, selling television sets and finding a market, or – should this turn out to be difficult – creating one.

5. DEMONSTRATING THE VALUE OF COMMERCIAL TELEVISION

No matter television’s establishment in the Netherlands, it remained a marginal phenomenon due to the limited television transmission hours (from 3 hours per week in 1953 up to 10 hours in 1955). To guarantee the production of television sets and the continued existence of the industry, Philips started looking for another occasion for television to present itself as an at the same time commercially and culturally interesting medium. Such occasion appeared with the so-called E55, the National Electricity Manifestation, an electricity exhibition in big port Rotterdam, where the city in co-operation with the Rotterdam business community took the initiative of demonstrating the results of modernization in the Netherlands ten years after World War Two. As has been extensively argued, TV was considered pre-eminently the technology of modernization and was granted a special place at the exhibition.

Organizers of E55 (all belonging to the Rotterdam business industry) had already in 1954 approached Erik de Vries, former Philips employee and leader of Dutch television experiments both at Philips’ PET and at the public broadcasting experiments, to supervise the E55. Philips established a separate legal entity, a foundation called Television 55 (TV55), for television transmission at E55. From the start of the foundation the idea was to produce commercial television programmes in order to prove that quality commercial programming in the Netherlands would be completely in line with a Ministerial declaration. In November 1953 the government articulated how advertisement on television would generate the necessary revenues in times of austerity and restoration; during parliamentary debates the government confirmed not to resist commercial television per se, thus articulating Dutch business sense. Philips trusted that, once a success, the E55

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23 The parliamentary debate on commercial television has been extensively discussed by Dutch scholars, among which de Goede P., “Commerciële omroep en de val van het kabinet-Marijnen in 1965” (Commercial Television and the Fall of Cabinet Marijnen in 1965), Jaarboek Mediageschiedenis, 2 (1990): 187-216.
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would convince the Minister to support the final introduction of commercial television in the Netherlands. However for the time being E55 was another experiment.

It may be self-evident that the existing broadcasting companies resisted the issuing of a broadcasting permit for TV55 by the government, especially as TV55 had announced to be willing to transmit a full daily programme for a couple of months from a studio to be built on the E55 ground. They feared the weakening of their position as well as the potential reach of 45 km of the intended commercial television broadcasts from the E55 ground, which meant reaching viewers outside Rotterdam. Yet the ruling Minister from the perspective of the national treasury (future revenues) considered TV55 another useful experiment and reassured the existing broadcasting companies that by no means it would anticipate the introduction of commercial television in the Netherlands. A permit was issued24.

Philips thereupon started what could be considered a lightning operation; the building of a studio, including a hall seating hundreds of people, a shooting and directing room, an outside broadcast unit and the installation of hundreds of television sets across the exhibition ground so as to enable people to watch the live broadcasts at different places on the exhibition ground. It was decided that all programmes would be sponsored programmes, and already sponsor money supported the building of the technical installation. Yet, under supervision of Erik de Vries, 90% of the eventual programming would not be related to the advertisements that were broadcast with the programmes, no matter the actual sponsor.

On 18 May 1955 Queen Juliana of the Netherlands opened the unique event at which the Netherlands during a hundred days presented itself as a modern nation. The transmitter operated within a limited reach of 45 km indeed. On the exhibition ground thousands of people daily came to see the potential achievements of television as has been reported by many newspapers. The Queen left at 13.00 and only four hours later complete film coverage of the visit was broadcast on all television sets across the exhibition ground25. Each day a television announcer introduced twelve programmes, half of which were pre-recorded on film. Programmes were repeated, yet a daily news show was freshly made, alternated with live entertainment programming, such as music and theatre performances, educational information, and quizzes and game shows. Though sponsored, the content of these programmes had no direct relation with the sponsors; it was announced that the performance of comedian Wim Kan “was offered by NV Rubberfabriek Vredenstein and especially written for TV55 and recorded”26. Yet information on sponsors was broadcast, an example of which is “The lying Dutchman, a filmed testimony of the Dutch aviation glory”, offered by Dutch airline KLM.

Already halfway the organizers declared TV55 a success. It had proven its value as propaganda for television, as spectacle and because it evidenced how much sponsored programmes could as well have cultural quality27. Finally, after hundred days, over 350,000 people had visited the electricity exhibition, more television sets were

25 Reported in national newspaper Algemeen Dagblad, 19 May 1955.
26 Vredenstein was a rubber factory. All programme schedules of TV55 are stored in National Archive, file Erik de Vries, 27.4.
27 As stated in a report from a business meeting of the TV55 foundation, 21 July 1955, National Archive, file Erik de Vries, 27.4.
sold and among the government interest in commercial television had increased. The TV55 organizers hoped the E55 experiment would set the ball of commercial television in the Netherlands rolling. Also according to Philips, the government had all the reason to realize commercial television. Erik de Vries, the programme supervisor, again had shown that commerce and culture are not antipodes per se. Moreover he expected commercial television in the Netherlands to guarantee a position of independence, which he considered conditional for the further development of television as a modern medium, not hampered by ideological (pillarized) forces. Progressive forces in the Netherlands, journalists and intellectuals as well as business people who imagined the Netherlands as a modern state also advocated this approach. These considered television the medium par excellence to enlighten the nation with a so-called “cultural break-through”, meaning a television service not framed by pillarization. Some of these would join forces in the next few years so as to realize commercial television. A great example to Erik de Vries of independent commercial television service was ITV in Great Britain.

6. FOREIGN MODELS VERSUS DUTCH POLITICS

With the Television Act of 1954 the British government had decided for a second independent channel, Independent Television (ITV), which operated in a dual system with the BBC, complementary and competitive. The governmental decision was the result of a heated debate among those who believed in commercial television and those who feared the influence of commerce on British cultural life and public broadcasting. Finally the decisive factor here was economics. In the early 1950s consumption increased, in particular of electronic goods, supported by advertising campaigns. And in this context profit was expected from television commercials. Economic growth after World War Two became the most important reason to break the monopoly of the BBC. It resulted in an independent commercial channel that operated like a regulated public broadcaster, with a specific task and partly controlled by the state. The amount of advertising was limited up to six minutes per transmission hour. Contrary to the BBC the institutional structure of ITV was organized regionally; regional production companies delivered programmes for their own region. Such regional spread encouraged the rise of television sets across the United Kingdom.

The British model became part of the debate on commercial television in the Netherlands in the 1950 and 1960s. Only one of the existing broadcasting companies (the progressive one) favoured commercial television, that is to say, it wanted to support advertising on public television. In this respect not only ITV was the example, but also the German regional Bavarian broadcasting company, where again Erik de Vries had helped in 1954 to build the broadcasting structure. As of 1956 the Bavarian broadcaster permitted advertising, accommodated in a separate foundation. It was acknowledged how Bavarian broadcasting director Clemens Münster had managed to realize a television

28 These observations were reported in many newspapers after the E55 ending.
29 De Leeuw, De man achter het scherm, 72-75.
31 Johnson, Turnock, “From start-up to consolidation”, 18-19.
service with a high cultural profile, and it was trusted this would work in the Netherlands as well, if in a dual broadcasting structure just like in the United Kingdom.

To advocate and realize the idea of independent commercially financed television in the Netherlands, in 1956 Television Exploitation Company (TEM) was established, supported by Philips and other Rotterdam business industries; it followed up on the TV55 television exhibition in that it aimed to broadcast cultural television programmes alongside advertising, which would not influence in any way the content of the cultural programmes. While TEM asked the government to issue them with a broadcasting permit, other candidates for operating commercial television appeared. One of which was the Independent National Television (ONTV), founded in 1956 that advocated national television indeed, which would be independent of confessional, political or commercial influences and would not appeal to public financial means. It took a stance against the ruling pillarized broadcasting model. Like TEM, ONTV was supported by business industries. These two companies joined hands in 1957 and merged into the Independent Television Exploitation Company (OTEM). The latter financially supported by big Dutch industries, such as Philips, Heineken, Unilever, several banks, the Dutch Cinema Association, as well as five big daily newspapers.

The Independent Television Exploitation Company emphasized the urgency to extend transmission hours, the need to gather financial means to encourage the growth of television and described as its mission a non-pillarized approach toward society and culture. The OTEM mirrored independent television in the United Kingdom; not sponsored programmes were envisioned, rather advertising in between programmes, which would serve as the only financial source. Erik de Vries, who was most experienced in realizing television services, was already developing a programming structure for OTEM, anticipating governmental debate and decision. The debate, which ranged several years, focused on whether advertising television was permitted and if so, whether it would be best accommodated with a new channel.

In 1961 a governmental memorandum Advertising Television in 1961 was launched, in which advertising was considered a feasible option for financing programming on a separate second channel without interfering with the content of the programmes, just according to the British model. Thereupon OTEM appealed for a broadcasting permit to transmit television programmes for a mere twenty hours per week. Yet anticipating the debate on the memorandum Advertising Television, seven other organizations nominated themselves for a license for commercial television with the government, among which the public broadcasting Facility Company representing the existing pillarized broadcasting companies.

During parliamentary debates the memorandum was hardly applauded. Religious and social parties (the majority in parliament) defended the interests of the pillarized broadcasting companies. Commercial television was pushed aside. Yet a second channel met general approval on condition that the existing broadcasting companies would take care of it. Subsequently a special committee was established to advise parliament on the preferred television broadcasting system, the second channel and the role of advertising. The committee didn’t succeed in harmonizing political parties on a common belief. The

32 According to its memorandum of association.
33 OTEM, De noodzaak van commerciële televisie (The need for Commercial Television), 1957.
parliamentary debates following the advise of the committee even led to the collapse of the cabinet. Thereupon a hasty installed new government drafted a Broadcasting Act, which was approved in 1967 and effectuated in 1969 and firmly strengthened the public (pillarized) broadcasting structure. In the meantime a second channel had been established per 1 October 1964 to be operated by the pillarized broadcasting companies. The Broadcasting Act allowed for advertising on public television, not for commercial television per se.\(^{36}\)

The pillarization model was forced upon television and articulated the conception of the post-war Dutch nation as multiform, yet conservative, pushed back within the borders of the pillars. To put it differently, in the arena where the struggle took place among different players in the field of television that claimed ownership over the new medium (the pillars, politics, the industry), the pillars, supported by confessional and social democratic political parties, finally won. Once and for all the industry disappeared from the television stage. Commercial television lost ground, as did those who saw its potential for cultural and economic growth. Early commercial experiments demonstrate how much television’s role was negotiated as true modern medium supporting liberal values for civilizing purposes\(^{37}\) or serving the dominant political national framework\(^{38}\).

**SUMMARY**

In the Netherlands the rise and growth of television in the 1950s was the result of a public debate in which three parties were leading; the state (government), the existing broadcasting companies, and the industry, which at the time meant the radio and television industry (Philips). One important issue that appeared in the public debate was public versus commercial broadcasting in relation to the potential role of television. This paper focuses on early experimental commercial broadcasting (1940s-1950s) in the Netherlands as a site where negotiations were played out. It discusses how commercial parties other then the radio and television industry joined the debate as well as independent individuals and to what extent all parties involved reflected the struggle over post-war modernization in the Netherlands. Drawing on Latour’s theory and discursively analysing the debates and negotiations, this paper aims to shed light on the different roles of the actors involved, the historical dynamics that shaped television broadcasting in the Netherlands and how eventually commercial forces that favored television as a cultural space were pushed back in favor of restorative powers. This paper also points to the commonalities in historical debates on commercial TV in Europe and to the unique character of Dutch television alike.

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\(^{38}\) Here we refer to the notion of mobile privatization as described by Raymond Williams (Television, 20), pointing to a paradox of television being a technology that at the same time represents a mobile and domestic way of life, thus connecting the public with the private.
RIASSUNTO

In Olanda, la nascita e la crescita della televisione negli anni Cinquanta è stata il risultato di un dibattito pubblico guidato da tre attori: lo Stato (Governo), le società di broadcasting già esistenti e l’industria, che al tempo coincideva con l’industria radio-televisiva Philips. L’opposizione tra broadcasting pubblico e commerciale, in relazione all’importante ruolo della TV, è stata un importante tema di dibattito pubblico. Il saggio si concentra sul primo broadcasting commerciale sperimentale (1940-50) in Olanda inteso come uno spazio di negoziazione, spiegando come il dibattito ha visto la partecipazione sia di altri attori commerciali, oltre all’industria televisiva, come di singoli individui indipendenti, e fino a che punto tutti gli attori coinvolti rispecchiavano le lotte del Paese legate alla modernizzazione nel dopoguerra. Partendo dalle teorie di Latour e analizzando discorsivamente i dibattiti e le negoziazioni, questo intervento cerca di illuminare i ruoli giocati dai personaggi coinvolti, le dinamiche storiche che hanno dato forma al broadcasting televisivo in Olanda, e il modo in cui le forze commerciali che interpretavano la TV come spazio culturale siano state respinte da poteri conservatori. Il saggio sottolinea inoltre gli elementi di comunanza nei dibattiti sulla TV commerciale in Europa, così come i caratteri unici della TV olandese.