Jens Ivo Engels / Frédéric Monier (eds.)

History of Transparency in Politics and Society

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Transparency in postwar Dutch political culture, 1945–1980s

Introduction

Since the “transparency revolution” of the 1980s, transparency has become one of the keynormative concepts that we use to define, measure or criticize modern democratic political systems.¹ Pierre Rosanvallon has argued that these days transparency has come to substitute previous democratic political ideals like “the general interest” or the “truth”. “Not knowing what power is supposed to do, people worry only about what it is supposed to be.”² And according to John Keane “in the era of monitory democracy, the constant public scrutiny of power by hosts of differently sized monitory bodies with footprints large and small, makes it the most energetic, most dynamic form of democracy ever”.³ The concept of transparency of course dates further back than the 80s. It first emerges in the work of Enlightenment philosophers like Immanuel Kant and Jeremy Bentham and in political-philosophical discourse referring to the accountability of government institutions and politicians. Transparency (versus secrecy) is strongly connected with concepts like openness, publicity, clarity and honesty. In modern democracies, transparency is one of the prerequisites for the trust that underpins the system, which is based on the availability of information and the accountability of politicians and government institutions.⁴

Like representation, legitimacy or accountability, transparency, however, in itself lacks any fixed meaning, but acquires different meanings, connotations and interpretations through time and space. From a historical perspective we see that certain interpretations of these concepts gain dominance, particularly through institutionalization in the form of rules, procedures, political languages and institutions that articulate the paradigmatic interpretation of these key concepts.

1 Marschall, Miklos: Transparency, in: Anheier, Helmut K./ Toepler, Stefan (eds.): *International Encyclopedia of Civil Society*, New York 2010, pp. 1566–1570, p. 1567.

2 Rosanvallon, Pierre: *Counter-democracy. Politics in an age of distrust*, Cambridge 2008, p. 258.

3 Keane, John: *The life and death of democracy*, London 2009, p. 743.

4 Marschall: Transparency, p. 1566.

The French political philosopher Bernard Manin, for instance, has improved our understanding of the paradigmatic shifts in how societies define political representation by presenting three ideal types of representative government which more or less succeed each other in time.⁵ It is not the aim of this article to present ideal types of transparency in government and politics, but inspiration is drawn from the work of Manin in an attempt to map the various ways in which the notion of transparency has manifested itself in Dutch postwar political discourse.

The notion of transparency played a key role in the transformation of representative politics across Western Europe in the 1960s. This transformation, characterised by Manin as a shift from “party” to “audience democracy”, meant that political identity formation was no longer predominantly based on a sense of belonging to the same political community. Instead, it came to rest on identification with politicians as persons with a particular political agenda, a particular personality and style of leadership. One can argue that this transformation was a very gradual one: electoral volatility did increase, but the existing political parties continued to play a crucial role in shaping political constituencies. To a significant extent this transformation was shaped by the new ways in which representative politics was represented in and by the mass media, which is commonly referred to as a shift from partisan towards public logic. Journalists started to act as critical watchdogs and associated themselves with serving the common good by offering a critical perspective on the democratic process on behalf of the people.⁶ In the 1960s, the media played a crucial role in shaping a political culture in which notions of “crisis”, a clash of generations and the need for political “renewal” took centre stage. Against this background, it is the aim of this article to track the history and impact of transparency in Dutch postwar political discourse in the decades before the “transparency revolution”⁷.

In a literal sense, the concept of transparency has only recently emerged in Dutch politics. Queries in databases of Dutch digitized newspapers and parliamentary proceedings indicate that up until the 1990s *transparantie* was hardly ever used in relation to politics:⁸ in a 1955 Dutch dictionary, the concept in its figurative meaning is only linked to the sound of music.⁹ Yet, the notion of transparency was very much present in Dutch postwar political discourse in the form of related concepts like *openheid* (openness) and *duidelijkheid* (clarity). Transparency here referred to the need to create a situation in which citizens

5 Manin, Bernard: The principles of representative government, Cambridge 1997.

6 Brants, Kees/ van Praag, Philip: Signs of media logic. Half a century of political communication in the Netherlands, in: Javnost – The Public 13/1 (2006), pp. 25–40, p. 29f.

7 Marschall: Transparency.

8 For digitized newspapers see: www.delpher.nl/kranten; for the proceedings of parliament see: <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/uitgebreidzoeken/historisch> [22. 2. 2020].

9 Woordenboek der Nederlandse Taal, 1955, available at: <http://wnt.inl.nl/search/#> [22. 2. 2020].

knew what to expect from the parties they supported, for instance in terms of the coalition governments they would (seek to) join. It served a clear purpose: to increase citizens' trust in the political system, as part of a broader effort to restore the strength of the democratic system after the war and to fend off the threat of extremism.

This article discusses how transparency became a key tenet of postwar Dutch political culture. The first section explores the partisan use of transparency in Dutch party politics. Transparency was at the heart of postwar debates, initiated by the social democrats, about a fundamental reorganization of the political landscape along the lines of the British Westminster model. The idea was to replace the multiparty, consociational system that was marked by the strong position of the confessional political parties and a political culture of seeking compromises through elite consultation, by a two-bloc system of progressive versus conservative forces. This was supposed to improve transparency and thus increase the agency of voters: by casting their ballot they could have a direct say on the course of government. The second section explores the role transparency played in discussions about the accessibility and clarity of government communication and information, which eventually led up to the 1980 Right to Information Act (*Wet openbaarheid van bestuur*). The third section analyses the role played by television and the popular press in promoting a culture of transparency in the 1960s and 1970s, specifically with regard to the “personality” of the politician and the need to open up to the public as a “human being”. Finally, the fourth section discusses the ideas behind the renovation of the Dutch house of parliament. In architecture and design, the new building was dedicated to promoting and radiating a culture of transparency.

Transparency is also required on the part of the author. This article brings together some of my previous, (partly co-authored) work on postwar Dutch political culture. In most of it, the concept of transparency was not at the heart of the investigation, so this article allowed me to bring my earlier findings together in a new analytical framework. The footnotes indicate where I am building on those earlier publications.

Openheid and duidelijkheid in Dutch party politics

The concepts of “openness” and “clarity” played a key role in Dutch postwar politics. They emerged against the background of criticism against the segmentation of Dutch politics and society in distinct, inward-looking and closed off sociopolitical groups. In the postwar years, pillarization – in Dutch *verzuiling* – became the key term used by the Dutch to describe their sociopolitical land-

scape.¹⁰ It referred to the existence of four distinct and more or less coherent communities united by a class or religion-based identity: the “red” or socialist pillar, the Roman Catholic pillar, the protestant pillar and finally the “neutral” pillar. The latter was made up by people and organisations that resisted the segmentation of the Netherlands along lines of class and religion and therefore labelled themselves as *algemeen*, which roughly translates as general or universal. The process of pillarization had set in from the late-nineteenth century onwards and was marked by the establishment of separate, pillar-based institutions in all spheres of life, ranging from Roman Catholic hospitals and socialist housing corporations to orthodox-Protestant primary schools. Key organisations within these pillars were the socialist, confessional (Protestant and Catholic) and liberal political parties. Their activities contributed to the intertwining of the state and the pillars by ensuring that the state through its policies and distribution of state funds solidified the existence of the pillar-based institutions.

During and after the Second World War, pillarization – or the more pejorative notion of “spirit of segmentation” – was blamed for the dire state of Dutch society. The Netherlands was falling apart. In order for the country to be able to resurrect, segmentation needed to be replaced by cooperation in truly *national* organisations. These ideas circulated among the Dutch intellectual elite that was held captive in concentration camps during the German occupation of the Netherlands. The biggest supporters of these ideas were to be found among progressive intellectuals, many of whom had previously supported the social-democratic party or other progressive-liberal parties and organisations. Some of the support also came from progressive forces within the confessional communities. They joined hands in the *Nederlandsche Volksbeweging* (Dutch People’s Movement, NVB). One of its main goals was to fundamentally reshape the party-political landscape by introducing a strong progressive political party. Countering pillarization in this case meant breaking the power of the confessional bloc in Dutch politics: the *Katholieke Volkspartij* (Catholic People’s Party, KVP), the *Antirevolutionaire Partij* (Antirevolutionary Party, dominated by orthodox-Protestants, ARP) and the *Christelijk-Historische Unie* (Christian-Historical Union, dominated by members of the Dutch Reformed church, CHU) together held a majority of the seats in Dutch parliament. The NVB tried to force the confessional groups to take sides: to either join the progressive forces on the left or to join the conservative bloc on the right. In the end, the NVB failed to

10 For a succinct and critical analysis of the concept of pillarization and its use in Dutch historiography, see: van Dam, Peter: *Staat van verzuiling. Over een Nederlandse mythe*, Amsterdam 2011; van Dam, Peter: *Das Feindbild als Selbstdeutung. Zur Genealogie von Versäulung und Entsäulung*, in: Peter van Dam, Peter/ Wielenga, Friso (eds.): *Religion als Zündstoff. Gesellschaftliches und politisches Engagement in den Niederlanden seit 1945*, Münster/ New York 2014, pp. 15–35.

achieve its goal. The movement supported the establishment of a new progressive party, the *Partij van de Arbeid* (Labour Party, PvdA). Although the new party managed to attract some left-wing members of the KVP, ARP and CHU, those parties did not flounder and re-emerged almost as strong as ever in the first postwar elections. The PvdA, in turn, failed to convincingly portray itself as a broad-based progressive party; the core of the new party was formed by the pre-war social democratic party and in much, the PvdA continued along the lines set out by its pre-war predecessor.¹¹

Although the pillarized order re-emerged after the war, attempts to break through this order, mainly on the part of the PvdA, but also by the liberal political party *Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie* (People's Party for Freedom and Democracy, VVD) did not wane. The concept of openness, *openheid* in Dutch, played a key role in the discourse of anti-pillarisation.¹² The proponents of openness claimed that confession-based organisations limited people's freedom by maintaining their exclusionary, inward-looking culture of organization. Openness in this case referred to opening up to society, to creating a situation in which people were free to decide which organisations to join, instead of being forced to seek isolation in the segmented, pillarized institutes.¹³ In the 1950s, however, Roman Catholics were hampered to become members of institutions that were linked with the socialist pillar, because the bishops advised against it. Moreover, confessional organisations also argued that the call for openness was merely meant to push people to join *other* pillarized organisations of the left.¹⁴

Openness also meant that organisations themselves opened up to society by getting rid of their "pillarized" label and by accepting members of all kinds of denominations and backgrounds.¹⁵ This would only take effect in the early 1960s, after the Second Vatican Council, when confessional organisations opened up to one another (establishing contacts and cooperation among Catholic and Protestant organisations) and increasingly to non-confessional organisations as well.¹⁶

Clarity, in turn, referred to the need to offer voters a clear choice at the ballot box about the direction of government. The social democrats argued that the

11 Kaal, Harm: Constructing a Socialist Constituency. The Social-Democratic Language of Politics in the Netherlands, c. 1890–1950, in: *Archiv Für Sozialgeschichte* 53 (2013), 175–202, p. 192–193.

12 See: Rijnmond kiezer, in: *De Telegraaf*, 29.5.1965.

13 Mellink, Bram: *Worden zoals wij: Onderwijs en de opkomst van de geïndividualiseerde samenleving sinds 1945*, Amsterdam 2013, p. 80, 96.

14 Teleurstelling, in: *Limburgs Dagblad*, 23.2.1955.

15 Openheid en geslotenheid, in: *De Volkskrant*, 26.4.1958.

16 Mellink, Bram: Tweedracht maakt macht. De PvdA, de doorbraak en de ontluikende polarisatiestrategie (1946–1966), in: *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 126/2 (2011), pp. 30–53, p. 47.

confessional parties failed to do so. After the elections these parties, after all, could benefit from their strong position in the centre of Dutch politics. Depending on what suited their interests best, they could either form a coalition government with parties of the left (the PvdA) or the right (the VVD). As a result, progressive confessional voters ran the risk of supporting a party that in the end could decide to steer to the right. Clarity, so its supporters argued, would be beneficial for Dutch democracy. Voters' trust in the political system would grow if they were given the opportunity to decide in which direction the government should go.¹⁷

In the 1950s, clarity and openness had emerged as partisan concepts that were mainly adopted by the social democrats as part of their effort to force the confessional parties to take sides. In the 1960s, these efforts intensified. Clarity and openness were also at the heart of the political message of a new political party, *Democraten '66* (Democrats '66, D66), founded in the year 1966, whose main aim it was to blow up the Dutch party-political landscape and rebuild it along the lines of the Anglo-Saxon model and to introduce the direct election of the prime minister.¹⁸ The fact that these concepts even gained currency among the confessional parties themselves shows the high degree to which clarity and openness dictated the language of politics. The confessional parties argued that through the strength of their political principles (*beginselen* in Dutch) they did offer voters clarity. Voters could count on the fact that these were the guiding principles that dictated the behavior and decisions of confessional politicians.¹⁹ The need to offer clarity thus triggered the confessional parties to put these principles at the heart of their political language and to show voters that it was more than just middle-of-the-road rhetoric. The orthodox-Protestants of the ARP for instance embraced the concept of "evangelicalism" to stress the fact that it was not a party of the status quo, but one with a clear, proactive political agenda that was directly based on the message of Christ.²⁰ As a result, despite the secularization of Dutch society – church attendance was in decline – religious discourse now figured far more prominently, and was more explicitly linked with a particular political agenda than it had been in the 1950s and early 1960s.

17 Mellink: Tweedracht, p. 41.

18 van der Land, Menno: Tussen ideaal en illusie. De geschiedenis van D66, 1966–2003, Den Haag 2003, p. 34; D66 probeerde tot duidelijkheid, in: Het Parool, 11. 11. 1966.

19 Het eigen gezicht van de KVP, 1967, in: Katholiek Documentatie Centrum [hereafter KDC], Archive of Jo Cals, inv.nr. 69; Lijst 5. Verkiezingskrant, 1967, in: Historisch Documentatie Centrum [hereafter HDC], Archive 413, box 6; R.F.M. Lubbers: Wat vooraf gaat aan strategie, in: Politiek Perspectief (1980), pp. 38–50, p. 42.

20 HTK, 1967–1968, 11. 10. 1967, p. 180.

Politics opening up to the public

In the immediate postwar years openness and clarity had first emerged as partisan concepts, claimed mostly by parties on the left who used them against the confessional parties. From the late 1950s onwards, however, these concepts were used by politicians across the board as part of their efforts to counter what they perceived as feelings of alienation, disengagement and apathy among voters, particularly the younger generation and women. These perceptions were triggered by opinion polls that indicated that the number of “floating voters” – voters who switched party in successive elections – was on the rise and that there was a gap between the issues and concerns on the minds of the voters and the agendas of the political parties.²¹ One of the ways to bridge this gap and to increase people’s trust in politics was open communication.

What Schudson has argued for the United States, also holds true for the Netherlands: “the culture of journalism changed and journalists asserted themselves more aggressively than before; and many governmental institutions became less secretive and more attuned to the news media”.²² Also in the Netherlands, journalists got rid of their deferential approach of politicians, the ties between newspapers and political parties loosened, and, to again quote Schudson, “news coverage became [...] more probing, more analytical and more transgressive of conventional lines between public and private”. The culture of “back-room politics”, the idea that the political elite preferred to make important political decisions behind closed doors, was under attack. Journalists were urging politicians to counter “indifference” among voters by showing “more openness”.²³

Against this background, albeit hesitantly, politicians embraced the calls for openness. After a long and complex formation of a new coalition government, in 1963 prime minister Victor Marijnen decided to publish the results of the coalition negotiations “for the sake of clarity and openness in politics”.²⁴ Moreover, members of government introduced press briefings after important cabinet meetings, but information also increasingly found its way to the press through strategic “leaks”.²⁵ Nevertheless, complaints about the culture of “secrecy” (ge-

21 Kaal, Harm/ de Jong, Wim: Mapping the demos. The scientisation of the political, electoral research and Dutch political parties, c. 1900–1980, in: *Contemporary European History* 26/1 (2017), pp. 111–138, pp. 128–129, 132.

22 Schudson, Michael: *The rise of the right to know. Politics and the Culture of Transparency, 1945–1975*, Harvard 2015, p. 143.

23 De Telegraaf, 29.1.1965.

24 *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 1.7.1963; *De Volkskrant*, 1.8.1963; see for 1967: Open, in: *De Telegraaf*, 22.2.1967.

25 van der Heiden, Peter/ van Kessel, Alexander (eds.): *Rondom de Nacht van Schmelzer. De kabinetten-Marijnen, -Cals en -Zijlstra 1963–1976*, Amsterdam 2010, p. 59; van den Broek,

heimhouderij) and politicians' "authoritarian mentality" (*regentenmentaliteit*) persisted. D66 urged parliament to open meetings of parliamentary committees to the public, while the social democrats wanted to improve the accessibility and availability of government documents.²⁶ In 1968 the government decided to install a commission to give advice on government communication, the public nature of political decision making and the introduction of a right to information act.²⁷ The report *Openbaarheid, openheid* ("Publicness, openness"), published in 1970 called for a radical overhaul of the existing culture of secrecy.²⁸ Although the government did not take up all the proposals, the report did lay the foundation for a gradual increase of openness in Dutch politics. The 1980 *Wet openbaarheid van bestuur* (Right to Information Act) was an important milestone, as was the decision in the same year, to open up the meetings of parliamentary committees to the public.²⁹ Politicians had gradually convinced themselves of the fact that openness could bridge the gap between politics and the public and could increase understanding among the public for the way in which political decisions came about.³⁰ Moreover, members of parliament contributed to more transparency in government politics through the increasing use of parliamentary instruments like interpellations, questions and parliamentary inquiries. The new Parliamentary Inquiry Act of 1977 allowed parliament to hold public hearings and to hear sitting members of government.³¹ The first of a range of inquiries was held in 1983.

Opening up to the public also meant that politicians should discuss politics in such a way that citizens were able to understand what they were saying. Already early in the 1950s, politicians were criticized for behaving and talking too "academic".³² They should offer "clarity" (*verstaanbaarheid*) instead of "politicales" (*onverstaanbaar jargon*) a Catholic political journal argued.³³ Complaints continued into the 1960s. A young member of the party board of the PvdA argued that a new language of politics could bring politicians more in sync with everyday

Ilja: Engagement als deugd. Politieke journalistiek tijdens het kabinet-Den Uyl, in: van Vree, Frank et al. (eds.): *Journalistieke cultuur in Nederland*, Amsterdam 2002, pp. 68–82, p. 74.

26 D66 en de buitenlandse politiek, in: *Friese Koerier*, 25.1.1967; *Het Vrije Volk*, 13.9.1967.

27 Brouwer, Jan Willem/ van Merrienboer, Johan: *Van Buitengaats naar Binnenhof*. P.J.S. de Jong, een biografie, Den Haag 2002, p. 192.

28 *Openbaarheid openheid*. Rapport van de commissie Heroriëntatie overheidsvoorlichting, Den Haag 1970.

29 Hoetink, Carla: *Macht der gewoonte. Regels en rituelen in de Tweede Kamer na 1945*, Nijmegen 2015, p. 73.

30 Hoetink: *Macht der gewoonte*, p. 409.

31 Daalder, Hans: *Van oude en nieuwe regenten. Politiek in Nederland*, Amsterdam 1995, p. 266.

32 Kaal, Harm: Popular politicians. The interaction between politics and popular culture in the Netherlands, 1950s–1980s, in: *Cultural and Social History* 15/4 (2018), pp. 595–616, p. 4.

33 *Uw visie gevraagd*, in: *Katholiek Staatskundig Maandschrift* 13/10 (1959–1960), p. 408.

life.³⁴ In the 1960s political parties and members of government started to hire public relations experts who were asked to give advice on political communication and helped politicians to tailor their language to the audience they were addressing.³⁵ As Speaker of the Second Chamber of Dutch parliament in the 1970s, social democrat Anne Vondeling was famous for personally rewriting the questions MPs handed in, replacing borrowed words with Dutch terms and erasing redundant phrases in order to make the language of parliamentary politics less opaque.³⁶

“Nothing works as clarifying as this little window called television”

Television played a pivotal role in shaping a culture of transparency. The medium helped to make politics more transparent by allowing citizens to watch and see the people that represented them from the sofa in their living rooms. After a hesitant start in the second half of the 1950s, politicians understood that television offered them a unique opportunity to literally show voters what politics was all about. By opening themselves up to the public gaze, politicians could try to bridge the “gap” that separated them from the people they represented. In 1955 the Second Chamber decided to allow TV cameras in the plenary hall for the live recording of the sessions of parliament. At first, MPs merely accepted the presence of cameras to record their proceedings, but in the 1960s they developed the belief that televised debates could help to strengthen the position of parliament as the centre of political debate.³⁷ One MP argued that the presence of TV cameras also helped to remind them that they were in parliament to represent the people (watching at home).³⁸

Also beyond parliament, politicians cherished the opportunities TV offered them for new forms of political communication. In 1963 the Netherlands was one of the first European countries to introduce televised election debates. Dutch

34 Nagel, Jan: Juist de jongeren hebben met politiek te maken, in: *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 25.2.1966.

35 van Praag Jr., Philip: *Strategie en illusie. Elf jaar intern debat in de PvdA (1966–1977)*, Amsterdam 1999, p. 25; Bornewasser, J.A.: *Katholieke Volkspartij 1945–1980. Vol. I. Herkomst en Groei (tot 1963)*, Nijmegen 1995, p. 328; Kaal/ De Jong: *Mapping the demos*, p. 131.

36 Hoetink: *Macht der gewoonte*, p. 160.

37 Hoetink, Carla/ Kaal, Harm: *Designed to represent. Parliamentary architecture, conceptions of democracy, and emotions in the postwar Netherlands*, in: Grossmann, Till/ Nielsen, Philipp (eds.): *Architecture, democracy and emotions. The politics of feeling since 1945*, New York 2019, pp. 18–38, p. 30; Hoetink, Carla/ Kaal, Harm: *The Material Culture of Parliament. A case study of the Dutch Second Chamber, 1945–2000*, in: *International Journal for History, Culture and Modernity* 6/1 (2018), pp. 13–48, p. 30; Van der Heiden/ Van Kessel: *Rondom de Nacht*, p. 76.

38 Hoetink: *Macht der gewoonte*, p. 346.

politicians and the press had closely monitored the first televised presidential debates in the USA in 1960. These debates, Dutch politicians argued, had helped to show millions of voters “what politics is all about”. At first, they saw television primarily through the lens of political education. TV could help to counter ignorance: it offered politicians the opportunity to explain their political agendas and to highlight differences between the political parties. Journalists claimed that the debates could help bringing politicians and the people closer together since the “person” of the politician now offered a new object of identification.³⁹

The public, too, linked the new medium with transparency. In a letter to her political party, one woman argued that “this little window called television” had a “clarifying” effect, but not in a way politicians imagined this to be. The woman maintained that much like “an X-ray”, TV provided “a lot of insights in the human character, and boy, what little of importance is left”.⁴⁰ Politicians undeniably had to get used to the new medium. “Visual” transparency brought with it that politicians not only needed to worry about *what* they said, but also *how* they said it and how they came across on screen. Not all politicians turned out to be gifted orators and parliamentary proceedings were not structured to meet the demands of the new medium in terms of visual attractiveness and attention span.⁴¹ The first televised election debates turned out to be rather technical and formal debates; some of the debaters had even brought documents with them to substantiate their statements. In this respect TV did not really bring politics closer to the people. On the contrary, the technical discussions had an alienating effect.⁴²

TV journalists, however, soon developed new formats and introduced new styles of journalism. They contributed to a culture of transparency in the sense that they invited politicians to open up to the public *as a person*. The early 1960s saw the introduction of TV programmes with one-on-one interviews of politicians. Through the use of close-up shots of politicians and by asking personal

39 Kaal, Harm: De cultuur van het televisiedebat. Veranderde percepties van de relatie tussen media en politiek, 1960-heden, in: Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis 127/2 (2014), pp. 293–316, p. 301, 304, 316.

40 Kaal, Harm/ van de Griend, Vincent: Postwar popular politics. Integrating the voice of the people in postwar political history, in: Kaal, Harm/ Slootjes Daniëlle (eds.): New perspectives on power and political representation from ancient history to the present day. Repertoires of representation, Leiden 2019, pp. 124–143, p. 135; see also: Susan Aasman: Aan de keukentafel – Het ideaal van het observeren van de politiek in de vroege geschiedenis van de televisie, in: A. Biefang/ M. Leenders (eds.): Erich Salomon en het ideale parlement. Fotograaf in Berlijn en Den Haag, 1928–1940, Amsterdam 2014, pp. 301–313, p. 307.

41 Hoetink: Macht der gewoonte, p. 291.

42 Kaal: De cultuur van het televisiedebat, pp. 302–305.

questions, a programme like *ONDER VIER OGEN* (Face to Face) suggested that it gave viewers access to the human being behind the politician.⁴³

Similar formats also emerged in the printed press. Schudson has characterised the press in the 1960s as an “evangelist for openness”. In the Netherlands, too, the parliamentary press contributed to the culture of transparency through contextual reporting, offering analyses and explanations of what politicians were saying and doing, and through a more confrontational style.⁴⁴ At the extreme of this development stood the rise of the gossip press in the 1970s, when journalists started to probe in the private lives of politicians. It showed that the deference to which politicians had normally been treated was clearly gone. In mainstream journalism a different kind of openness dictated the approach of politics. In the 1960s news and opinion magazines started to publish interviews with politicians. The goal of journalists like Bibeb and Alice Oppenheim was to uncover the “authentic” person behind the politician. In order to do so, they followed politicians in their day-to-day life, asked them to reflect on their feelings and discussed their private life with them. In the 1970s, also popular illustrated magazines printed interviews with politicians. Magazines argued that such interviews would help to bring politicians “closer” to the public. To this end, they also published photos of politicians in a private setting, sitting on the couch with their wife or playing a game with their children.⁴⁵

Politicians went along with this culture of transparency in journalism and accepted that television and new forms of journalism were changing the nature of politics. With the “audience democracy” gradually replacing “party democracy” self-fashioning and self-representation became a key element of political communication, as Andreas Schulz has argued.⁴⁶ Transparency, in terms of displaying one’s “authenticity” – showing that politicians were “representatives of themselves” – was essential in closing the gap between politicians and the people and to win people’s trust; the trust upon which political representation is grounded. Moreover, politicians recognized that platforms like TV and the popular press offered them access to citizens that might otherwise be hard to reach. The use of these stages also triggered them to present themselves and their political message in new and more appealing ways. The visual orientation of the mass media helped to make politics less abstract: displaying the “human being” behind the politician offered voters a new object of identification.⁴⁷ Therefore,

43 Kaal: *Popular Politicians*, p. 9. For an analysis of the early history of politics on Dutch TV see: Aasman: *Aan de keukentafel*.

44 Schudson: *The rise of the right to know*, p. 145.

45 Kaal: *Popular Politicians*, pp. 8–12.

46 Schulz, Andreas: *Der Aufstieg der “vierten Gewalt”*. Medien, Politik und Öffentlichkeit im Zeitalter der Massenkommunikation, in: *Historische Zeitschrift* 270 (2000), pp. 65–97.

47 Kaal: *De cultuur van het televisiedebat*, p. 304; Kaal: *Popular Politicians*, p. 3.

politicians were willing to open up their private personae to the public gaze, to provide the public a view behind the scenes. New communicative formats offered politicians a prominent platform to do so and new experts in the field of PR and communications ensured that they could master these formats.⁴⁸ Politicians came to appreciate the mass media as an important platform for the articulation of political ideas and self-representation, rather than treating the media as mere recorders or transmitters of their public activities.

Building a House of Transparency

The culture of transparency in Dutch politics also had material and spatial connotations. While politicians were “opening up” to the public in several ways, their accommodation still conveyed secrecy and obfuscation. The Dutch house of parliament did not meet the demands of the time, both in terms of facilities and its layout and design. Across Europe, the buildings where parliaments convened had been designed with other goals in mind. In the nineteenth century, a house of parliament was, above all, supposed to impress, as part of the attempt of parliament to establish itself as the country’s key political institution – a position previously held by the royal court.⁴⁹

The Dutch case, however, slightly deviates from the general history of parliaments in Europe. The complex of buildings at the Inner Court in The Hague that houses the offices of parliament – both the Second Chamber (from here on referred to as parliament) and the First Chamber or Senate – dates back to the later middle ages. Since it clearly was not designed to accommodate a modern-day parliament, throughout the nineteenth and early-twentieth century several renovations were carried out. People could easily get lost in lots of dark and small corridors connecting the multiple buildings and rooms at the Inner Court, which together formed the “house” of parliament. After the Second World War, MPs gradually became convinced that a huge overhaul was needed. In 1956, the number of MPs had increased from 100 to 150, parliament’s administrative staff was rapidly expanding and the (small) public gallery could not accommodate the increasing number of visitors. Moreover, from the 1960s onwards, the press started to associate the complex at the Inner Court with a political culture that lacked transparency. Parliamentary photographers mercilessly portrayed politicians settling matters in private conversations behind the green curtains that separated the plenary hall from the surrounding rooms and corridors.⁵⁰ In

48 Schulz: *Der Aufstieg*, p. 91.

49 Kaal/ Hoetink: *The Material culture of parliament*, p. 18.

50 Van den Broek: *Engagement als deugd*, p. 76.

the early 1970s, the notion of “backroom politics” repeatedly popped up in public discussions about the obscure practices of wheeling and dealing that took place behind the scenes of parliamentary politics.

Against this background, in the early 1970s parliament started to discuss plans for a new building. In their discussions about a new house, which was to be integrated in the existing Inner Court complex, Dutch MPs typically led economic considerations prevail: they preferred a functional design over a pompous new building. Other key requirements were accessibility and transparency. The new building should be easily accessible to the public; it was supposed to become a place where politicians and the people they represented could meet. On top of that, the public should be literally able to see what their representatives were doing. This was a common motif in postwar parliamentary architecture, for instance in the *Bundestag* in Bonn with its glass-walled plenary hall which expressed the attempt of the postwar democratic state to articulate humility and transparency.⁵¹ In its list of requirements for the design of the new building, Dutch parliament explicitly included the demand that the new building should radiate openness.⁵²

Pi de Bruijn, the Dutch architect who in 1980 won the competition to build the new accommodation of parliament, indeed put transparency and openness at the heart of his design. The most striking feature of his plan was the construction of a large, spacious corridor with a glass ceiling that connected the two squares at each side of the Inner Court complex, which is located in the city center of The Hague. The architect envisioned this passage to act as a meeting point for politicians and the public. The shopping public was supposed to be able to use it to reach the square at the other end of the complex and since offices and meeting rooms were located near the corridor, visitors, journalists, politicians and other officials could easily mingle. Also the plenary hall itself was designed to increase transparency. Strategically placed windows allowed the public on the streets to catch of a glimpse of what the MPs were doing on their behalf in plenary hall.

At the inauguration of the new building, in 1992, politicians praised the “open” design, which allowed citizens to “keep a close eye” on their representatives and to check to what extent the MPs deserved the trust of the voters.⁵³ The new building, however, also faced criticism. Politicians and parliamentary journalists warned for the risks of too much transparency. First of all, they argued, politics could not entirely do without some form of back-room politics in order to settle issues and get things done. These were familiar arguments; for the

51 Nielsen, Philipp: Building Bonn. Democracy and the architecture of humility, in: History of Emotions – Insights into Research, 2014, available at: <https://www.history-of-emotions.mpg.de/en/texte/building-bonn-democracy-and-the-architecture-of-humility> [25. 2. 2020].

52 Hoetink: *Macht der gewoonte*, p. 437.

53 Hoetink/ Kaal: *Designed to represent*.

same reason parliament had also been hesitant to open up committee meetings to the public. Secrecy served a purpose: committees could focus on thinking through the pros and cons of the issues at stake before they were presented in open session. In open committee meetings, members, instead, could be tempted to play to the gallery.⁵⁴ Second, some journalists feared that maximum transparency might have a negative effect on citizens' trust in the political system. Much like the response triggered by the first televised sessions of parliament, citizens would be confronted with the oratorical deficiencies of MPs, with complicated, technical debates and with MPs that were either distracted or simply not present at all. In the end, for reasons of safety, some of the transparency soon disappeared. The corridor was not opened to the shopping public, but only accessible for people working in parliament. After the rise of terrorist threats in the twenty-first century, parliament implemented strict airport safety regulations.⁵⁵ Parliament had to acknowledge the boundaries of transparency.

The limits of openness

In 1977 the social democrats were confronted with the limits of openness. After a convincing election victory in May, the social democrats were confident that their leader, prime minister Joop den Uyl, could stay in office for another four years. The progressive zest for openness expressed itself in the negotiations for the formation of a new coalition government with the Christian-Democrats (CDA). For the sake of "democracy" the PvdA and their progressive partner D66 had promised that the formation would not take place in the back-rooms of politics, but out in the open. It made the negotiations much more complex. The number of people interfering in the negotiations – from strong headed MPs to party activists – increased and this triggered a hardening in points of view on both sides of the negotiation table. Moreover, much of the professed openness was staged and strategic. In practice, "openness" resulted from press leaks, either to placate the own supporters or to influence the negotiations.⁵⁶ In the end, after months of negotiations, attempts to establish a coalition government of PvdA, D66 and CDA failed. After that, without bothering too much about openness, things went much quicker. Within a few weeks, CDA and VVD agreed on forming a centre-right government. A famous photograph came to symbolize the effectiveness of back-room politics: it showed Dries van Agt (CDA) and Hans Wiegel (VVD)

54 Hoetink: *Macht der gewoonte*, p. 409.

55 Hoetink/ Kaal, *The Material culture of parliament*.

56 van Baalen, Carla/ van Kessel, Alexander (eds.): *Kabinetsformaties 1977–2012*, Amsterdam 2016, p. 79.

having dinner in a restaurant in the Hague, apparently exploring the opportunity to work together. The photographer had been tipped off by VVD-leader Hans Wiegel.⁵⁷

In terms of political culture, one could argue that this signified a shift. Yes, in the 1980s transparency was more strongly anchored in Dutch politics, thanks to the 1980 Right to Information Act, a more assertive parliament – articulated among others in its 1983 inquiry into government support for the Dutch shipping industry – and the continuing press interest for the person behind the politician. Dutch politicians, however, were well aware of the limits of transparency. Amidst the recession of the 1980s, a managerial approach to politics rose to the fore. Trust in politicians was based on their ability to “get things done”. In 1986 the CDA, led by prime minister Ruud Lubbers (1982–1994) campaigned with a slogan that asked voters to “let Lubbers finish his job”. It was a clear example of output legitimacy. Successful negotiations, behind closed doors, between the government, employers’ organisations and trade unions stood at the basis of attempts to achieve spending cuts and revive the Dutch economy. Lubbers and his successor as prime minister, the social democrat Wim Kok, both mastered the fine art of reaching compromises, which came to be internationally known as the Dutch *poldermodel*.

Conclusion

This article has offered a first exploration of several discourses and practices that gave shape to the notion of transparency in Dutch postwar politics up until the 1980s. In its various guises, throughout the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s the call for transparency increasingly made its mark on Dutch political culture, from party political strife to parliamentary architecture. On several occasions, the calls for transparency triggered a debate about the limits of transparency and the functionality of secrecy in politics. How transparent could or should democratic politics be?

Immediately after the Second World War, the notion of transparency was part of Dutch political discourse particularly in discussions about rebuilding the democratic system and ensuring people’s trust in it. The social-democrats tapped into the notion of transparency as part of their effort to realise a “breakthrough” in Dutch politics and end the existing culture of pillarisation. In this case, transparency touched upon the desire to end a socio-political culture in which citizens were encapsulated in elite-controlled, inward-looking organisations and associations. Openness was the mantra of those who urged religious elites to end

57 Kleppe, Martijn: Achterkamertjes in beeld, in: NRC-Handelsblad, 10.10.2013.

their restrictive politics and allow citizens freedom of choice with regard to the organisations they wanted to join and the political parties they wanted to support. In the 1960s, the restrictive culture of pillarisation indeed ended. The social-democrats and D66 continued their attack on the confessional parties in an attempt to force them to abandon their convenient position in the political centre and to offer voters more “clarity”. These attempts failed. In the 1970s, the confessional parties joined hands and established a new Christian-Democratic centre party that would lead the government from 1977 until 1994 (and again from 2002 until 2010).

This article has also discussed a range of practices through which parliamentary politics was opening up to the public in the post-war years. In part, politicians were pushed in this direction by a new culture of journalism. Moreover, politicians convinced themselves of the fact that for the sake of clarity and openness, they should engage more with the public. This could range from holding press briefings and allowing TV-cameras in the plenary hall, to accepting invitations for interviews that also touched upon the human being behind the politician. The 1970s formed the heyday of this new culture of transparency. In this decade, Dutch parliament also worked towards establishing a new Right to Information Act, commissioned the construction of a new, transparent House of Parliament and conducted negotiations for a new coalition government pretty much out in the open. The 1980s and 1990s subsequently pointed a somewhat more mixed picture. Parliament did embrace the instrument of the parliamentary inquiry, but against the background of a financial-economic crisis politicians also cherished the aura of “fixers” who tried to win people’s trust based on their ability to get things done.

Towards the end of the millennium, the managerial and neoliberal approach of the 1980s and 1990s would, however, also reach its limits. After all, the rise of populism in these years has been fueled, at least in part, by discontent with the inscrutable and opaque nature of parliamentary politics, of a political elite locked in an “ivory tower”. Against this background, currently transparency – in various guises – again plays a prominent role in reviving representative government and parliamentary democracy.⁵⁸

58 For an analysis at the level of the EU, see: Gianluca Sgueo: *The Influence of Transparency on Addressing Populism in the EU*, 2018, available at: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3137099> [3.3. 2020].