

The Dutch Mrs. Consumer

A reflection of the development of Dutch consumer culture and American cultural influence on the Netherlands, 1946 - 1968

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Introduction

Topic Description



- A woman strolling through a Dutch pedestrian shopping street... -

This consumer's paradise for Mrs. Consumer – *De Lijnbaan* – was opened in Rotterdam in 1953 and elicited national and international attention, because it was the first car-free shopping street with shops on both sides situated in the middle of a large Dutch city. The period in which *De Lijnbaan* was built and opened can be defined as displaying the early years of a developing Dutch consumer culture, which seemed to be based on the American model of consumption according to many voices in public and academic spheres. These years directly after the Second World War show the beginning of a development towards the consumer culture as we know it today.

The objective of this paper is to construct an accurate image of the development of Dutch consumer culture and the possible American cultural influence on this development in the years between 1946 and 1968. To reach this goal, the developments surrounding the Dutch Mrs. Consumer will be central, for she is the most important active subject within Dutch consumer culture. The thesis to which this paper adheres is that the development of the Dutch Mrs. Consumer reflects the most important developments of consumer culture and American cultural influence on the Netherlands.

This thesis results in the following research question that will drive this paper's argumentation: In what way does the development of the Dutch Mrs. Consumer reflect the development of Dutch consumer culture and the extent of American cultural influence upon Dutch consumer culture, in the period 1946-1968? To find an answer to this complex question, the paper has been divided into four separate chapters, all dealing with one sub-question to finally find an answer to the main research question.

Chapter one paints the portrait of the Dutch housewife in quite a static and isolated way. This approach in the first chapter enables further analysis of the development of the Dutch Mrs. Consumer by providing a general outline to base the remaining part of the research on. The chapter provides arguments for the importance of focusing on women, or housewives, when attempting to analyze the development of a consumer culture and describes some general characteristics of the Dutch Mrs. Consumer. It tries to answer the following sub-question: Who is the Dutch Mrs. Consumer, and why should she be considered as an important player in Dutch consumer culture?

Chapter two then departs from the static outlook on Mrs. Consumer and shows that the Dutch Mrs. Consumer has been part of, and has been subject to multiple changes when it comes to her job description and her surroundings. Developments and changes in household technology, the emancipation process, and consumer activism in relation to the Dutch Mrs. Consumer will be described. The chapter shows that the Dutch Mrs. Consumer is not a static or limited, but a dynamic player in Dutch consumer culture. It tries to answer the following sub-question: What developments have been influential to the development of Mrs. Consumer, and to what extent did Mrs. Consumer herself influence these developments?

Chapter three is a continuation upon the theory and discussions raised in chapter one and two, but adds a new perspective on the development of Mrs. Consumer: the presence of possible American cultural influence. This would not be possible to do without first having looked at the development of Mrs. Consumer in a national context, concerning important trends surrounding Mrs. Consumer in the Netherlands, as is done in the first two chapters. The third chapter is completely dedicated to the American cultural influence on Mrs. Consumer in the Netherlands, and adds an important dynamic influence

to the discussion about the development of the Dutch Mrs Consumer. It tries to answer the following sub-question: In what way has American cultural influence played a part in the development of the Dutch Mrs. Consumer?

Chapter four, finally, shows the Dutch Mrs. Consumer in a truly dynamic setting, a place where consumer culture probably is at its best represented: *de Huishoudbeurs*. This chapter recollects all the previously made assumptions and conclusions concerning the development of the Dutch Mrs. Consumer. With this, all the earlier hypotheses concerning the development of Dutch consumer culture and American cultural influence will be reviewed through a close up of the phenomenon *Huishoudbeurs*. It tries to answer the following sub-question: How do the influential forces upon the development of the Dutch Mrs. Consumer (as referred to in chapter one, two, and three) reflect and become visible at the *Huishoudbeurs*?

Finally, some words must be said concerning the chosen timeframe for this research. The period 1946-1968 has been an important period for multiple reasons. First of all, it was a period of successful rebuilding after years of depression and a world war. The successful recovery from a wartime economy brought with it a tremendous growth in production and consumption. Some even typify this period as the 'Golden quarter century' of the 20th century because of its constant economic growth and progress. Especially in the first years of rebuilding and the beginning of the fifties, it might not have felt this prosperous for everyone, but the statistics show undeniable signs of constant economic progress. However, from the second half of the fifties on, the higher levels of prosperity became more widespread and the corresponding development of a consumer culture became part of everyday life in the Netherlands. The year 1968 then marks the end of this unrestrained and undisputed growth of prosperity and consumption. A period of economic stagnation, and criticism on consumer behavior and the economic capitalist system followed. The period 1946-1968 contains the development from a consumer culture with limits to a consumer culture of 'unlimited consumption'.

Academic discussion

Secondary literature and existing academic discussions will especially be central in the first three chapters of this paper. From a multitude of secondary sources the central standpoints and themes of this paper will be singled out. The important discussion points that evolve from these central themes match this paper's research into the development of Dutch consumer culture and American cultural influence surrounding the Dutch Mrs. Consumer. In an attempt to start a new discussion, this paper applies parts of these existing discussions on two specific topics that reflect the development of Dutch consumer culture and American cultural influence: the Dutch Mrs. Consumer and the *Huishoudbeurs*. This method will ultimately result in a paper that will add a new approach to discussions in the field of consumer culture studies and American cultural influence studies.

Chapter four does not focus on secondary literature as much as the first three chapters do. Primary and secondary literature on the *Huishoudbeurs* are both hard to find. However, Annelies Wiersma has put her personally collected archive on the *Huishoudbeurs* at the disposal of the author of this paper, which made it possible to actually add a chapter on the *Huishoudbeurs* linked to the development of Dutch consumer culture to this paper. The relevance of research on the *Huishoudbeurs*, therefore, lies in the fact that it has not been done yet within academic literature, while it clearly is an interesting phenomenon with respect to the development of Dutch consumer culture and American cultural influence. The *Huishoudbeurs* can be seen as a showcase of the practical consequences of American cultural influence on Dutch consumer culture.

Next to the *Huishoudbeurs* archive, this paper uses multiple other primary sources to back up the secondary literature concerning American cultural influence and Dutch consumer culture with examples and facts. Several polygon videos are used to get a better view on Dutch household technology, the *Huishoudbeurs* and the Dutch housewife. A number of COP reports will help to construct the image the Dutch had of Americans and America. The verses of Annie M.G. Schmidt and Joke Kool-Smit's *Het Onbehagen bij de Vrouw* will aid in grasping some of the criticism that nevertheless did exist in the years of growing consumption. To create an image of the Dutch housewife, several issues of the magazine *De Vrouw en Haar Huis*, yearbooks, a NIPO study on the pastime of the Dutch housewife and the full collection of the *Baedeker voor de Huisvrouw* will be used. And to replenish the discussion about women's organizations in the intermediary field a booklet on the *Tentoonstelling De Nederlandse Vrouw 1898-1948*, several issues of the magazine *Denken en Doen*, an overview of all women's organizations collected by the *Nederlands Vrouwencomité* and the archives of the *Nederlandse Vereniging voor Huisvrouwen* will be consulted.

Chapter 1

An outline of the Dutch Mrs. Consumer

Introduction

To construct an accurate image of the development of Dutch consumer culture, it is first of all necessary to paint the portrait of the Dutch Mrs. Consumer. By means of this outline, it will then be possible to provide an answer to the sub-question: Who is the Dutch Mrs. Consumer, and why should she be considered as an important player in Dutch consumer culture? To answer this question, this chapter will first of all attend to the question why it is important to focus on the Mrs. – or the housewife – when it comes to investigating Dutch consumer culture, or any consumer culture for that matter. In the second paragraph the Dutch housewife plays an important role. As she is the leading lady in consumer society, her typical surroundings, characteristics and skills will be discussed.

One important issue must be addressed before putting our focus on women. Namely the fact that it is impossible to talk about the woman, the housewife or the Mrs. Consumer as representing one kind of person. One must realize the diversity among these women; differences in age, class, religion etc. Annie M.G. Schmidt realized this as well as she wrote the following: *“De Vrouw! Altijd weer De Vrouw! De Vrouw moet dit en de Vrouw wil dat. Maar wie is ze? En wat is ze? En hoe moet ik me haar voorstellen? [...] De eerstvolgende keer dat iemand weer tegen me begint over: Ja maar, de Vrouw, dan ga ik zeggen: Welke bedoelt u? [...] Nee, voorlopig heb ik afgedaan met De Vrouw; ze is me werkelijk te vervelend. Vrouwen zijn veel boeiender.”* (Schmidt, 47-48)

In this paper, Annie M.G. Schmidt’s texts will be quoted regularly. She is someone who described many facts from daily life exactly as they were, including some covert criticism. People recognized themselves and their own situation in her poems, radio plays and other work. Her texts therefore seem to depict a remarkably precise image of the public issues that mattered in the years of rebuilding, the fifties and the sixties.

1.1 Focus on women

When looking at the development of our consumer culture from the years directly after the Second World War until the end of the 1960s, it is clear that the economic and political focus increasingly shifted towards the consumer. This paragraph first of all tries to explain the increased interest for the consumer by looking at the American model of consumption and its spread around 'the West'. How did this American fervor for the consumer come into being in the United States? And how did this American ideal transfer to Europe? Secondly, this paragraph exposes why the term 'housewife' is almost interchangeable with the term 'consumer' during these years. In what way did the housewife occupy a leading role in the consumer culture? And finally, the term of the 'citizen consumer' is addressed. What exactly did society expect of the new 'citizen consumer' housewives in the context of this increasing focus on consumers?

1.1.1 The American model of consumption

The twentieth century of Western society is generally accepted as the Age of Mass Consumption. The cause of the collective intake of this entitlement of an entire century can be found in the seemingly unstoppable growth of the consumer side of the economy. Between the 1920s and the 1990s, the United States and Europe both witnessed an unprecedented flux of vacuum cleaners, refrigerators, television sets and multiple other household appliances into their homes. The production side of the economy became dependent on a persistent demand from the consumer side of the economy. And as disposable income grew, products became more affordable, more and more people wanted to buy, and also could actually buy, one of the many new products that kept on entering the market.¹

Mass consumption has shaped the most central aspects of American and European life, including the economical policies and politics in general on both continents.² It is important to realize that this model of consumption forms the basis of contemporary Western culture. It is possible to make this claim because Western culture nowadays still derives its *raison d'être* from a capitalistic system that completely depends on mass production and mass consumption.³ Although this cannot be denied, the question still remains: why was this American model of consumption so successful? What did the ideal of the American model of consumption promote?

¹ A. de la Bruhèze and R. Oldenziel, eds., *Manufacturing Technology, Manufacturing Consumers. The Making of Dutch Consumer Society* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2009), 13.

² M.J. Daunton and M. Hilton, eds., *The Politics of Consumption: Material Culture and Citizenship in Europe and America* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 203.

³ I. Cieraad, *De Elitaire Verbeelding van Volk en Massa: Een Studie over Cultuur*. Muiderberg: Coutinho, 1988), 113.

The basic characteristics of the American model of consumption are best described by the introduction of the concept of the Consumers' Republic that arose between the 1940s and 1970s during the Age of Mass Consumption.⁴ Lizabeth Cohen coined the term Consumers' Republic in 2001 to describe the popular belief in an ideal society in which the consumer was the main propelling-force behind economic, social and political growth.

Economic growth would originate from the deliberate adjustment of new products to new consumers.⁵ It was believed that a tight coalition between producer en consumer would cause economic affluence. In this relationship, production must be seen as a means to achieve the eventual goal of consumption. In 1956 already, a Dutch study group to the United States focused on prosperity and consumerism, noted in their report that the United States sees its own market and its own consumption as the spindle around which everything else evolves. They state that Americans, living in this Consumers' Republic, believe that economic catastrophes like the Great Depression can be prevented by an economic policy that is fully adjusted to the consumer and by measures that promote the act of consuming.⁶

The presumption then was that this economic growth would be accompanied by social and political growth. The fact of having a choice as a consumer was believed to have a positive effect on everyone's democratic freedom. The freedom to buy was seen as part of the democratic right to choose. This belief in the link between democratic freedom and consumption is highly visible in the United States' vision and actions concerning the Marshall Plan. During the years in which Marshall Help reached a vast number of European countries, the United States made sure that everyone in those countries witnessed the results of America's prosperity. Beautiful kitchens stuffed with electrical household appliances were displayed at fairs and exhibitions all over Europe, propagating the connection between the arising prosperity in private consumption and democratic freedom.⁷

The economic affluence and democratic freedom that the Consumers' Republic promised, would eventually have a leveling effect on society. The act of consuming would serve as a neutralizer, as everyone could be a consumer. Everyone would have the same opportunity to reach a happy consumers' life, regardless of wealth or power.⁸ The expression 'Customer is King' applied to all.

As a marginal note to these ideals, it is necessary to state that these ideals are in fact partly illusionary, as is addressed in Lizabeth Cohen's *A Consumers' Republic: The*

⁴ Daunton and Hilton, *The Politics of Consumption*, 214.

⁵ J.W. Schot et al., *Techniek in Nederland in de Twintigste Eeuw: Deel IV* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2001), 13.

⁶ *Welvaart en Konsumptie* (Den Haag: Contactgroep Opvoering Productiviteit, 1956), 16-19.

⁷ Greg Castillo, "Domesticating the Cold War: Household Consumption As Propaganda in Marshall Plan Germany," *Journal of contemporary history* 40 (2005): 263.

⁸ V. de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance Through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge/London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 102-103.

Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America. She points out that next to the undeniable successes that mass consumption brought, it also brought about economic inequality and a divide in society along gender, class, and racial lines.⁹ But still, the ideals of this Consumers' Republic and the sanctified positive effects of mass consumption, form the basis of the Western capitalist system as we know it today.

And finally, we do have to keep in mind that the end of the old model of consumption in Europe did not start the immediate incorporation of the American model that had been evolving in the United States since the Great Depression, just like that. It is undeniable that the subject of raising consumer purchasing power, and with that the national standard of living, was present on every European country's agenda.¹⁰ However, this did not mean that all European countries were embarking on a process of exactly copying the American model of consumption. The model represented a system that was being used and that people might have wanted to copy in order to achieve similar results. It should be seen as an example, a draft that is not a definitive blueprint. Models of consumption that eventually developed in Europe, therefore cannot be seen as models equal to the American model of consumption. The discussion about the degree to which Europe actively incorporated, altered or rejected certain American cultural elements into their own economic and political system will be elaborated upon in chapter three. For now, the sociologist Kees Schuyt and the historian Ed Taverne put it this way in their book *1950: Prosperity and Welfare: Dutch Culture in a European Perspective*: "However, the United States' formula for innovation and modernization was by no means uniformly accepted in Europe. Postwar political frameworks varied widely between the Netherlands, Britain, France, and Germany, and economic modernization took place with strongly varying degrees of success and based on completely different goals, instruments, and institutions."¹¹

⁹ Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2008).

¹⁰ De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*, 340.

¹¹ Kees Schuyt and Ed Taverne. *1950 Prosperity and Welfare: Dutch Culture in a European Perspective* (Assen / Basingstoke etc.: Royal van Gorcum / Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 45.

1.1.2 Mrs. Consumer in a leading role

After unraveling the ideals of the American model of consumption and the Consumers' Republic, it is clear that the consumer and consumerism, had become central issues around which a successful and prosperous economy would evolve. This belief was firmly imprinted on American minds, but also in Europe people recognized the importance of the consumer side of the economy. Now, who made up this side of the economy? Who had the leading role when it comes to consuming in this Western consumer culture? Everyone was eventually seen as a possible consumer: young and old, men and women. But most attention went out to women, especially in their role as housewives.

Housewives form a sometimes neglected and forgotten group in Dutch history and society, while focusing on this particular group will offer a researcher an important addition to the history of the development of consumer culture. For a long time, research concerning the housewife was not seen as a serious academic pursuit. This general tendency was advanced by feminist actions and utterances during the Second Feminist Wave in the Netherlands, that portrayed the housewife as a foolish simpleton. However, there are three concrete reasons why the housewife and her consumer behavior should be studied in relation to Dutch consumer culture.

First of all, housewives can be seen as one of many occupational groups in the Netherlands. A very important occupational group, because they made up a substantial part of Dutch society. After the Second World War, the Dutch *Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek* estimated that 98% of all Dutch women in 1947 had the 'occupation' of housewife.¹² Compared to the surrounding European countries and the United States, this percentage was very high.¹³ And despite the fact that over time more and more women took up an occupation outside the home, most Dutch women kept on spending a large amount of their time on their household and children.¹⁴ This way the Dutch housewife continued to be an important element in the constantly developing consumer culture, despite the emancipating developments. All this meant that especially in the Netherlands the term 'woman' almost automatically meant 'housewife'. And as women made up about half of the Dutch population, it must be clear that this group should not and cannot be neglected as shaping a part of history, and most importantly Dutch consumer culture.

Secondly, housewives controlled the household budget and often were the sole authors of the family's expenditure book. Figures appearing in multiple research reports in that time demonstrated that the housewife managed almost all of the disposable income, and also that she determined what expenses and purchases were to be done.

¹² E. Kloek, *Vrouw des Huizes: Een Cultuurgeschiedenis van de Hollandse Huisvrouw* (Amsterdam: Balans, 2009), 198.

¹³ C. van Dorst, *Tobben met de Was: Een Techniekgeschiedenis van het Wassen in Nederland 1890-1968* (Eindhoven: Technische Universiteit Eindhoven, 2007), 153.

¹⁴ M. Groffen and S. Hoitsma, *Het Geluk van de Huisvrouw* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Boom, 2004), 27.

The focus on the housewife, therefore, can be assented to numbers and figures from practice.

According to historian Victoria de Grazia, 80% of all spending was executed by women.¹⁵ This premise was already known back in 1951, proven by an article in *De Courant* which stated that indeed 80% of the national income passes through the hands of "Neerlands huisvrouw".¹⁶ The realization of the weight that can be attributed to the financial decisions of the housewife had also reached the study group that went to the United States in the context of a study on prosperity and consumption commissioned by the *Contactgroep Opvoering Productiviteit* in 1956. They stated that a woman's decisions are of tremendous significance, "want zij is het, die verreweg het grootste deel van het gezinsinkomen, voor zover het voor huishoudelijke uitgaven beschikbaar is, besteedt".¹⁷

The historian H.A. Goedhart has more facts to add to this important awareness in his book *De Invloed van de Vrouw op Consumptie en Productie*, which was published in 1959. He shows that in West-Europe, 85% of all money that enters the household in the form of wage payment or salary, is spent by women. He states that in almost 100% of all cases, women take care of all expenditures on food supplies. And in more than 76% of all cases, women control the costs that are made on clothing, other consumables, jewelry, television sets, radios, books, theater- and cinema-tickets. In short, he points out the influence of women on a large part of family spending.

After this, Goedhart compares the Western European figures with the results from an American Roper survey and a study done by Gilbert Burck, which indicate the same important influence of the housewife in the United States when it comes to all purchases related to the household. Goedhart then concludes by noticing that the influence of Dutch housewives should anyhow be perceived as greater than that of the American housewife. He sees the Dutch housewife as a highly influential authority in consumer affairs.

And finally, we can say that Victoria de Grazia, *De Courant*, the Dutch study group and historian H.A. Goedhart have made justifiable claims about the leading role of the housewife when it comes to the consumer side of the economy. The term 'housewife' is almost interchangeable with the term 'consumer' during the years in which our present consumer culture found its origins. The housewife had a leading role in more than one way in consumer culture. That is why the housewife often is the producer's and government's main target group when it comes to new consumer goods and new policies that have to do with consumption. This puts women in a very influential, powerful and important position: the position of the citizen-consumer.

¹⁵ De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*, 435.

¹⁶ *Archief Huishoudbeurs: De Courant*, 10 maart 1951.

¹⁷ COP-rapport: *Welvaart en Konsumptie*, 11.

1.1.3 Citizen-consumers

With the recognition of women's importance in society, the housewife was put in an influential position. According to Goedhart, a significantly dominant position in the Western world, which in most cases exceeded the importance of men.¹⁸ This 'new' role for women, however, did not automatically mean that the way in which this role was to be fulfilled in the best possible way was clear cut.

With the increasing focus on consumption, an old discussion gained momentum again, as historian Meg Jacobs has noticed in the book *The Politics of Consumption: Material Culture and Citizenship in Europe and America*, which was edited by M.J. Daunton and M. Hilton. In her article, Jacobs states that "for generations, intellectuals believed that an abundance of goods, or an indulgence in materiality, dulled the political senses and deadened any activist impulses. But that is not true, least of all in the United States."¹⁹ This discussion focused on the effects of mass consumption on society, and can be divided in two opposing sides. Those two opposing outlooks both have a different take on the consumer's role in society.

In *The Politics of Consumption*, historian Lizabeth Cohen addresses the two seemingly opposing definitions that can be given to the consumer. The first way to look at the consumer is the purely economic way. A consumer then is best called a 'sovereign consumer'. A consumer who is free to pursue his or her own individual wants and is focused on private gain in the economic sphere. A consumer who is primarily seen as a customer. This image of the consumer is often ascribed to the American consumer by European critics. The second way to look at the consumer is the purely moral way. A consumer then is best called a 'social citizen'. A consumer who wants security of his or her social rights and is focused on the general good and public interest. A consumer who is primarily seen as a citizen. This image of the consumer is often ascribed to the European consumer by both European and American critics.

The juxtaposition of these two types of consumers, however, has to result in the conclusion that both types do exist and that there is a certain tension between both typifications. It is impossible to make a simple distinction between these two types of consumers, presented as opposites.²⁰ As a rule, people do not belong to just one of the two described consumer profiles. Cohen argues that both types became intertwined and connected in the ideology of the Consumers' Republic that developed in the United States, which idealized economical as well as social growth. This brought together the 'social citizen' and the 'sovereign consumer' and resulted in the often used term of the 'citizen-consumer', who "simultaneously fulfilled personal desire and civic obligation by

¹⁸ H.A. Goedhart, *De Invloed van de Vrouw op Consumptie en Productie* (Amsterdam: Van de Geer, 1959), 36.

¹⁹ Daunton and Hilton, *The Politics of Consumption*, 223-224.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 203.

consuming."²¹ With her argument, Cohen represents the American perspective in the discussion about consumer culture. She defines the American consumer culture that led up to the Consumers' Republic as "a complex shared commitment on the part of policymakers, business and labor leaders, and civic groups to put mass consumption at the center of their plans for a prosperous postwar America."²²

However, the European perspective in the discussion about consumer culture and the role of the consumer herein, does not completely match Cohen's description of the American consumer. Indeed, the European consumer can also be perceived as a mixture of the two types of consumers described by Cohen. Nevertheless, a few differences can be noticed. The European consumer came about in a different environment in which a focus on the 'social citizen' side of the consumer was more significant than the focus on the 'sovereign consumer' side. Europe has always focused more on social rights, the general good and public interest when it came to raising the level of living standards. Historian Victoria De Grazia mentions the Europeans' search for the accurate role for the consumer to fulfill as a conflict "between the European vision of the social citizen and the American notion of the sovereign consumer."²³ This conflict resulted in a European citizen-consumer who "turned uneasily between state and market, and between the security promised by the European welfare state and the freedoms promised by the American consumer culture."²⁴

The European hybrid of the sovereign consumer and the social citizen, therefore, led to an emphasis on the moral task housewives had when walking out to the stores to do shopping, and not on their freedom to buy whatever they wanted. In the first years after the Second World War and in the rebuilding period, it was even impossible and unrealistic to see the European consumer as a sovereign consumer as the circumstances still were not favorable to the limitless consumption as we know it today.

²¹ Daunton and Hilton, *The Politics of Consumption*, 213-214.

²² Elizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic*, 11.

²³ De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*, 342.

²⁴ Ibid.

1.2 The Dutch Housewife

After looking at the development of the Western model of consumer culture, it is clear that the consumer, and especially the housewife, plays an important part in this process. This paragraph will take a closer look at the Dutch housewife. Who was she? What were her surroundings and what did they mean with regard to her task as a citizen-consumer? Did she have any striking and important characteristics? An answer must be sought to all these questions to discover who the Dutch housewife was.

1.2.1 De familie Doorsnee: the Dutch family

As citizen-consumers, Dutch women took up their important task within their work field: the family and the home. Household consumption had become their moral, political and economical duty; a very responsible burden in fact. This responsibility within the family and the home went hand in hand with the prevailing ideal of the family as the cornerstone of society, or '*het gezin als de hoeksteen van de samenleving*'. The domestic ideal of the family prevailed in the years directly after the war and had an extensive influence on Dutch society.

First of all, an answer must be sought to the question why this ideal originated in the first place, and why it subsequently became so dominant and widely accepted throughout the Netherlands. The roots of the ideology of domesticity can be found in the years of the industrial revolution. Back then, the family was seen as a civilizing force that would help to solve all the problems that the industrial revolution instigated.²⁵ An explanation, however, for the postwar success of the ideology of domesticity should be sought in the situation the Netherlands was in directly after the Second World War. As the smoke of the war slowly vanished, a heavily damaged and impoverished country emerged. The whole Dutch economy was brought to a halt as the complete national and international transport fell into disarray, because of destroyed bridges, roads, ports, railways and farmlands.²⁶ According to the press and the government this situation led to moral deterioration and immoral behavior, especially among girls and women.²⁷ This situation called for immediate action, and the Dutch government found the solution to the problem: the family.

²⁵ De la Bruhèze and Oldenziel, *Manufacturing Technology*, 27.

²⁶ Schuyt and Taverne, *1950 Prosperity and Welfare*, 33-34.

²⁷ M. Cornelis and M. Hinderink, *Vrouwen in Nederland en de Verenigde Staten* (Houten: Fibula/Unieboek, 1989), 144-153.

The Dutch government saw the necessity of the restoration of morality in the Netherlands and launched the campaign '*Gezinsherstel brengt Volksherstel*'. The poster on the next page depicts the vision and thoughts concerning this campaign.²⁸ By contributing to this campaign, government helped in propagating the wide acceptance and dominance of the harmonious family as the cornerstone of society. The national political strategy was based on the traditional model of the family: the man as the breadwinner and the wife as the caretaker of the household, husband and children.²⁹ These traditional values served as support in a time of insecurity and disorder.³⁰

Finally, an attempt has to be made to describe the practical results that this ideal had for Dutch families. What were the effects of its dominance? In the Netherlands, the dominance of this ideal actually resulted in the commonly held belief that a family should consist of a married couple; a male breadwinner and a housewife who took care of the household, her husband and children. Only when this ideal was reached, you would be seen as having succeeded in life. People also expected an assisting role from the government, helping them in their pursuit of reaching this family ideal. Both government and society believed that this ideal should be reachable for everyone, irrespective of your original walk of life.³¹

A consequence of this idealization of a married family life was that people who did not marry at a young age were disapproved by society, and sometimes even hindered by the government. Especially the confessional political parties, for example, opposed every bill that would promote the possibility for women to work outside the home. Annie M.G. Schmidt describes this 'crime of being unmarried' in her poem *Koppelin instinct*. "*Waarom is Tinus niet getrouwd? Waarom is Tinus niet getrouwd! Waarom loopt hij nog altijd los in 't bos der ongehoorzaamheid. Ten prooi aan slang en sluwe vos? Hoe oud is hij? Nog niet zo oud... Waarom is Tinus niet getrouwd?*"³² She voices society's dissatisfaction with people who did not conform to the ideal of the harmonious family.

²⁸ Poster van de actie '*Gezinsherstel brengt Volksherstel*', van vlak naar de Tweede Wereldoorlog [photo], available from http://vorige.nrc.nl/binnenland/article1767592.ece/lk_is_uit,_wij_zijn_in?service=Print.

²⁹ P.M. Luykx and P. Slot, eds., *Een Stille Revolutie?: Cultuur en Mentaliteit in de Lange Jaren Vijftig* (Leiden: DBNL, 1997), 109.

³⁰ Kloek, *Vrouw des Huizes*, 180.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 181.

³² A.M.G. Schmidt, *Huishoudpoëzie* (Amsterdam: De Arbeiderspers, 1957), 52-53.



6 voorwaarden voor gezinsherstel

Hebt **EERBIED** voor elkander
en zeker voor de ouderen.

ONVERSCHILLIGHEID
verlaagt het gezin.

Weest **EERLIJK** tegenover
Uzelf en Uw huisgenoten.

LEUGEN vergiftigt het
gezin.

Behoudt **HULPVAARDIGHEID** in het
huishouden, ontdukt niet Uw plaats als ouder.

EGOTISME ondermijnt
het gezin.

Bouwt aan **SAAMHORIGHEID** en ver-
slept niet in offervaardigheid en in aandacht
jegens elkander.

TWEEDRACHT ontbindt
het gezin.

Houdt U aan **ORDE** en aan de
ongeschreven regels in Uw huis.

WANORDE ontsiert het
gezin.

BEHEERST U in Uw gedragingen en
tegenover Uw naasten.

TUCHELOOSHEID
sloopt het gezin.

WAAROM eerbied, orde, eerbied, zelf-
beheersing, hulpvaardigheid, saamhorigheid?

OMDAT er geen gezonde samen-
leving kan bestaan zonder deze voorwaarden.

**Gezinsherstel brengt
Volksherstel**



Another result of this widespread idealization of the harmonious family is the fact that something like 'the average family' actually did come into being, which can be proven by taking a look at one of Annie M.G. Schmidt's other works: *de Familie Doorsnee*. This family was a fictitious radio family, who could be heard every Monday evening from 1952 till 1958 in a radio play. It probably was the most popular radio item the fifties had known.³³ The reason for this popularity must of course be sought in the brilliance of its creator, but also in the fact that the show had something recognizable for everyone. All listeners could identify with the problems, comments, humor and reactions of the family.³⁴ This indicates the existence of a certain communality, shared by all the real families that were chained to their radio sets. Something that cut right through the Dutch pillarized society. This communality should be sought in the fact that all listeners were part of a family resembling the *Familie Doorsnee*. A traditional family, that is. Consisting of mother the housewife, father the wage-earner and children: the average, or *Doorsnee*, family.

This ideal of the nuclear family, however, is not a typical Dutch phenomenon. The way in which the family played an important part in containing society's fears of out-of-control sex and rebellious women is comparable to the United States' culture of domestic containment. Only the cause of the dominance of this ideal should be sought in another phenomenon next to the Second World War: the Cold War. This ongoing period full of tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union led to unrest that had to be contained and controlled. The American nuclear family offered the solution and a stable place in suburbia where sex could be contained within marriage and traditional gender roles within the family.³⁵

Concluding it is possible to say that the ideal of the family as the cornerstone of society has led to a strong separation between the public and the private in both the Netherlands and the United States. And with it, this ideology promoted a strict division of tasks between men and women in its attempt to offer a stable and secure place in times of uncertainty and unrest.³⁶

³³ E. de Lange, *Sober en Solide: De Wederopbouw van Nederland 1940-1965* (Rotterdam: NAI Uitgevers, 1995), 117+119.

³⁴ Luykx and Slot, *Een Stille Revolutie?*, 15.

³⁵ E.T. May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic books, 2008), Ch4.

³⁶ M. Berendsen and Anneke van Otterloo, "Het 'Gezinslaboratorium': De Betwiste Keuken en de Wording van de Moderne Huisvrouw," *Tijdschrift voor sociale geschiedenis* 28, no. 3 (2002): 30.

1.2.2 Adjustment skills: a true chameleon

One important characteristic of the Dutch housewife is her skill to adjust to any kind of situation. Els Kloek puts it this way in her book *Vrouw des Huizes: een Cultuurgeschiedenis van de Hollandse huisvrouw*: "Mijn indruk is dat het beeld van 'de Hollandse huisvrouw' zich eeuwenlang steeds heeft gevoegd naar de omstandigheden waarin ze figureerde. [...] Ze lijkt wel een kameleon: altijd neemt ze de kleur aan van de tijd waarin ze opereert."³⁷ This chameleon characteristic showed in the years of rebuilding directly after the Second World War, the years of scarcity during the fifties and the years of clearly growing prosperity in the sixties. This ability to change, matched the consensus culture that thrived in Dutch politics and Dutch pillarized society, in which different groups with different convictions were forced to constantly negotiate and accede in order to reach compromise.

Especially the years of rebuilding and scarcity following the Second World War were demanding when it came to the Dutch housewife's adjustment skills. The fact that government policy was almost completely aimed at the recovery of industry, had a big influence on the daily life of the housewife and her family. Consumption possibilities were limited and sovereignty of consuming was still far removed from that day: sobriety prevailed. The fast economic recovery of the Dutch economy stood in sharp contrast to the daily struggles of most Dutch families.³⁸ The focus of the government policy aimed at the restoration of the economy had been entirely on export, heavy industry, agriculture: in short, the improvement of the international competition position. The development of family consumption had been of secondary importance and did not have a priority.³⁹

Out of this situation, the housewife still had to make the best. Because ultimately, she was the centre of the family, and the family was the cornerstone of society. This notion was even promoted by the government. So while this same government was doing little to nothing to meet and support the housewife in her role as citizen-consumer, they did preach the importance of the harmonious family, economic thrift and creativity.⁴⁰ This task was taken on obediently by the Dutch housewife. She did everything to handle the household budget in the most economically efficient way. Every penny was turned around and every decision was thought about twice.

This was her contribution to the reconstruction and rebuilding of the Netherlands. This was her important task to accomplish with success, the men would take care of the rest. Her task of keeping a household up and running and to take care of a family was portrayed as an honorable task. A task that could be experienced as an "emotional

³⁷ Kloek, *Vrouw des Huizes*, 10.

³⁸ Schuyt and Taverne, *1950 Prosperity and Welfare*, 34.

³⁹ G. Buiten, "Is Zuinigheid Echt Verleden Tijd?: De Nederlandse Consumptiemaatschappij tussen 1950 en 1990," *Spiegel Historiael* 31, no. 6 (1996): 232-233.

⁴⁰ Van Dorst, *Tobben met de Was*, 153.

trip."⁴¹ 'Everything for people and country! Look, how clean everything is! This is my way of contributing to the rebuilding of my country!' seemed to be the general thought in most women's minds after doing one of their many cleaning chores around the house. As Els Kloek puts it: "*Nog nooit was de huisvrouw van Nederland zo onmisbaar geweest als in deze naoorlogse jaren. En nog nooit had ze zoveel erkenning gekregen. Zij was het stootkussen van de wederopbouw.*"⁴²

But when the economy as a matter of fact really had recovered up to prewar levels and started to grow rapidly, including the corresponding rapidly growing prosperity, the Dutch housewife knew how to adapt again. She started consuming. More and more durable household appliances entered the Dutch kitchens and living rooms. It took a little while longer before housing also adapted to this growing prosperity. In the first years of the arising affluence, the quality of housing stood out poorly compared to the durable consumer goods that had already been appearing in the homes.⁴³

The changes in consumer behavior and life style are also explicable from a number of figures. The *Centraal Bureau voor Statistiek* has calculated that the effective income growth per capita has risen with 230% in the period between 1955-1979.⁴⁴ Besides this, the total consumption of Dutch family households has doubled between 1948 and 1957 (from 10,568 million guilders to 20,710 guilders).⁴⁵ These figures display an enormous change in the daily life of the average Dutch household, and especially in the life of the Dutch housewife. For she eventually was the one who could force up the expenses on home decoration and electrical household appliances, that would change her life.⁴⁶ The changing conditions in the Netherlands went hand in hand with a changing daily life, a changing life style and a changing task for the housewife, showing her skills in adaptation: a true chameleon.

⁴¹ D. Mackenzie and Judy Wajcman, eds., *The Social Shaping of Technology* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1999), 291.

⁴² Kloek, *Vrouw des Huizes*, 200.

⁴³ De Lange, *Sober en Solide*, 126.

⁴⁴ A.D.D. Paasse, *Consumentisme: Een Onderzoek naar de Ontwikkeling van het Nederlandse Consumentisme vanaf 1945* (Rotterdam: Erasmus Universiteit, 1993), 8.

⁴⁵ Goedhart, *De Invloed van de Vrouw op Consumptie en Productie*, 217.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 64.

Chapter 2

In constant negotiation with Mrs. Consumer

Introduction

The Dutch housewife had become an influential part of society in her role as a citizen-consumer. She was recognized to be an important and influential actor in the further development of the economic and social wellbeing of the entire country. The introductory text in the booklet that was distributed at the exhibition 'De Nederlandse Vrouw 1898-1948' is illustrative of this recognition: "Moge deze tentoonstelling allen, die haar bezoeken, doen zien, welk een grote taak juist door de Vrouw te vervullen is voor de Welvaart, het Geluk en de Vrede van haar land."⁴⁷ This job description was her acknowledged task, and the household her well-established working context.

All of her activities were executed within this one accepted framework for women to be active in. From the realm of the household, she has influenced and was influenced by multiple developments in society. The sub-question relating to this situation is: What developments have been influential to the development of Mrs. Consumer, and to what extent did Mrs. Consumer herself influence these developments? To answer this question, this chapter will attend to three different areas in which women have been influential and in constant negotiation with other players in society. The choice of these three subjects also corresponds with the subject matter that will, and therefore can be discussed in chapter four: the *Huishoudbeurs*.

First of all, paragraph one of this chapter will look at the Dutch housewife in relation to technological development. Then, paragraph two will consider the housewife in relation to the changing position of women in the Netherlands. And finally, paragraph three will describe the housewife and her role in the development of the conscious consumer and consumer movements. By attending to these subjects, this chapter moves from the static image of the Dutch Mrs. Consumer as painted in chapter one, to the dynamic environment she found herself in.

Another influence that has defined and affected the Dutch Mrs. Consumer has been American cultural influence. The next chapter contains an extensive discussion on this subject. This chapter, therefore, refrains from providing examples that will lead to a discussion about American cultural influence. Examples of American cultural influence within the realm of technological development, women's emancipation and the development of women's consumer organizations will be dealt with in chapter three.

⁴⁷ *Tentoonstelling de Nederlandse Vrouw 1898-1948* (Den Haag: Stichting De Nederlandse Vrouw 1898-1948, 1948).

2.1 Mrs. Consumer and the development of household technology

The twentieth century is the era in which technology and its development became more significant with every year. Technological development grew out to be a subject of constant and deliberate organization and reflection within trade and industry, within the government and within society in general.⁴⁸ Its influence on daily life is evident as it affected economy, politics and culture simultaneously.

The development of household technology is particularly important in relation to the Dutch housewife. Who or what influenced the technological changes that occurred in every home? What did this technological development bring her? These questions will be answered in this paragraph. First of all, the focus will be on the architects of technology. Secondly, the technological revolution in the home and its visible effects will be discussed. And finally the professionalization in the household will be attended to.

2.1.1 Technology's architects

The reason for looking at technological development as being a complex and dynamic process that can be related to the Dutch Mrs. Consumer, lies in the conviction that there are various architects at play in this process. Various groups in society that actively or passively leave their mark on technological development can be determined when looking at the amenability of technology. The inventors, engineers and managers are often immediately thought of when trying to indicate the architects of technology, but this paper claims the existence and influence of more actors in this process.⁴⁹ Technological development, among others, is influenced by mankind, science, economy and politics.

This chapter will mainly focus on the fact that women and organizations have been important architects of technology. Paragraph 2.3 of this chapter describes the development of consumer organization in relation to the Dutch Mrs. Consumer. As founders and members of many of these organizations, women have played an important role. But also as sole consumers, not connected to any organization, they have played their part in influencing the development of technology. The focus on the consumer as an architect suggests an important nuance in the discussion about the creation of technology; it displays the role of women in the evolvment of the technological revolution in the home.⁵⁰ The often encountered view of the passive housewife, who stoically let the influx of household appliances flood her house without being critical or hesitant in accepting these considerable changes in her household should be abolished. Because, although mainly men were involved in production and design, women have

⁴⁸ Y. Segers et al, eds., *Op Weg naar een Consumptiemaatschappij: Over het Verbruik van Voeding, Kleding en Luxegoederen in België en Nederland (19de-20ste Eeuw)* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2002), 81.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 85.

directly influenced their work through consumer organizations, or indirectly through their purchases. By her choice of buying or not buying certain new products, the housewife has had a substantial influence on the development of technology and on the production side of the economy.

The interconnectedness between consumers and producers explains the fact that certain products succeed on the market and certain products fail miserably. This inspection of a product occurs at a so-called 'consumption junction'. Historian Ruth Schwartz Cowan has developed this concept of the consumption junction in her research, trying to understand the social meaning of scientific, technological, and medical change. She was the first to argue that the success of a product depended on the consumer's point of view, and with this she shifted the scholarly focus on technological change towards the social construction of technology.⁵¹ Cowan describes the consumption junction as "the place and time at which the consumer makes choices between competing technologies".⁵² It can be seen as a place where production and consumption meet, in the person of consumers, producers, consumer organizations, designers, government agencies and experts.⁵³ At this junction, these parties together determine the prospects of new products and technological developments.

Sociologists Wiebe Bijker and Trevor Pinch agree with Cowan and define the process that occurs at the consumption junction as part of the social construction of technology. They approach technology in a contextual and constructivist way by arguing that human action indeed shapes technology. The success of a new product depends on the interpretation of all the people that interact at the consumption junction. All these groups and individuals may interpret a new product in different ways, and their interpretation may even change over time. Bijker and Pinch call this interpretative flexibility.⁵⁴ Every product has a history of adoption that was influenced by this interpretative flexibility occurring at the consumption junction. And even this history of adoption influences the eventual acceptance of a new product in the future. The continuing influence of past interpretations on products proves the path-dependence of technological change.⁵⁵

Concluding, it is possible to state that the spectacular technological changes that occurred in the twentieth century were not just the direct consequence of technological development, but were the result of a complex interplay between society and technology.

⁵¹ A. de la Bruhèze and R. Oldenziel, eds., *Manufacturing Technology, Manufacturing Consumers. The Making of Dutch Consumer Society* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2009), 14.

⁵² Ruth Schwarz Cowan, "The Consumption Junction: A Proposal for Research Strategies in the Sociology of Technology" in Wiebe E. Bijker, Thomas P. Hughes, and Trevor J. Pinch. *The Social Construction of Technological Systems. New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), 263

⁵³ Van Dorst, *Tobben met de Was*, 14.

⁵⁴ Mackenzie and Wajcman, *The Social Shaping of Technology*, 113.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 19-21.

A process in which it is impossible to point out the dominant architect of technology, but in which it is certain that Mrs. Consumer played an important part.⁵⁶ Now, the fact remains that this process has caused technological revolution to occur. And this is nowhere more visible than in the domain of the housewife: the kitchen.

⁵⁶ Mackenzie and Wajcman, *The Social Shaping of Technology*, 16.

2.1.2 A technological revolution in the home

Because of a number of important industrial and technological improvements which were already set in motion before the Second World War, a technological revolution in the home took off after the Second World War. There were a few requirements for this revolution in the household to succeed and advance throughout the years of rebuilding, scarcity and growing affluence. First of all, structural changes within the home were needed and realized. The change from coal or wood to gas or oil as source of energy was immensely important for the development of household technology.⁵⁷ As well as the construction of large technical systems such as the electricity network, the water piping network and the drainage system.⁵⁸ Especially the electrification of every household between 1920 and 1940 laid the basis for an ongoing technological revolution in every home. And second of all, mental and behavioral changes were needed and realized for this revolution to continue. In the years just after the First World War, the Dutch became increasingly focused on innovations.⁵⁹ These two conditions for modernization – both material and mental – kept the spiral of technological change in the household in motion.⁶⁰

The forces of modernization resulted in what may be seen as the most direct force behind the technological revolution in the home: the growth of disposable income in every household. Innovations lead to a decrease in product prices, and product innovations lead to an increase in quality, making the products that entered the market affordable and desirable. This positive change in income development resulted from economic growth, and in turn again reinforced the economic growth that drove technological progress forward.⁶¹

The transformation of the average Dutch kitchen provides us with a good example of the effects of the technological revolution in the home. The kitchen was the nerve center of the household and was managed by Mrs. Consumer, the housewife. This female domain contained the bulk of machinery that entered the household in the second half of the twentieth century. In her kitchen, Mrs. Consumer brought together technology, organization, labor, ideals and consumption.⁶² The kitchen, being the location where the technological revolution in the home mainly took place and at the same time being the unmistakable domain of the housewife, therefore, shows and indicates the weight of women's influence on the social construction of technology.

⁵⁷ Mackenzie and Wajcman, *The Social Shaping of Technology*, 285.

⁵⁸ Van Dorst, *Tobben met de Was*, 131.

⁵⁹ H. Baudet, *Een Vertrouwde Wereld: 100 Jaar Innovatie in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1986), 85-94.

⁶⁰ Kees Schuyt and Ed Taverne, *1950 Prosperity and Welfare: Dutch Culture in a European Perspective* (Basingstoke etc.: Royal van Gorcum / Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 55.

⁶¹ J.C. van Ours, *Gezinsconsumptie in Nederland 1951-1980* (Meppel: Krips Repro, 1986), 117.

⁶² M. Berendsen and Anneke van Otterloo, "Het 'Gezinslaboratorium': De Betwiste Keuken en de Wording van de Moderne Huisvrouw," *Tijdschrift voor sociale geschiedenis* 28, no. 3 (2002): 301.

Now what were the visible changes in the kitchen? What did Mrs. Consumer buy and what did the market offer her? In what order did the advance of household appliances take place and why? In the years before the Second World War, most households already had their own electrical iron, vacuum cleaner and radio. The Second World War disrupted the advance of more household appliances that was already under way. The fifties then showed a slow but steady entrance of more household appliances, such as the half-automatic washing machine, the gas oven, the sewing machine and the hand mixer. It took until the late fifties, the beginning and rest of the sixties before the fully automatic washing machine, electrical sewing machine, fridge, centrifuge and coffee machine seized their spot in the kitchen. And it was not until the seventies that the dishwasher and the freezer appeared in the average Dutch kitchen.

The explanation for this phased penetration of household appliances lies in the developments in wage increase, and technological progress. The economist J.C. van Ours explains this phased penetration in his book *Gezinsconsumptie in Nederland 1951-1980*. In the first phase of penetration, during the fifties and the first years of the sixties, the household appliances that entered the household helped to mechanize the household. The appliances mainly simplified routine household chores and were quite affordable. But in the second phase of penetration, during the second half of the sixties and the seventies, the household appliances that entered the household instigated a qualitative improvement in household work. Partly because of new technological features, but also because of the redevelopment of existing products as van Ours argues.⁶³ These household appliances were more expensive, but nevertheless came in reach of the average household because of the wage explosion that commenced in 1959 and gave Mrs. Consumer greater purchasing power.⁶⁴

These phases of household penetration were accompanied by a shift in the consumer's readiness to buy durable consumer goods, to which household appliances belong. In his article *Is Zuinigheid Echt Verleden Tijd? De Nederlandse Consumptiemaatschappij tussen 1950 en 1990*, the historian G. Buiten shows that in the first years after the Second World War, Mrs. Consumer was still forced to be economical. The household budget was mainly spent on food and clothes, not on durable consumer goods. According to Buiten, this slowly changed in the course of the fifties when more and more durable consumer goods entered the households. The period in which durable consumer goods were most highly valued was the sixties, when most household appliances entered the household. This appreciation for the acquisition of durable consumer goods decreased when the Dutch households became saturated with household

⁶³ Van Ours, *Gezinsconsumptie in Nederland*, 117-118.

⁶⁴ M. Cornelis and M. Hinderink, *Vrouwen in Nederland en de Verenigde Staten* (Houten: Fibula/Unieboek, 1989), 144-153.

appliances in the seventies. The appreciation then shifted towards the expenses made on holidays, sports and other leisurely activities.⁶⁵

The technological revolution in the home forged an unprecedented amount of appliances showing up in Dutch kitchens. This rise in technology in the home also led to another important development: the professionalization of the household.

⁶⁵ G. Buiten, "Is Zuinigheid Echt Verleden Tijd?: De Nederlandse Consumptiemaatschappij tussen 1950 en 1990," *Spiegel Historiael* 31, no. 6 (1996): 229-230.

2.1.3 Professionalization of the household

A process that occurred parallel to the mechanization of the household was the professionalization of the household and the corresponding efficiency movement. These developments show that the technological revolution affected the way in which work within the household was perceived. In the first decades of the twentieth century the term 'efficiency' gained importance in the realm of industry, but in the household as well. It was Frederick Taylor's idea about scientific management and the quest for rationality in workflows that led to the inspiration of a certain Christine Frederick. She was an American home economist who was the first to apply Taylorist ideas to the household in her book *'The New Housekeeping: Efficiency Studies in Home-Management'* that appeared in the United States in 1914. Her work was popular in Europe as well and motivated authors like the French writer and philosopher Paulette Bernège (*L'Importance Sociale de l'Éfficiency Ménangère*, 1932) and the German architect Erna Meyer (*Neue Haushalt*, 1929) to publish works on the theme of laborsaving ideas. The translations that appeared in Dutch were introduced by two women who were actively involved in the *Nederlandse Vereniging voor Huisvrouwen*.⁶⁶ The foundation for the interest in the topic of household efficiency and rationalization was laid by a small group of highly educated women who inspired many housewives at the grass-roots level. This resulted in a widespread belief and confidence in the professionalization of the household. The extensive popularity of the theme radiates from a short article published in an edition of the magazine *De Vrouw en Haar Huis* in 1949: "Nu zitten wij weer in een andere eeuw: de eeuw der efficiency. Men kan geen stap meer doen of men leest een artikel, hoort een lezing of spreekt een specialist, die uitlegt hoe men die stap nog meer efficiënt zou kunnen maken."⁶⁷

The fact that housewives were more than willing not only to pick up advice but also to bring it into actual practice shows from the report that was filed by the Dutch study group that went to the United States in the context of research concerning life on the average American farm. Their report holds the following section which proves the popularity of the efficiency movement among Dutch housewives: "Vooraf de huisvrouwen toonden voor deze lezingen veel belangstelling. Zij willen graag nieuwe ideeën opdoen voor een doelmatige inrichting van woonruimte en keuken. Reeds hoorde ik van veel huisvrouwen dat zij het gehoorde in toepassing probeerden te brengen door haar

⁶⁶ Respectively E.J. van Waveren-Resink who also translated Christine Frederick's work (*'De Denkende Huisvrouw'*, 1928) and R. Lotgering-Hillebrand. The relation between consumer organizations as the *Nederlandse Vereniging voor Huisvrouwen* and the efficiency and rationalization movement will be discussed in paragraph 2.3 which deals with the Dutch housewife in relation to consumer organizations.

⁶⁷ *De Vrouw en Haar Huis* 43, no. 4 (April 1949), 159.

huishouden zo in te richten dat zij zich veel werk kon besparen."⁶⁸ The implementation of these practicalities and the efficient management of the household made it possible for women (and men) to view the task of being a housewife as a true profession, a job that included a feeling of pride and honor.⁶⁹ Mrs. Consumer could imagine herself pursuing a professional career within the home, while at the same time being able to be a good wife and the best mother possible.⁷⁰

The professional approach towards the housewife and the focus on efficiency in the household at the grass-roots level, eventually lead to action from government and science as well. The Dutch study group to the United States that investigated the topic of home economics, already mentioned in their report that there is a responsibility for government and science in stimulating and facilitating the professionalization of the household. They stated the following: "*Het zou toe te juichen zijn wanneer er op een van de departementen in Nederland een afdeling zou zijn die zich bezig zou houden met alle vraagstukken die samenhangen met huishoudonderwijs, huishoudelijke voorlichting en het wetenschappelijk onderzoek op het terrein van de huishouding.*"⁷¹ It seems that their recommendations were read and heard, because in 1952 a new field of study was founded at the agricultural college in Wageningen. On the 9th of December of that year, Mrs. Drs. C.W. Visser accepted the position of professor in the *Landbouwhuishoudkunde* (the study later on changed its name to *Huishoudwetenschappen*). The field of study, among others, comprised the protection of the consumer, the influence of technology on our daily life, and it was dedicated to contribute to the further professionalization of the housewife.⁷² The academic discipline crowned all the work that was done by the professionalization movement in the years leading up to this moment.⁷³

Another consequence of the professionalization of the household was the continuous rise in popularity of self-help books concerning the household. The fact that housewives were admitted to be professionals, and almost every woman was or became a housewife in the years after the Second World War, explains the popularity of these information guides concerning everything the housewife needed to know. It was believed that the knowledge it took to manage a household successfully could not be transferred from mother to daughter anymore. The household had to be studied as a complex and

⁶⁸ *De Amerikaanse Boerderij: Ervaringen van Drie Nederlandse Meisjes* (Den Haag: Contactgroep Opvoering Productiviteit, 1954), 31.

⁶⁹ Van Dorst, *Tobben met de Was*, 151.

⁷⁰ Annegret S. Ogden, *The Great American Housewife: From Helpmate to Wage Earner, 1776-1986* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1986), 139.

⁷¹ *Economie in de Huishouding: Rapport Studiegroep Landbouw* (Den Haag: Contactgroep Opvoering Productiviteit, 1951), 128-129.

⁷² M.P. Mazeland, "Dertig Jaar Wageningse Huishoudwetenschappen," *Vakblad voor Huishoudkunde* 4, no. 59 (1983), 59.

⁷³ J.W. Schot et al., *Techniek in Nederland in De Twintigste Eeuw: Deel IV* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2001), 115-116.

new area of knowledge by every housewife to ultimately successfully execute her task.⁷⁴ The fact that this belief led to a rise in information directed at Mrs. Consumer was also noted by A.M.G. Schmidt in 1952. She wrote: "*Ik heb het gevoel, dat driekwart van de vrouwen bezig is het overige kwart voor te lichten. [...] Kortom, waar ik ga of sta of mijn ogen sla, voorgelicht zal ik worden.*"⁷⁵

A great example of such an influential and very present advisory book was the *Baedeker voor de Huisvrouw*, which was published by the *Nederlandse Boekenclub* as from 1955. It was an encyclopedia consisting of twenty-four issues that contained useful information, skills and rules of conduct considering a broad number of topics.⁷⁶ And another example of the increased stream of advice directed towards the housewife is the series of information films made in partnership with the *Ministerie van Landbouw, Visserij en Voedselvoorziening* on behalf of the households in the countryside, in an attempt to pass on the thoughts about efficiency and professionalization to this part of the Netherlands as well.⁷⁷

The professionalization of the household and the popular genre of advisory books and films for the housewife seem to indicate a positive development in the acknowledgement of the importance of the housewife. But is this truly the case, or is there another side to this belief in technology, efficiency and professionalization? The next paragraph will look into this theme by focusing on the position of women in society, which also includes the effects of the technological revolution in the home on the daily life of the average Dutch housewife.

⁷⁴ M. Groffen and S. Hoitsma, *Het Geluk van de Huisvrouw* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Boom, 2004), 16.

⁷⁵ A.M.G. Schmidt, *Nieuwe Impressies van een Simpele Ziel* (Amsterdam: Querido's Uitgeverij, 1952), 26-28.

⁷⁶ Ruth Oldenziel and C. Bouw, eds., *Schoon Genoeg: Huisvrouwen en Huishoudtechnologie in Nederland 1898-1998* (Nijmegen: SUN, 1998), 61.

⁷⁷ Two of these information films can be watched online, that is: *Wenken voor de Wasdag* [Video], 1959 [cited 19 April 2011], available from <http://www.geheugenvannederland.nl>. And: *Goede Strijkmethoden* [Video], 1959 [cited 19 April 2011], available from <http://www.geheugenvannederland.nl>.

2.2 Mrs. Consumer and her position in society

The technological revolution in the home has been of great significance to the changes that occurred with regard to the position of women in society in the years building up to second-wave feminism. The technologically improved household appliances that showed up in every Dutch household had a catalyzing effect on the emancipating process of women. Technological progress played its part in the increase of affluence, and with that in the changing of the position of women in society. However, it cannot be argued that technology alone was responsible for the emancipating changes that could be observed in the fifties and sixties. Nevertheless, certain is that partly due to the interplay between technological development and the Dutch Mrs. Consumer, a road to transformation had been ascended. Her place in society slowly changed, her job description had to be adjusted with every step that was taken away from the 98% percent of fulltime housewifery in the Netherlands.

Mrs. Consumer herself has been one of the architects of the technological revolution in her home. That way she has indirectly cooperated in the process towards her ever changing job description and position within society. As a social group in society, housewives have shaped technology, but this same technology has shaped and reconstructed their identity.⁷⁸ This paragraph tries to show the dynamic interaction between social change in every woman's life and the technological changes that were occurring in their homes.⁷⁹

To achieve this, first of all, this paragraph reviews the changes that occurred in the life of Mrs. Consumer due to the technological changes around her. What was the impact of this technological revolution on her daily life and in what way did it really change her household work? And finally, this paragraph pays attention to the growing discontent among women and the criticism arising from women in public functions and their rank and file of housewives. What topics instigated women's discontent and what did they subsequently do to enforce change in Dutch society concerning this subject matter?

⁷⁸ Mackenzie and Wajcman, *The Social Shaping of Technology*, 113.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 296.

2.2.1 Mrs. Consumer and her electric servants: a fairy tale?⁸⁰

The impact of the technological revolution in the home cannot automatically and immediately be seen as exclusively reducing and simplifying the work of the average Dutch housewife. This paper argues that Mrs. Consumer was not solely a beneficiary of the technological revolution, which among others brought about the spectacular rise of (electric) household appliances and the professionalization movement with its infinite belief in the wonders of technology and electricity. Of course it is clear that disposable income rose, the level of affluence increased and daily life changed significantly because of this revolution in the home. But did this solely lead to improvements in the job of the housewife or did society regularly place the average housewife in a fantasy world that stood far from reality? A world that was filled with the illusion of the benefits of technological conveniences, or in brief: a fairy tale world only shedding light on one side of the story.

A simple fact was that the technological revolution instigated an unrivalled explosion in the number of different household appliances that was produced and could be used in the home. This rise in variety did not stop at the multitude of appliances, because materials, food ingredients and textiles for example also grew in diversity. The consequence of this extensive list of appliances and products that would not stop growing was the fact that the housewife had to be in a constant state of picking up information and familiarizing herself with everything around her.⁸¹ With the growing knowledge-intensity of the household it also became more labor-intensive, despite the labor-saving characteristics that most new household appliances did possess.⁸²

Moreover, more and more women became housewives as it became increasingly difficult to find a servant girl or maid. Historian Els Kloek argues that "*langzaam maar zeker ontwikkelden alle vrouwen van Nederland zich tot professionele huisvrouwen, ongeacht hun stand of rijkdom.*"⁸³ In the process, the so-called '*Dienstbodenvraagstuk*' instigated a rise in the number of housewives, and at the same time a rise in the popularity of striving to be the perfect housewife. When a housewife managed to cope with the increasing claims on her time and skills, it was indeed possible to reach the ideal of being a professional and modern housewife because of all surrounding technological advances.⁸⁴ However, the kitchens had never been as clean, the rooms had never been as tidy, the children had never been as important and the clothes had never been as freshly washed as in the second half of the twentieth century, which indicates that the

⁸⁰ 'Electric servants' is a term used by Victoria de Grazia in *Irresistible Empire*, 419.

⁸¹ E. Boissevain and T. de Jooode, *Tussen Te Koop en Miskoop: De Geschiedenis van de Consument en zijn Belangen in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Ideeboek, 1976), 60.

⁸² Schot et al, *Techniek in Nederland*, 101.

⁸³ E. Kloek, *Vrouw des Huizes: Een Cultuurgeschiedenis van de Hollandse Huisvrouw* (Amsterdam: Balans, 2009), 193.

⁸⁴ De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*, 419 + Berendsen and van Otterloo, "Het 'Gezinslaboratorium'," 303.

household had become a tall order, incomparable to earlier times.⁸⁵ With the increase in the number of household appliances, Mrs. Consumer's household tasks expanded as well. This meant '*More Work for Mother*' as Ruth Schwartz Cowan strikingly titled one of her books and in which she argues that "the work process of housework may have changed substantially [...], but the work itself has not gone away."⁸⁶

Still, the image of the push-button-housewife prevailed. She could sit down in her chair and order her electrical servants to do the job that previously had been her chore.⁸⁷ This unrealistic picture of the housewife was intensified and spread throughout society by advertisers, producers, and designers in an effort to sell their products. According to their ideals, the housewife was always portrayed with a smile on her face in some sort of heavenly environment in which the drudgery of everyday household work was not visible at all.⁸⁸

The promotional films produced by the *Vereniging van Exploitanten van Electriciteitsbedrijven in Nederland* all display a clear example of this idealized life of the housewife, which could apparently be reached because of new technology and electricity. The film *Een Goede Gooi* was made in 1950; a year in which electrical household appliances were still far removed from being average household effects. Nevertheless, the focus of the film already is on the vital importance of electrical household appliances to lead a modern and pleasant life. The household appliances in the film come to life and state: "*Wij met zijn allen maken het haar mogelijk om de hele dag een dame te blijven. [...] Zonder de hulp van electriciteit kan een moderne vrouw niets beginnen. [...] Door electriciteit maakt de moderne mens het zich gemakkelijk. En waarom niet? En toch zijn er nog wel vrouwen die het fijn schijnen te vinden om de hele dag te sloven.*"⁸⁹ This idealized situation of a housewife who gets to sit down and lets her electrical servants do the job for her remains strong. In 1960, the *Vereniging van Exploitanten van Electriciteitsbedrijven in Nederland* still managed to display the same image of a happy housewife thanks to her electrical household appliances. The following dialogue in the film *Tijd om te Leven* occurs: "[Son] *Ik wil graag een meisje worden.* [Mother] *Waarom?* [Son] *Dan wordt ik later mama en dan hoef ik lekker niet zo hard te werken als papa. Dan heb ik een wasdinges en een afwasdinges en, nouja je weet wel.* [Mother] *Maar dan*

⁸⁵ E. Kloek, *Vrouw des Huizes*, 212.

⁸⁶ Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology From the Open Hearth to the Microwave*. New York: Basic books, 1983), 193.

⁸⁷ Oldenzien and Bouw, *Schoon Genoeg*, 12.

⁸⁸ Groffen and Hoitsma, *Het Geluk van de Huisvrouw*, back cover + Van Dorst, *Tobben met de Was*, 130-131.

⁸⁹ This film can be watched online: *Een Goede Gooi* [Video], De Vereniging van Exploitanten van Electriciteitsbedrijven in Nederland, 1950 [cited 19 April 2011], available from <http://www.geheugenvannederland.nl>.

*zou je moeten trouwen met een man. Er moet immers een papa zijn die dat allemaal voor je koopt.*⁹⁰

Apart from the idealization of household work, these quotes even display the persistent ideal of the harmonious family, in which father works and mother takes care of the household. It could be said that partly due to the idealization of the possibilities household technology brought, the domestic ideal of the harmonious family dragged on as well. The average Dutch housewife, however, did not complain about her intensified task in the household or even did not realize that this was the case. From a NIPO study commissioned by Philips in 1966, it seemed that about 80% of the housewives was contented and happy with her life, and another 15% was averagely happy.⁹¹ Nevertheless, feelings of dissatisfaction with life as a housewife did rise and criticism from a very conscious group of women began to be voiced and heard.

⁹⁰ This film can be watched online: *Tijd om te Leven* [Video] De Vereniging van Exploitanten van Electriciteitsbedrijven in Nederland, 1960 [cited 19 April 2011], available from <http://www.geheugenvannederland.nl>.

⁹¹ NIPO, *De Nederlandse Huisvrouw* (Eindhoven: Philips Nederland n.v., 1966), 65.

2.2.2 Paving the way for second-wave feminism

In 1967 Joke Kool Smit wrote and published her renowned article in *De Gids* which dealt with 'Het Onbehagen bij de Vrouw'. This critical piece is generally seen as the work that instigated second-wave feminism in the Netherlands, bringing about intensified discussion, and intensified action considering the emancipation of women. Smit's essay functioned as a trigger, but it cannot be said that it was the first sign of dissatisfaction starting the process of emancipation in the Netherlands.

Because of the advance of technology in the household, women were freed from manual and more than full-time household work, and were still able to maintain a decent standard of living.⁹² This development increased the chances for change in the position of women in society. The fact, however, that women were not entirely freed from household labor, created feelings of discontent that would ultimately flow into the tumultuous years of second-wave feminism. The road towards this period of second-wave emancipation has been as important as the period itself; the preparatory work in the fifties and early sixties by the first Mrs. Consumers, is what made the emancipation and feminist movement in the late sixties and seventies so successful in the end.

Although it seemed that the fifties were devoid of action on the level of women's emancipation, this is not entirely the case. Of course the status quo was one of rebuilding and comprehended a search for stability and safety.⁹³ A vehement fight for women's rights did not match this national mindset. However, this should not lead us to belief that there indeed was no activity within this field which was of any importance. Signs of early dissatisfaction could be felt and seen throughout society and women's organizations were battling their case in the background. These silent battles had been continuously going on since the end of first-wave feminism. And it is important to acknowledge the deep historic roots of the seemingly sudden rise of activity in the field of women's emancipation during the late sixties.⁹⁴

As an example of this constant slumbering presence of discontent among housewives during the early fifties, it is possible to examine some of Annie M.G. Schmidt's work, which is interweaved with criticism directed at the social reality in which the average Dutch housewife found herself. In her rhymes she voices the conflicting demands that were laid on the housewife that caused the slumbering unease among women. Long before Smit would explicitly name and point out this dissatisfaction, Schmidt already tried to distinguish reality from the idealized passings of daily life.⁹⁵ She

⁹² Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology From the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic books, 1983), 209-210.

⁹³ M. Cornelis and M. Hinderink, *Vrouwen in Nederland en de Verenigde Staten* (Houten: Fibula/Unieboek, 1989), 160-166.

⁹⁴ P.M. Luykx and P. Slot, eds., *Een Stille Revolutie?: Cultuur en Mentaliteit in de Lange Jaren Vijftig* (Leiden: DBNL, 1997), 129.

⁹⁵ Schot et al, *Techniek in Nederland*, 129-131.

clearly attends to the matter of the 'women's issue' in her *Nieuwe Impressies van een Simpele Ziel* from 1952: "Maar er bestaan geen Taken, er bestaan alleen taken met kleine letters; die moeten gedaan worden, dáár niet van, maar laat asjeblijft die hoofdletter weg. [...] Met een taak, denk daar goed aan, kom je ooit wel eens klaar, die doe je gewoon. Met een Taak kom je nooit klaar, die rust op je als duizend kilo."⁹⁶

The same dissatisfaction with the status quo for women could be distilled from articles published in *De Vrouw en haar Huis* every now and then. This magazine may be seen as quite a progressive periodical. Already in 1947, for example, the following could be read by whatever housewife with a subscription to this magazine: "Wij willen natuurlijk graag ons huishouden bestieren, maar wij willen geen slaaf zijn van de vele dagelijksche beslommeringen, die men huishoudelijke plichten noemt. Wij willen ons niet alleen bezighouden met de materiele kant van het huishouden, maar wij willen tijd en geld beschikbaar hebben voor de schoonheid van het leven, voor een concert, een tentoonstelling, genieten van een mooi boek of een goede lezing, ons verdiepen in het leven van onze kinderen. [...] En dan zullen we veel van wat een vroeger geslacht noodzakelijk en onontbeerlijk vond, moeten laten schieten. Geen uitvoerige maaltijden meer, geen al te keurig gedekte tafels, geen al te wit blinkende wasch, geen 'grote beurt' van de kamers al te vaak. Beter stof op de meubels, dan een stoffige geest."⁹⁷

These two examples of dissatisfaction show its clear presence in the years directly after the war and during the fifties, far ahead of the publication of Smit's '*Onbehagen bij de Vrouw*'. But the task of the housewife itself was not the only theme that caused this discontent. The position of women with respect to men, the traditional breadwinners in society also played its part in the dissatisfaction. This subject matter was popular throughout the country: newspapers, magazines, libraries and discussion evenings were filled with studies, articles and presentations about women and their position in society.⁹⁸ What was her place in society? What role should she play in the family? Would it be agreeable if she took up a paid function outside the home when time allowed her to?

This popular discussion topic can actually be linked to factual changes that were obtained during the fifties concerning the position of women in society and the possibilities she had in life. Halfway through these years, government and business discovered that the shortage in manpower would not be solved entirely by inviting immigrant workers. They became aware of the need to approach an untapped source of potential workers: the housewives. With this awareness, the process of ending all impediments for women to enter the labor market slowly started to take off.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Schmidt, *Nieuwe Impressies van een Simpele Ziel*, 66.

⁹⁷ *De Vrouw en Haar Huis* 41, no. 7 (Juli 1947), 234-235.

⁹⁸ Luykx and Slot, *Een Stille Revolutie?*, 90.

⁹⁹ Cornelis and Hinderink, *Vrouwen in Nederland en de Verenigde Staten*, 144-153.

A first important step in this emancipation process was the abolishment of the 'Wet Handelingsonbekwaamheid'. This legal basis of the difference between men and women, was removed officially on the first of January 1957. This was the result of a motion presented by a female member of parliament, Corry Tendeloo, in 1955 which was accepted with 46 votes in favor and 44 against. The acceptance of this motion could not have been reached without the collaboration between the women in parliament, and a supportive rank-and-file of women who had reached an important consensus on this topic within the Dutch pillarized society. With all Dutch women being competent to act and sell on a legal basis and being judicially aligned with men and unmarried women, the foundations were laid for more social change.

The number of women working outside the home grew, but this growth should still be seen as minimal compared to the rest of Europe and the United States.¹⁰⁰ Reasons for this slow growth could partly be found in the fact that it was still common practice that women got fired as soon as they married, despite the legal abolishment of the incompetence of women. Luckily there were some examples of the positive changes that occurred because of the acceptance of the Tendeloo-motion. For instance the changes in the composition of the *Contactgroep Opvoering Productiviteit* in the Netherlands. In their year-report of 1956, nineteen photographs were published. On none of those pictures a woman could be spotted. However, there were some women listed on their staffing list: eight misses, all working at the secretariat. But then, in the year-report of 1960 a change is noticeable: next to three misses at the secretariat, two madams are listed as well, indicating that hiring married women became increasingly accepted after the acceptance of the Tendeloo-motion.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Cornelis and Hinderink, *Vrouwen in Nederland en de Verenigde Staten*, 154-160.

¹⁰¹ *Vijf Jaar Cop: Contactgroep Opvoering Productiviteit 1950-1955* (Den Haag: Contactgroep Opvoering Productiviteit, 1956).

2.3 Mrs. Consumer and the consumer movement

Due to the steadily improving legal and economic position of women in society, Mrs. Consumer gained in importance and power. Being seen as a fully competent part of society, the housewife could increasingly live up to her task of being a citizen-consumer. Individually, but in organizations as well, Mrs. Consumer embarked on the road towards the emancipation of the consumer. This paragraph deals especially with the origins and operations of women's consumer organizations up till the sixties. It shows the developments in consumer activism that lead up to the period of actual growing affluence and the period in which Mrs. Consumer's role expanded. The activities practiced by the early consumer organizations should be seen as the preparatory work for a successful consumer emancipation and activism prior to the years in which everyone's focus really shifted towards the consumer. A task in which women, again, played an important role as they picked up the challenge of representing the consumer in various contexts.

To show the relation between Mrs. Consumer and the Dutch consumer movement, this paragraph will first attend to some theory on consumerism. Then, it will discuss the development of consumer organizations in the Netherlands. And finally, it will link the development of those organizations to the tendencies of idealization and professionalization in the Dutch household.

2.3.1 Theory on consumerism

Before describing the development of women's consumer organization in the Netherlands, it is important to attend to some theory on the emergence of the conscious consumer and how this consumer can be placed within the realms of the producer and government. What is consumerism? How did the politics of consumption develop in the Netherlands? And what are the characteristics of the average consumer?

First of all, the term consumerism should be defined as it is a term that is often used and applied in many ways. This paper sees consumerism as a social movement with the primary goal of protecting the consumer against everything that threatens his or her rights. Consumerism as a movement has developed itself over the years and has become more and more institutionalized.¹⁰² This paragraph will focus on the early signs of consumerism, from the early twentieth century up till the sixties, that eventually lead to the institutionalized consumerism as we know it today.

Next to this, it is important to realize that consumerism obtains its shape within a certain dynamic context. This context can be called the politics of consumption. An arena in which interaction between the state, market and society constantly takes places and in which the negotiating space for consumers as a group changes nonstop.¹⁰³ The state

¹⁰² A.D.D. Paasse, *Consumentisme: Een Onderzoek naar de Ontwikkeling van het Nederlandse Consumentisme vanaf 1945* (Rotterdam: Erasmus Universiteit, 1993), 6.

¹⁰³ De la Bruhèze and Oldenziel, *Manufacturing Technology, Manufacturing Consumers*, 23.

creates the frame in which the rights of the consumer can be secured, and with that it tries to maintain a balance between consumer and producer, or in brief, the market.¹⁰⁴ Both the state and the market have for a long time neglected the important role of the consumer. In the consumption junction between the three parties, this meant that the negotiating space for the consumer was marginal in the first years of the twentieth century. This negotiating space, however, expanded with the emergence of the emancipation of consumer society as we know it today.¹⁰⁵ These developments in the mediation junction, at which state, market and consumer meet each other, show the changes and the constant renegotiation considering the role and influence of the citizen-consumer.¹⁰⁶

Besides the position within the consumption junction, the consumer also had several other characteristics determining his or her power and influence within society. Mrs. consumer, first of all, can be given an active or a passive character. This paper argues that all consumers are active consumers. Thereby, it argues against the generally accepted image of the submissive, spineless, materialistic and superficial consumer influenced by mass-consumption, described by cultural anthropologist Irene Cieraad in *De Elitaire Verbeelding van Volk en Massa: een Studie over Cultuur*.¹⁰⁷

Of course, not all consumers are aware of their active shaping of consumption and production. However, this does not mean that they should be seen as passive consumers. Although, they do not show signs of conscious consumerism, they do have an active influence on production and their own identity by purchasing and using certain consumption items. And next to this, they have the opportunity to abstain from buying a certain product. This can be called the consumer's 'countervailing power', which is a term coined by the economist John Kenneth Galbraith indicating the opposing force consumers have against the pressing on of producers and advertisers.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, Mrs. Consumer should be pictured within a complex and active process.¹⁰⁹

Secondly, Mrs. Consumer's behavior and buying motives can be given a rational or irrational character. This paper argues that the actions of the consumer often reflect the irrationality of subconscious and subjective thought, and not the rationality of conscious and objective thought. Even next to the claim of the existence of the active and conscious consumer, it must be said that most purchases do not entirely reflect the rationality of the consumer. In 1959, Goedhart already points to a study that showed the preference for buying motives legitimated by irrational arguments. 72% of the studied

¹⁰⁴ Paasse, *Consumentisme*, 68-75.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 59-66.

¹⁰⁶ M.J. Daunton and M. Hilton, eds., *The Politics of Consumption: Material Culture and Citizenship in Europe and America* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 5.

¹⁰⁷ I. Cieraad, *De Elitaire Verbeelding van Volk en Massa: een Studie over Cultuur* (Muiderberg: Coutinho, 1988), 104.

¹⁰⁸ Baudet, *Een Vertrouwde Wereld*, 154.

¹⁰⁹ Van Dorst, *Tobben met de Was*, 167.

consumers was convinced by a buying motive that appealed to their irrational arguments, and only 28% was convinced by a buying motive that was purely rational.¹¹⁰ The realization of this irrationality of the consumer was embraced by producers and advertisers who conducted extensive studies on the psychology of the consumer, trying to develop the most successful selling techniques.

A couple of these described possible characteristics of the consumer already indicate the heterogeneity of this group. According to historian Y. Segers et alii in *Op Weg naar een Consumptiemaatschappij*, consumers exist in many forms and identities.¹¹¹ One consumer may be more active and conscious of his or her role as a consumer. And the other consumer may be more susceptible for irrational buying motives. Consumers differ in want and purchasing power as well. These various possible character traits lead to an infinitely diverse group of consumers. All these individuals with strongly divergent desires and characteristics form a heterogeneous group that can impossibly be seen as a homogeneous faction within the consumption junction.¹¹²

Still, consumers did organize themselves as 'one' group from the early years of the twentieth century on. The way in which this happened and how this organization of consumers evolved over time will be described in the next section of this paragraph.

¹¹⁰ H.A. Goedhart, *De Invloed van de Vrouw op Consumptie en Productie* (Amsterdam: Van de Geer, 1959), 27.

¹¹¹ Segers et al, *Op Weg naar een Consumptiemaatschappij*, 87.

¹¹² Goedhart, *De Invloed van de Vrouw op Consumptie en Productie*, 59.

2.3.2 The development of women's consumer organizations in the Netherlands

It was not until the twentieth century that it became quite common and accepted for women to organize themselves in various women's organizations. But already in the nineteenth century, women started to found associations, exclusively for women.¹¹³ A characteristic of women's organization in the twentieth century was their increased attention for the consumer. A vast field of intermediaries arose, positioning themselves between producers and consumers, with women taking up an important place in that widespread and diverse field.

The organizations that were set up by consumers themselves can be described to have proceeded through three different phases of development. In the first years of rising consumerism, the establishment and institutionalization of these organization was the most important matter. After having laid the foundations of consumer representation and consumer lobbying in these organizations, it was possible to enter the second phase of professionalization. With the professionalization of the intermediary field, it became possible to eventually proceed into the third phase in which the emancipation of the individual consumer took place. Before and just after world war two, most consumer organizations were still in the first phase of their development. But from the fifties on several organization made the transformation towards the professionalization of their activities and the emancipation of their rank and file. It seems acceptable to claim that the process of institutionalization in the first years of rising consumerism should be seen as an important prelude to professional consumer activism as we know it today.¹¹⁴

The role of Mrs. Consumer in the coming about of the first consumer organizations has not been negligible. She has played an important part in preparing the road and exploring the field of consumption before many new organizations started working in this field in the fifties. Housewives put themselves forward as the only serious and genuine protectors of the public interest, in contrast to producers and government.¹¹⁵ As the advocates of every Mrs. Consumer in the Netherlands, they promoted the importance of a focus on the consumer in governmental and business circles. They recognized the active role consumers had in a society that increasingly became a consumer's republic.

The most important function of women's consumer organization in the intermediary field between producers and consumers was to close the gap between these two groups, which had become wider in the years of industrial revolution and depression between the first and the second World War. Because of urbanization, industrialization, the emergence of mass production and the differentiation in the chain between producers

¹¹³ Kloek, *Vrouw des Huizes*, 185-186.

¹¹⁴ Segers et al, *Op Weg naar een Consumptiemaatschappij*, 104-105.

¹¹⁵ Daunton and Hilton, *The Politics of Consumption*, 208+211.

and consumers, producers lost touch of who their consumers were and what their consumers wanted.¹¹⁶ Producers often missed the necessary knowledge to build out their market consisting mostly out of housewives. This lack of knowledge caused them to hire professionalized and specialized women. They took the mediatory efforts of consumer organizations seriously and cooperated in forming a coalition between producers and voluntary women's consumer organizations, forming a hinge between production and consumption that would function smoothly until after the Second World War.¹¹⁷

According to the most important women's consumer organization of that time, the *Nederlandse Vereniging voor Huisvrouwen* (NVVH), housewives should even be seen as consumers and producers at the same time. They acknowledged the fact that a consumer also produced his or her own environment by buying and using certain products.¹¹⁸ The idea for this organization rose up during the '*Nationale Tentoonstelling van Vrouwenarbeid*' die gehouden werd in 1898.¹¹⁹ It took some time to develop the eventual objectives of the organization that was to be founded, but on the 17th of December 1912 the NVVH was a fact. The basic and original goal was "*de behartiging der belangen van de Nederlandsche huisvrouwen als zodanig*".¹²⁰ In trying to reach this goal the NVVH, among others, published a monthly magazine called '*Denken en Doen*', aired a weekly radio '*huisvrouwen halfuurtje*' from 1927 on, and tried to influence the Dutch government by pleading for more devices for the Dutch households. The NVVH has never been very much in the foreground; this did not match their objective of simply delivering useful and practical work for every housewife behind the scenes.¹²¹ But this seeming invisibility did not reduce their name and reputation among Dutch housewives. The NVVH is frequently mentioned in multiple women's magazines, and the NVVH magazine even has a few writers that worked for *Denken en Doen* and for *De Vrouw en haar Huis* at the same time, indicating the widespread reach that the ideas of the NVVH must have had.

Another matter that enlarged the fame and influence of the NVVH was their subsidiary, the *Instituut voor Huishoudtechnisch Advies* (IVHA). The IVHA was founded by the NVVH in 1926 as a separate institute that tested food, materials and household appliances, and consequently advised producers concerning possible improvements to the product. In this mediating role between makers and users, the IVHA had a pioneering role in Europe. Their example was followed, among others, by comparable organizations

¹¹⁶ A. de la Bruhèze and Onno de Wit, "De Productie van Consumptie: De Bemiddeling van Productie en Consumptie en de Ontwikkeling van de Consumptiesamenleving in Nederland in de Twintigste Eeuw," *Tijdschrift voor sociale geschiedenis* 28, no. 3 (2002): 268.

¹¹⁷ L. Bervoets and Ruth Oldenziel, "Vrouwenorganisaties als Producenten van Consumptie en Burgerschap 1880-1980," *Tijdschrift voor sociale geschiedenis* 28, no. 3 (2002): 274.

¹¹⁸ Berendsen and van Otterloo, "Het 'Gezinslaboratorium'," 303.

¹¹⁹ T. de Rijk, *Het Elektrische Huis: Vormgeving en Acceptatie van Elektrische Huishoudelijke Apparaten in Nederland* (Rotterdam: Uitgeverij 010, 1998), 59.

¹²⁰ Kloek, *Vrouw des Huizes*, 186-187.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 188.

in Germany and Denmark, with whom the IVHA exchanged ideas and experiences.¹²² The original objective of the IVHA was “*voorlichting te geven over alles wat de Hollandse huishouding eenvoudiger en goedkoper maakt*”.¹²³ To reach this goal, the Institute brought together various kinds of user knowledge, causing both a focus on household appliances from the realities of the everyday household and from a scientific point of view.¹²⁴ When a product was approved by the IVHA, it received the IVHA quality mark which held the text “*goedgekeurd door de Nederlandse Vereniging van Huisvrouwen*”. This quality mark still exists, but has fused with several other quality marks into the *Keurmerkinstituut*.

Two other examples of women’s consumer organizations can also indicate the vast influence the NVVH had in the development of the negotiating space for consumers and their organization at several consumption junctions. Those two examples are the *Vrouwen Electriciteits Vereniging* (VEV) and the *Nederlandse Huishoudraad* (NHR). The first was one of the pioneering organization founded before the Second World War in 1932 as the ‘*Vereeniging van Vrouwen tot Bevordering van Doelmatige Arbeidsmethoden door Elektriciteit*’. The organization originated from the midst of the NVVH and had a largely overlapping objective. The only, but most important, difference was the VEV’s imperturbable conviction of the blessings that electricity would bring to the household.¹²⁵ The second organization, the NHR also had a connection to the NVVH. It was founded in 1950 and tried to fulfill an umbrella function. The NHR consisted of 15 women’s organizations and some groups of experts, and among these members the NVVH of course could be found.¹²⁶ The objective of the NHR, however, was unique because it was the first organization that specifically mentioned the promotion of consumer interests as its main goal.¹²⁷

The cultivation of the consumption junction and the early thoughts on the position of the consumer regarding the state and the market made it possible for others to take over the bridging task of these pioneering women during the fifties and the sixties. Their major strains in the interest of the consumer lead to the postwar spectacular growth in the number of experts and their organizations, focusing on the consumer and also positioning themselves between producers, government and consumers.¹²⁸ With the shifting and growing focus on the consumer, companies founded their own testing laboratories and design departments.¹²⁹ Also new academic disciplines in the social

¹²² De la Bruhèze and Oldenziel, *Manufacturing Technology, Manufacturing Consumers*, 48.

¹²³ De Rijk, *Het Elektrische Huis*, 60.

¹²⁴ Bervoets and Oldenziel, “Vrouwenorganisaties,” 278-281

¹²⁵ De Rijk, *Het Elektrische Huis*, 65.

¹²⁶ *Jaarboek voor de Huisvrouw 1958* (Amsterdam: Elseviers Weekblad, 1958), 158.

¹²⁷ Paasse, *Consumentisme*, 39-45.

¹²⁸ Schot et al, *Techniek in Nederland*, 104.

¹²⁹ De la Bruhèze and Oldenziel, *Manufacturing Technology, Manufacturing Consumers*, 19+21.

studies and market research emerged, convinced of their expertise in the field of consumption which previously has been in the hands of the earlier mentioned women's consumer organizations.¹³⁰ Women's consumer organization were pushed to the background and could not be seen as the sole representative of Mrs. Consumer anymore.¹³¹ Concluding we can say that when producers and government finally became aware of the important position of the consumer within the market system, women's consumer organizations lost their initial function as a spokesperson for all Dutch housewives.

¹³⁰ De la Bruhèze and Oldenziel, *Manufacturing Technology, Manufacturing Consumers*, 21-22.

¹³¹ Bervoets and Oldenziel, "Vrouwenorganisaties als Producenten," 283.

2.3.3 Women's consumer organizations in the era of idealization and professionalization of the household

The degree of influence women's consumer organization had within the consumption junction was highly significant. The activities of organizations like the NVVH, however, also left their traces directly on the consumer and on the development of Mrs. Consumer. Women's consumer organizations, for example, have caused the ideal of the housewife to persist, and they have intensively shaped the discussion with respect to efficiency and professionalization of the household.

First of all, an explanation for the claim that women's consumer organizations have had a significant influence on the idealization of the task of the housewife should be provided. These organizations have continuously put the emphasis of their activities regarding consumer interests on the housewife, who according to them seemed to have a certain inherent position in society with corresponding tasks.¹³² By leaving the conventional image of the perfect family intact, an organization like the NVVH proved to be quite conservative when it came to their picturing of society.¹³³ In all their communication, these women's consumer organizations confirmed women in their role as a housewife and provided society with the perfect role model that matched the strivings of government and churches towards a society full of harmonious families.¹³⁴ The NHR even helped to produce several yearbooks, especially written for women and published by Elsevier as '*Jaarboek voor de vrouw*'.¹³⁵ It was full of women's advice confirming the housewife in her role within the home.

And secondly, an explanation for the claim that women's consumer organizations have had a profound influence concerning the efficiency and professionalization movement should be given. It was already mentioned in paragraph one of this chapter: the translations of Christine Frederick, Paulette Bernège and Erna Meyer concerning efficiency in the household, were popular in the Netherlands as well. The publication of these translations was among others incited by some prominent NVVH board members, showing their profound interest in matters of professionalization in the household. These efficiency ideas matched the principle of the organization to provide all Dutch housewives with the best advice to run their household.¹³⁶ The rationalization of the household through the use of efficiency was not subject to heavy debate within organizations like the NVVH or the VEV, it was accepted as the one theme that would be beneficial to every

¹³² Luykx and Slot, *Een Stille Revolutie?*, 105.

¹³³ De Rijk, *Het Elektrische Huis*, 61.

¹³⁴ Groffen and Hoitsma, *Het Geluk van de Huisvrouw*, 13.

¹³⁵ Elsevier, 158.

¹³⁶ *Jaarboek voor de Huisvrouw*, 61-62.

housewife.¹³⁷ There were no signs indicating the realization of a possible unrealistic fairy tale ideal of the household caused by this focus on professionalization.

It is possible to show the influence of women's consumer organization on the idealization of the housewife and the role of the efficiency discussion in this, by using an example. Again, the kitchen provides us with a surrounding in which it is possible to show the role these organizations had in determining the daily life of the average Dutch housewife. With the increasing interest for efficiency and rationalization of the household, the interest for the 'rational kitchen' arose as well. The focus on the rationalization of this part of the household mainly came from the women's consumer organizations like the NVVH and their IVHA.¹³⁸ Their focus on the efficient kitchen resulted in the design of the *Bruynzeelkeuken* in 1937 by Piet Zwart, but was preceded by two other important designs. Namely, the '*Holland Keuken*' designed by an architect named Janzen commissioned by the The Hague division of the NVVH in 1920, and the '*Frankfurter Küche*' designed by the architect Schütte-Lihotzky in 1937.¹³⁹ Those three kitchens were products of the search for the perfect and efficient kitchen.

Eventually, a simplified and standardized version of the *Bruynzeelkeuken* appeared in numerous new houses that were erected after the Second World War. This was a small kitchen that was built in seclusion from the living room or any other area in the house. It was seen as a compact, but highly efficient 'family laboratory' where mother could execute the production of multiple goods that would eventually be consumed by the family.¹⁴⁰ This strict separation of production and consumption in the household was caused by the idealized role reserved for the housewife, but also by the physical separation of the kitchen and the rest of the house advocated by producers, architects and women's organizations in the mediatory field. This way, women's organization who had propagated the development of the 'rational kitchen' had outlined the lives of many Dutch housewives.¹⁴¹

It is interesting to see that with the changes in the position of women in society, partly because of the technological revolution in the kitchen, the kitchen itself and the arrangement of the average Dutch house changed again as well. The sixties show a rise in the popularity of the open kitchen that was not designed as a technical or professional environment. This development matched the wish of many women not to be judged on their skills as a housewife, and to be part of society in another role than being 'just a

¹³⁷ De Rijk, *Het Elektrische Huis*, 76.

¹³⁸ Segers et al, *Op Weg naar een Consumptiemaatschappij*, 86.

¹³⁹ Ruth Oldenziel and C. Bouw, eds., *Schoon Genoeg: Huisvrouwen en Huishoudtechnologie in Nederland 1898-1998* (Nijmegen: SUN, 1998), 40.

¹⁴⁰ The term 'Family Laboratory' is derived from M. Berendsen and Anneke van Otterloo's "Het 'gezinslaboratorium'."

¹⁴¹ Berendsen and van Otterloo, "Het 'Gezinslaboratorium'," 321-322.

housewife'.¹⁴² The literal increase of the view on household work, caused by the rise of the open kitchen has also helped to break open the discussion about household work and the one person that had been held responsible for this heavy job for decades: the housewife.¹⁴³

This chapter has tried to describe and analyze the dynamic environment in which Mrs. Consumer found herself every day. An environment in which she was constantly engaged in negotiations between herself and the technology around her; negotiations between herself and her own emancipation process; and negotiations between herself and the consumer organizations that functioned as her representatives within society. In these complex processes of interaction, Mrs. Consumer has played an important part. There has been a clear influence back and forth between Mrs. Consumer and her surroundings.

To make the subject matter concerning Mrs. Consumer even more challenging, this paper points out one more influential process which is possibly present in all fields of activity concerning Mrs. Consumer: American Cultural Influence. Chapter three will attend to this heavily debated subject, which cannot be denied when trying to create a full image of the Dutch Mrs. Consumer and the development of consumer culture in the Netherlands

¹⁴² De Rijk, *Het Elektrische Huis*, 81.

¹⁴³ Oldenziel and Bouw, *Schoon Genoeg*, 44.

Chapter 3

Mrs. Consumer: between dreams and reality

Introduction

Mrs. Consumer should be seen as an interestingly complex and dynamic personality after having looked into her constantly evolving character and the processes and developments that continuously surround her person. Her character profile and behavior are influenced by multiple developments in society, which she also influences in her turn. This process of mutual shaping has proven to be a challenging process to map in chapter two. However, this paper has to deal with one more intricate phenomenon that is closely linked to the world of the Dutch Mrs. Consumer and has influenced her and her surroundings in many ways: American cultural influence. The sub-question to which an answer is sought in this chapter is: In what way has American cultural influence played a part in the development of the Dutch Mrs. Consumer?

To construct an answer to this question, in paragraph one, some theoretical notions about cultural influence in general will be introduced, making it possible to attend to the topic of Americanization after that. Paragraph two then, deals with American luxury's attractiveness to the Dutch Mrs. Consumer, mainly by showing the reasons for the success of the Marshall Plan in the Netherlands. And finally, paragraph three faces the facts and analyses the transformation of the Dutch stereotypical outlook on America and the American Mrs. Consumer towards a more realistic outlook. The intercultural contact and cultural transfer between the Netherlands and the United States will be central throughout this chapter.

3.1 Theory on cultural influence

Before focusing this chapter fully on the process of American cultural influence, it is important to take a closer look at the dynamics of cultural transfer in general. What is the definition of culture? What or who determines the development of culture? And how does cultural transfer take place? This paragraph will try to find an answer to all these questions.

3.1.1 The dynamics of culture

Culture is a term that can be used and interpreted in many ways, both in daily life and academic literature. Culture can be approached in a static or a dynamic way. As an example of both approaches, the work of Geert Hofstede and the work of Neil Campbell provide a possibility for an interesting comparison. Hofstede represents the rather static approach to culture, and Campbell and Kean represent the more dynamic approach to culture.

Geert Hofstede describes "culture as the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another" in his influential book *Culture's Consequences: comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations*.¹⁴⁴ This definition implies that an individual, as a part of a certain group, possesses several inherent cultural traits, causing him or her to behave and think differently than individuals who are not a part of that same group or collectivity. These differences in behavior and thought are caused by the values people hold. These values are inspired by the programming of their mind, their culture. Frequently, values can be deduced from someone's visible behavior, but the cultural meaning that lies behind this behavior is often hard to uncover.¹⁴⁵

According to Hofstede, the values that determine our behavior and form the basis of our culture, are acquired early in our lives and are therefore hard to change as they are programmed into our minds without even being consciously involved in this process. As a result, studying and trying to familiarize oneself with the culture of another group of individuals is a problematic, if not impossible, task.¹⁴⁶ Still, scholars search for similarities and differences between diverse cultural groups, convinced of the fact that both of them exist and are to be found.¹⁴⁷ It might not be possible to completely grasp the reason why these similarities and differences do exist, but it is a fact that both are stressed within cultural comparisons.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ G. Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organization Across Nations* (Thousand Oaks CA: Sage Publications, 2001), 5.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 424.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 24+26.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

Hofstede, however, does believe that the unique traits of a culture can be subject to change. Change that is slow and most often influences a group's culture from the outside. Culture proves to be a very stable phenomenon that is not easily altered and transformed over time. Nevertheless, forces of nature and forces of man do bring about slow but evident changes in a culture. Trade and technological breakthroughs, for example, have been important influences of man on Western culture in the past century.¹⁴⁹ These two developments have caused economy and technology to change, which subsequently have caused societal norms and cultural values to change.¹⁵⁰

Compared to Hofstede's perception of culture and cultural change, professors in American Studies Neil Campbell and Alasdair Kean adhere to a much more dynamic definition of culture. In their book *American Cultural Studies: An Introduction to American Culture*, they describe culture as "a way of life" that is "multi-faceted and ever changing."¹⁵¹ Their approach to culture differs from Hofstede's approach on three important points.

First of all, by acknowledging the unsteadiness and changeable character of culture, Campbell and Kean show that cultural development must be seen as a constant negotiation or discourse between different voices, ideologies and interpretations.¹⁵² In this dialogue "culture is always in a process of negotiation, with positions and identities shifting, with official voices being parodied and satirized, with power being contested."¹⁵³ With this claim, the authors bring up the issue of power and the question whether or not culture can always represent all the voices that possibly can be deducted when studying a culture and its elements. Secondly, Campbell and Kean hold a more global and transnational outlook on culture. They argue that history, and therefore culture, "is part of a global system and cannot be viewed in isolation; it is trans-national."¹⁵⁴ This basic assumption urges a student of culture to take on an international and cross-cultural point of view when trying to comprehend a culture and its unique traits. Finally then, Campbell and Kean distance themselves further from Hofstede's arguments by claiming that culture cannot simply be seen as the collective programming of the mind of a group or a collective of individuals. They state that it is needed "to take into account both internal variation and division," even within a group or category that Hofstede would label as having, or belonging to, the same culture.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁹ Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences*, 34.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁵¹ Neil Campbell and Alasdair Kean, *American Cultural Studies: An Introduction to American Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 5 + 13.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

The process of cultural influence and cultural change can be studied within the household of Mrs. Consumer as well. Her act of consuming is an act that can and must be studied as an expression of culture. An act influenced by Hofstede's irrational underlying cultural values, and by Campbell and Kean's contact, motion and global exchange. Although a household is strongly fixed in habit and place, trade and technology have caused it to transform in unpredictable ways, bringing about changes in the behavior and daily life of Mrs. Consumer.¹⁵⁶ Therefore, consumer behavior can certainly be predicted along cultural lines, and not only along economic lines. Psychologists Hofstede and M. de Mooij support this argument by stating that "the wealthier countries become, the more manifest is the influence of culture on consumption" in their article on convergence and divergence in consumer behavior.¹⁵⁷

One interesting result of this convergence of the level of affluence is that consumer behavior became more heterogeneous and cultural differences became stronger, instead of becoming weaker as one might suspect.¹⁵⁸ American historian Richard Pells assents to this statement by arguing that "the economies and communication systems of the advanced industrial nations had become more intertwined," and by stating that this has led to a "global perspective" and a "nationalist impulse at the same time."¹⁵⁹ This, for example, means that when the Netherlands converged towards the American standard of living considering the level of affluence in the years of rebuilding and growing affluence, cultural differences increasingly started to determine the differences in buying behavior between the two countries. The economic systems of the two countries converged, but the value systems did not.

¹⁵⁶ V. de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge/London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 428.

¹⁵⁷ Hofstede and de Mooij, "Convergence and Divergence in Consumer Behavior," 67.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁵⁹ Richard Pells, *Not Like US: How Europeans Have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American Culture Since World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 331.

3.1.2 The process of Americanization

The fact that similar developments take place in different societies, for example due to trade and technological development leading to intercultural contact, does indicate that the transfer of certain cultural elements can be a possible accompanying effect. The main reason for this premise lies in the given that technology and trade are processes intertwined with culture and filled with cultural meaning, because they originate in a cultural context that influences their development and form. The transfer of cultural elements, therefore, is a complex process in which certain cultural traits are taken from one cultural context and are implemented in another cultural context. This implies a certain process of adaptation and reception to which a cultural element is subjected. A cultural element cannot simply be transferred from one culture to the other without a hint of alteration or transformation in its use and meaning.¹⁶⁰

It is impossible to fully justify claims considering the origins of certain cultural elements. Therefore, the reconstruction of the effects and the reception of new cultural influences is a difficult and controversial topic according to historian Frank Inklaar.¹⁶¹ Victoria de Grazia adds to this, that especially during the last few decades, in which intercultural contact only has increased, it has become even more complicated to compare cultures and to define the cultural origins of certain cultural elements.¹⁶² In this chapter, the intercultural contact and cultural transfer between the Netherlands and the United States is central. The cultural influence between the two countries has been a two-way process without a doubt, as the United States can be seen as the result of European migrants, and with the maturation of the 'New World', the United States has been able to influence Europe in return. However, the focus will be on the cultural influence the United States had on the Netherlands, and on the Dutch way of accepting and adapting these American inspired new cultural elements into Dutch society and culture: the process of so-called Americanization.

The twentieth century is regularly described as 'the American century'.¹⁶³ Reality was that during and after the Second World War, America's role in the world had only increased and Europe's role decreased as a natural consequence in this shifting balance of power. The shift towards a seemingly unipolar world and a stronger hegemony allocated to the United States, lead to an increased focus on the economy and politics of the United States of America, including an increased focus on their culture. Young people usually welcomed the 'new' cultural utterances and products coming from America, and

¹⁶⁰ F. Inklaar, *Van Amerika Geleerd: Marshall-Hulp en Kennisimport in Nederland* (Den Haag: Sdu Uitgevers, 1997), 132-142.

¹⁶¹ Inklaar, *Van Amerika Geleerd*, 132-142.

¹⁶² De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*, 90.

¹⁶³ R.W. Rydell and Rob Kroes, *Buffalo Bill in Bologna: The Americanization of the World, 1869-1922* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 173.

did not abstain or refrain from interpreting these elements as being American.¹⁶⁴ But a large part of the Dutch society was concerned about the negative consequences of this cultural orientation towards America.¹⁶⁵ They saw American culture as superficial, loud and materialistic, and its influence was considered to be one-sided, infectious, irresistible and a threat to the natural and pure national culture of the Netherlands.¹⁶⁶

The increasing worries and concerns about American cultural influence after the Second World War seem to indicate that this process of Americanization also started with the end of this war. This, however, is a false premise. Historians Robert W. Rydell and Rob Kroes argue in their book *Buffalo Bill in Bologna: the Americanization of the World, 1869-1922*, that the process of globalizing American mass culture began as early as the mid-nineteenth century. They state that "the European encounter with American mass culture after the Second World War needs to be understood as part of a cumulative and complex history of American cultural transmissions and European receptions."¹⁶⁷ A claim that can be supported by the movies, music and literature that already entered the European households before the Second World War. And also by the intense debate among European intellectuals concerning the presumed negative consequences of the inflow of these American cultural elements, that already flared up long before the Second World War.¹⁶⁸

The debate about the possible negative influence reveling from American cultural influence might be considered to have stemmed from an unfounded and irrational fear of cultural change. However, there might have been some reason for concern as it is demonstrable that the United States actively tried to influence the image-making of European citizens considering America and American mass culture. The Marshall Plan can act as an example of this conscious Americanization from the side of the United States and will be thoroughly discussed in paragraph two of this chapter. The plan sought to win the hearts and minds of Europe by propagating the Consumers' Republic in an effort to create a bulwark against the advance of Communism.¹⁶⁹ To succeed in this effort, the United States realized that they had to undermine the predominant European belief in the negative influence of mass culture and mass consumption by instigating a cultural counteroffensive that offered arguments for the fact that American cultural influence

¹⁶⁴ Kees Schuyt and Ed Taverne, *1950 Prosperity and Welfare: Dutch Culture in a European Perspective* (Assen / Basingstoke etc.: Royal van Gorcum / Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 381.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 382.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 381 + Inklaar, *Van Amerika Geleerd*, 132-142 + Jan Donkers, *De Amerikaanse Droom in Nederland 1944-1969* (Nijmegen: SUN, 2000).

¹⁶⁷ Rydell and Kroes, *Buffalo Bill*, 172.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

should not be seen as inferior and malicious.¹⁷⁰ In this view, the United States, can be seen as culturally imperialist, leaving nothing to chance and considering no single effort too much to reach their goal.¹⁷¹ However, while indicating the possible cultural imperialism of the United States, one should not lose sight of the fact that every European still had the power of being the receptor. Every European could offer resistance to this American cultural influence, or practice selective appropriation of the offered cultural elements, proving the limits of American influence.

One last remark which puts the process of Americanization into perspective should be made. The postwar cultural change in the Netherlands, often ascribed to this process of Americanization, should not solely be seen as the effect of American cultural influence. First of all, Inklaar provides us with an argument for the claim that it is possible for the Netherlands to have known an autonomous process concerning the cultural change after the Second World War. This is a plausible claim, because it is imaginable that two cultures come up with the same solutions when they are confronted with the same issues.¹⁷² Secondly, the sociologist Kees Schuyt and historian Ed Taverne point out that the issues with which the Netherlands were confronted, were not necessarily American or Dutch for that matter, but global in a sense. The entire western world was going through an important transformation from modernity towards postmodernity.¹⁷³ A global process that was caused by, or went hand in hand with, expanding international markets, empowerment of the consumer and increased cooperation within Europe.¹⁷⁴ Some scholars, however, do link these global developments to the United States again, and consider the United States as the producers of the blueprint for this world-wide homogenization.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁰ Greg Castillo, "Domesticating the Cold War: Household Consumption As Propaganda in Marshall Plan Germany," *Journal of contemporary history* 40 (2005): 270-271.

¹⁷¹ Schuyt and Taverne, 1950, 59.

¹⁷² Inklaar, *Van Amerika Geleerd*, 132-142.

¹⁷³ Schuyt and Taverne, 1950, 485.

¹⁷⁴ D. Barjot et al, *Catching Up with America: Productivity Missions and the Diffusion of American Economic and Technological Influence After the Second World War* (Parijs: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonnes, 2002), 65.

¹⁷⁵ Schuyt and Taverne, 1950, 44.

3.1.3 The United States as an example

The United States are often considered to be the developers and catalysts of the global process of modernization, leading towards the postmodern society as we know it today. In this view, they provided the world with a blueprint, free to copy and to alter according to different cultural contexts and surroundings. The foundations and basic principles of modern day society are often ascribed to have descended from this American blueprint, putting the United States in a position of guiding country.

For several decades, America has been the prime example and main inspiration for different countries belonging to the western world. Economically, politically and culturally, America has been able to take up this role of leading the way, and therefore functioned as some sort of wonder- or promised land. The message of the Marshall Plan, 'You too can be like US', resonated quite well in the Netherlands, causing Dutch economy, politics and culture to direct attention to the American example in many ways. The United States functioned as a reference society and made it possible to reimagine our own future in the context of the flourishing United States of America.¹⁷⁶ This Americanized vision of the future has lead most European countries to build upon the easily accessible and readily provided American blueprint for modernization and rising affluence.

The blueprint, as mentioned earlier, did get reworked and modified in different ways. Schuyt, Taverne and historian Dominique Barjot point out that the US formula was by no means accepted in every European country. And even if it was accepted as an example, it was implemented differently in each country.¹⁷⁷ Every European country had its own outlook on the offered American blueprint and realized the proposals for modernization matching their own cultural framework. National cultural filters made sure that in the whole of Europe, there was no exact copy of the American model to be found.

Although the economic modernization propagated by the Americans took place with strongly varying degrees of success within Europe, the Netherlands has known a successful adoption of the American perspective.¹⁷⁸ The implementation of certain American elements into Dutch society, politics and economy, therefore, should not be seen as a problematic or highly resisted process. The Netherlands have a reputation of being open to foreign or new cultural elements, and the United States were generally accepted to have developed an accurately operating social-economic system which was considered worthy of closer look.¹⁷⁹ Because of the Dutch readiness to cooperate internationally and because of the historically determined openness of Dutch politics and culture, the Americans sympathized with the Netherlands as well. This mutual

¹⁷⁶ Rydell and Kroes, *Buffalo Bill*, cover.

¹⁷⁷ Schuyt and Taverne, 1950, 45 + Barjot et al, *Catching Up with America*, 63.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁷⁹ Inklaar, *Van Amerika Geleerd*, 50 + 132-142.

appreciation between the Netherlands and the United States has been one of the main reasons leading to the successful transfer of the American blueprint for modernization.

The development of Dutch technology can offer an example of this successful transfer of the American blueprint for modernization. Velo, a former Dutch producer of washing machines, has clearly used American washing machines as an example for its own line of production. In 1901, they started with the import of American washing machines, but soon decided to start a production line of their own. Based on the design and the processed technology in the American washing machines, Velo created its own product. Back then, the American washing machines were not protected by any patent yet.¹⁸⁰ Another act that was characteristic of Velo's use of American technology as their blueprint was their response to the popularity of imported American metal washing machines in the Netherlands. Only when the statistics showed a continuous rise in the purchase of American produced metal washing machines, Velo decided to start developing and producing a model of their own.¹⁸¹

The development of women's emancipation can also offer an example of the transfer of the American blueprint for modernization. An advertisement published in a *Huishoudbeurs* catalog featured the following text: "*In Amerika is het de gewoonte, dat de gehuwde vrouw een betrekking vervult. Ook het leven in Nederland ondergaat een verandering...*"¹⁸² This statement clearly uses the situation in the United States as an example to indicate that the future of Dutch women was heading in the same direction, proving the blueprint function of America considering the position of women in society.

The last example of the transfer of the American blueprint to the Netherlands can be offered by one of the most important Dutch women's consumer organizations, the NVVH. In their minutes of 20 February 1953, it is written that: "*Mej. Duivendak, Directrice Landelijke Commissie Huishoudelijke en Gezinsvoorlichting voor het Arnhems Vrouwencomité, een uiteenzetting had gegeven over haar Amerikaanse ervaringen, en van de ontwikkeling van de huidige organisatie van de voorlichting aldaar. [...] Mej. Duivendak had te Arnhem de raad gegeven kernen van geschoolde huisvrouwen te vormen, die zich zouden kunnen wijden aan de voorlichting van hun minder bekwame huisvrouwen. Mej. Goedhart wil een bespreking met mej. Duivendak over het idee van de local leaders.*"¹⁸³ The displayed interest in the American way of educating housewives, and the simple fact that one of the NVVH board members had attended a lecture on the results of a study trip to the United States, proves the fact that the NVVH also used

¹⁸⁰ M. Groffen and S. Hoitsma, *Het Geluk van de Huisvrouw* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Boom, 2004), 33.

¹⁸¹ C. van Dorst, *Tobben met de Was: Een Techniekgeschiedenis van het Wassen in Nederland 1890-1968* (Eindhoven: Technische Universiteit Eindhoven, 2007), 156.

¹⁸² Archief Huishoudbeurs: 1957.

¹⁸³ Archief NVVH: *Notulen NVVH Hoofdbestuur* (20 Februari 1953).

elements from the blueprint that America offered considering its actions in the consumer movement.

All three examples show the implementation of a part of the American blueprint. However, it must be noted that this mostly did happen according to Dutch standards and was adapted and transformed in a way that it matched the Dutch cultural framework. The need for careful and selective appropriation of 'foreign' and somewhat unknown cultural elements for their effects to be successful in the new context, was realized by the Dutch *Contactgroep Opvoering Productiviteit*. They noted that "*imitatie van Amerikaanse voorbeelden zonder aanpassing aan de Nederlandse achtergrond [ongewenst zou] zijn*".¹⁸⁴ Dutch government had the same inclination concerning the changes that were to be made on the road towards modernization. Therefore, economic growth was always linked to social policies, securing social stability as a goal above that of higher productivity.¹⁸⁵ The Dutch government acted as a barking watch-dog on a short leash within a relatively large garden, called 'the market', when dealing with economic growth. The Netherlands should be seen as having developed an economic system situated somewhere between a free-market economy and a centrally directed economy, in which government tried to create a balance between pure corporatism and plain socialism.¹⁸⁶

To create this precarious balance, government had its own distinct way of decision-making. It made extensive use of a consultation model, which led to an ever-present consensus style of decision-making. Every principal theme was deliberated in a slow and well considered fashion within government, and with all imaginable parties involved. As a pillarized society, the Netherlands had deep roots within this culture of meetings, discussions and consensus seeking. The Dutch economic system and the Dutch way of handling debatable subjects and complex governmental issues proved that the offered American perspective had certainly led to a process of adjustment and interpretation, rather than imitation or direct duplication.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ *Economie in de Huishouding: Rapport Studiegroep Landbouw* (Den Haag: Contactgroep Opvoering Productiviteit, 1951), 120.

¹⁸⁵ Barjot et al, *Catching Up with America*, 121.

¹⁸⁶ A. de la Bruhèze and R. Oldenziel, eds., *Manufacturing Technology, Manufacturing Consumers: The Making of Dutch Consumer Society* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2009), 31-32.

¹⁸⁷ Schuyt and Taverne, 1950, 68.

3.2 Propagating affluence

In the previous paragraph, the decision-makers on the state level and the public authorities were mainly discussed as the decisive receivers, processors and editors of American cultural influence entering the Netherlands. The influence of the United States' model of economic modernization has left an unmistakable imprint on the development of Dutch government policies, but the attractiveness of the American blueprint for progress and the elevation of the standard of living in Europe did not only affect government. Dutch society was also deeply impressed by the images and stories coming from the other side of the Atlantic, propagating another lifestyle and an overflow of luxury into the daily life of the average Mrs. Consumer.



3.2.1 Scarcity versus luxury

The Netherlands found itself in a period of scarcity and inevitable economical thrift after the Second World War. There was a shortage of almost everything, consumer goods not excluded. Mrs. Consumer was forced to improvise and manage her household as economically as possible during this time of distribution and deficiencies. Simultaneously, the increased contact with the United States has allowed in the image of another reality, another possibility concerning daily life. America provided the Dutch Mrs. Consumer with her own 'American Dream', together with the notion that this dream could actually become reality as it already was in the United States. While American luxury flirted with the Dutch housewife, the Dutch government preached economical thrift in every household.¹⁸⁸ The sober existence of everyday life in the Netherlands was far removed from the affluence, wealth and luxury of the United States. The picturing of this American life full of luxury stood in stark contrast with Dutch reality in the postwar years and this led to an inevitable tension, constantly putting the Dutch Mrs. Consumer in between dreams and reality.

Mrs. Consumer was brought into contact with the luxury of the American consumer culture through magazines, radio, television and all sorts of other media. The confrontation with the American lifestyle could not be avoided in any way. The attractive and new American culture also made its appearance in the popular radio play *In Holland Staat een Huis* through the persona of the *Doorsnee*-daughter that had emigrated to Canada. On the 6th of December 1954, almost every Dutch household could hear how the radio characters were introduced to the pedagogic ideas of Dr. Spock, nylon, make-up and all sorts of new household appliances. It was not only new to Mrs. *Doorsnee's* eyes and ears, but to every listener as well.¹⁸⁹ The introduction to these foreign subjects and items caused a previously unmatched curiosity and rising expectations that could not be stopped by the daily reality of paucity.¹⁹⁰

The American consumer goods that were brought to the attention of Mrs. Consumer were still unaffordable, but exemplified rather what the average Mrs. Consumer yearned for. The presented products were encouraging her to dream on, and this dream was intensified by repeated exposures to, for example, the symbol of American luxury: the kitchen.

The photograph presented on the previous page shows how Queen Juliana of the Netherlands sees round the Frigidaire Kitchen of the Future at the *Schiphol* exhibition

¹⁸⁸ Schot et al, *Techniek in Nederland*, 104.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 129-131.

¹⁹⁰ P.M. Luykx and P. Slot, eds., *Een Stille Revolutie?: Cultuur en Mentaliteit in de Lange Jaren Vijftig* (Leiden: DBNL, 1997), 16-17.

'*Het Atoom*' in 1957.¹⁹¹ This General Motors model kitchen was elaborately examined and discussed in women's magazines and news bulletins, presenting every Dutch housewife with the dream-image of the push-button-housewife. In this futurized kitchen, everything literally came riding towards her when she waved a hand or pushed a button on the control panel that was central to the functioning of the kitchen. This preliminary design of technological possibilities in the household and the shiny electrical appliances together made the kitchen an example which filled every housewife's heart with desire. The kitchen propagated a dream and an idealized image of the housewife and her surroundings, instigating unrealistic expectations, but desires that would prove to be useful and essential in the development of a successful Dutch consumer culture as well.

The desires of Dutch housewives were significant deciders in the eventual success of the emergence of the Consumers' Republic in the Netherlands. Those craving were the foundation upon which a modern Dutch consumer culture could develop. An important and well-known tool in this stimulation of consumer wants was the European Recovery Program, which is better known as the Marshall Plan. Next to financial and technological assistance to ensure economic growth in Europe, it made intelligent use of the propagandist effects of clear displays figuring the luxurious American lifestyle that fed Mrs. Consumer's dreams about a better future.

¹⁹¹ *Queen Juliana in the Frigidaire Kitchen of the Future* [photo], available from <http://www.flickr.com/photos/bjacques/5555882740/>.

3.2.2 The charm of the Marshall Plan

The idea for the European Recovery Program originated in the United States in the mind of George C. Marshall who took the initiative and made his plan worldly wise on the fifth of June 1947. It would take until 22 September of the same year for Europe to answer his proposal with the drafting of the European Recovery Plan. On the third of April in 1948 then, president Truman of the United States signed the Economic Cooperation Act, finally enabling the Marshall Plan to take flight. The details of Marshall Help for the Netherlands were agreed on in a bilateral agreement between the Netherlands and the United States on the second of July 1948.

The Marshall Plan was, among other reasons, set up to reach three concrete economic goals: first the recovery of the war-ridden economy, then the modernization of this same economic system, and finally the liberalization of the economic system combined with the liberalization of every Dutch citizen.¹⁹² To reach all these goals in the Netherlands, large amounts of American Marshall dollars were invested in the Dutch economy.¹⁹³ Between 1948 and 1952, the inflow of American dollars into the Netherlands amounted to 969 million dollars.¹⁹⁴ This amount came down to 109 dollars per capita. Only Great Britain, France and Italy received a larger amount in total dollars, but did not reach a comparable sum per capita. Only Greece received a larger amount of Marshall dollars per capita.¹⁹⁵ The seemingly large measure of support for the Netherlands can be explained by the unstable and uncertain economic situation the country found itself in. There was a structural shortage on the national balance of payments, which was worse than the shortages in the other European countries. And because the situation of the national balance of payments defined the share of American help that was to be received, the Netherlands experienced great financial advantage compared to other countries.¹⁹⁶

The number of Dutch companies that used American Marshall dollars to import goods and resources reached a number of about 4,100.¹⁹⁷ Those businesses mainly imported agricultural products like bread grains, raw cotton and tobacco. And next to these agricultural raw materials, resources for the industrial and chemical sector were bought in the United States as well. Ore, iron, steel and oil found their way to the

¹⁹² Barjot et al, *Catching Up with America*, 63.

¹⁹³ The Marshall Help dollars formed 8,4% of the national income of the Netherlands in 1949. This was the highest percentage of the national income in the years the Netherlands received Marshall Help. 1948: 5%. 1950: 6,9%. 1951: 2,5%. From: Jan Luiten Zanden van and R.T. Griffiths, *Economische Geschiedenis van Nederland in de 20e Eeuw* (Utrecht: Het Spectrum, 1989), 194.

¹⁹⁴ E. Boissevain and T. de Joode (*Tussen Te Koop en Miskoop: De Geschiedenis van de Consument en zijn Belangen in Nederland*. Amsterdam: Ideeboek, 1976), 58.

¹⁹⁵ Schuyt and Taverne, 1950, 64.

¹⁹⁶ Jan Luiten van Zanden and R.T. Griffiths, *Economische Geschiedenis van Nederland in de 20e Eeuw* (Utrecht: Het Spectrum, 1989), 195.

¹⁹⁷ Pien van der Hoeven, *Hoed Af voor Marshall: 1947-1952 De Marshall-Hulp aan Nederland* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 1997), 121.

Netherlands, together with new machinery to process these materials into intermediate or finished products.¹⁹⁸ These expenditures show that the financial support coming from the United States did not directly go towards the consumer nor was invested in the import of consumer products like household appliances. What these investments in raw materials and resources did do, was provide the Dutch economy with a basis to build upon. This way, the requisites for the development of a successful consumer economy were created by investments in the growth of productivity and the restoration of the balance of payments.

The goals of the Marshall Plan were clear: recovery, modernization and liberalization of Europe. Both the United States and Europe agreed on the need to reach these goals. The historian Richard Pells points out that this agreement between the two countries is a clear example of the harmony that usually existed between the United States and Europe concerning their political and economic interests.¹⁹⁹ But still, the motives for the acceptance and the provision of the actual financial help needed to reach these goals differed between the Netherlands and the United States. The reasoning for the United States to offer help in the rebuilding of Europe is twofold. First of all, it can be seen as a generous gesture and a sign of sympathy directed towards the countries that together formed the oldest and most faithful allies of the United States. But second of all, it is possible to view the Marshall Plan as an act that completely met the self-interest of America.

The claim of American self-interest playing its part in the development of the Marshall Plan, can be supported in an economical and in a political way. Economically, it was important for the United States that the European market got restored as quickly as possible. Europe has been, and continued to be, an important area of distribution for America, therefore Marshall Help contributed to the verification of a safe economic future for the United States itself. And politically, the Marshall Plan formed an influential weapon in the American battle against communism. Through the Marshall Plan, America tried to introduce Europeans to a new societal perspective with the central issue of economic growth leading to affluence and social and political stability.²⁰⁰ According to Barjot, the Americans held a strong "belief in productivity and welfare, welfare and social peace, social peace and democracy".²⁰¹ This belief clearly matched the basic ideal of the Consumers' Republic, which formed the basis of the American model. It comprehended both the economic and political grounds for the execution of the Marshall Plan.

¹⁹⁸ Van Zanden and Griffiths, *Economische Geschiedenis van Nederland*, 194 + Keetie E. Sluyterman, *Dutch Enterprise in the Twentieth Century: Business Strategies in a Small Open Economy* (London/New York: Routledge, 2005), 140.

¹⁹⁹ Pells, *Not Like US*, 57.

²⁰⁰ Inklaar, *Van Amerika Geleerd*, 31-32.

²⁰¹ Barjot et al, *Catching Up with America*, 113.

The belief that the Marshall Plan would bring about positive results for both American development, and for Europe's development of a Consumers' Republic, caused the American government to fully devote itself to maximize the positive economic and political effects of the Marshall Plan. The outlook of also possibly getting the upper hand in the Cold War made the United States develop an effective cultural diplomacy policy as a weapon in their psychological warfare. An official and genuine propaganda campaign was part of the Marshall Plan to ensure the lasting effects of the financial support. According to Pells, this focus on cultural diplomacy as part of the Marshall Plan during the Cold War shows the fact that "American culture and American power were inextricably connected".²⁰²

An example of an elementary influential cultural component of this Marshall Plan campaign in Europe was the exhibition 'A Better Life', which toured the whole of Europe. It consisted of a fully decorated and furnished model of a suburban home, showing more than 6000 household products that were all designed and manufactured in a Marshall Plan member nation.²⁰³ However, nearly all products in the kitchen were imported from the United States of America, together forming the earlier mentioned symbol of American affluence and reinforcing European desires to reach the same degree of luxury.²⁰⁴ This way, the exhibition intelligently combined elements that invigorated European pride in their own accomplishments, and elements that confirmed that there still was work ahead to reach the same kind of lifestyle as Europe's distant neighbors had.

Dutch politicians did realize that there was an element of self-interest in the American aid offered in the form of the Marshall Plan, but the economic benefits the Plan produced were valued much higher.²⁰⁵ The Dutch economy stood at the brink of an economic crisis caused by the imbalance on the national balance of payments. In 1947, the Dutch government was confronted with an unsolvable dilemma in their effort to fix the balance of payments. One option was a severe decrease in imports which would certainly cause a rebound in consumption and economic recovery. The other option was the maintenance of the high imports which would eventually lead to the bankruptcy of the Netherlands.²⁰⁶ Therefore, the Marshall Plan came exactly at the right time and moment. It was received in a positive way and enjoyed public support.

The realization of the American self-interest, and the Dutch necessity that were both served by the Marshall Plan, was perfectly verbalized in one of the reports of a study group that went to the United States as a part of the Marshall Plan. It stated the following: "*Een volk dat zijn eigenbelang ziet in de economische, social, hygiënische en*

²⁰² Pells, *Not Like US*, 39.

²⁰³ Castillo, *Domesticating the Cold War*, 274-275.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 281.

²⁰⁵ Inklaar, *Van Amerika Geleerd*, 24.

²⁰⁶ Van der Hoeven, *Hoed Af voor Marshall*, 35.

kulturele opbouw van andere landen, dat zijn fabrieken en bedrijven openstelt voor zijn concurrenten en dan bovendien dat bezoek nog financiert en organiseert, een volk, dat dit alles wist samen te vatten in de uitdrukking 'You can't do business with a beggar', geeft een blijk van een breedheid van visie, die enig is in de historie der volken". It also expresses the gratitude that was commonly met among Dutch society. The picture on the next page also portrays an utterance of this appreciation by means of the most extensive export product of the Netherlands: flower bulbs.²⁰⁷ The Plan, and its accompanying propaganda of the American way of living, stimulated the belief in a better future and Europe's own road towards a period of affluence and luxury.

²⁰⁷ *Thank you Marshall 1951* [photo], available from <http://www.flickr.com/photos/oecd/3384842940/>.



3.3 Constructing images of the American housewife and her surroundings

The inflow of American images representing the perfect life, among others stimulated by the Marshall Plan, lead to the construction of a certain mental representation of America and the American Mrs. Consumer in the minds of the Dutch. Those mental representations often were based on stereotypes, but later on the realization of diversity started to influence the image of the American housewife as well. With the proceeding of time, the economic situation in the Netherlands improved, and the urge to constantly compare and link everything to the United States slowly disappeared. The constructed images, therefore, turned from stereotypes and critical admiration to realism and actual criticism.

3.3.1 The victory march of stereotypes

The increased trans-Atlantic contact after the Second World War did not increase the mutual understanding and realistic image-making of one another. Intercultural contact does not automatically lead to the immediate disappearance of stereotypical mental representations. Therefore, in the first years after the Second World War, Americans were often seen as a group with shared characteristics and not as individual members of a diverse society.²⁰⁸ According to Pells, this tendency to generalize often lead to transatlantic misunderstanding. More often than not, the Dutch held the "propensity to generalize, and to inflate subtle differences into moral categories..."²⁰⁹

This victory march of stereotypes also filtered through in the many reports that were published after the Dutch study trips to the United States, coordinated by the *Contactgroep Opvoering Publiciteit* (COP), which was an institutional part of the Marshall Plan's Technical Assistance. The COP study teams wrote down clear examples of stereotypical image-making in their reports. Although the reports were indeed based on their own experiences in America, they did contain many stereotypical descriptions of America and the Americans, because of the study group's persistent previously outlined images and the propagandistic character of the study trips. The result of the study trips can best be described as giving the Dutch a careful picture of the promised land, containing more information about America than already was known, but a picture that was still directed by American propaganda and Dutch old-fashioned stereotypes.²¹⁰ Looking at it this way, the study teams did not produce any new input considering the Dutch image-making of America, but they did provide us with a clear example of the persistence of traditional and stereotypical images of America.²¹¹ Therefore, the

²⁰⁸ Inklaar, *Van Amerika Geleerd*, 424.

²⁰⁹ Pells, *Not Like US*, 19.

²¹⁰ Schuyt and Taverne, *1950*, 63.

²¹¹ Inklaar, *Van Amerika Geleerd*, 129-130.

stereotypes that can be deduced from the COP reports can be seen as the generally applied images of America in Dutch society.

The COP reports that were most representative for the America-image of the Dutch Mrs. Consumer, or most influential with regard to the coming about of the America-image of the Dutch Mrs. Consumer, were: *Hoe Leeft en Werkt de Amerikaanse Boer?* published in 1950, *Economie in de Huishouding: Rapport Studiegroep Landbouw* published in 1951, *Voorlichting Plattelandsvrouwen* published in 1953, *De Amerikaanse Boerderij: Ervaringen van Drie Nederlandse Meisjes* published in 1954, and *Welvaart en Konsumptie* published in 1956.

The consumer team that published the last mentioned report provides us with the clearest reflection of the thoughts and ideas of the Dutch Mrs. Consumer, since that study team was composed by the *Nederlandse Huishoudraad*. It consisted of nine members, of which there were six women, and four of them directly represented the NHR. The other members of the study group were tied to several organization that were closely related to the NHR, and to the *Nederlandse Vereniging voor Huisvrouwen* as well.²¹² This paper argues that the Dutch Mrs. Consumer partly incorporated the America-images practiced by her representatives in the consumption junction, or saw her own America-image confirmed in theirs. Therefore, this study group can be seen as an intermediary for the transference of America-images to their rank and file.

American society elicited admiration and aversion at the same time.²¹³ Pells points out that dependent upon "who was speaking, America could be either fascinating or appalling..."²¹⁴ Contradictory characteristics like individualistic and teamwork-minded, or social and superficial were mentioned within the same sentence, however, not resulting in the realization that 'the American' could not be perceived as having a uniform personality based on uniform culturally determined characteristics. Stereotypes dominated the image-making in the COP reports, while diversity could actually be detected when reading between the lines.

When focusing on the praiseworthy character traits of the American woman, or housewife, multiple stereotypical characteristics were attributed to her persona as well. This often resulted in a serious advice for the Dutch Mrs. Consumer to adopt a number of these stereotypical character traits. The American housewife was portrayed as an assertive and independent woman who stood directly next to her husband. She lived a full life while being a housewife, but at the same time often taking up a profession

²¹² They were associated to the *Huishoudelijke Voorlichtingsafdeling van de Vereniging van Exploitanten*, to the *Nederlandse Organisatie voor Toegepast-Natuurwetenschappelijk Onderzoek (TNO)*, to the *Nederlandse Consumentenbond*, and to the *Vereniging Nederlands Fabricaat*.

²¹³ T. de Rijk, *Het Elektrische Huis: Vormgeving en Acceptatie van Elektrische Huishoudelijke Apparaten in Nederland* (Rotterdam: Uitgeverij O10, 1998), 159-225.

²¹⁴ Pells, *Not Like US*, 5.

outside the home. This made her into a self-confident woman who showed her power and consciousness in the market place as well. Mrs. America was a Mrs. Consumer who should be taken seriously, because she was informed, highly critical and possessed great purchasing power.²¹⁵ Therefore, Mrs. America never seemed to be perceived as 'just a housewife' in the Netherlands, but as a housewife who was able to make more out of life next to cooking and cleaning. Even more so because of her efficient use of household appliances.

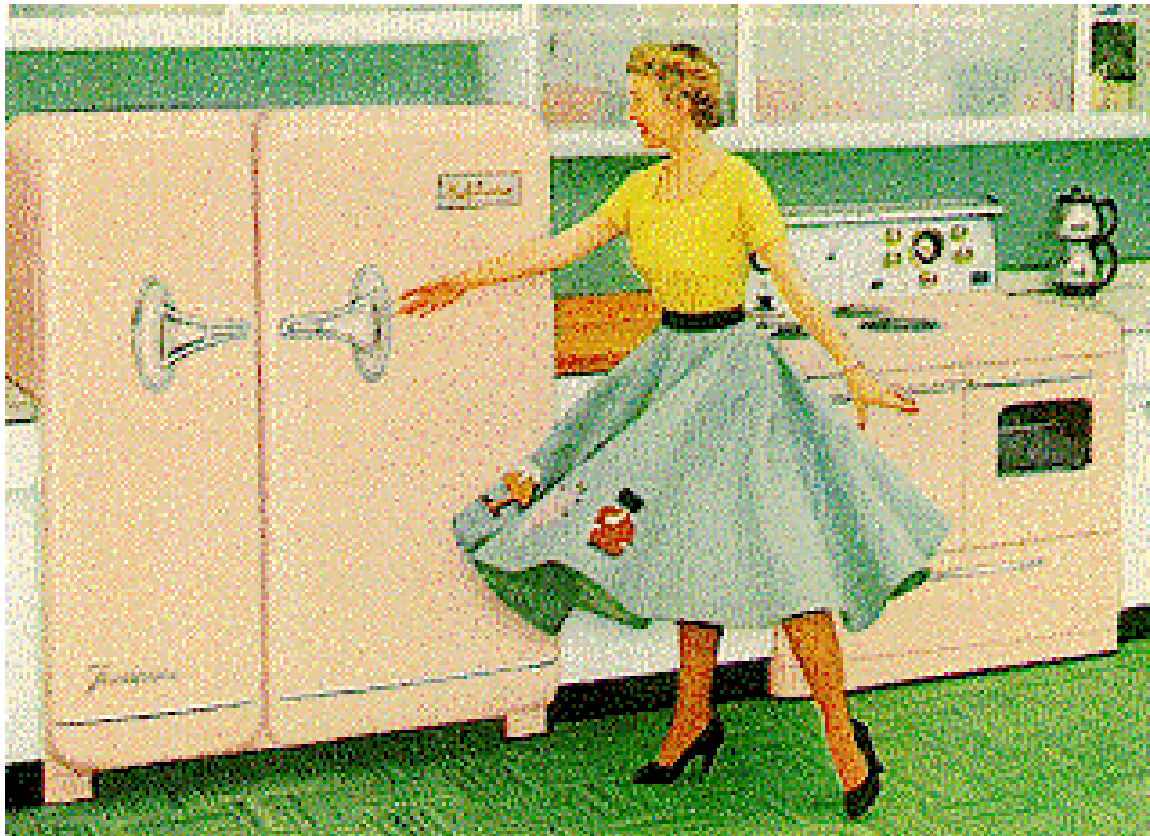
The presence of electrical household appliances in every American kitchen seems to be a generally accepted premise. The American kitchen, in which these appliances were centered, formed the symbol of American affluence and was mentioned as such in nearly a quarter of all the study reports published by the COP.²¹⁶ The image-making considering the American household, and especially the kitchen, matched the pictures of American dream kitchens propagated by Marshall Plan campaigns as depicted on the picture.²¹⁷ A typical description of such a stereotypical American kitchen can be found in the COP report *De Amerikaanse Boerderij: Ervaringen van Drie Nederlandse Meisjes*: "Allereerst treft men daar de ijskast aan - en dat niet bij wijze van uitzondering, maar algemeen. [...] Verder zag ik in de keuken een groot electrisch fornuis met twee ovens en een bewaarplaats voor pannen. Een serie knopjes diende om de temperatuur van het fornuis en de verhittingsduur van kook- en bakproducten te kunnen regelen. [...] Uiterst practisch is de emaille gootsteen met kranen voor koud en warm water."²¹⁸ This quote is not directly radiating with admiration, but does indicate the lead of the Americans with respect to kitchen furnishings and household appliances compared to the average household effects in the Dutch homes. It puts forward the stereotypical idea that all American household were filled with these dream machines, and therefore were worthy of generating the desires of so many Dutch housewives.

²¹⁵ Inklaar, *Van Amerika Geleerd*, 104-120.

²¹⁶ Schot et al, *Techniek in Nederland*, 108.

²¹⁷ *What Happened to Rosie?* [photo], available from <http://universityhonors.umd.edu/HONR269J/projects/hchunt/paper.htm>.

²¹⁸ *De Amerikaanse Boerderij: Ervaringen van Drie Nederlandse Meisjes* (Den Haag: Contactgroep Opvoering Productiviteit, 1954), 15.



Nevertheless, admiration was not the only attitude towards America, its housewives, and its kitchens; there was criticism to be read and heard in Dutch society as well. The communality with the attitude of admiration, however, is the fact that the attitude of criticism directed at America and American society could often be linked to certain stereotyped mental representations as well. In relation to Dutch culture, this focus on the negative elements of American culture functioned as a strengthener of pride and consciousness of our own cultural habits and traits. The critical sounds that were ventilated towards America often comprised the squandering of consumer products, the use of installment buying, the pressure for women to start working outside the home, and the habit of the American housewife to go out. These critical notes matched the situation in the Netherlands, where economical thrift, scarcity, and the ideal of the family with the woman in the role of the housewife were rampant.

The existence of both admiration and criticism, made it quite common that the American household, and the American kitchen were portrayed as useful and admirable examples, while at the same time the American housewife, who lived and functioned in these dream kitchens, was depicted with a certain skepticism.²¹⁹ The *Vrouwen Electriciteits Vereniging*, for example, postulated the following: "*Amerikaansche huisvrouwen...meestal trekken wij toch een bepaald gezicht, als wij dat zeggen, halen onze schouders op en steken even onze onderlip naar voren, want eigenlijk zijn wij overtuigd dat wij, Hollandsche huisvrouwen, toch wel met eenig recht onze sportieve en uithuizige collega's mogen verdenken van gebrek aan degelijkheid en zelfs wel van eenige vluchtigheid en nonchalance van hun huishoudelijke plichten.*" This utterance also clearly shows that the criticism directed at the American housewife can be linked to the Dutch ideal of the perfect housewife, who should be in the home at all times, providing her family with all the best she can deliver.

²¹⁹ De Rijk, *Het Elektrische Huis*, 73.

3.3.2 Reality check: facing the facts

The positive and negative Dutch mental representations of America and the American Mrs. Consumer were mainly based on stereotypes in the first years of increased intercultural contact. Later on, however, the realization of diversity in the United States, and the signaling of commonalities between the Dutch and the American housewives started to transform the image of the American housewife. This change away from stereotypical image-making, was made possible because of the successful rebuilding of the Dutch economy, creating the possibility for the Dutch to realize their own 'American Dream'. The urge to compare the two cultures, therefore, disappeared and the image-making of American culture became more realistic and based on reality.

America appeared to be different from the imagined images of America, and more diverse than Marshall Plan officials tried to make the Dutch believe. Reality was often less rosy and luxurious than advertisers, public opinion and Marshall Plan propaganda would propagate. Of course, the Second World War did not leave behind a devastated and destroyed United States, but created a growth in production and consumer wants. This difference with Europe made it possible that even during the Second World War, one out of three American households already had running water and central heating, and 52% of the households possessed a washing machine and a refrigerator.²²⁰ The washing machine was already introduced to the Americans by the middle of the twenties, and only cost 30 dollars fifteen years after this first introduction.²²¹ These numbers and dates show that the United States indeed was ahead of Europe concerning the introduction of household appliances, but it also shows that not everyone in America possessed these new and luxurious machines as Europeans were made to believe during the Cold War years. The displays of the so-called average American kitchen were greatly exaggerated. Victoria de Grazia points out that most American women were even still doing their household chores by hand, just like their Dutch colleagues.²²²

The American woman entering the labor market also was subject to image-making that was partly true, and partly untrue. It is a fact that in America, more women had entered the labor force in comparison with the homeward bound women in the Netherlands. However, this move from being housewives, to being working mothers, did not take place without resistance and criticism from society. It was not as self-evidently admitted as the Dutch were made to believe. Many American women struggled with the decision to take up a job because of cultural pressures that portrayed the ladylike homemaker as the idealized image for women.²²³ An increasing amount of American

²²⁰ Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology From the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic books, 1983), 195-196.

²²¹ H. Baudet, *Een Vertrouwde Wereld: 100 Jaar Innovatie in Nederland*. Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1986), 85-94.

²²² De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*, 427.

²²³ Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, 202.

women did start working outside of the home despite cultural pressures, but continued to feel safest as a part of the traditional nuclear family within the realm of the household, just like their Dutch colleagues.²²⁴

The two sections above already imply the realization of previously unknown and concealed similarities that existed between the situation of American and Dutch housewives. With the decrease in stereotypical image-making and the increase in realization of actual reality, similarities moved to the foreground and caused a focus on resemblances instead of a focus on differences. It is possible to say that with the convergence of the economic systems and consumer cultures of the Netherlands and the United States, the need for America as an example and guiding country slowly vanished, leading to a decrease in stereotypical image-making and an increase in truthful America-images in the Netherlands. This, however, did not mean the complete banishing of stereotypical image-making and use of generalizations concerning the United States and its inhabitants, but merely a move in the direction of truthful images of America in the Netherlands.

At the same time, the Dutch housewife became a full and equal colleague to the American Mrs. Consumer as the Netherlands increasingly moved towards the American model of consumption, albeit with its own adjustments and uses of the offered blueprint. The reason to look up to the American Mrs. Consumer was diminished, but there was all the more reason to cooperate and work together with American women, who were in fact involved in the same problems and processes as the Dutch Mrs. Consumer. In the years of continuously growing affluence, together and simultaneously women in America and in the Netherlands actively tried to improve their position as women in society, attempted to fight the domination of the idealized image of the housewife, and endeavored to properly represent Mrs. Consumer within the consumption junction. Or, they passively underwent all the changes and developments surrounding and affecting their daily lives. All in their own way, matching their cultural values and histories of development. To eventually diverge again over time, as their cultures and consumer behavior started to become more heterogeneous as an inevitable result of growing affluence and wealth.

The Dutch Mrs. Consumer was loosened from her precarious position between dreams and reality. The aligning of the Dutch Mrs. Consumer with her long admired counterpart in America, happened simultaneously with the aligning of the Dutch economy with its American counterpart. The fact remains that America played a stimulating and catalyzing role in this process, but that this did not necessarily lead to a duplication of American culture in the Netherlands. Nevertheless, multiple American products and cultural elements did find their way onto the Dutch market for the Dutch to buy and

²²⁴ Annegret S. Ogden, *The Great American Housewife: From Helpmate to Wage Earner, 1776-1986* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1986), 137-139.

interpret in their own ways. Chapter four of this paper will try to show some of the factual imported products from America finding their way into the Dutch homes through the hands of Mrs. Consumer at an event that comes very close to being a true consumption junction: the *Huishoudbeurs*, where consumer, producer and the intermediary field meet.

Chapter 4

A close up of Dutch consumer culture: Mrs. Consumer at the Huishoudbeurs

Introduction

*"Er is ontzettend veel te zien,
er is – punt één – een wasmaschien,
die mangelt, strijkt en droogt en sproeit
en die ook broeit (of juist NIET broeit,
daar wil ik af zijn). Bovendien
is er dan nòg een wasmaschien,
die ook nog bleekt en perst en wringt
en daarbij op en neder springt.
Een stofzuiger, die klopt en veegt
en die daarna zichzelf weer leegt
en koffie maalt en haren droogt
en die alleen geen kinders zoogt.
Men kan er uren over praten!
Het staat hier vol met apparaten
die veel meer kunnen dan ze hoeven,
maar ik ben hier om soep te proeven..."*

The poem on the previous page describes the feelings of Dutch writer Annie M.G. Schmidt concerning the annual Dutch *Huishoudbeurs*.²²⁵ She describes the abundance in household appliances exhibited at this fair and her personal reasons to visit it.

A phenomenon such as the *Huishoudbeurs* can be inspiring to a writer, but also offers a student of consumer culture various approaches to the topic. Schmidt's short poem already touches upon multiple topics concerning consumer culture that can be studied in relationship with the *Huishoudbeurs*, such as: the development of household appliances and the reasons for a woman to visit the *Huishoudbeurs*. Therefore, it can be said that the *Huishoudbeurs* is an expression of consumer culture: a cultural text which can be read and analyzed to eventually deduct answers that provide an insight into 'reality'. The fair is an example of a place where "our sense of what is right and wrong, normal and abnormal, important or not worthy of our attention" can be constructed.²²⁶

The first three chapters of this paper on the development of the Dutch Mrs. Consumer have focused on her general outline and position within Dutch society in a time of rising affluence and consumption. Then, on her influence considering several developments surrounding her in daily life and, in turn, the influence of these developments on Mrs. Consumer herself. And finally, on the influence of American culture covering all the other developments that are related to Mrs. Consumer.

In this fourth chapter, all this will be looked at in closer detail by figuratively entering one of the clearest examples of Dutch consumer culture where Mrs. Consumer literally partook in the negotiations of the consumption junction: the *Huishoudbeurs*. This annually held combination of an exhibition and a market provides us with a reflection of the world in which Mrs. Consumer lives, acts and shops. A world in which the contours of the Dutch Consumers' Republic progressively could be discerned. A world in motion and in development when it comes to technological progress, the emancipation of women, and the organization of the women's consumer movement. All these developments that are of substantial importance to the world of Mrs. Consumer can be discovered and uncovered at the *Huishoudbeurs*. A closer look at these developments visible at the *Huishoudbeurs* also reveals the possible influence of American culture on the Dutch Mrs. Consumer. Therefore, it can be said that the *Huishoudbeurs* is a reflection of society, social trends and the developing consumer culture in the Netherlands as the main players at the *Huishoudbeurs* are producers, consumers and the intermediary field. These three elements present at the *Huishoudbeurs* together have shaped Dutch consumer culture and consequently the Dutch Mrs. Consumer.

²²⁵ A.M.G. Schmidt, *In Holland Staat Mijn Huis* (Amsterdam: Querido's Uitgeverij, 1955), 132-133.

²²⁶ Neil Campbell and Alasdair Kean, *American Cultural Studies: An Introduction to American Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 14.

The sub-question that forms the basis of this chapter is the following: How do the influential forces upon the development of the Dutch Mrs. Consumer (referred to in chapter one, two, and three) reflect and become visible at the *Huishoudbeurs*? To answer this question, the first paragraph will elaborate upon the concept of the consumption junction in a more practical and visualized fashion, by showing the origins and history of the *Huishoudbeurs* and by describing the typical function of a fair like this. In the second paragraph then, the larger trends in society and consumer culture will be dealt with by zooming in on the situation at the *Huishoudbeurs* considering technological development, the emancipation of women, and the possible process of Americanization.

This chapter will frequently draw information from an archive, which is owned by Annelies Wiersma who writes her dissertation on the *Huishoudbeurs*. Over the years, she has collected important and unique material considering this Dutch fair, through the RAI, but also through the former Press Officer of the *Huishoudbeurs*, Kees van Rijswijk. He has kept an archive full of newspaper articles, catalogs, press information, all collected in about 16 dossiers. It is because of the access to this archive, that it became possible to compose this chapter on the poorly documented and archived phenomenon of the *Huishoudbeurs*.

4.1 A visualization of the consumption junction

To visualize the theoretic idea of a consumption junction, it is helpful to take a closer look at the *Huishoudbeurs*. First of all, the history, founding and development of this fair provide insight considering the goal of the *Huishoudbeurs*, which matches the idea of a consumption junction. And second of all, the function of the *Huishoudbeurs* and the related reasons for producers, consumers and the intermediary field to visit or be part of this fair help to understand the workings of the consumption junction as well.

4.1.1 The *Huishoudbeurs*

The *Huishoudbeurs* has an interesting and protracted history, which does not simply start with the contemplation and founding of this particular fair. As historians Robert Rydell and Rob Kroes argue in their book *Buffalo Bill in Bologna: the Americanization of the World, 1869-1922*, a culture of fairs and exhibitions already existed long before the twentieth century. In the nineteenth century, there were the so-called industrial fairs, and in the second half of this century world fairs gained in popularity. These were all held to display a country's, or multiple countries' industrial and economic achievements. In between the First and the Second World War, specialized fairs focusing on only one branch of industry came into existence. Women's organizations and magazines, for example, organized exhibitions showing solely the new findings and inventions that would benefit the audience of housewives.²²⁷ These shows of household appliances, where women could be introduced and get acquainted with new products, were already called *huishoudbeurzen*. It is estimated that there were about 300 fairs like this organized every year throughout the Netherlands.²²⁸

After the Second World War, a man named P.F. Blokker wanted to create a new and successful household fair in Amsterdam originating from the tradition of the prewar *huishoudbeurzen*. In 1948 he organized his first fair under the name of *Damesbeurs*, and this exhibition got a sequel in 1949. The use of the name *Damesbeurs*, however, led to a lengthy lawsuit because of a certain mister Flaumenhaft. He claimed that the rights to the name belong to the women's magazine *Dameskroniek*, which organized earlier versions of the *Damesbeurs* before the Second World War and wanted to continue to do so after. Mr. Flaumenhaft's argument won the case and Blokker was forced to find an alternative name for his annual household fair.²²⁹ In May 1950, Blokker organized the one-time *Domein der Vrouw*. This name, however, did not catch on with the public and therefore he was forced to come up with another title for his household fair. In his search for the name that would eventually prove successful and lasting, he met Mrs. Tosi who was the widow of Mr. Tosi. This Mr. Tosi had organized more than 300 retailer fairs since

²²⁷ Archief Huishoudbeurs: *Telegraaf*, 11 maart 2006, T3.

²²⁸ Archief Huishoudbeurs.

²²⁹ *Revue der Reclame* 11 (Maart 1951), 87 + Archief Huishoudbeurs: *Binnenhof*, 1950.

1921 under the name of *Huishoudbeurs*. Blokker legitimately bought the rights to use this name from Mrs. Tosi and officially launched the first *Huishoudbeurs* from 29 September till 8 October 1950 in the *Houtrusthallen* in The Hague.²³⁰ The fair was annually held in Amsterdam and one other Dutch city, but as from 1955 on, the *Huishoudbeurs* has been organized solely at the RAI Amsterdam without trips to other sites or cities.

P.F. Blokker, who should not be confused with one of the Blokker brothers responsible for the successful household shop 'Blokker', had a clear vision and business strategy concerning the *Huishoudbeurs* for which he had created a new impetus. He saw the fair as a medium for the producer and the consumer to come into direct contact.²³¹ According to Kees van Rijswijk, Blokker also imagined and organized the fair with the idea that it should be a trade fair at which women could learn something, but at the same time would be able to entertain themselves.²³² It should be an educational and pleasant experience exclusively for women and their families.²³³ Blokker was a true businessman, among others involved in the *Genootschap voor Reclame* and the *Vereniging van Exposanten*, which made him an influential and well-respected *Huishoudbeurs* director from 1948 until 1982.²³⁴ His daughter then sold on the iconic fair to the RAI.

Blokker left behind a popular, professional and progressive fair that focused on housewives and household products. Also because of his constant forging ahead and advanced ideas about successfully running a household fair, the *Huishoudbeurs* is worth studying. Blokker, for example, introduced the auditing of the amount of visitors by independent accountants in 1961, when the competing household fairs like the The Hague *Damesbeurs* and the Rotterdam *Femina* still did not recognize the necessity for such a management tool.²³⁵ Together with the *Damesbeurs*, in 1956 Blokker also made the definite decision not to invite retailers anymore, but to stick solely to producers and importers as exhibitors.²³⁶ This way, the feeling of shopping at a regular shopping street was eliminated, and the opportunity to thoroughly compare goods became reality.²³⁷ Blokker even attended to consumer rights by disagreeing with an important decision made by the *Nederlandse Consumentenbond* and the *Damesbeurs* to allow exhibitors to use purchasing-agreements at fairs. In his own words: "*Daar kan een vodge papier*

²³⁰ Archief Huishoudbeurs: *Haagse Courant*, 1950.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Archief Huishoudbeurs: *Telegraaf*, 11 maart 2006, T3 + *Telegraaf*, 22 maart 2003, 5.

²³³ *Ariadne* 15 (April 1960), 339.

²³⁴ *Revue der Reclame* 12 (December 1952), 356 + *Ariadne* 17 (November 1962), 1262.

²³⁵ Dolf Hell, "De Tastzin Wint het van Virtual Reality: Huishoudbeurs na 50 Keer Nog Springlevend," *Adformatie* 23, no. 12 (1995): 34 + *Ariadne* 18 (September 1963), 824-826.

²³⁶ *Revue der Reclame* 16 (Maart 1956), 79.

²³⁷ *Ariadne* 15 (April 1960), 339.

overheen worden gelegd en het woord 'Koopcontract' is al weer aan het oog onttrokken [...]."²³⁸ And his conviction that it was possible for a household fair with its home base in Amsterdam to be a nationwide success, is further proof of his progressive mentality. In 1960 Blokker stated: "*Waarom niet in Amsterdam en alleen in Amsterdam? De huisvrouwen maken zoveel excursies tegenwoordig, zij komen ook wel uit de provincie om een Amsterdamse Huishoudbeurs te bekijken.*"²³⁹ And even up to this very day, he was proven right.

It was hard to not have heard from the annual *Huishoudbeurs* in Amsterdam with all the media attention the fair cultivated. Every year, the *Huishoudbeurs* was a topic in many television shows, news bulletins, polygon clips, radio shows, women's magazines, window posters and door-to-door papers.²⁴⁰ The *EVA-Journaal* and the *Wierings Weekblad* for example issued extra appendices and pages exclusively focusing on the *Huishoudbeurs*. In total, an average of 400.000 subscribers in the region of Amsterdam alone would find these special *Huishoudbeurs* editions on their doormat in the sixties.²⁴¹ This broad and extensive media attention was beneficial for the name and fame of the *Huishoudbeurs*, but also for the exhibitors at the fair. A striking example of this awareness is the following quote that was whispered in the ear of a TV-director by one of the exhibitors during the recording for a certain television show: "*Nog twee meter naar rechts mijnheer...vier rooien...*"²⁴²

As mentioned earlier, the amount of visitors was officially registered as from 1961 on. Unfortunately these figures are not easy to retrieve. From the archival material collected by Kees van Rijswijk and a view issues of the *Revue der Reclame* and *Ariadne* it becomes clear that there has been an increase of visitors from a number of 112.000 visitors in the early years of the fair to a maximum of 330.000 visitors in 1975. In 1962 there were 144.006 paying visitors, and in 1963 there were 185.268 visitors and over 300 exhibitors.²⁴³ This indicates a steady rise in popularity and size of the *Huishoudbeurs* over the years, creating an increasingly attractive platform for the consumption junction to manifest itself.

²³⁸ *Ariadne* 17 (November 1962), 1262.

²³⁹ *Ariadne* 15 (April 1960), 339.

²⁴⁰ *Revue der Reclame* 18 (April 1958), 180-182.

²⁴¹ *Ariadne* 1963, 1965 and 1966.

²⁴² *Ariadne* 15 (Januari 1960), 12-13.

²⁴³ *Ariadne* 17 (April 1962), 671 + *Revue der Reclame Expres* 1 (November 1963), E49.

4.1.2 The consumption junction in practice

The *Huishoudbeurs* provided the producer and the consumer with an opportunity to meet and interact, face to face. And even the invited consumer organization and other intermediary groups had a chance of directly interchanging thoughts with visitors and exhibitors. This creation of a factual consumption junction is the main function of a fair like the *Huishoudbeurs*. The added value especially lies in the direct contact between Mrs. Consumer and the actual products. She can taste, touch, try and test all the presented products right under the eyes of the producer. The photograph below, shows a group of tasting and testing housewives at the *Huishoudbeurs* of 1951.²⁴⁴

The main reason for Mrs. Consumer to visit an exhibition such as the *Huishoudbeurs* can be found in her interest to discover novelties. According to a study in J.M.H. Huynen's *Trends in Trade Fairs*, novelties and the latest things are what draws 58% of the visitors to an exhibition. Next to this, 22% of the visitors comes to an exhibition to learn something, and 13% swings by just for pleasure.²⁴⁵ A statement from a *Huishoudbeurs* visitor in 1959 indicates a combination of the three mentioned most popular reasons to visit a fair like the *Huishoudbeurs*: "*Och het is altijd wel aardig. Je ziet wat en je leert wat, al zal je direct niets kunnen kopen. Het lijkt wel alsof er elk jaar méér dure dingen bijkomen. Maar ik zeg zo, die f1,50 haal je er wel uit. Reken alleen dat je anders toch gauw 65 cent voor een kopje koffie betaalt. Hier kan je er twee of drie voor niks krijgen. En gegeten hebben we ook genoeg. En je blijft een beetje op de hoogte, je kan meepraten. In een winkel zie je wel eens iets staan, maar dan durf je er niet naar te vragen. Hier zijn ze blij als ze kunnen demonstreren.*"²⁴⁶

The educational part of the *Huishoudbeurs* was impossible to overlook. It tried to offer orientation and information as a preparation for future transactions by inviting only trustworthy exhibitors and also by organizing a comprehensive program of accompanying lectures and congresses.²⁴⁷ But the fun part also received substantial attention from the organization of the *Huishoudbeurs*, for the fair was always accompanied by cabaret, competitions, fashion or award shows ensuring a spectacular visit.

²⁴⁴ *Proevende Bezoeksters op de Huishoudbeurs, Amsterdam, 9 maart 1951* [Photo], available from <http://www.flickr.com>.

²⁴⁵ J.M.H. Huynen, *Trends in Trade Fairs* (Valkenburg: Uitgeverij Het Land van Valkenburg, 1973), 218.

²⁴⁶ *Ariadne* 14 (April 1959), 217.

²⁴⁷ Huynen, *Trends in Trade Fairs*, 53.



For a producer, there were many reasons to partake as an exhibitor in a fair like the *Huishoudbeurs*. For them, first of all, the *Huishoudbeurs* should be seen as a commercial fair to promote sales and turnover. Participation in such a fair especially worked during the introduction of a new product. By giving such a new product an enormous amount of attention at a fair, a producer tried to heighten its brand reputation and to bring about repeat purchases.²⁴⁸ Second of all, the *Huishoudbeurs* can also function as a test market where a producer can exclusively focus on its main target group: the housewife. As visitors to the *Huishoudbeurs*, the housewives then function as a vast test panel for producers to test the popularity and marketability of their goods upon. With an average of 50.000 people passing a stand like the one on the photograph on the next page, a situation is created that offers the perfect opportunity to ask and listen to what those people have to say.²⁴⁹ The *Instituut Industriële Vormgeving*, for example, executed extensive surveys and interviews in 1951, 1952, 1953 and 1956.²⁵⁰ Concluding, it is possible to say that the *Huishoudbeurs* holds a dual function for producers: it is a sales promotion instrument, and a test market for the marketing mix at the same time.²⁵¹

²⁴⁸ Hell, "De Tastzin Wint," 35.

²⁴⁹ Photograph from Archief Huishoudbeurs.

²⁵⁰ *Revue der Reclame*, sept 1951, jrg. 11, 263 + aantekeningen AW

²⁵¹ Huynen, *Trends in Trade Fairs*, 256-257.



However, the interacting consumers and producers, all with their own agenda and reasons for visiting the *Huishoudbeurs*, are not the only players at this consumption junction. Despite the often very direct contact between Mrs. Consumer and Mr. Producer, it cannot be said that this contact was not influenced or affected by the possible interference of the present consumer organizations at the fair. Principally because of the close contacts between the management of the *Huishoudbeurs* and for example the *Nederlandse Vereniging voor Huisvrouwen* (NVVH) it is impossible to ignore the influence of Dutch intermediary consumer groups within the consumption junction which is formed every year at the *Huishoudbeurs*.

The NVVH will serve as the most obvious exemplary consumer organization that is unmistakably involved in the consumption junction that arises at every *Huishoudbeurs*. Their opinion concerning commercial fairs is quite critical, but positive as well. The NVVH recognizes the benefits of being able to get acquainted with new products and to make ample comparisons between these products, but they also point out the possible dangers of visiting and buying at a fair. They for example point out that the exhibited products at a fair are not selected or censored by an objective institution, therefore, the public ought to be very critical itself.²⁵² Because of this unceasing presence of commercialization, and because of the variety in household fairs throughout the Netherlands and their subsequent diversity in quality, the NVVH refuses to publicly prefer any of these fairs. Exhibitions and fairs that are held solely in favor of the producer's interests are disapproved of without any exception.²⁵³

Apparently, the *Huishoudbeurs*, was not seen as a fair that only served the interests of the producers. For the fact is that the NVVH did offer some kind of cooperation when it came to P.F. Blokker's household fair. The probable reason for this acceptance of the *Huishoudbeurs* as a proper and respectable fair is that the NVVH realized that Blokker's intentions to create an educational and informing fair were sincere. What also played along was the realization within the NVVH board of the importance of such a fair in the local community.²⁵⁴ This attitude concerning the *Huishoudbeurs* lead to a year-long cooperation between the Amsterdam department of the NVVH and Blokker.

²⁵² *De Vrouw en Haar Huis* 42, no. 8 (1948), 321: article written by prominent NVVH-member Ms. Lotgering-Hillebrand.

²⁵³ Archief NVVH: *Notulen NVVH Hoofdbestuur* (7 Januari 1949).

²⁵⁴ Archief NVVH: *Notulen NVVH Hoofdbestuur* (18 maart 1955).

Blokker always consciously tried to draw groups of women to his *Huishoudbeurs*, and through the NVVH he could achieve his goal to reach at least an important part of this target group. Every year, the NVVH-magazine *Denken en Doen* contained discount coupons and announcements concerning group discounts for a visit to the *Huishoudbeurs*. The communication between the NVVH and the *Huishoudbeurs* management about the placement of these coupons and advertisements can be retraced in the archives and minutes of the NVVH.²⁵⁵ At the same time, these archives offer further proof for the collaboration between the NVVH and the *Huishoudbeurs*. In 1951, the president of the NVVH, Ms. Driessen-Blok, even opened the *Huishoudbeurs* as is shown on the photograph on the next page.²⁵⁶ And in 1952, one of the prominent NVVH-members, Ms. Van Iterson-Rotgans, was invited to be part of the *Huishoudbeurs* Honorary Committee.²⁵⁷ The minutes of the Amsterdam department in 1958 eventually prove that the NVVH also was one of the exhibitors at the *Huishoudbeurs*: "*Ook dit jaar was onze afdeling met een stand vertegenwoordigd op de Huishoudbeurs.*"²⁵⁸ This sentence implies that the presence was something that had repeated itself in the previous *Huishoudbeurs* years as well. Evidence for this postulation can be found in a Polygon item from 1955 which completely focuses on the *Huishoudbeurs* that was held in that year. In one of the shots, the NVVH stand of the Amsterdam department is visible in all its glory.²⁵⁹

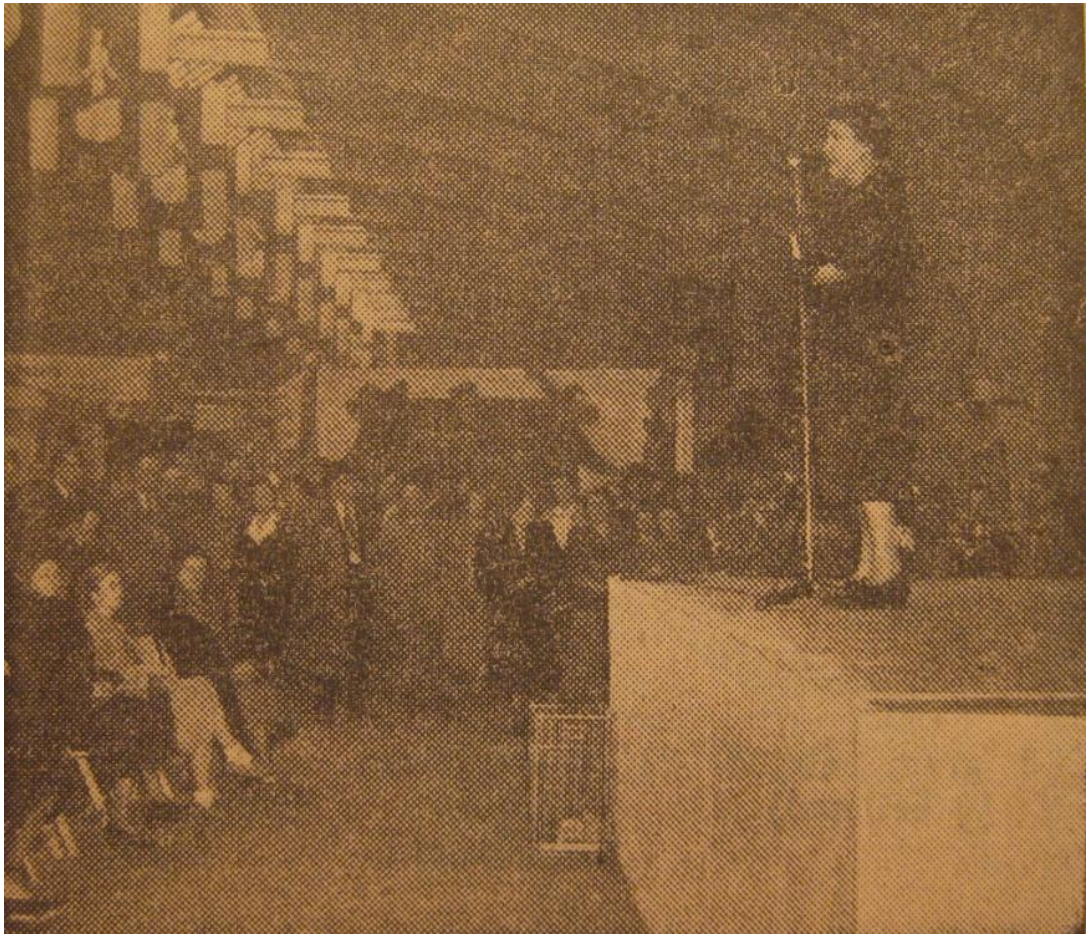
²⁵⁵ The subject of coupons and discounts for the *Huishoudbeurs* are for example to be found in the following minutes: *Notulen NVVH Hoofdbestuur* (10 feb 1955), and *Notulen NVVH Amsterdam* (11 feb 1964), (22 jan 1963), (8 jan 1963) and (18 dec 1962).

²⁵⁶ *De Presidente van de Afd. Amsterdam van onze Vereniging, Mevrouw Driessen-Blok, opent de Huishoudbeurs te Amsterdam* [photo], available from *Denken en Doen* 35 (April 1951), 13.

²⁵⁷ Archief NVVH: *Notulen NVVH Hoofdbestuur* (19 Februari 1952).

²⁵⁸ Archief NVVH: *Notulen NVVH Amsterdam* (1958).

²⁵⁹ *Polygon News Item on the Huishoudbeurs: 1955* [Video], available from <http://geschiedenis.vpro.nl>.



The identified teamwork between Blokker's *Huishoudbeurs* and the NVVH, did not mean that the critical opinion of this consumer organization concerning household fairs vanished or diminished in any way. In the first year that the fair was organized under the name *Huishoudbeurs*, the *Huishoudbeurs* management contacted the NVVH concerning a survey they wanted to execute on the subject of the ideal home. According to the NVVH, the questions in the survey were of such poor quality, that they decided not to participate in the survey. However, they did not entirely refuse to cooperate, instead of providing answers to the asked questions, they sent the management of the *Huishoudbeurs* a copy of their own research concerning housing.²⁶⁰ A comparable critical statement was made by one of the prominent NVVH-members, Ms. Posthumus-van der Goot, in 1952 concerning the surveys that were conducted at the *Huishoudbeurs* that year. She states that "*Wij hebben het gevoel dat dit opinie-onderzoek geheel door mannen is opgezet, die nog te weinig rekening hebben gehouden met de vrouwelijke psyche. Het idee is zeer toe te juichen, maar de uitvoering had even anders moeten zijn.*"²⁶¹ To further proof the NVVH's critical attitude, it should be pointed out that in 1960, the NVVH even introduced household fairs as one of their study topics. The results of this study were diverse in their outlook on household fairs. The results of the study went from the opinion that a household fair is "*een prettige instelling omdat men niet direct tot kopen behoeft over te gaan, doch eerst als rustig kan bekijken*", to the view that household fairs often are "*rommelig en lawaaierig*".²⁶²

It can be presupposed that the uttered criticism by the NVVH did get through to the *Huishoudbeurs* management, because they saw the NVVH as a serious organization. Consequently, next to the acceptance of the *Huishoudbeurs* as a just fair by the NVVH, Blokker in turn also acceded to the professionalism and added value the NVVH offered. This appreciation, for example, is apparent from the granting of the P.F. Blokker-prize, or the *Zilveren Knip*, to the IVHA. As from 1970 on, this prize was awarded yearly to people or organizations who made themselves useful for the Dutch housewife and her family.²⁶³ The appreciation for the NVVH, and its certification institute IVHA, also showed from the many references to both in the advertisements surrounding the *Huishoudbeurs* and in the stands at the *Huishoudbeurs* itself. Exhibiting producers and the fair's management saw the NVVH and IVHA quality mark as a guarantee for quality and credibility.

²⁶⁰ Archief NVVH: *Notulen NVVH Hoofdbestuur* (18 December 1950).

²⁶¹ *Revue der Reclame* 12 (Mei 1952), 162.

²⁶² *Denken en Doen* 44 (September 1960), 28.

²⁶³ Archief *Huishoudbeurs*.

4.2 The *Huishoudbeurs* as a reflection of Mrs. Consumer's world

The previous paragraph has described the history of the *Huishoudbeurs* and reflected upon the place and actions of the three most important players at its consumption junction: the consumer, the producer and one of the most important Dutch consumer organizations. The *Huishoudbeurs* created a yearly platform for interaction between these stakeholders in the emerging and developing Consumers' Republic in the Netherlands. The world in which the *Huishoudbeurs* was organized every year was in a state of constant movement. Numerous processes influenced the functioning of the consumption junction and the outcomes that were negotiated within this arena. Therefore, the *Huishoudbeurs* should be seen as a reflection of important trends that manifested themselves in Dutch society. These trends also affected the developments and changes in the world of Mrs. Consumer. To show the effects of these trends on the surroundings of Mrs. Consumer and the housewife herself, this paragraph will zoom in on technological development, the emancipation of women and the Americanization of the Dutch household by focusing on the visible presence of these processes at the *Huishoudbeurs*. This way, those trends and processes are analyzed in a factual situation, which serves as a representation of the Dutch consumption culture.

It is not possible to claim that the *Huishoudbeurs* provides a complete and exact representation of Dutch consumption culture and its consistent developments, but it does offer a truthful image of the most important trends. This claim is supported by the socio-economic functions attributed to fairs and exhibition like the *Huishoudbeurs* in J.M.H. Huynen's book *Trends in Trade Fairs*. According to Huynen fairs can influence and accelerate technical progress; increase the level of technological knowledge of the population; serve as a propaganda weapon in a political battle; serve as a tool in culture promotion or the promotion of certain ideals; function as a proofreader of the personal or collective image; and serve as a source of recreation and amusement.²⁶⁴ Therefore, the *Huishoudbeurs* can be studied as a source holding possible answers to the questions concerning the development of Dutch consumer culture.

4.2.1 An evolving world

At the *Huishoudbeurs*, the technological revolution that took place in the homes of all Dutch housewives after the Second World War of course showed in the exhibited and displayed household products. Every year, new electrical appliances and innovative materials were introduced at the *Huishoudbeurs*, bringing many housewives in contact with important novelties that would change their world.

²⁶⁴ Huynen, *Trends in Trade Fairs*, 185-188.

Nevertheless, next to this obvious manifestation of the development of technology, another important conclusion concerning the technological revolution in the home can be drawn from the exhibited product at the *Huishoudbeurs*. That is, the shifting of the most important product pillars on which the *Huishoudbeurs* was based shows the changing wants of the visiting housewives and their families. In *De Tastzin Wint het van Virtual Reality*, the journalist Dolf Hell argues that nowadays furniture, cosmetics and clothing are the main marketed products at the fair, showing the preferences of the public. In the very first years of the *Huishoudbeurs*, during a time that was still dominated by scarcity, this main product pillar was formed by products made of new synthetic materials and some electrical household appliances. In the years of growing affluence, the focus shifted to all the new electrical household appliances like washing machines, refrigerators and sewing machines, together forming the most important product pillar of the *Huishoudbeurs* all the way into the sixties. When the market slowly became saturated with these durable household consumer goods, the contents of the most important product pillar altered once again.²⁶⁵

The influence of the increasing affluence is visible in the main function the *Huishoudbeurs* had. In the beginning, the information and educational element was much more present, because all the products exhibited at the fair were new to most housewives. Mrs. Consumer still needed to be taught how to operate a washing machine, or how to arrange the content of a refrigerator. Instructions on subjects that now strike us as common knowledge, were of fundamental necessity in the years that the technological revolution in the home took off. Over time, when most housewives had acquainted themselves with all kinds of technological household equipment, the *Huishoudbeurs* became more of a consumer fair with the corresponding attractions and entertainment.

Every now and then, the *Huishoudbeurs* gave rise to unintentional statements that could be used and analyzed in the discussion about the architects of technology. The fair, for example, was the immediate cause for a member of the *Genootschap voor Reclame* to write down the following in their magazine *Revue der Reclame*: “[Dit jaar] is de man met centimeter, stopwatch en rekenliniaal het vrouwendomein-bij-uitstek binnengedrongen en is eens even aan het rationaliseren geslagen. Het resultaat was: wasmachines, droogmachines, strijkmachines, maal-, meng-, pers-, blaas- en zuigapparatuur, die van de ouderwetse keuken een klein bedrijfje maken voor de verwerking van grondstoffen en halffabrikaten, die als merkartikel aan de markt worden gebracht. In dit geheel krijgt een dergelijke huishoudbeurs het karakter van een confrontatie tussen de moderne techniek, toegepast ten behoeve van de huisvrouw-bedrijfsleidster van dit fabriekje en een betrekkelijk traag reagerend – want geestelijk

²⁶⁵ Hell, “De Tastzin Wint,” 34.

*niet aangepast – publiek van huisvrouwen-als-huisvrouwen.*²⁶⁶ The argument of this man matches the often heard idea that men are the main architects of technology, household technology included. With this argument he completely ignores the work that generations of women already had done in the field of efficiency and professionalization of the household. He states that the masculine progressive method of working does not match the feminine backward state of mind assigned to most housewives. This also immediately brings this paper to the development of women's emancipation visible at the *Huishoudbeurs*.

The ability and skills of women were often still seen and valued in the light of the idealized image of the housewife within the familiar environment of the home and the family, and the *Huishoudbeurs* created an opportunity for those women to ventilate some of their sense of honor considering their task in society. A section of a poem written to praise the *Huishoudbeurs* in 1951 shows this shared pride among housewives in their task within society: "*Een Amsterdamse Huishoudbeurs is in het RAI-gebouw; Zij toont wéér d'energie, de kracht En 't kunnen van de Vrouw.*"²⁶⁷ Pride that was linked to the generally accepted role for women in society: housewife.

Many events and subjects attended to at the *Huishoudbeurs* confirmed the persistent character of the ideal of the housewife. Therefore, it can be said that the *Huishoudbeurs* did not initially function as a driving force behind women's emancipation and their transition away from the idealized image of the housewife. A verse from the official *Huishoudbeurs*-song clearly displays the status quo considering the housewife and her position in society: "*Op de Huishoudbeurs kijkt de huisvrouw met plezier, Want de Huishoudbeurs geeft haar vreugde en vertier, En hier laat ze manlief alles zien, Dan koopt hij beslist dit of dat, misschien.*"²⁶⁸ The separation in responsibilities according to gender roles often even was literally visible, as is shown on the photograph depicting sitting women and standing men while listening to a salesman.²⁶⁹ Finally, a Polygon news item from 1953 aids in the communication of the traditional gender roles as well, by stating that all housewives visiting the *Huishoudbeurs* should go home on time to serve dinner at 18.00 pm sharp.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁶ *Revue der Reclame* 14 (Maart 1954), 100-101.

²⁶⁷ Archief Huishoudbeurs: *De Courant*, 1951.

²⁶⁸ Hell, "De Tastzin Wint," 34.

²⁶⁹ *Zittende dames en staande heren kijken toe tijdens de presentatie van Ruton-stofzuigers 1959* [Photo], available from <http://www.geheugenvannederland.nl>.

²⁷⁰ *Polygon News Item on the Huishoudbeurs: 1953* [Video], available from <http://geschiedenis.vpro.nl>.



The strong influence of the ideal concerning the most important role of women in society even brought about feelings of guilt after a visit to the *Huishoudbeurs*, according to a study of Makrotest in 1965. The results from their study elicit the conclusion that the *Huishoudbeurs* should aim to help women to overcome their feelings of guilt by making sure that Mrs. Consumer gets the feeling of having done something useful or having learnt something important while visiting the fair. Only then she could provide herself with justified arguments for her absence from the home and the family.²⁷¹ An exemplary part of the *Huishoudbeurs* that aimed to create a feeling of purpose and usefulness among the visiting housewives, were the activities organized around the Congress of women's organizations in 1963 concerning the European common market, as shown on the photograph.²⁷² By focusing on such a subject, the *Huishoudbeurs* tried to instill the idea upon the visiting housewives of their importance within the European community as highly significant citizen-consumers.



²⁷¹ *Ariadne* 20 (November 1965), 1221.

²⁷² *Europa-dag* [photo], available from *Denken en Doen* (April 1963).

Despite the persistent idealized image of the housewife in society, politics and at the *Huishoudbeurs*, the changes that did occur in the daily life of the average Dutch housewife did nevertheless reflect in the exhibited products at the fair. The shifting of priorities caused by the technological revolution in the home, shows from the change in presented products. For instance, the electrical washing machine and the vacuum cleaner bag made of paper were considered to be important novelties at the fair of 1953. But in 1967, a slimming-machine and a sauna for the living room were put forward as the most important innovations.²⁷³ This shows a shift from basic household equipment to items used for recreation, which was probably partly caused by the technological revolution in the home that by 1967 reached the end of its heyday. The *Huishoudbeurs* of 1968 was even entirely dedicated to the recreation of the housewife and her family. According to the *Revue der Reclame* this subject indeed gained in popularity because of "de moderne apparatuur en de gemakkelijk te onderhouden meubelen, vloerbedekking en gordijnen [die] de huisvrouw meer vrije tijd verschaffen."²⁷⁴

It took a while before the simultaneously growing discontent among women with their place and role in society manifested itself at the *Huishoudbeurs*. This can probably be explained by the fact that the fair's main target group consisted of housewives who were attracted to the appeal of a fair 'just for housewives'. They embraced the term and role of being a housewife and did not consider this as a problem. But at the same time, the women who became active in second-wave feminism tried to communicate their message concerning the problematic and disrespectful nature of the idealized image of the housewife. During the *Huishoudbeurs* of 1970, a group of *Dolle Mina's* stormed into the fair trying to convince the visiting housewives of their line of thought.

²⁷³ *Polygon News Item on the Huishoudbeurs: 1953 + 1967* [Video], available from <http://geschiedenis.vpro.nl>.

²⁷⁴ *Revue der Reclame Expres* 5 (Juli 1967), E100.

4.2.2 An Americanized world

As technological progress and the changes in the position of women in society both are reflected at the *Huishoudbeurs*, it must also be possible to find traces of American cultural influence within this consumption junction mainly populated by housewives and producers. Were those players within Dutch consumer culture influenced by the Marshall-Plan and its concurring propaganda concerning American products and culture? What kind of American products were exhibited at the fair? How did the *Huishoudbeurs* influence the housewives' image of America? And did the United States function as an example or guiding country in any way? The answers to these question will together present a practical example of the extent to which the world of Mrs. Consumer was influenced by America: by way of both factual products ánd imagined stereotypes.

The influence of the Marshall Plan can be noticed directly and indirectly at a household fair like the *Huishoudbeurs*. The most obvious direct influence of the American aid can be signaled at the *Huishoudbeurs* of 1950, which took place from 29 September until 8 October in The Hague, where one of the stands was manned by the *Contactgroep Opvoering Productiviteit*.²⁷⁵ Their goal was to inform the visiting housewives about the importance of raising productivity and implementing efficiency measures in the household.²⁷⁶ This way the COP made their contribution to the American Marshall Plan propaganda machine that fueled the Dutch movement towards a more consumer oriented economy and the rise of a Consumers' Republic in the Netherlands. A goal that was considered to be beneficial to the Dutch economic recovery, but which also served the American strivings to create a bulwark against the so-called threat of Communism. The *Huishoudbeurs*, therefore, provided America with one of the battle grounds created by American Marshall Help where consumer culture was promoted in order to convince the Europeans of the benefits of trying to reach a higher standard of living.

The indirect influence is noticeable in the increasing interest for international participants by the management of the *Huishoudbeurs*. In 1950, they created a scoop by being the first household fair to hire out some of the stands to Belgian entrepreneurs.²⁷⁷ By 1961, the degree of internationalism had grown out to the exhibition of household products from sixteen countries, excluding the Netherlands itself. Although an important part of the stand holders came from one of the European countries, producers from Canada, the United States, Australia and Japan could also be found at the *Huishoudbeurs* of 1961. Germany and the United States seemed to be the most important trading partners when it came to household products destined for a fair like the *Huishoudbeurs*. The German exhibitors displayed washing machines, sewing machines, refrigerators,

²⁷⁵ Archief Huishoudbeurs.

²⁷⁶ *Vijf Jaar Cop: Contactgroep Opvoering Productiviteit 1950-1955* (Den Haag: Contactgroep Opvoering Productiviteit, 1956), 46.

²⁷⁷ Archief Huishoudbeurs: *Telegraaf*, 1950.

clothesline systems, photo- and film equipment, kitchens, gas ovens, housing textiles and items for plant care. The United States producers showed a wide variety of washing machines, sewing machines, vacuum cleaners, floor polishers, mixers, electric blankets, refrigerators, ventilators and air-conditioning. The remaining countries also presented important and revolutionary household products, but offered a less diverse and extensive collection.²⁷⁸

This internationalization and focus on the United States and Germany, can partly be attributed to the catalyzing effect the Marshall Plan had in the development of broader economic structures and the growth of import and export throughout Europe. Marshall Dollars were mainly used to finance imports from the United States and to rebuild the European economy, including the German market. Therefore, the propelling force of the Marshall Plan had further stimulated the development of a European Common Market, to which the Netherlands secured full access in 1961 by abolishing the import- and export limitations that were in place since the Second World War. By then, the focus of the European countries, including the Netherlands, had underwent certain important changes indirectly caused by the Marshall Plan. The attention exclusively paid to the United States declined, and the interest in Europe and the rest of the world's market increased. America lost its important function as a guiding country and a provider of a blueprint. This blueprint for a successful consumer economy had already been transferred and adjusted to the cultural values of the European countries. The blueprint, however, had proven effective: most Europeans had at one point reached a standard of living that was comparable to the American standard, and as a result Europe started to widen their gaze and stopped to see only the United States as an example and possible trading partner.

At the same time, the pride in Dutch products and producers rose again, showing a rise in self respect and confidence in an increasingly international world. The *Huishoudbeurs* of 1960, for example, emphasized the high quality of Dutch products.²⁷⁹ And although there were many international products and producers present at the *Huishoudbeurs* in 1963, the *Huishoudbeurs* special of the *EVA-Journaal* only mentioned a few of these products. The main interest was with products that were of Dutch origin and were produced in the Netherlands.²⁸⁰ This reflects the fact that the Netherlands has used the American blueprint for the development of a successful consumer culture, but had made it its own by giving special attention to European or Dutch products ready for consumption.

²⁷⁸ Archief Huishoudbeurs: 1961.

²⁷⁹ *Ariadne* 15 (April 1960), 339.

²⁸⁰ *EVA-Journaal* (22 Februari 1963) + (1 Maart 1963).

Still, household products of American origin have always been on display at the *Huishoudbeurs*, in between the Dutch and European products. To provide an indication of the variety and amount of presented U.S. products at the fair, the table on the next page offers an overview of American products that were published, or received some extra attention, in the *Huishoudbeurs* catalogues between 1950 and 1964. After an analysis of this overview, it is possible to postulate that American products, as a rule, were part of the exhibited products at the *Huishoudbeurs*. The presence of these American products seems to reach a climax in 1961, when indeed trade barriers in the Netherlands were lowered.

| American products in the <i>Huishoudbeurs</i> catalogs, 1950-1964²⁸¹ | | |
|--|--|---|
| <i>Year</i> | <i>Product</i> | <i>Description</i> |
| 1950 | Washing machine / dishwasher | Amerikaanse superwasmachine die in een handomdraai om te bouwen is tot een vaatwasser. |
| 1951 | Refrigerator | Frigidaire, de Aristocraat der koelkasten, nu onder uw bereik. Geïmporteerd door Minne Sluiter. |
| 1952 | Refrigerator | Amerikaanse koelkasten, met vriesruimte. f1400,- tot f2200,- gulden. Geïmporteerd door Meyjes en Höweler. |
| 1953 | American kitchen Sewing machine Make-Up | Nieuwe metalen Amerikaanse keuken. Geïmporteerd door Minne Sluiter. Singer naaimachine. Max Factor Hollywood. |
| 1954 | Make-Up Cereal Sewing machine | Will's vitamine cream. New York. Goedgekeurd door de wereldberoemde vitamine expert te Chicago. Geïmporteerd door Import Unie Amsterdam. Kellogg's Corn Flakes en Rice Krispies. Singer naaimachines van aluminium. |
| 1957 | Kitchen + washing machine Washing machine Cereal | Deel van de ideale flat. Een Amerikaanse stalen Apro-Crosley keuken met volledige outillage, w.o. de Rondo Doris S. semi-automatische wasmachine. Volautomatische vaatwasmachine (Amerikaans) voor huishoudelijk gebruik. Kellogg's Corn Flakes. |
| 1958 | Do-it-yourself Swimming Pool | Afdeling Doe 't Zelf. Hollywood zwembad in uw tuin. |
| 1959 | Do-it-yourself | Amerikaanse tubes met vloeibare stoffen, die we niet dan in vaste vorm kennen: rubber, staal, porcelein, nogal dollarachtig duur, maar heerlijk voor zelfdoeners.* |
| 1960 | Meat | Diepgevroren, geheel panklare in Cry-O-Vac vacuum verpakte kalkoenen, kippeborsten e.d.; verpakkingen van 1 pnd. En ook groter. Geïmporteerd door Institute of American Poultry Industries, Rotterdam. |
| 1961 | Grill Mixer Sewing machine Vacuum cleaner Ready-to-eat meals Manual dish washer | Cadillac Roto Grill. Sunbeam handmixer. Singer Slant-O-Matic naaimachine. Nieuwe klop-veeg-zuigmachine Hoover. Kant-en-klaar maaltijden met kalkoen; diepgevroren, op een in drie vakken verdeeld aluminium blad. Geïmporteerd door Institute of American Poultry Industries, Rotterdam. Dishmaster. |
| 1962 | Refrigerator | General Motors Frigidaire. Vanaf f398,- gulden. Koelkasten, diepvriezers, volautomatische wasmachines, drogers en vaatwasmachines, centrifuges, elektrische fornuizen, air-conditioners. |
| 1963 | Refrigerator Sewing equipment | General Motors Frigidaire. Witch. Amerikaans patent. Een automatische draadinsteker voor naalden. |
| 1964 | Snacks | Filler-snacks en Bakon Krisp. |

²⁸¹ Archief Huishoudbeurs: catalogi. The product marked with (*) comes from *Ariadne* 13 (April 1959), 217.

It is difficult to determine the popularity of these American items among all other items, and with that the influence of these items on the visiting Dutch housewives, only with the data from *Huishoudbeurs* catalogues. Fortunately, one of the mentioned products has received a well-documented amount of attention: the Apro-Crosley kitchen that was part of the ideal apartment furnished by the popular women's magazine *Margriet* pictured on the enclosed photograph. Just like the other American products exhibited at the *Huishoudbeurs*, the Apro-Crosley kitchen influenced the image of America in the mind of the average Dutch housewife. The products elicited admiration and criticism at the same time, and sometimes increased the perseverance of certain stereotypical ways of looking at the American housewife and American culture in general.

The attention and ventilated opinions considering the Apro-Crosley kitchen can function as an example of the admiration that was often elicited by American products. The appearance of this American kitchen at the *Huishoudbeurs* of 1957 was mentioned at least in six articles or advertisements within the *Huishoudbeurs* archive. One of these articles holds the following phrases which clearly radiate with admiration: *"Is dit geen 'schone' keuken? Schoon in beide betekenissen? Nooit rommelig, want alles, wat U nodig hebt is weggeborgen in praktische en stofvrije kasten. Hangende en staande kasten, die met één vingerbeweging verend open en dicht te doen zijn. En alles glad, zonder naden en richels en uitsteeksels. Met ronde hoeken. En ook schoon in de betekenis van mooi. Dit staal blijft helder wit en glad. En U doet geen stap teveel in deze Apro-keuken, want al Uw gereedschap wordt in logisch ingedeelde laden en kasten weggeborgen. [...] Natuurlijk is er een koelkast en een fornuis in de ideale keuken, maar ook een vatenwasmachine. Deur uitdraaien, afwas erin, dicht, knop, en automatisch wordt de vaat gewassen en gedroogd."*²⁸² The Polygon news item from 1957 with the *Huishoudbeurs* as its topic also elaborately attends to the matter of this American kitchen. They call it a *"moderne druk-op-de-knop keuken"*.²⁸³

²⁸² Archief Huishoudbeurs: 1957.

²⁸³ *Polygon News Items on the Huishoudbeurs: 1957* [Video], available from <http://geschiedenis.vpro.nl/artikelen/16750942>.



However, the Dutch were critical towards American culture and American products as well, thereby often reinforcing stereotypical ideas about the average American housewife and her surroundings. In an issue of *De Courant* from 1951 which attended to the topic of that years' *Huishoudbeurs*, the so-called 'ideal kitchen' was described as "*mooi en onpersoonlijk*", with the focus mainly on the impersonal part. This critical view was expressed in several statements advancing the stereotypical images of America such as the following concerning the ever-present refrigerator: "*U kent ze wel...uit boeken. Twee meter hoog, anderhalve meter breed – een soort bootwerker die z'n borst uitzet.*" And within the vicinity of this giant American refrigerator, the article describes the American Mrs. Consumer in a comparable critical and stereotypical fashion: "*In deze omgeving scharrelt Mrs. America dan rond, zit op een hoge barkruk, die onderdeel is van de keukenoutillage en foetert in zichzelf, dat haar televisie-apparaat nog niet boven haar ijskast is gemonteerd.*"²⁸⁴ These two examples from the article radiate with criticism and sarcasm directed at American consumer culture and the American household.

Another example of obvious and unfettered criticism full of stereotypes and generalizations considering the American Mrs. Consumer was displayed by the speaker who opened the Youth Forum at the *Huishoudbeurs* of 1961. He spoke about his own experiences during a visit to an American couple in New York, and pointed out the following: "*Ze stond op en liep naar een apparaat toe aan de wand in de huiskamer. Eerst haalde zij een handle over, toen drukte ze op een knop. Er begon iets te gonzen. Er ging een rood lampje aan. Het gonzen ging over in het overvliegen van een straaljager. Toen vond er in het apparaat een soort explosie plaats en het rode sein sprong op groen. Een rookwolk werd zichtbaar. Ze drukte op weer een knop. Haalde vervolgens een andere handle over en floep! Daar was de wafel, bestrooid en al.*"²⁸⁵ The vision of the American housewife that the Dutch youngsters attending the Forum got from this message was clearly not realistic or free of generalizations and stereotypical America images.

Next to the criticism and disapproval considering the American way of life, and the synchronous admiration and appreciation of Mrs. America and her surroundings, the *Huishoudbeurs* also presented examples of America's functioning as a guiding country. The incorporation of a few American cultural trends into Dutch culture, for example, indicated that America often provided the Netherlands with a useful blueprint. Some important trends visible at the *Huishoudbeurs* that had crossed the Atlantic were the subject of men in the kitchen in 1954, the Hollywood Filmstar look-a-like contest in 1955, the *Doe-'t-Zelf* hype in 1958, the *Kant-en-Klaar-maaltijden* from 1960 to 1965, and the

²⁸⁴ Archief Huishoudbeurs: *De Courant*, 1951.

²⁸⁵ Archief Huishoudbeurs: 1961.

importance of family recreation in 1961.²⁸⁶ These often as American indicated trends have clearly influenced the offered goods and products at the *Huishoudbeurs*.

In following these important trends in the realm of the household, the *Huishoudbeurs* always tried to make sure that they exhibited the newest of the newest. All the novelties and innovations shown at the fair guaranteed a dream-visit for every Dutch housewife. The fair offered them an opportunity to daydream about all the presented household appliances and modern products.²⁸⁷ In general, the average visiting housewife could not afford to actually buy the items presented at the fair. During the years of scarcity directly after the Second World War, women were even flocking into lines to get hold of a single tea-spoon that was given to the first 500 visitors.²⁸⁸ This indicated the hunger and yearning for different times.

The *Huishoudbeurs* functioned as a generator of desires. Desires that were elicited by the admission to look around, taste, feel and smell the newest products without being forced to buy.²⁸⁹ For just one guilder entrance fee in the early years of the fair, the Dutch housewife was allowed and made to dream of 'better times'. These dreams became wishes, these wishes became demands, which eventually resulted in a process of catching up with America concerning the level of affluence and standard of living. This effect of confronting the Dutch housewife with the possible luxuries for her household, was exactly what Marshall Plan officials had in mind. The *Huishoudbeurs* shows that the American Dream nested itself within Dutch society and became the driving force behind the further growth and development of the Consumers' Republic and consumer culture in the Netherlands. The *Huishoudbeurs* has certainly contributed to this process, and the organizers of the fair even seemed to realize the fact that they were part of it. The illustration on the next page proves this claim. It was published in the *Huishoudbeurs* catalog of 1961 and along with it the following text was written: "*Voorts geven een kleine dertig exposanten van wasmachines, centrifuges en combinaties de indruk dat de achterstand die de Europese vrouw op dit gebied nog heeft op haar Amerikaanse zuster, gestadig wordt ingelopen.*"²⁹⁰

²⁸⁶ Archief Huishoudbeurs

²⁸⁷ Archief Huishoudbeurs: *Telegraaf*, 11 maart 2006, T3.

²⁸⁸ Hell, "De Tastzin Wint," 34.

²⁸⁹ *Ariadne* 15 (April 1960), 339.

²⁹⁰ Archief Huishoudbeurs: 1961.



Conclusion

Now does the journey from a basic outline of the Dutch Mrs. Consumer, to the world in which she interacts, to the influence of American culture on her daily life, and eventually to a factual example of the consumption junction in the form of the *Huishoudbeurs* provide an answer to the research question that started of this paper? Is it now possible to state in what way the development of the Dutch Mrs. Consumer reflects the development of Dutch consumer culture and the extent of American cultural influence upon Dutch consumer culture, in the period 1946-1968?

Mrs. Consumer has first of all proven to have been an important player in Dutch consumer culture. Her leading role at the consumer side of the economy can be proven by pointing out the fact that she was part of a large occupational group of housewives who were generally in charge of the household budget. The term housewife therefore is mostly interchangeable with the term consumer, or better said citizen-consumer, as Mrs. Consumer was expected to wisely use the power she yielded from purchasing goods to benefit her family and her home. As the guardian of the family as the cornerstone of society, she took up the burden of being a consumer and a social citizen at the same time. This outline of the Dutch Mrs. Consumer answers the question of who she was, and why she should be considered an important player in Dutch consumer culture.

Secondly, Mrs. Consumer has proven to have been part of several influential developments that have consequently shaped her own development. The processes of technological development, emancipation of women, and the development of the consumer movement have uncovered the dynamic and constantly evolving environment of the Dutch Mrs. Consumer. To a certain extent she has also herself influenced the course and evolution of these developments as she was one of the three main players within the consumption junction shaping Dutch consumer culture. This showcase of the constant negotiations surrounding the Dutch Mrs. Consumer answers the question of what developments have influenced her development, and to what extent she influenced these developments herself.

Thirdly, American cultural influence has proven to have placed Mrs. Consumer in between dreams and reality. The images of the American consumer culture, among others propagated by the Marshall Plan, stimulated the belief in a better future for the Netherlands. This belief was accompanied by an increase in wishes and demands considering household consumption and the standard of living, forming the foundations for the development of a Dutch Consumers' Republic. The images of America that arose in the Netherlands because of its reference and guiding function, were often full of stereotypical interpretations, and elicited admiration and criticism at the same time. The

fact that America often served as an example and the creator of the blueprint for modernization, did not necessarily lead to imitation or direct duplication of this blueprint. The American cultural elements propagating the road towards a better future were carefully and selectively appropriated through a process of adjustment and interpretation. Therefore, it is possible to state that American cultural influence has presumably played a part in the development of the Dutch Mrs. Consumer, but could never be said to have been decisive. This elucidation concerning the process of Americanization answers the question in what way the Dutch Mrs. Consumer was influenced by American culture.

Finally, the *Huishoudbeurs* has shown how all the referred to influential forces upon the development of Mrs. Consumer have reflected and were visible at this factual consumption junction. The fair, therefore, has to be seen as a valuable cultural text that contains and brings together multiple cultural elements that are closely linked to the development of the Dutch Mrs. Consumer, and Dutch consumer culture. The *Huishoudbeurs* represented the world and consumption junction in which Mrs. Consumer operated every single day. An evolving world, for example, concerning technological development, the emancipation of women and the process of Americanization. All these trends have manifested themselves in Dutch consumer culture which in turn could be visualized through a close up of the *Huishoudbeurs*. This close up of Dutch consumer culture provides an answer to the question how all developments surrounding the Dutch Mrs. Consumer were reflected at the *Huishoudbeurs*.

Concluding it is possible to state that the development of the Dutch Mrs. Consumer has reflected the development of Dutch consumer culture, as it is impossible to view the main player within consumer culture and consumer culture itself as separate and isolated subjects. Mrs. Consumer and consumer culture are inseparable and indissoluble. But to what extent has American cultural influence played its part in the development of Mrs. Consumer and the interconnected consumer culture? Has American cultural influence decided the direction in which Dutch consumer culture was heading? Or was there a more general trend throughout the Western world that directed the development of Dutch consumer culture?

A definite answer to this question cannot be given. However, it is possible to make a case for the fact that the United States did leave their imprint on the development of Western consumer culture. Since, even if it is argued that a global trend in the development of consumer culture existed, it is possible to state that the United States have played an important part in developing the blueprint for this worldwide trend. America's role as a guiding country and reference society throughout Europe provides the proof for this claim. In the Netherlands as well, America has served as an example and

catalyst concerning the development of a functional Consumers' Republic in which Mrs. Consumer received the leading role.

It is possible to speak of Americanization of Dutch consumer culture, when this means that the Dutch have carefully selected certain American cultural elements, and have altered and adjusted these to match the cultural framework of the Netherlands. The Dutch meaning given to consuming, consumption and the consumer therefore differ from the American meaning given to the same words and acts.

Now does this mean that the Dutch Mrs. Consumer is unique? It would be tempting to invalidate this statement considering all the parallels in Western consumer culture in mind, but actually she is. The way in which the Dutch Mrs. Consumer originated, and the way in which her persona developed over time, does provide us with a unique process. Each country displays a differently functioning consumption junction, and a differently determined space for this consumption junction to develop itself in. The manner in which the Dutch consumption junction, and the consistent Dutch consumer culture, has obtained its shape and functioned within the Netherlands is responsible for the uniqueness of the Dutch Mrs. Consumer and Dutch consumer culture.

The influence of the Second World War, the political climate, the economic miracle, the persistent ideal of the housewife, are all examples of important Dutch parts in the shaping of Mrs. Consumer and the consumption junction in which she functioned. This, combined with some Americanization in the form of the Marshall Plan and the attractiveness of the American blueprint for the construction of a successful consumer society, created incomparable and unique circumstances in which the Dutch Mrs. Consumer has developed, reflecting the development of an inimitable Dutch consumer culture.

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