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National College of Art and Design
Faculty of Design
Department of Visual Communication

The Design of a Nation

The Dutch Graphic Designer and his commitment to the cultural arena.

By Peter Williams

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San Kees Schelvis

Arian Stinstraat

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INTRODUCTION

From my experiences of studying in a college of 'Art and Design', it was virtually unheard of that two departments such as 'Fine art' and 'Graphic Design' worked closely together. If they did, what would the outcome be?

Primarily, this thesis looks at Dutch graphic design, its relationship to style and its ability to communicate to society. But more importantly it looks at the outcome of the close relationship the Dutch graphic designer had with the artist. I will be investigating how this relationship came about and their relationship to an industrialised society from the Industrial Revolution to the present day.

This close relationship between the Dutch graphic designer and artist has resulted in a re-thinking of industry and new values to society.

It is my firm belief that graphic design can express our social and cultural values as the graphic designer's primary client is society itself.

CHAPTER ONE

Having studied graphic design and typography in the Netherlands for almost four months on a student exchange, I was struck on my return, by the lack of clarity in graphic design in Ireland.

It was from these realisations that my interest grew in the importance of good design and designing primarily for society. My interests lie not so much in graphic design principles, but in trying to understand how a country, such as the Netherlands, grew to realise the importance of good design. In this thesis I will look at the stepping stones the Dutch took to arrive at the level of design that they have achieved today.

Primarily, this thesis looks at Dutch graphic design, its importance, style and commitment to society. As it is important to establish the characteristics that identify products as 'Dutch', we should learn something about the development of the design discipline and the environment in which it grew in the Netherlands. In order to do this, I will survey aspects of Dutch design and assess it in relation to its culture. Having said that, I must keep in mind that culture is problematic and the limitation of design is determined by society itself.

This historical introduction, therefore is about the development of a design culture, how a culture functions and how it is shaped. This historical introduction

will also give reasons why the artist / craftsman had problems in communicating to industry. It is important to understand that we recognise a direct correspondence between the condition of our culture and the way we organise materials for production. Since the work of designers is concerned with expression, exchange of ideas and information, the main aim of this historical introduction is to establish a perspective to where the designer, craftsman or artist fits into the world of the Dutch industrialist. This thesis will involve arguments between the graphic designer and the industrialist in relation to 'form and function', from the industrial revolution to the present day and its influence on the Dutch society.

To give a historical context on commerce, the Industrial revolution did not effect the Netherlands until around 1890. Previously, the cultural, social and economic climate of the country was typical of a trading nation. The wealth, that came from this developed a large number of specific aspects including administravite qualities, agriculture and fishing, architecture, the visual arts and most of all a spirit of commerce. These aspects formed a specific culture and had a large effect on the Netherlands prior to the industrial revolution. Under this influence of a trading culture, the Industrial revolution developed strongly and can be seen by large international companies today.

A number of industrial companies grew out of a variety of manufacturers using traditional methods of preparing materials, such as textiles, leather, wood and ceramics. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, we can see

Dutch design developing in many of these industries. When relating traditional methods of manufacturing to industry, it is clear to see that the Dutch culture was greatly influenced by the Arts and crafts movement that was happening in England. Dutch craftsmen were concerned about losing their traditional methods through mass production in industry. The Great Exhibition made it clear to many for the first time that the quality and design of most Dutch industrial products were deplorable. A number of journalist writers, artists, industrialists, and also the government, expressed their serious concerns about the quality and design of the Netherlands industrial product. The craftsman, who later became the designer was confronted for the first time with the complex of problems related to the industrial mass production of consumer goods, problems, which were different to those of craftsmanship. The nationalistic ideas on the Netherlands product, as were expressed in the objectives of the Organization for Netherlands Manufacture, among others, led to a reassessment of historical Netherlands style, which led as a source of inspiration for new derivative forms.

It is important at this stage that I make a number of general definitions of various peoples professions, who worked in and around the growing Dutch industries. So far, I have mentioned the craftsman who will later become artist / craftsman to the designer, but just as importantly, I must mention the role of the artist in relation to the industrialist, for it is artistic involvement between the designer and industrialist that made the Netherlands unique in design processes today. These definitions should explain why the industrialist engaged designers to evaluate a mass produced product, how the contact came about and how their relationship

developed. But more importantly, by understanding the above we will see a uniqueness that graphic design in the Netherlands has developed.

The foundation of design in the Netherlands proved to be a long process in the beginning as the industrialist neither understood the term 'artist / craftsman' nor did he see the need to employ him, as the industrialist had already employed artists to work with his products. The industrialist saw the artist for having a talent of creativity which the craftsman did not have, and it was the talent of the artist that many felt would have a fruitful effect on industry. But still, the artist and the industrialist had to learn how to work together as a number of problems arose. As regards the mass produced product, the artists' concern was only that of an aesthetic value, eg. 'form', leaving the industrialist or the craftsman to deal with the 'function' of the product. The artist may have been seen by the industrialist as a means of marketing through his popular artistic abilities, as the industrialist's main concern was to woo the consumer into buying the product.

So where did the artist / craftsman - designer fit into this situation of mass production? To put it very simply, the designer had a combination of skills; the practical skills of the craftsman and the creativity of the artist. The artist / craftsman, learning from the artist, also had the skill to co-exist with industry and commerce. The artist / craftsman at this early stage found it hard to position himself within industry because of his rare and not yet understood characteristics. This position that the artist / craftsman - designer wanted in terms of industry is still a real issue today, particularly graphic designers, which have the most trouble

in being understood and gaining a professional status. Even the 'Oxford English dictionary' has a hard time defining 'design' or the 'designer' with almost two pages of a definition resulting in a general one as 'problem solving', or a 'mental plan'.

But getting back to the Netherlands, the need for designer's skills, in both handling 'form and function' within the product, was seen as an important issue after the evaluation of the Dutch product in the Great Exhibition. The designer was granted an emancipation from various public discussions and organisations sympathetic to the designer or better known as the artist / craftsman. A uniqueness of the Dutch product came about from these discussions. Since the artist was still valued for his handling of the product and was greatly admired within the Dutch society, brought forward the idea of designing primarily for society. Thus the artist and designer worked closely together in the Dutch industry. The designer, or the artist / craftsman demanded not so much a place in life as a place among the arts, but a place in Industrial or Applied Arts which became 'Useful art' or 'Decorative art'. One of the first examples of this was in the 1859 industrial exhibition held in Amsterdam, where the objects exhibited were not only decorative but also useful.

Designing for Industry

A product is the result of an organised process, in which relations and interactions exist between labour, knowledge, capital, machines and distribution. The design of a product is as an important part of a process in which social conditions and

cultural developments determine the quality of the produce. For this reason, design cannot be considered independent. But still, the biggest problem to society and the designer, was the industrialist who had little respect for design or materials, he was out for gain only. Even though the artist had an ideal relationship to material, it was the designer who could make it possible, to use this material for a wider public audience. He did it not for gain, but for honour of tradition like the craftsman, but on a more creative basis.

As a result of a number of developments in the industrialisation of the Netherlands, the need for promoting interests on the 'Dutch product' increased. From these realisations, various societies and trade unions were established in dealing with the role of the, the craftsman, artist and artist / craftsman. The largest and strongest of these organisations were the 'ANTB, - General Dutch Unions of typographers, and VANK - Netherlands Associations for Crafts and Industrial Art, both founded in the late eighteenth century. The primary aim of the VANK was to promote the development of crafts and industrial art. The problem was that VANK recognised the craftsman and the artist separately which proved to be problematic instead of bringing the ideals of the two together, resulting in the appreciation of the artist / craftsman - the designer. Many discussions and publications followed as both the craftsman and artist were fighting for two separate things. These public discussions were seen to go on for almost fifty years. Organisations differed a lot in origin and character, thus resulting in confusion between each other. Some looked to the left and the socialist utopia, blaming the capitalist / industrialist, others were more influenced

by the ideas of Morris, Crane and Ruskin in the 'Arts and Crafts movement'. The outcome of these discussions made the designer or artist / craftsman of that time contradict himself; the industrialist / manufacturer with whom he was obliged to work for, was at the same time the capitalist against whom he had to protect his artistic ideals.

The VANK published its findings after it published its letters of discussion. T. Landre, who belonged to the left wing wrote in this publication, that production was not engaged in the process of manufacturing the product regarding function, but for the trade of the product which was over decorative. However Landre's attitude to the machine was not a negative one as he regarded mechanisation a genuine collaboration between art and industry. He argues that the laws of design will eventually be dictated by one and the same power mechanically, so that a certain unity will happen, and thus will be the beginning of style. What was relatively new in Landres' statement was the importance of form, the laws of design and the machine as factors determining style.

In 1929, Piet Zwart (1885 - 1977), a man of considerable talent in the field of graphic design, typography, furniture designer and maker and even architecture, was very sympathetic to the goals of the artist / craftsman relating to industry, made the opening speech at the centenary of the VANK - 'Initially applied art products were made for aunties and a few acquaintances of Het Gooi. The market has widened a little and now consists of artistic intellectuals, malleable women and wealthy individuals or societies, who can afford to show off the fact that they have 'taste' and want to go along with the modern movement. Design is not a question of taste, but an expression of our attitude to life, dictated by the metacosmos. Design and the use of materials are not a question of individual desire, but responsible factors in society. One of the moral forces that has come out of the technical world compels us to recognise that we have no right to use material to satisfy our individual pleasures". (Martis 1986, p. 15 - Zwart, 1926, p. 26)

At this early stage we can see clearly that Zwart was looking for a re-evaluation of a lost co-ordination between industry and society, a goal that is persistent with many Dutch designers today.

The VANK, like other organisations caused major discussion and even confusion in the Netherlands, but it did succeed in a number of ways. One being the influencing of public opinion and especially government support. Another success was that its publications and public debates made the industrialist realise that the same craftsman he employed was working for different industries which encouraged a more conservative attitude and was not very creative.

Fortunately with the rise of decoration from the 1920's onwards, the concepts of the visual arts had been broadened to include applied painting and sculpture. Thus the 'Applied Arts' were no longer thought of as being the opposite to the 'Liberal Arts', but were placed over the 'Technical Arts'. Developments in architecture and the visual arts made a great contribution to the awareness of the elements; 'function and form'. From this, the words 'Old Crafts' and 'Applied Arts' became one word - 'Industrial design'. It is from this past and development, that industry, is just as much a part of culture, as painting and literature.

The position as in terms of definition of the artist / craftsman come designer was difficult to grasp as he was skilled in industry, the machine, handwork, commerce and art. One thing was clear, the artist / craftsman was not an art manufacturer.

From his emancipation, the result was not the work he did, but the 'idea' or the design he thought up. He could now distinguish himself from the craftsman and was capable of earning his reputation as a specialised tradesman. He was now a combination between the industrialist and artist.

Even though organisations such as the VANK gained recognition from society and became very well known at large, it is my firm belief that they are not the cause of the unique Dutch design as we know it today. These organisations only emancipated the artist / craftsman theoretically. It was a handful of companies, printing firms and designers that were willing to keep up with technical innovations, keeping in mind society at all times, that gave us the unique style of Dutch graphic and industrial design today. But it is important to realise, something that can easily be overlooked, the organisations that grew out of the Industrial Revolution had one major contribution to this uniqueness of Dutch design, they proclaimed that designing should not be executed for profit, but to design for society, and just as important keeping the involvement of the artist in industry. 'Form and function' was thus seen in the Dutch product. Because these discussions were constantly exposed it stimulated industry to see design management as a strategic importance for successful business, resulting in quality.

At this early state, I can conclude that Dutch graphic design is unique. From the Industrial revolution to the present day, the conjunction of needs and services of the industrialist, artist and designer respectively, have established a special design

climate in the Netherlands. Ministries as diverse as Welfare, Health and Cultural affairs recognise the importance of design as a contributing factor to the cultural climate in the Netherlands and to the users of Dutch products around the world.

CHAPTER TWO:

Industrial Communication

Because of the Netherlands social, economic and technical development in the second half of the 19th century, the graphic industry went through an emancipation, for it was a member of one of the first trade unions, ANTb - General Dutch Union of typographers in 1899. The graphic industries interests were on par with the craftsman and also had a willingness to co-operate with artists. The graphic industry also underwent problems of communication to the industrialist, on how a corporate identity was invaluable to him, resulting in a corporate product.

From 1860 to the beginning of the nineties, the graphic industry underwent a major growth due to the rising need for printed information which could be seen in the educational sector. There was also a greater need for commercial printing due to the industrialisation of the Netherlands.

In the very early nineteenth hundreds, a change took place in book design. The decorative treatment of the separate parts was no longer the principle aim. Instead, the unity of all compositional parts of the books design was of first importance. New importance to typography was given theoretical support in 1904 in 'logica boekdruk' by J.W. Enschede. In it he stated that a book was primarily an object of unity and typography must be the starting point of the ornamentation of a book. Because of the influential Arts and Crafts movement on the art of

book making, dutch publishers, designers and artists began to understand that co-operation between them was indispensable to achieve fine graphic design, and thus the situation slowly improved.

Piet Zwart was one of the first founders of industrial design. More importantly, he was one of the greatest pioneers of typography and graphic design the world had ever seen. As far as he was concerned, a non-applied department like painting could be discarded and replaced by subjects like synthetic and representational drawing, advertising, modern reproduction methods and even typography. Decorative art and sculpture, he thought, should make way for a department in which various types of industrial designs could be taught.

His attitudes towards design would eventually change the face of Dutch graphic design and typography which is one account for its powerful identity and recognition today.

The reason why Zwart's work was so fundamental, was that he continually kept in mind the Dutch culture and geography. When geography is looked at for inspiration, then it establishes the basis of a national identity through graphic design.

As early as 1920, Zwart thought that there was a lack of discipline in the urban industrialised environment and had caused a visual condition characterised by clutter, confusion and chaos. De Stijl had a major impact on Zwart's work. He

enjoyed its purity, simplicity, use of primary colours and a sense of organisation. But still, it was too pictorial for him as De Stijl was not committed to new technology and constructive methods. As a result, Zwart's work became simpler, more open with an increased use of space, fewer typefaces and a design approach that was purely typographical. This design approach grew in the Netherlands and in the 1920's, the real significance of typography did not lie in the type - design itself, but more importantly in the expressive use of typography in relation to its content. Therefore, when used in this way as an expressive medium, typography came to acquire a function in modern society. The commercial attitudes of company management, especially after seeing the work of Zwart, called for a greater reaction to current development. On one hand there was the commercial considerations of the management that wanted a good market with a fine product, and on the other, the aesthetic ideas of the designer. To support commerce, the emphasis in advertising and the treatment of various publications was placed as important and was left in the hands of the graphic designer.

A major part of recognition towards Dutch graphic design lies with the type foundries. Because of the lack of Dutch type faces available, the graphic industry was dependent on foreign type. It was not until 1912 that the first Dutch typeface, 'the Hollandsche Medeval' by De Roos was introduced. Simplicity, harmony, legibility were its outstanding characteristics. But the idea grew in the 20's that the real significance of typography did not lie in the type design itself, but in the expressive use made of it in relation to the content. Only when used in this way as an expressive medium, would typography acquire a function in

modern society. This influence of the term 'new typography' in graphic design could be seen from 1927 onwards. Its distinguishing features included the use of Sans Serif type faces, asymmetrical construction, contrasting effect and the use of photo montage. Graphic design now started to break loose of the decorative arts, but still the artist was involved. These achievements were on par with political and social developments of that time.

Now that we have seen a brief transformation of typography and graphic design, it is easier for us to understand their background and principles, their main principle being, designing for society. It is now easier to see the link between the graphic industry in the 20's and the industry today. To illustrate this link, I shall look closer at the work of Piet Zart, his advertising work and the work of 'Lettergieteris Amsterdam' Type-foundry.

CHAPTER THREE

A Growing Tradition

Dutch graphic designers have always pursued a firm theoretical basis. In the words of 'spinoza', "their ethics became clear in their rectilinear rules of conduct". (Eye No. 10, vol. 3, 1983, p.78). These words bring the work of Piet Zwart to mind. Zwart wrote in 1919, "Our time has become characterised by an enthusiastic desire for change, born out of a growing discontent over social conditions, determined and guided by new means of production, new spiritual insights and new ideas". (Zwart, 1929, p. 26). For Zwart, typography was an ideological question - he wanted to free the reader from what he considered boring. He achieved his desired goal of making reading a process that directly involved the reader. He felt that it would be possible through the 'New Typography' to actually change the way people read. What the Dadaists and futurists were trying to achieve with typography, Zwart took a step further. A step that brought the Netherlands to a unique Dutch style. This uniqueness can be seen by his earlier characteristics in the use of visual puns, giving a second meaning to the letter or word. He guides his viewer by use of composition and text using letters and shapes as visual signals.

In 1923, the Dutch Cable factory commissioned Zwart who between then and 1933 was involved in the production of 275 advertisements. These mostly typographical advertisements constitute Zwart's major contribution to Dutch typography that has given the latter an identity that can be still seen today.

Keeping in mind the Dutch culture and ideology which was discussed earlier, Zwart's work became simpler, more open and lighter with an increased use of diagonals, greater use of white space, fewer typefaces and more typographical elements. Zwart was a master of visual pun, he amplified meanings of phrases and words by using basic typography. Text itself acted as a catalyst for his creativity. For example, Similes, allusions, metaphors, hyperholes, positioning, axis, size shape and weight. The history of Dutch graphic design has always been described as conceptual and ideological in practice. It is the use of Zwarts visual pun that has probably brought it to that level today, given that the Dutch were exposed to this way of visual information for over seventy years.

As Zwart was a firm believer of keeping up with technical innovations, he was one of the first designers to incorporate photographic imagery in harmony with his typography. Zwarts first use of images can be seen in the 1928-29 catalogue for the N.K.F. cable company, in which he incorporated close-ups, cross-section photographs of electrical cables and other relating images. Products had never before been presented in such a manner. He achieved a dynamic balance between text, image and white spaces on the page. His double page spreads worked as single compositions and it was work that made designers all over Europe take notice. The best examples of his photomontage can be seen in the 1933, 'Delft tables' information booklet and postage stamp design. As with any technical innovation, the use of photomontage was at first a topic of controversy, but just like his typographical methods, it too was accepted. By the end of the 1920's Dutch society witnessed a major leap in their every day printed matter in just

thirty years. Through the published ongoing of different organisations and the help of the government, the Dutch society was very well educated in the area of design. From this early stage the Dutch society has been climbing a conceptual ladder on which they are visually educated. The ladder is constantly being built by the Industrialist, artist and graphic designer.

Artistic Policy

Along side Piet Zwart, attention should be given to the 'lettergieterij Amsterdam' - type foundation company 1851 - 1977, for it too played, as a company, a major role in educating a society visually. Although there were continuous problems for the graphic industry, because of its advance from handcraft to an industrial process, the lettergieterij progressed strongly and made many technical advances. The aesthetic aspect of their product was also to receive as much attention. The 'Lettergieterij', had a commercial attitude that always called for attention to current developments, which especially meant fine typography. This attitude came with the help of 'Uhlenbroek', one of the companies directors who commissioned S.H. de Roos to design the companies own typeface. From this, an artistic policy came about and de Roos was employed as a full time designer which helped to change the art of bookprinting. The lettergieterij subsequently acknowledged the importance of good design, and the influence the company could have on the development of typography. The success of the first designs by De Roos undoubtedly contributed to an artistic freedom in which the company trusted his professional knowledge. For commercial reasons the emphasis in advertisements and various publications was put in the importance of good design.

Furthermore, attention to fine typography also led to a course of contacts with companies that likewise had an idealistic attitude, thus again spreading this new way of communication.

Thus far I have talked very little about advertising, because the attention Dutch companies gave to advertising is limited compared with those of France or England. The Dutch poster got off to a very bad start but organically turned itself into another form of advertising which became unique to the Dutch. Advertising in the Netherlands ran parallel to that of graphic design. It was concerned with posters, advertisements and packaging. Various companies sought contact with an artist for their advertising and it was felt that advertising of artistic quality was a way to have value as a way to educate the public. However the designs these artists made were so over decorated that any intended message contained in them was lost. Simply, the poster did not work which led to a different type of advertising which I regard as being more of a cultural solution. One company called 'Calve' produced artistic calendars as they were popular with the public. In 1915, the company 'Van Nelle' made advertising murals made by artists on the side wall of their factory. The style again ran parallel to the graphic industry with representations of commerce, industry and painting techniques which included the products. The murals were depicted distinctively, yet not overpowering to the viewer but more like blending in with the environment and societies taste in general. Other companies and even government institutions caught on to this rare type of advertising and murals were being placed in locations where a train or bus may pass by. This type of mural can be seen

today, in the form of company publications, nor advertising campaigns but on a cultural level commissioned by the Government, bringing forward the idea of a national identity and uniformity on a cultural level.

In the 1930's, typography, graphic design and advertising was based on existing ideas. Attempts were made by small groups to achieve a contemporary design by new means. With the outbreak of World War Two, there was an interruption in this progression. After 1945 the development of graphic design could be resumed. Readability and clarity were fundamental, without the loss of personality from the designer.

CHAPTER FOUR

Educating a Society

With a typographical tradition and design principles that were made at the turn of the century, Dutch graphic design was among many disciplines followed by those who practised the applied arts from 1945 onwards. It then became a separate identity. The Netherlands subsequently acquired a reputation as a free market of ideas that led to unusual results. Printers too played a role, providing designers with the opportunity to experiment.

Shortly after the last war, Dutch society began to rebuild itself with great enthusiasm and idealism. During the war a number of associations of artists discussed the idea of forming a single organisation. These discussions resulted in the foundation of the 'Federative Van Beroeps Verenigen van Kunstenaars' (Dutch Federation of Professional Assistance for Artists) in 1946. They proclaimed that the professional associations, led by a federation, must together strive to establish an Arts Council (Raad van de Kunst). This council would, it was hoped, influence and co-ordinate general artistic life in the Netherlands and make policy decisions with regard to all art forms. This line of thinking served to unite all those who practised the applied arts in Holland.

After the war, Dutch artistic life was slowly revived and new museum policies arose. Museums felt obliged to be more active in meeting the needs of the art lover in the Netherlands. In 1945 Sanberg was appointed director of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. Sanberg did most of his own promotional work and felt a great freedom from the government. He commissioned Otto

Treumann for graphic design work that include the famous posters and catalogues for the Van Gough exhibition.

Apart from the graphic designers, type foundries, design organisations and companies, the Museum also played a major role in the education of design. This is an interesting point when one considers that museums hold works of art. It was not until 1987 that five museums held joint exhibitions of design as there was an ongoing public interest since 1945 in the design of an industrial society.

Dutch museums placed a low value on the industrial product. Museums existed only for art and the arts were valued more highly than the applied arts. Only graphic design was accepted despite the fact that books and posters were manufactured industrially. This may have been due to documentation interests. These design exhibitions originated from many discussions on the idea of Dutch culture, the outcome of which was that museums existed for the education and help in choosing an environment in which the Dutch lived. A further reason why the Dutch considered holding design exhibitions may relate to artistic creativity. As previously mentioned the Dutch placed a high value on art which at that stage was on par with the Bauhaus ideology. The latter stated that there is very little distinction between artist, craftsman and designer. The 'artistic products' were of a greater significance than the everyday objects seen in the environment. It could be said that the statement of these exhibitions was that objects can be valued as much for their social significance as well as for their functional solutions. The Dutch could now see a retrospective of design in their country in a short time. These exhibitions proved to be very popular.

Design Groups

From 1950 onwards, accelerated technical development (especially in the area of photographic typesetting) strongly influenced graphic design and the possibilities for the use of the graphic product. In 1963, the Dutch airline KLM looked abroad for the design of a corporate identity. This was the catalyst for a well organised, broadly based design centre where up to that no such professional organisation existed. Much discussion took place with this news and that same year the 'Associate Voor'(Total Design or TD) began. Its members were Wim Crouwel (graphic design), Frisco Kramer (industrial design) and Benno Wissing (graphic and interior design).

Total Design's aim was to develop and execute design concepts in all fields in order to achieve a unity of ideas. This concept of achieving unity was not a new one since many organisations in the Netherlands had discussed it from as early as the 1800s. However, they mostly concerned themselves with artistic theories and this was seen to be part of an idealistic pursuit. This was not the idea of Total Design. The latter was a design association, an enterprise that was well thought out in which various specialities were combined. Total Design's role in graphic design was substantial, but its significant role in the 1960's and 1970's died down when a number of other associations were founded e.g. 'Tel Design', 'BRS' and others. One of the members of Total Design stated "It was needed in the Netherlands - it was a process of purification."(Cardonozo p.260 - de Broos 1985 p.13).

Soon after its establishment, Total Design began to concentrate on large projects and commissions that demanded a severe analytical approach. Total Design is famous in the Netherlands for creating styles and identities for large institutions, which at that time were becoming very popular. Total Design also worked extensively in the public sector. A good example of this is their design orientations for the signs in Schipol Airport, *see Plate 1*.



Plate 1: Signage Systems at Schipol Airport

In this example one can clearly see that Crouwel, the founder of Total Design, had a design principle that was not playing with form, rather with the simplification of communication. Crouwel saw graphic design as a problem solver and thought that he should approach a problem in a structured way without artistic pretensions. In other words a pleasant aesthetic design was not acceptable.

Anthon Beeke, a man who stood for a totally different type of design joined Total Design in 1972. I find it very strange that Total Design, a design group that was fairly radical in the simplification of design, welcomed Anthon Beeke on board its design group. Beeke's designs can be described as conceptual which proved to be very popular with the public. His typography is clear but retains a slightly crazed artistry. A good example of this can be seen in *Plate 2*.



Plate 2: A Poster by Anthon Beeke - 'Aids the killing bite of love'

Perhaps, however, Crouwel and Beeke had something in common; something that adheres to society, since both designers were not in search of a style. It may be Crouwel's principle of Total Design that he employed Anthon Beeke-he was designing to suit all tastes.

Among the other design groups in the Netherlands of this time was 'Studio Dunbar', set up by the designer Gert Dunbar. Dunbar, originally a painter, enjoys an artistic freedom that he does his best not to lose in his design commissions. He seems to have a talent for persuading his clients to indulge in a far-reaching experiment. In 1986 he stated:

"My colleagues sometimes scold me for being an artist among designers, but that is exactly what I want. I have always taken the fine arts to be a sort of breeding ground for all sorts of applied designs. What we attempt to put into our work, in the way of emotions, feeling for graphic design, sensitivity and expression, has always been pursued and worried at by practitioners of the Fine Arts long since. When our commissions land themselves to it, we plainly do our best to copy the very same feelings the artists have crystallised for themselves, and to plagiarise whatever we can to bring it into applied design" (Caradozo/A.Stroeve 1987 p.265)

For Studio Dunbar, contemporary graphic design is the changeable, the fragmentary and the revitalising.

We now see a fundamental difference between two professional associations and that is exactly what the design group 'Hard Werken' strives on. Each member of the group works independently. In typography, changing the leading, addition of colour and typographical humour often lead to unexpected results, ending up with a message which they claim comes across more clearly. This free experimental work has gained Hard Werken a great number of commissions. From Anthon Beeke to Studio Dunbar and Hard Werken, it seems they all 'throw' the rules of design 'out the window' when it suits them and yet they are still successful. When one looks more closely at these designers, they all have something in common. Even though all of their design principles differ, most of their work is for the cultural sector. In addition, they all have the same belief that designers, having completed their professional education, should not

work so much for advertising firms, but should focus on solving the real problem of communicating to society.

Conclusion

These well-regarded designers have now established the link between themselves and their predecessors in the hope of trying to educate society and the industrialist through design. We have now seen the remarkable stepping stones which Dutch designers, craftsmen, artists, industrialists and society have taken to bring the Netherlands to the design conscious society that it is. Keeping all of their efforts in mind enables me to understand Dutch designers and society and to offer a conclusion on Dutch graphic design from the 1970's to the 1990's.

Design is a relatively new concept in historic terms. It is problematic because design covers a wide range of different activities. That said, what is it that concerns the designer given that design is a relatively individual process? It must simply be a question of attitude. Dutch graphic design exists today simply because of a large number of design exhibitions, publications, television and radio.

If we look at design simply as a process of function and form, then it is interesting to look at the current state of typography in the Netherlands. The designer's concern with form can be broadly detected here. Dutch typography can be broken down into two ideas viz. that typography is divided between the objective/analytical and the functional/subjective.

These ideas were discussed in a public argument between Wim Crouwel and Sam Van Toorn. Crouwel saw typography as a means of communication and van Toorn saw it standing for political consciousness. Crouwel thought the designer should not be original but rather a problem-solver tied down by many restrictive conditions. Only this, he felt, can contribute to a human development of society.

His typography tried to bind politics to a humanist culture. The kind of type face is unimportant to him. ' I rarely use a sans serif typeface because it would be in harmony with a modern age' , Crouwel explains (Boekraad 1987 p.265). This statement could be construed as contradictory given that Crouwel designs purely for society. What matters to him is the X - height and width i.e. purely its function. Crouwel calls himself a traditionalist - I call him a radical. With his approaches he is more of a 'Fluxis' artist of typography than Anthon Beeke. It seems he is designing for his own theories rather than society's, as society's needs are not very simple.

What can be seen from these discussions as regards design groups, typography and advertising is a division of labour in the graphic design process in the Netherlands. It is the difference in attitude between a creative designer and a decorative designer. There seems to be a separation in the actual design process for a client- the separation between conception and execution.

Two views emerge from this conceptual approach to design. Crouwel's preference is for simple, clear forms. I find this minimalist approach to design too simplistic in meeting society's needs as this type of design is contained within itself and does not refer to matters outside the design. This rejection of ornament

is firmly rooted in the Bauhaus tradition that is generally accepted as containing the prime characteristics of modern design. I agree that good design has emerged in the Netherlands from tradition. Most of this groundwork has been done before World War Two. This, I believe, is giving a desire for change in graphic design in the Netherlands. A counter-movement is clearly emerging in the work of a number of designers and purist designers are becoming a rare breed. The real uniqueness of Dutch graphic design and typography today is that designers of the 'counter movement' are not abandoning the tradition and are using form to communicate and cause reaction. This way of designing does carry a personal slant, thus new meanings are given to functions and concepts.

This explains the increase in the conceptual design approach similar to the work of Anthon Beeke and Gert Dunbar. Because of this acceptance of 'conceptual design', the Dutch graphic designer today enjoys a rare artistic freedom that is seldom seen in any other country. These designers would not be able to enjoy this free if Dutch society were not familiar with this conceptual approach to design. Thanks are thus due to people like Piet Zwart. That said, I firmly believe that the Netherlands has a strong identity through this type of graphic design. I first noticed this while in the Netherlands. I found I was slower to read into a poster than the average Dutch person even if the poster was in English. It is obvious that this way of reading is built into Dutch society. It is an impressive and expressive use of form.

Dutch graphic design students enjoy an even greater artistic freedom. So much so that it is not unusual to see a student transferring to the fine arts department a number of times in one year as their teaching is so closely related.

It is also not unusual to observe a painting hanging in a student's critique based on the idea of the fine piece of typography hanging next to it. Most design academies in the Netherlands pursue a policy of being as expressive as possible.

Thanks to many things including years of discussion, government bodies, the private sector (e.g. the PTT), the industrialist and the designer, the Netherlands has come a long way in designing adequately for society. It is a unique country as regards attitudes towards art and design and in most cases both are used in parallel. The Dutch designer today, with a brief on the drawing-board, works from an entirely different angle. Designers in the Netherlands are now making form a matter of discussion and are going to extreme lengths to utilise it.

Even though the Netherlands is a country that did not set out to acquire a national identity through graphic design, it has done so organically. It is a country that is attuned to design for whatever sector. I must, however, stress that graphic design is, and always will be, a profession that has to be studied thoroughly. I say this as I find a number of problems arising because of this new way of designing. I draw my conclusions on these problems from interviews with two contemporary Dutch designers: Jan Kees Schelus and Arian Stinstratt. Jan Kees Schelus works on a freelance basis for the PTT and also teaches graphic design in Academi Minerva, Groningen while Arian Stinstratt is an art director for an advertising agency in Amsterdam.

The Dutch graphic designer today has, I feel, realised his power within society and may be abusing his artistic freedom without knowing it. He/she is thus less aware of his/her clients' real needs. There are almost 3,000 graphic

designers in the Netherlands today and almost all it seems are doing the same thing. Because Dutch businesses take design so seriously, they commission a designer to define a corporate identity. The latter is often 'churned out' presenting an image of the firm that may not exist. So many designers in the Netherlands today are making a living out of this urge or trend to have a corporate identity-identities that are not being defined properly.

I would say that my argument is similar to that of the industrialist of the 1800's in that the same craftsman was working for different industries. This created a lack of creativity and originality. I tend to blame the popularity of corporate identities on the Dutch PTT as it is the 'mother' of all identities in the Netherlands. Its image, I believe, has become an overpowering influence. I see their corporate identity hiding behind the face of an advertising campaign. The consumer is almost manipulated by the power of their image and their involvement with the artist. The PTT's house style at present is designed to make an intervention into our consciousness. It does this in ways we cannot ignore but very cleverly does not 'shout' at us. It is a form developed for a social context which the customer cannot control. The PTT ensures that its identity is recognised by paying a lot of attention to art and design. I am not saying that the hard work of the PTT on a cultural level is invaluable. However I feel they have gone too far without considering the aims of Van Royen - they should curtail their massive campaign on the appreciation of art on design.

The developments of the Dutch postal telecommunications services today and in the past are unique. Van Royen, managing director of the PTT in 1920, saw it as a responsibility of the firm and of the Dutch government to set high

aesthetic, organisational, linguistic and typographical standards. For this the Netherlands should be eternally grateful. The PTT presents itself today through its postage stamps, annual stamp collection, telephone cards, annual reports, business gifts, letter boxes and telephone booths. It is in these that Dutch developments in art and design can be seen. Despite being a privatised company, the PTT was able to encourage industry to try out new products of this kind and share the risks involved. This encouragement is, in itself, a major contribution to design in the Netherlands. One of the less attractive aspects I find about the Dutch government is its over-sensitivity to art on a cultural level. The PTT, a company that has so much involvement in the public sector may have embarrassed the Dutch government in persuading them to erect large quantities of sculptures. Quantity is no solution to an aesthetic problem.

I myself have travelled extensively throughout the Netherlands and have encountered numerous pieces of art at the sides of roads and in town squares. This has led me to believe that the artist is purely making financial gain at the expense of the Dutch government. I would estimate that about 70% of these sculptures or murals are badly executed. There now exists a 'butter mountain' of uncontrolled art. The government even set up a safety committee to prevent, for example, a sculpture falling on a car in bad weather conditions. Perhaps it is a different sort of committee they should be setting up.

In the past we have seen Dutch designers struggling for emancipation and understanding from the industrialist. Indeed they have won that emancipation and have made the Netherlands a unique society in terms of its awareness of art

and graphic design. Hopefully this awareness will lead to Dutch society discussing what its needs are.

The 'butter mountain' of art that I previously referred to (above) does not surprise me as we approach the turn of a new century with vast amounts of technology, tools and reproduction techniques for the designer. If we cast our minds back, the same thing happened (more clearly in the Netherlands) at the turn of the last century. Back then, the industrial revolution saw the printer using twelve different typefaces for a simple message on a poster. This is similar to the situation the graphic designer faces today in that he/she is surrounded by technology resulting in the development of 'new wave' typography. I ask the designer today to experiment with these new techniques in his/her own spare time so that a clearer and more successful design might evolve.

One should remember that design's primary client is society. Typographical and graphic design should grow out of new techniques as design in the Netherlands could become a style industry. This can also be seen internationally whereby a complex technological society is almost quicker than the designer. Our symbolic environment is losing its value to trivialisations that diminish the design industry and the room for a culture to flourish. We see people like Oliver Toscani (of Benetton) who believes he is producing art, not advertising. But how is it not advertising when one takes an image out of context and places a logo on it? Toscani's campaign is dangerous to society because when the Benetton logo is placed on the image, one trivialises society. Mike Salisbury (who created the 'Camel' mascot) of Salisbury Communications simply

thinks he is giving the public what they want and feels there is nothing he can do to change the situation of design today.

Gert Dunbar states:" In contrast designers fulfil the role of lookers and provided they are given the space, even of seers, the client does more than simply give someone else a free hand. He has his own domain whatever his knowledge of design may be" (Oltheten 1987 p.269). It is our job as designers to train the client about design which in the long run will affect society and change their views to what they really want. The present day designers have trained the industrialist in the area of design and this makes the Netherlands unique. Both companies and design organisations rarely dispute the importance of design. It is now up to Dutch design academics to help young designers look closer at their clients' needs. Graphic design in the Netherlands could become too decorative and shallow with the loss of its beautiful and unique relationship between the industrialist, artist and designer. Therefore, educating industry about the role of the graphic designer is a necessity.

It is my firm belief that design can express our personal, social and cultural values. It can communicate our ideas and help us to define ourselves. The progression of Dutch graphic design resulted not only in a rethinking of industry, but also gave a new context to society as regards materialistic values. It has come to a stage today that, with the aid of modern technology, anyone can become something of a designer. This may disturb some of us in the design profession in that we now have an even greater responsibility to society. Design, therefore has become a multi-disciplinary process that includes design research, product planning, product design, ergonomics and graphic design. In a world that

has become a global village through modern telecommunications technology, it is important not to forget that graphic design has not completely changed but is rather maturing.

I would like to quote W.F. Gouwve, secretary of the Association for arts and Crafts in industry and artistic advisor to the Dutch PTT. In 1926 he stated:" In the future it should become possible to say: 'show me your printing and I will tell you who you are'"(de Broos 1985, p.7).

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