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THE DEBATE

THE LEGENDARY CONTEST
OF
TWO GIANTS OF GRAPHIC DESIGN

FOREWORD BY
RICK POYNOR

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THE LEGENDARY CONTEST OF TWO GIANTS OF
GRAPHIC DESIGN

WIM CROUWEL • JAN VAN TOORN

Foreword by
RICK POYNOR

Essays by
FREDERIKE HUYGEN
and
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FOREWORD

The appearance of this book in English is a significant moment in the study of graphic design. For Dutch designers, the public debate in Amsterdam, in 1972, between two leading figures, Wim Crowel and Jan van Toorn, has long been seen as one of those pivotal moments in the history of a profession, when vital issues burst into flame and become a focus for discussion. Even for the Dutch, though, except for those present at the time, the debate was little more than folklore until the belated publication of the edited transcript in 2008.

Only the most attentive English-speaking followers of Dutch graphic design would be aware of any of this. In 1983, some tantalizing extracts from the debate surfaced in English translation in *Ontwerp: Total Design*, a dual-language monograph about the company cofounded and captained to greatness by Crowel. But this book, long out of print, has become a rare object in its own right. Now, at last, we can find out what this plain-speaking pair of design legends had to say to each other, though we do this in a world where the battle lines are not so easy to draw—today the notion of aggressively challenging someone else's views is apt to make many

of us uncomfortable. Pluralism, a willingness to accept that there are plenty of ways of doing design, or anything else, and many equally valid outcomes, has become our constitutional preference.

Even in less accommodating times, such debates between two designers prepared to hammer it out in public, in the presence of their colleagues, have been exceptional, and whenever they happened, they were remembered. One famous exchange took place in the 1940s between Max Bill and Jan Tschichold, following a lecture by Tschichold in which he outlined the limits of the New Typography for the design of books. Bill saw this as an unacceptable retreat into convention, and in an eight-page broadside published in the Swiss design press strongly objected to the use of centered type over modernist asymmetry. Tschichold leapt to the attack in another article, brandishing his credentials as a professional typographer—Bill was an architect and painter, and in Tschichold's view merely an amateur with type. Historians are still mulling over the finer points of this contest.

In 1989, an even more impassioned clash occurred when Tibor Kalman of the New York City design company M&Co laid into Joe Duffy, head of the Duffy Design Group in Minneapolis, at an AIGA design conference in San Antonio, Texas. Kalman took issue with an ad in the *Wall Street Journal* promoting the services of the Michael Peters/Duffy Design Groups and criticized Duffy as a prime example of how design had become

overcommercialized. After an unsatisfactory debate at the conference, *Print* magazine restaged and recorded the entire shooting match in its offices. Kalman was cantankerous, Duffy kept his cool, and the result was a draw.

Now that English speakers can read the debate between Crouwel and Van Toorn, we see that it is similarly unresolved because—and here I show my own pluralist colors—it never could be. If we reduce the two men's arguments to their most elementary form (the nuanced version can be studied in the transcript), then Crouwel believes that it is the graphic designer's sacred duty to present what the client, as message-maker, wants to say, and to do this as clearly and objectively as possible. The designer has no reason or justification to become personally involved in the message, imposing his vision between sender and receiver; to do so will inevitably cloud and confuse that message and make it harder for the viewer to understand.

For Van Toorn, this technician-like posture of detachment is an illusion. He argues that there can be no such thing as an objective message and no neutrality on the part of the designer, because any act of design, in which the designer takes the role of intermediary, will introduce an element of subjectivity. Since this is the case, the designer should explicitly acknowledge and make use of the opportunity to construct and critique design's social meaning. For the designer to take this course, rather than hiding behind a mask of neutrality, both

engages and liberates the viewer. Once the designer acknowledges that subjective intervention is inevitable, it is natural to want to work for clients whose content accords with the designer's personal concerns and convictions. Crouwel rejects this narrowing down of possible design clients, while Van Toorn sees Crouwel's uniformity of graphic outcome as a restriction of conceptual and aesthetic possibilities.

As we can now see, few projects by either designer were mentioned in the course of the debate, which inclines toward an abstract representation of the issues. In their encounters over the following decade, Crouwel tended to draw attention to work by Van Toorn that he disliked—here he describes a calendar for the printer Spruijt as “overblown”—rather than Van Toorn singling out Crouwel's work for comment. An illuminating moment of comparison arises when they consider projects they have carried out separately for Jan Dibbets, a Dutch conceptual artist, but this is cut short by a break in the discussion. For both designers, the largely unstated background to the debate lies in their work on catalogs and posters for major Dutch museums, Crouwel for the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and Van Toorn for the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven. Despite Crouwel's complaints about Van Toorn's indulgence, the cultural sector is one area in which designers might reasonably expect to be permitted a high degree of latitude in interpretation. Van Toorn worked mainly for cultural clients, though, and he doesn't explain in the debate how his techniques could be applied in more

quotidian forms of design for business purposes. Could Total Design's corporate identities for companies and organizations ever have been conceived with a similar degree of subjectivity and freedom?

The lack of a clear outcome and the feeling that the issues remain up in the air don't make this debate any less informative or interesting. With unusual explicitness, Crouwel and Van Toorn chart the essential and enduring conditions that arise in design work. There is always a spectrum of possible positions, depending on the nature of the task and the motivations of the designer. Any designer will need to occupy a position (or a series of positions) on the scale between the extremes proposed by Crouwel and Van Toorn—the fundamentally political nature of Van Toorn's critique became more obvious as the 1970s progressed. What Crouwel and Van Toorn did have in common, though, was an unwavering commitment to the rightness of their respective analysis and practice. Now in their eighties, as friendly colleagues, they still hold fast to the principles that shaped two very different bodies of work, both of the greatest interest to later designers.

In no sense does it belittle Crouwel and Van Toorn's achievements to point out that, regardless of how they tried to rationalize their strategies, the pair were irreconcilable in temperament and fundamentally opposed in taste, a factor that shouldn't be overlooked. Quite clearly, they could have argued their cases forever without coming to an agreement or changing each other's

minds in the slightest. Their historic dialogue encourages us to think through the issues, propelled by the realization that they matter just as much today as they did in 1972. By weighing up the arguments, designers will find out where they want to stand.

Rick Poyner

INTRODUCTION

Over forty years ago, on a night in 1972 that was to take on mythic proportions, Dutch graphic designers Wim Crouwel and Jan van Toorn engaged in a public debate about their views and tenets. Titus Yocarini, then director of the professional organization of Dutch graphic designers (Grafisch Vormgevers Nederland, GVN), made an audio recording of that debate and the discussion that followed. Several years ago, this recording was recovered by curator and graphic designer Dingenus van de Vrie, and this constituted the occasion for a publication in Dutch in 2008, now translated into English.

It is exciting to be able to witness the verbal battle between two grand masters of design when they were young, but the other reason for publishing it is that the arguments of both gentlemen have perfectly withstood the test of time. Wim Crouwel and Jan van Toorn can be seen as representatives of two opposed schools of graphic design: the rational approach versus the personal approach. They represent the classical antagonism between the engineer and the artist, the graphic designer as a service provider versus the designer who is more intent on personal expression. During those years, from the mid-1960s through the 1970s, social

and political commitment were hot topics as well. Crouwel and Van Toorn have, however, continued to regularly voice and otherwise express their respective positions with great consistency ever since. The debate on November 9, 1972, was perhaps the most exhilarating manifestation of their ongoing discussion.

Because some passages were hard to decipher, due to inarticulate speech or noise from the audience, the manuscript is slightly abridged. Some fragments were lightly edited for better comprehension. Additionally, British design critic Rick Poynor comments on the longevity and ongoing relevance of the debate to the field today, and Dutch design historian Frederike Huygen contributes an essay to this volume that elucidates the historical context of the debate, positioning it in the practices of each designer. Finally, Dingenus van de Vrie looks more closely at the practical implications of these two giants' different perspectives on graphic design. He juxtaposes a number of their works that lend themselves well for comparison because they share the same topic, were commissioned by the same client, or show similar affinities. These works are printed in the color spreads in the final section of the book, which also comprises a representative selection from the oeuvres of Crouwel and Van Toorn.



The occasion for organizing a public discussion between Wim Crouwel and Jan van Toorn was an exhibition of the latter's work, as part of a series about Amsterdam-based artists. It was held in Museum Fodor, which at

the time served as an "annex" of the Stedelijk Museum located on the Keizersgracht in Amsterdam. Previously, the Fodor had shown posters from the Paris student revolt of May 1968, in an exhibition designed by Van Toorn, which a critic writing for progressive weekly *De Groene Amsterdammer* had characterized as "messy."

In the fall of 1972, Museum Fodor put on display posters, calendars, and catalogs by Van Toorn in a rather informal exhibition designed by George Sluizer. The show also exhibited anti-Vietnam war posters made by Van Toorn's students. As a Stedelijk Museum publication, the catalog for this exhibition was designed by Wim Crouwel and his assistant Daphne Duyvelshoff. For the Fodor they developed a standard typography: a red cover with a pink dotted grid, showing the title "fodor" together with the issue number, 8, in a computer-like typeface. The remaining text on the cover—data on Van Toorn's career and on the exhibition's dates and location—was printed in a black typewriter font. Instead of pages, however, the catalog contained a loose, poster-sized fold-out comprising photo compositions and a handwritten credo by Van Toorn (set in all lowercase letters):

an object of graphic design should not be looked at on the wall of a museum because the object's design thus takes on too much importance of its own. seen in relation to content, after all, design is already dominant as a formal exercise. bear in mind that printed matter is made to function in a specific situation, and there primarily its meaning is determined.

While preparing the "catalog" for the exhibition, it was decided that both designers would continue their conversations in a public debate.



Faint, illegible text columns on the left page, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the paper.



CROUWEL - VAN TOORN

THE DEBATE



TRANSCRIPT

MUSEUM FODOR, AMSTERDAM

NOVEMBER 9, 1972

WIM CROUWEL

My first remark is a generalizing one. When as a designer you respond to a topical social or cultural pattern, this may give rise to, first, an analytical approach, in order to arrive at an objective participation in a process of communication; this is an approach, in my view, of lasting value and longevity. And, second, it may give rise to a spontaneous approach that strongly appeals to current opinion and therefore has powerful communicative effects. But I believe this is a short-lived communication.

In my opinion, these are the two things that move us, and I would like to clarify them. Designer A, who favors the analytical approach to arrive at a maximally objective message, will be inclined to make use of solidly tested means only and will not be easily tempted to experiment for the sake of novelty. For this reason, he is also likely to end up in a place that is sometimes characterized as rather dry. By contrast, Designer B is more likely to make use of trendy means, and he will not reject experiments in order to arrive at new results.

Further, Designer A will be inclined to position himself professionally, without surrendering his sense of responsibility vis-à-vis society, and therefore he will refrain from engaging in specialties that are not his. Through his specific work, he will provide a contribution

to the problem articulated. I think that Designer B, based on his large sense of responsibility towards society, will tend to become so absorbed by the problem posed that he enters into specialties that are not his. He runs the risk of wasting his expertise by resorting to an amateurish contribution to the problem at hand.

Our colleagues know which side I'm on, for I believe that as a designer I must never stand between the message and its recipient. Instead, I try to present the issue as neutrally as possible.

JAN VAN TOORN

I think that as a specialization graphic design, just like other forms of design, has begun to fall short under the pressure of industrial developments in our society and all their various consequences. The designer falls short not only because through his use of form he programs rather than informs, but also because he no longer questions his goal and responsibility. His design influences and conditions users, rather than supporting its content.

I start from more or less the same two types of designers as Wim. But what you call the analytical designer, I call the technologist-designer, because he works with methods derived from technology and science. The analytical strand, of which you are a characteristic exponent, is determined by a technological-organizational attitude. I do not believe that a designer can adopt, as you put it, the position of neutral intermediary. The acts you perform take place *through* you, and you are a subjective link. But you deny this subjectivity, meaning: you view your occupation as a purely neutral one.

Wim says that he uses a particular graphic means as a neutral thing, but in my view it is always used subjectively. Its use, after all, has social meaning. It has a social goal and that is why it is subjective. It is there that your influence lies, be it your personal influence or your influence as a group. It all depends on how you use your means.

Those in graphic design, just like people in other specialties, are inclined not only to exaggerate their own value, but also to start seeing their dealings and their means as a goal in itself, thus losing sight of the actual goal. This is why I once again looked up what you wrote in the 1961 Christmas issue.¹ The first thing you say there about design is that form is determined by content. But in the remainder of this short article I do not read a single word on the relation between content and form, yet there is an awful lot about formal options, techniques, and technology, so about means in general. But today, I feel, the relationship between form and content is in fact highly relevant. It is perhaps more so than in 1961, for it comes with a responsibility. And maybe we should be adventurous in facing the challenge, without perhaps sufficiently knowing the means we have at our disposal.

WIM CROUWEL

When you say that my approach is technological and observe that I constantly talk about technology, this is an effect of my fondness for technology. I was at times strongly influenced by technical innovations. But I do not have the sense of being led by technology to such

1. The Christmas issue of *Drukkers-weekblad en Auto-lijn*, a weekly trade publication for the printing and publishing industries (p. 112).

a degree that I've ever become an extension of the machine. Technology is a source of wonder to me, and I have long believed that it would be able to free us from a great many difficulties.

After all, the amount of information fired at people has grown so large that it can no longer be processed.



WIM CROUWEL

In this predicament a particular technology may offer a solution, if you apply it well. To apply technology well, I once made a proposal for a new basic alphabet. And this implied larger freedom for the designer than before, when alphabets were forced upon us and handed down to us from the Renaissance, the baroque, and neoclassicism.

To be sure, the designer has freedom, but it also comes with certain formal restrictions. Formal restrictions can be stretched according to your needs. So when I show admiration for technology, this does not automatically lead to technological work.

I would like to cite a recent statement by Jan, from the newspaper: "The function of a graphic designer is to convey information. This should happen in a way that makes it possible for the reader or viewer to arrive at a view of his own, rather than imposing the mind-set of the messenger."

When Jan says that design is a subjective activity, he adopts—as a designer—the role of intermediary. I'm afraid, however, to adopt such a subjective role, and rather try to take an objective stance.

At first glance, Jan van Toorn, as he put it in the newspaper quote, views the designer as a coordinator who, without defining views of his own, merely provides assistance in realizing some communication of information. But this is not the case with Jan, because he does not operate without taking a position in between sender and receiver. Jan quite consciously participates subjectively in that process.

JAN VAN TOORN

Let us first briefly talk about this subjectivity. In my view, there are two important issues. To convey content does not mean that the design itself does not represent particular values. Any design has a certain content, an emotional value. It has specific features. It has a clear goal. You have to convey something to somebody. Perhaps a political conviction, perhaps only a report on a meeting. Any design is addressed to someone. The double duty of the messenger, the designer, is to convey the content without interfering with it. On the other hand, there is the designer's inescapable input and

subjectivity. You cannot deny this dialectic, and you should rather see it as an advantage.

You are afraid of it, and you used the word "fear." You do not want to inflict harm onto either the content or the identity [of the message], which is why you always design in the same way—this, at least, is what I think your work will show over a longer period. By giving the same design response in all situations, you produce work of great uniformity, in which any sense of identity is lost. In my opinion, however, identity is a most essential feature of all human contact, including the communication of any kind of message.

WIM CROUWEL

I agree with you when you say that you can never step outside of yourself. As the designer of the message, you stand in between the sender and the receiver. And when I claim to be afraid to put myself in between them, that is because I feel it's never productive for me to add a vision of my own on top of it. I believe you can separate the two.

When a designer works for a political party or wants to promote his own political convictions, he goes at it in a very subjective way, because he then chooses a perspective. He will shape this perspective through his own personal input in order to get his point across as optimally as possible. This implies that a designer should only do work that he can fully agree with. Well, it is impossible for me to concur with that position. In particular with regard to work involving a political dimension, I say: "It's okay to do it subjectively." But then you

run the risk of ending up with a rather narrow range of assignments.

When you take a position like mine, I say: "Guys, I do not want to contribute to what the man says, because I want to be able to offer my services as a designer in a wider area." After all, when as a designer I adopt a subjective position and I'm constantly aware of it, this is automatically visible in my designs. However, this is possible in specific cases only, and not in a very broad area, or you risk lapsing into that amateurism I mentioned previously, something I do not believe in. At the time I had an extensive conversation with René² about a program aimed at doing something about educational materials for developing countries. In this context, one designer felt motivated to immerse himself completely in the problem of educational materials, and subsequently he began to design based on that knowledge. My response would be: Come on, boys, stop it! You go too far as a designer. This is something you really shouldn't do, because in this instance you'd better engage an educational specialist to supply the specific know-how. You are the designer, and you shouldn't come anywhere near that specific know-how. Instead, based on *your* know-how, you start tackling the problem from your professional attitude and approach, after you've been given a thorough briefing. And this is the part someone else should stay away from, because this is your territory. Of course there has to be an ongoing conversation, unquestionably, but I strongly believe in specialties.

I fear, then, that for instance standard typography, meaning book typography, cannot be done by someone

2. René de Jong, then director of the organization for Dutch Graphic Designers (GVN).

3. The *Nieuwe Zakelijkheid* (New Objectivity) is a term used in the Netherlands for modernism and functionalism in architecture and design in the interwar years.

who adopts such a subjective stance, for a book, any book, will never become a better one just through its typography. Never ever. Even the admirable achievement of the *Nieuwe Zakelijkheid*,³ a typography that follows the text closely and emphasizes it, is way too subjective to my taste already. I find it altogether wrong. But let me not exaggerate the word “subjective.” The subjective designer has a much more limited scope of work, and he’d better accept it. His talents will never be done full justice while there is a demand for designers in many more domains.

JAN VAN TOORN

First let me address your specialties and the reference to the New Objectivity. A specialist attitude such as yours, whereby you get in touch with other disciplines but do not want to immerse yourself in their backgrounds and expect to be briefed, produces a proxy. You create a disconnect, whereas there are in fact connections. Moreover, general human experience, which can’t be reduced to a single operational denominator, spans more territory than that covered by the rational disciplines. Still it is quite possible to approach, to come nearer to such a human dimension, and this is something you ignore.

The designer should approach his vocation from the angle of the artist and the origin of his *métier*, and from an industrial-technological angle. For me, however, it is not relevant at all to articulate the different methods and their corresponding means. It is about one’s attitude regarding social relations. This is what should

be center stage, but you see it only once in a while.

You impose your design on others and level everything. You were at the forefront, and now our country is inundated by waves of trademarks and house styles and everything looks the same. Yet there are challengers as well, and they come from designers who take a much more sensitive approach. To me, your approach is



JAN VAN TOORN

not relevant, and in my view you should not propagate it as the only possible solution for a number of communication problems, because it’s not true. What your approach does is basically confirm existing patterns. This is not serving communication—it is conditioning human behavior.

WIM CROUWEL

I think you’re right on many points, and it would sadden me if a designer’s contribution came across as a pulp of uniform corporate identity programs. When you work on a company’s or organization’s identity, the

package of demands you analyze proves to be the same in most cases. I translate "responding subjectively to it" as: "when I am cheerful, I respond in yellow, and when I am dejected I respond in blue." Frankly, I don't



IN THE AUDIENCE: GIELIJN ESCHER AND CHARLES JONGEJANS

believe in it. After all, the communication of many businesses and organizations and the information on which you collaborate tend to be quite similar, and it is not necessary to disguise this fact or to put a gloss on it.

Subjective design leads to results that in my view seem just as overblown or that are even uniform as well, except that they are uniform in the *short run* compared to the things that also come across as uniform in the long run. The latest Spruijt calendar by Van Toorn is as pretentious as a piece of so-called *good design*,⁴ or as a *clean* piece of design.

JAN VAN TOORN

A client's package of demands is rational, and you can sum it up straightforwardly in a list of points. But how

4. Here Crouwel uses the actual English phrase, "good design" (p. 123).

identity is determined is not the same every time, nor are you a neutral intermediary.

Several weeks ago I read an article by Brecht⁵ about the epic theater. He writes about being an actor. You're standing there, and still you're playing a role. You shouldn't want to deny this ambiguity. Engage with it! It will not truly function until you manage to find the right balance. I suspect that you need to train yourself in it, but in my view you should not try to evade it.

5. German playwright Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956)



My calendar for Spruijt is an experiment and a thing to look at, not a thing to read. It does have order, yet it is order with a twist to it. You continue to feel that something's happening. And with a calendar that is fine, while in the case of typography you might not do it. In typography you will perhaps be more cautious to break rules because there are so many of them. But in fine art, experiments have been done for centuries, and perhaps we should pick up more from that tradition and use more from it.

WIM CROUWEL

I have great affection for the artist, but at the same time I do not claim to be one—I do not have as much freedom as an artist. Many designers are living with the dilemma of wanting to be a visual artist rather than a good graphic designer.



WIM CROUWEL

Let me go back to that calendar and your issue of identity. You state that it is possible to list everything neatly in the package of demands and clarify it all, but that identity cannot be made intelligible. But scientists in psychology and philosophy are looking for it; they in fact try to quantify identity, so that it becomes comprehensible. The same is true in aesthetics, which is perhaps one step further along. Notably Max Bense⁶ is quite far already in developing quantification methods for all elements of aesthetics, so that these things can be applied better and in a more goal-oriented fashion.

Your calendar, Jan, your story about it is fine. But that calendar is not a vehicle for selling your story, or is

6. German philosopher in aesthetics and semiology Max Bense (1910–1990), who taught at Ulm in the 1950s.

it? That cannot be the motivation for making a calendar, can it? You would be better off publishing it in a book. In my view it is nonsense to use a calendar as a vehicle for such stories, even when they interest you and many others, myself included. I consider a calendar an object in which you can express time as an element—an object such as a clock.

JAN VAN TOORN

Grids are highly effective for conveying a message, but that is merely a starting point. You should not promote their use as the only way of design, or the only solution for arriving at great communication for the future.

WIM CROUWEL

You say that I promote grids as the one true thing. I say that graphic design consists of a process of ordering for the benefit of the clarity and transparency of information. This needs to be founded on particular principles, because clarity and transparency on their own do not lead to quality information. There has to be an underlying principle as well.

My basic principles may have been characterized at times as subjective, but to me they are objective. When I depart from modular structures, then this is an underlying principle to me. These structures can be simple, but they can also be extremely complex. And I believe that design—not just graphic design, but also spatial design, architecture, and industrial design—benefits from a cellular approach, from a highly structural approach.

Typography, for instance, is a preeminent example of such a process of ordering. Every form or shape in typography that wants to be more is one form too many. As a typographer you merely arrange information clearly so as to convey it in an easily readable way. That a clear arrangement may lead to incredible monotony is not at issue here; what matters is that you order things according to a specific point of view, from a basic principle. This is what determines form, and such form might well lead to a style as well.

In my view, typography does not have to be determined by tradition and history at all. It is time, I believe, that we throw overboard all those dos and don'ts that have kept typography in a straightjacket for so long. When as an alternative I advocate my structural approach, my cellular approach, which culminates in the use of grids for typography or spatial grids for architecture, I really have a different idea in mind.

JAN VAN TOORN

By traditional form I mean what you refer to as something determined by tradition. It does not so much pertain to style, but to our way of reading, the way of reading we have grown accustomed to. It does not just emerge out of the blue, but has a history. It is a case of historically determined human behavior. And you cannot simply act as if it doesn't exist.

Working with grids, it seems to me, is a tremendous refinement of our tools, but it is not essential and only of interest to fellow professionals. We saw where systematic ordering *ad absurdum* leads us in the protests

against the closing of the Hochschule in Ulm.⁷ banners with perfectly clean typography. But in this way of protesting you do not see any identification with those you address, and this is a crucial problem for which a designer has to find a solution.



JAN VAN TOORN

WIM CROUWEL

Jan, I don't believe in that at all. The lively concern of these people and their involvement—their *angehauchtheit*, as they call it in Germany—is equal to that of people who protest in more amateurish ways. Look at Paris '68!⁸ The posters they made there are all obvious cases of amateurism; not a single one of them has any value. Not one of them is a good piece of design that really tries to convey an idea. It is all clumsy work that comes across as sweet, pleasant, full of feeling, but not as tough. Good designers could have conveyed the content much more strongly and this could have brought the movement more success.

7. By 1967 the Ulm School of Design was financially troubled and beset by faculty conflicts; some faculty members departed and the curriculum was scaled back. In 1968 the regional parliament in Bonn withdrew all funding to the school, forcing the institution's closure amid student and faculty protests.

8. Dramatic period of civil unrest, massive general strikes, and the occupation of universities and factories across France.

JAN VAN TOORN

Why then did those designers fail to contribute? Because they are incapable of giving adequate answers. So all that remains is amateurism. The people in our profession have no answers.

WIM CROUWEL

Jan, before the break let's briefly return to the typography in the catalogs we make for museums. I have always taken the view that these catalogs should have a kind of magazine format, because they need to tell the museum's story, rather than that of the artist. For this reason, they should be recognizable in their design as coming from an institution that takes a specific stance vis-à-vis contemporary art.

This has led to catalogs of which people said: "We can't recognize the artist in it." But the artist *was* present in the reproductions, and I have nothing to add to his story. The artist's own story, when conveyed clearly and in a readable fashion by means of well-placed illustrations according to a certain principle, should be so powerful that he is always stronger than me. What I add to it is at most the specific objective of the museum involved.

In your catalogs for the Van Abbemuseum I recognize first and foremost the voice of Jan van Toorn, while that of the artist becomes perceptible only if I put in some more effort. As "pieces of art" these are great contributions to what is currently possible in free typography, but they are outright unreadable. I simply get stuck.

9. Crouwel again uses the English phrase here.

JAN VAN TOORN

At the Van Abbemuseum we wanted to do things differently. Our museum was not something that needed to be sold; at stake was a program made by people and also one that evolves. This policy, which is discernible in its exhibitions and activities, had to be center stage, not the institution. Through their activities and connections, the staff determines the museum's identity. And this does not take place while I sit at home thinking up designs. Usually we [the director and I] have a conversation, if possible with artists joining in—a joint discussion in which I am not told how I should do something, but in which we look at the historical considerations that should be in the catalog. It is a matter of seeking an identity collectively, a concern I then try to respond to, using the tools of my profession.

WIM CROUWEL

Recently I had an interesting experience in the context of the catalog for Jan Dibbets. As a conceptual artist he conveys a number of incredibly clear thoughts through his work. I am deeply impressed by it, and therefore I love working on such catalogs. And when you love the work so dearly, you feel inclined to add your own story. But that story is in fact my story, my testimony of this affection. Well, Jan Dibbets immediately rapped me on the knuckles. He said: "Just listen to me, boy, you are standing in between me and the public here. Would you please refrain from doing that. Please, position that line straight again." This confirmed, I felt, what I usually in fact try to do in my work. Dibbets tells his

story. He gives me the briefing and I am the one who, as typographer, as designer, takes a service-oriented stance in trying to translate his story to the public. For this is something Jan Dibbets himself cannot do.

JAN VAN TOORN

True, he cannot do that, but he does have thoughts about it. I also designed an exhibition for Dibbets. We sat together with a group of people, and he told us what activities he planned to organize in the museum. He has clear views about it, and it is then up to me to find a *stance or attitude*. Just as the museum had to try and answer questions or find a spot in the museum where Jan could operate. The same applies to me, for the activities involved are part of a collective endeavor rather than just my own. At one point these culminate not in all sorts of separate pieces but in something that results from a shared mind-set.

WIM CROUWEL

I believe I shouldn't say much more. It is my conviction that you yourself play a large role in this process and that you are the last person to create something together with the artist. It is the artist who creates and brings things into being.

JAN VAN TOORN

Dibbets has been very preoccupied with that catalog indeed. That has never been an issue of contention between us. On the contrary. Other artists tell me as well that they think my posters are great and that they recognize their own mind-set in them.

AFTER THE BREAK

JAN VAN TOORN

It is not a matter of whether you feel closer to your work's recipient or not. What matters is the question: What has to be done? What kind of function does your work have? Which factors determine contact between people? Can we learn more about that? After all, human beings have been conditioned in part.

WIM CROUWEL

Human beings are able to recognize themselves better in typography that relies on very simple, transparent principles that define the matter clearly, without veiling or obscuring it, rather than on the basis of Jan's much more subjective story. This is why I believe that what Jan claims to do is not in fact what he does.

SPEAKER (UNKNOWN)

What are the things you choose as a human being and as a designer with your specific capabilities? For God's sake, choose the right objective and cut down on consumption. Don't work for any other lousy business. It does not make a hell of a difference whatsoever whether it is a museum or a peanut butter company, or some margarine producer located in the far corner of the country. The choice involved is a much more essential one. What matters is the effective attack on the social

structures that prevail today. We should make a choice, but not one for the industry or capitalism, because that is pointless. All night the discussion has been about



RENÉ DE JONG AND JAN VAN TOORN

nice places, such as museums, but not about work in less attractive corners such as Shell Oil and the like. At issue is a much more fundamental choice. This has not yet been addressed. Let us talk about that.

RENÉ DE JONG

I would like to narrow down the conversation somewhat, not because of a lack of problems to discuss, but because it is a discussion that we all have been in many times within numerous fields and in many places, namely: if you want to change the world, where should you begin?

Talking about taking a socially committed stand in its ultimate implications seems to be a big story about which strategy or tactics you use to achieve social change. What is far more interesting to me is this: if

you share the view that your profession is also a means for bringing about changes in society, you should start talking about how you can do so as an individual while belonging to a professional group. Which means need to be developed? Which assignments should you accept? Should you be actively looking for specific assignments or not? It is one thing to go look for work as a designer in places where social relevancy would be useful; it's another thing to not walk away from the places where you do work.

WIM CROUWEL

These two people claim that they find such commitment, or such a concept of commitment, much more important to discuss tonight than that which we originally had in mind. As if we have to put our social commitment into words. But when someone asks me how I, being the person I am, wish to put my talent at the service of society, I don't mind articulating it. I am not afraid to do so, not at all in fact.

I believe that if you follow the tendency that I sense from the question about commitment, ninety percent of our colleagues would have to be advised to leave their profession. In fact, this is something I keep telling my students. I say to them, "Above all, make sure you know what you are doing. If this is incompatible with what you aspire to do, get out of it today and rather embark on a study such as political science or philosophy or psychology; or go into politics, because from there you have much more influence on people and you may achieve whatever you aspire faster than through our vocation."

After all, our clout is incredibly limited. Politicians in parliament can respond directly to our society and introduce bills that our government may subsequently implement. We do not find ourselves on that side. I'm not a politician, and I also made a conscious decision to stay away from that world. I love my profession, and I try to make a contribution from there.



EDY DE WILDE

THE DEBATE IN CONTEXT



Frederike Huygen

On November 9, 1972, a momentous encounter took place between Wim Crowwel and Jan van Toorn. In a smoky, noisy, and packed hall of the Museum Fodor in Amsterdam, the two entered into a debate about their views on the graphic design profession. In his account graphic designer Paul Mijksenaar¹ wrote that "Several hundred (!) in attendance from throughout the country had hurried to Fodor to witness a fair fight between these two heavyweights in the discipline of graphic design. The audience let itself be heard, too, as evidenced by frequent outcries like: 'That is bullshit! That's a lie! Crap! Nonsense!' And so on."²

The direct occasion for the debate was an exhibition about the work of Van Toorn at the Museum Fodor, which at the time was part of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. Crowwel, as this museum's in-house designer, produced the exhibition catalog. That night the two designers tried to clarify their approach and attitude in relation to clients and assignments, while they also talked about the discipline's social role.

The discussion, which would prove to affect many a designer in the Netherlands³, did not stop that night but went on even into the 1980s, as reflected in the

1. Paul Mijksenaar (b. 1944), graphic designer. From 1992 to 2007 he was professor of Visual Information Design at the Faculty of Industrial Design, Delft University of Technology.

2. Paul Mijksenaar, "n Rodeo voor ontwerpers," *GVN Bulletin*, 9 February 1973, n.p.

3. Walter Nikkels responded to the discussion in the 1980s. Paul Hefting, Tessa van der Waals, Edo Smitschuijzen, and Max Bruinsma used a text by Van Toorn
↳

from 1983 in the *Rietveld Idiotenband* (a magazine of the Rietveld Academy) as a source for discussion. At that time, the contrast invoked by Crouwel and Van Toorn came to the forefront again in a publication by Lex Reitsma, *Ontwerpen en/of vormen? in which he interviewed designers on their different conceptions of education*. Hugues Boekraad wrote about Crouwel versus Van Toorn in the catalog *Holland in vorm* (1987); Camiel van Winkel introduced their contrasting views in his study *Het primaat van de zichtbaarheid* (2005); and Esther Cleven referred to them in her inaugural lecture from 2007.

calendars Crouwel and Van Toorn designed in subsequent years, with which they reacted to one another, as well as in textual contributions to the book *Museum in Motion* (1979), two issues of the Goodwill series printed by Lecturis (1978), and in journals such as *Kunstschrift* and *Museumjournaal*. The discussion focused on the design of catalogs, posters, exhibitions, and institutional identities for museums, but both designers' views on design education were addressed as well. Other issues treated included the profession's social relevancy, the level of expressive freedom in design, the designer's own opinions, and the relationship between design and the visual arts.

All these various topics have featured more or less prominently in debates about design to this day. At the time, Van Toorn and Crouwel appeared regularly in the media and expressed their views in interviews and presentations as well as in writing, but also through their teaching. Their influence on the world of graphic design was large, and their work served as a touchstone for many other designers.

CAREERS

What did the careers of these two designers look like by 1972? At that point, Wim Crouwel (b. 1928) had already created an impressive body of work. In the 1950s he designed spectacular trade fair stands and exhibitions, as well as printed materials for the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven. In 1961 he was invited to design the *Kerstnummer Drukkersweekblad*, the Christmas issue of a weekly for the printing and publishing industries,

and two years later he cofounded Total Design, which would evolve into a large and influential design studio with assignments from businesses, museums, and governmental agencies. As of 1964 Crouwel was designing all catalogs and posters for the Stedelijk Museum. Starting in 1957 he made a calendar each year for the printing firm Van de Geer. His futuristic New Alphabet typeface, first published in a *Kwadraatblad* issued by the printing firm De Jong & Co in 1967, elicited quite a bit of discussion, and he was very present in the media and at symposiums. Furthermore, he won many awards, and in 1970 he was asked to work for the World Expo in Osaka. Crouwel also contributed to educational institutions, in particular as an instructor at what is now the Delft University of Technology.

Jan van Toorn was just three years younger than Crouwel, but his career took off later. As of the 1960s, he established a name for himself through the calendars he designed for Mart. Spruijt, a printing firm, and five years later he intensively collaborated with Jean Leering, director of the Van Abbemuseum, on the design of this museum's printed matter and exhibitions. He also designed *Range*, a magazine published by the highly esteemed PR company Philips Telecommunications Industry. Unlike Crouwel, Van Toorn was self-employed. In 1968 it was his turn to design the *Kerstnummer Drukkersweekblad*, while that same year he began to teach at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy, Amsterdam. He trained many designers there, and the steady income provided by his teaching job made it possible for him to work on interesting, noncommercial assignments.

The work of both designers was highly valued by contemporary critics. Dick Dooijes referred to Crowwel in a 1965 issue of *Drukkersweekblad* as "a strong design personality," and the critic Rolf Mager wrote in the advertising journal *Ariadne*: "Topping my list of admired typographical calendars is that of Van de Geer printers, in which Wim Crowwel—always looking for new ways—experimented with letters again, with truly impressive results."⁴ In 1962 he identified Van Toorn as a "naturally talented person," praising his gift for illustration and his knack for graphic thinking in the *Spruijt* calendar devoted to music. Mager noted that this designer managed to operate as a creator of ideas, typographer, and illustrator all in one, and as a coordinator of a team, including author Willem van Toorn (his brother) and photographer Paul van den Bos.⁵ By that time, Van Toorn performed both an editorial and a managerial role in the design process, and unlike Crowwel, he was not averse to illustrative elements. Over the following years there was continued praise for Van Toorn, who was characterized by Mager as "inventive," "playful," and "typographically in control." Dick Dooijes was no less complimentary: "This generally fine work belongs to the best that is currently printed in the Netherlands because of its versatility, its well-considered ideas, and also its playfulness," he wrote in 1966, when Van Toorn received the Werkman Award.⁶ Strikingly, both Crowwel and Van Toorn acted self-assuredly and were extremely consistent in their attitude toward their profession.

4. Rolf Mager, "Kalender-typotectuur (II)," *Ariadne* 17 (1966) 1, pp. 96–97.

5. Rolf Mager, "Drukkerij Mart Spruyt. Grootmeesters van de klein(druk) kunst," *Ariadne* 13 (1962) 6, pp. 296–97.

6. Dick Dooijes, "Jan van Toorn, winnaar van de Werkmanprijs," *Drukkersweekblad* 54 (1966) 33, pp. 890–92.

CROWWEL: ABSTRACTION AND ORGANIZATION

As early as 1961 Wim Crowwel claimed during a panel discussion that in his catalogs for the Van Abbemuseum he was after organization and standardization.⁷ These catalogs started from a basic layout elaborated in great detail, making it easy to provide any further instructions by phone to the typesetter and other people at the printing establishment. Crowwel also developed pre-printed instruction forms. This was the time, according to museum director Edy de Wilde, who commissioned the work, when Crowwel shifted from an intuitive approach to a more systematic one.⁸ In the 1961 Christmas issue, the designer articulated his credo: design is a matter of analysis and rational order, not of art, and the graphic designer ought to approach his task more like an industrial designer.

In this period, several exhibitions of Swiss graphic design were on view at De Jong & Co printers, work that was a great source of inspiration for Crowwel. Earlier, in the 1950s, he had gotten to know the Swiss designers Ernst Scheidegger, Gérard Ifert, and Karl Gerstner personally through his design activities for stands and exhibitions. The Swiss guys with buzz cuts were proponents of the constructivism of Max Bill, which was disseminated through journals as well as by their teaching at the Hochschule für Gestaltung (Design Academy) in Ulm, Germany. "They chiefly concentrated on composition, on minimal aesthetic ordering on a gray plane, with as little motion in it as possible."⁹

At the time Crowwel was a member of the Liga Nieuw Beelden (League of New Imagery), a collective of Dutch

7. Anonymous, "Goeie drukwerk vraagt een grondplan door een grafische architect," *Ariadne* 12 (1961) 3, p. 247. For Crowwel, see also Frederike Huygen and Hugues Boekraad, *Wim Crowwel. Mode en module*, 010 Publishers, Rotterdam, 1997.

8. In "Extra bulletin (over het werk van Wim Crowwel)," Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1979.

9. Peter Struycken and Wim Crowwel, "Elke typograaf ken de tweestrijd tussen zijn beeldende ambities en zijn dienende rol," *Kunstschrift* 30 (1986) 2, pp. 60–63.

constructivists set up in 1955. As another influence he mentioned the work and views of designer Anthony Froshaug, who promoted pragmatic typography, indicated how accents and contrasts gave structure to the text, and talked about design as "problem solving." Organizations such as the AGI (Alliance Graphique Internationale) and conferences of the international professional association Icofrada, for which Crouwel also performed managerial tasks, fostered international contacts and exchanges of ideas.¹⁰

Both the concrete artists and the graphic designers from Switzerland based their work on mathematics and systems. This explains the title of a book by Karl Gerstner from 1957, *Kalte Kunst* (*Cold Art*), in which the author linked this art to prewar modernism. They advocated anonymous design, simplicity, order, and clarity, while rejecting the personal and emotional-artistic approach in favor of the advancement of pure information. Grids and plan-based design (*Programmmentwerfen*) constituted the alpha and omega of their approach. Crouwel has always defended and advocated similar views: geometry, minimalism, universality, neutrality, and visual communication. Print was a matter of formal and procedural organization—of method, no less and no more. And like the Swiss he looked ahead to the computer era and made a distinction between objective and subjective design. Moreover, they shared the view that visual excess, styling, and chaos of print and information had to be fought or reined in.

In theory it was about the designer who puts himself at the service of the text and remained invisible

10. Icofrada is an acronym of International Council of Graphic Design Associations. This organization, set up in 1963, held its first conference in 1964. In a debate conducted at this meeting, the Swiss, with their rational and strictly professional approach, were pitted against others who pointed to the individual input of the designer. See R.Th. Luyckx, "Internationale organisatie van ontwerpers bijeen," *Revue der Reclame* 24 (1964) 19, p. 728.

himself, but in practice Crouwel created a very poetic mode of "cold art," bearing his personal stamp. He combined his letter distortions and visual typography with great sensitivity for color and form. In the 1960s his work strongly reflected influences of the "new abstraction" and minimal art.

In a retrospective article from 1990, entitled "Op een afstand" ("From a distance"), Crouwel very clearly describes his basic assumptions and position at the time.¹¹ Several passages suffice to illustrate them:

The development of my design practice started from a guiding, utopian ideal. It was necessary to create a sense of order amidst the world's immense visual chaos—this, I felt, was the preeminent task of designers. As I believe Rietveld once said: 'That which is equal in human beings is more important than that which makes them different.' Everything you saw around you cried out that personal expression had to be fought. [...]

For the designer it was still essential to express the spirit of the age and the ideals comprised in it. One had the sense that graphic design was very much a service, that you could help people to gain some understanding of the complicated world around them. [...]

One looked for the intended typographical emphasis in the placement on the page rather than in differences in type size. In other words, you were after sweeping minimalism to create as much room as possible for interpretation. It was highly important to foster visual calm. Publications that were somehow interrelated also had to have a design that expressed their connection, so as to create transparency for readers while also creating distinctions among the various businesses. This marked the start of what later on we would refer to as *house style*. [...]

11. Wim Crouwel, "Op een afstand," in Koosje Sierman (ed.), *Grafische vormgeving verhoudt zich tot beeldende kunst*, Eindhoven (Lecturis) 1990, pp. 23–28.

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In typography you formulated your own rules for modes of typesetting. Thus grids were developed that in fact go back to the Middle Ages. We learned everything from studying old manuscripts and incunabula, in which you can still see the carefully drawn grid lines. We would verify their pages' measurements and examine how their specific tension was created. Other study materials were the splendid treatises written by Jan Tschichold about margin progressions. The challenge was to take in everything, to try to derive new rules that would be valid for a new era. [...]

I have to admit that in the 1970s I grew quite confused about the shift in our educational system, from training a craft and skills to the development of a socio-critical state of mind. Whenever possible I voiced my opinion about it at symposiums, I systematically tried to explain to all those people who in my view were misguided that these changes were disastrous. I felt that good averages were better than peaks and lows, and this could be achieved through sound education. Instead of a critical attitude regarding students' achievements, a spirit of *freedom, equality, and brotherhood* prevailed—an excessive tolerance. Boundaries between departments began to fade. Autonomous art departments, which in my view are altogether *out of place at academies anyhow, mixed with applied arts departments*, as a result of which there was no more learning of craft/skill at all. [...]

The moment when visual art starts to grow dominant in applied art and design, the work seems no longer about finding an expression for the topic but rather about expressing one's *self*. At the same time, I reject dictatorship in design, as happens in advertising. This is why the chameleonic dexterity of many designers today bothers me. You run into them merely by

opening the 1990 annual of the designer's association BNO: *designers who do not develop a personal style and whose work hardly betrays the maker. One should be careful, I feel, not to go the way of advertising.*

VAN TOORN: VISUAL EDITING AND MEDIA

In 1964, Jan van Toorn said: "It is not our job to please business."¹² He also spoke up against working for advertising and in favor of larger freedom, a view shared by all of the designers associated with the *Gebonden Kunsten federatie*, or GKf (Federation of Applied Arts). When asked about his relationship with clients, he replied: "It's enjoyable. But it is extremely difficult to get out from under the atmosphere determined by clients, and to be yourself and hold on to it. This requires some struggle... Even when the director or the man in charge of publicity is positive, somehow the whole company system, with its salesmen, purchasing agents, and its historical-psychological structure, will put pressure on you. The point is to be able to break it. Nice when they realize you were right all along." As these words underscore, Van Toorn, though not yet solidly trained in *Marxist thought*, was already looking to stretch boundaries, so as to be able to leave his own mark on an assignment.

Another statement of 1965, in the context of his design of *Range* (a PR magazine of Philips Telecommunications), also appears to anticipate points of view he would later embrace. He felt that this magazine, which was preeminently geared toward technology, had to be about "contrasting the irrational with the

12. Anonymous, "Jan van Toorn ontwerper: Wij zijn er niet voor het genoegen van de industrie," *Revue der Reclame* 24 (1964) 3, p. 109. For Van Toorn, see also Rick Poynor, *Jan van Toorn: Critical Practice*, 010 Publishers, Rotterdam, 2008, and the book *Design's Delight*, 010 Publishers, Rotterdam, 2006, in which several texts by Van Toorn are reprinted.

13. Rolf Mager, "Jan van Toorn bouwt verder aan de imago van Philips' Telecommunicatie Industrie," *Ariadne* 16 (1965) 10, pp. 1014-16.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 1016.

15. Dick Dooijes, "Jan van Toorn, winnaar van de Werkmanprijs," *Drukkersweekblad* 54 (1966) 33, pp. 890-892.

rational, the symbolic with the analytical."¹³ Obviously, he started from another background and orientation than Crouwel. Rolf Mager put it as follows: "Jan van Toorn works from a well-aimed sense of form that is based on solid training in decoration and illustration. Although you will rarely, if ever, find a typographical weakness in his work, he does not like to go on fiddling to achieve perfection. His motto is that 'at one point you have to throw out something with a certain measure of guts.'"¹⁴

Dick Dooijes managed to characterize his work equally well when he went to visit Van Toorn after he won the Werkman Award in 1966. According to Dooijes, Van Toorn typically rejected any form of dogma, and he had a dislike of formalism, of "programmed typography," and of conventions: "by abandoning any form of dogma you avert sterility; you have to be prepared and able to reconsider the direction you take for every assignment anew. You should approach each subject in terms of its unique qualities...all of this means that there can be irregularities in your work and that it will not always be tidy, but this will keep you fresh and this will show in your work anyhow."¹⁵

While Van Toorn took pleasure in the design process as an exploration of materials and knowledge, Crouwel and his studio wanted to streamline and standardize that process. He passed on complex assignments to his assistant Jolijn van de Wouw. Crouwel's preference for linking up industrial thought with graphic design was no option for Van Toorn, who also rejected uniformity.

In the 1966 annual report of the City of Amsterdam,

Van Toorn for the first time added socially committed photography, to counterbalance its dry data and create a shock effect. Smoke bombs, street fights, slums, and dilapidated housing projects thus became integrated in this bureaucratic publication, as well as a full-page image of a begging bowl. Working with images began to fascinate him, and he certainly would have liked to design an illustrated corporate publication. That same year he did in fact design a brochure with a visual narrative for the Sikkens paint company, and in 1968 he was able to let his imagination flow freely in the Christmas issue of *Drukkersweekblad* devoted to museums.

In his commentary on this project, Van Toorn foreshadowed the position he would adopt four years later. Although he did not want to influence the viewer or stand between him and the content, he also wanted "everyone to be able to get things out of it according to their liking," while trying to avoid offering items as isolated objects.¹⁶ In Mager's words, when commenting on the Spruijt calendar in 1972, his work "observes, memorizes, improvises, varies, plays; it disconnects elements and reconnects them in a new context. It leaves open all options for interpretation; it invites us to reflect, to think along, to add, to complete."¹⁷

Meanwhile Van Toorn had found inspiration in work by intellectuals such as Dutch historian Jan Romein and the Frankfurt School's critical theorists, but also in the theater of Bertolt Brecht, the cinematography of Jean-Luc Godard, and Hans Magnus Enzensberger's media theory. "I began to see that the sender-receiver

16. R. Janssen, "Jan van Toorn ontwerper Drukkersweekblad-kerstnummer '68 wil de beschouwer volwassen behandelen," *Ariadne* 19 (1968) 50, pp. 1470-1471.

17. Rolf Mager, "Met Jan van Toorns kalender voor drukkerij Spruijt bent u een jaar bezig met mensen," *Ariadne* 23 (1972) 27, p. 901.

model of communication was much too limited and that dogmatic views were not going to lead us anywhere. I also realized that dealing with facts influences your view and that dialectics is essential for communication."¹⁸ He also studied photojournalism as a phenomenon, as well as the avant-gardism of the 1920s and 1930s.

From this amalgamation, Van Toorn distilled a number of views about the profession and a way of deploying his graphic means, in terms of both their content and visual power. As a designer he embraced a critical attitude, in order to bring about a more critical perception amongst the public. By clearly manipulating his materials and breaking with conventional narrative techniques, the public would become aware of that manipulation and be compelled to relate to the content. To this end, Van Toorn behaved rashly and chaotically when organizing materials and elements in his designs. He further pursued visual narrative, in particular in the calendars he designed, in which he explored the use of collage and montage, deliberately mixing images from divergent genres. He purposefully manipulated politically charged photos and images from everyday life. The sense of alienation thus produced was supposed to activate viewers and stimulate their awareness of media.

"I am constantly looking for a structure to control and order chaos, but I will immediately reverse any order I find and turn it into chaos. Our experience of reality becomes an impoverished one if all would be neatly ordered and verifiable. Chaos is a crucial given

18. Jan van Toorn, interview with Frederike Huygen, July 14, 2008.

that constantly reminds us of an irrational and emotional experience of reality, one that is hard to indicate through verbal means alone. I consider it my task to open up such tensions and make them visible."¹⁹

THE 1960s AND AFTERMATH

The discussion between Crouwel and Van Toorn took place in the middle of the period defined as "the turbulent sixties," an era of student movements, playful happenings by groups calling themselves *Provos* and *Kabouters* (goblins), as well as of resistance against authority and the powers that be.²⁰ In these years prosperity grew to new heights, youth culture was on the rise, and the influence of the media skyrocketed. Many social domains became infused with demands for change, participation, and empowerment. Artist Constant Nieuwenhuys denounced designers as opportunists in a 1969 essay included in his *De opstand van de homo ludens* (*The Revolt of Homo Ludens*), and he blamed artists as well for surrendering their critical attitude regarding the prevailing order for the sake of their own success. The artists themselves engaged in "aksion" and claimed their co-responsibility for society. Everyone and everything was politicized.

For example, the architecture department at what is now Delft University of Technology was democratized, and in 1970 its leadership adopted a proposal that reflected several arguments advanced by Van Toorn. As it was put: "the architecture department believes that the working group on 'Alternative Education' serves as an adequate forum for working within the department

19. "Evert Rodrigo over Jan van Toorn," *Kunstschrift* 30 (1986) 2, pp. 56–59.

20. In *Isjapunten: 1950* by Kees Schuyt and Ed Taverne, the sixties, as a period of change and revolt, last from 1965 to 1976.

on *cooperation* (to prevent it from degrading into a narrow-minded specialist's training), *division of labor* (to break with the presumption that it would educate genius generalists), and *social critique* (to be able to develop a strategy in which the section can contribute to processes of empowerment)."²¹ In a book published by Delft architecture students, entitled *De elite* (The Elite, 1970), one could read: "As regards housing construction, the vision of the technocrats implies a growing dehumanizing of the individual. At best human beings still serve as object of manipulation, while false needs are created to sustain the prevailing manufacturing system and to raise its output. The construction business therefore merely follows in the footsteps of capitalism." Critic J.J. Vriend fueled the debate with his study on "left-wing building, right-wing building" (*Links bouwen, rechts bouwen*, 1972). In 1971, when putting together an exhibition on architecture between 1920 and 1940 in the Van Abbemuseum (*Bouwen '20-'40*), museum director Jean Leering relied in part on his reading of *De elite*.

During this era, power, technology, and capitalism were under fire, while the theory of media manipulation gained ground. Unbridled consumption and advertising were judged to be abject monstrosities and opium for the masses. With a sense of urgency, the 1972 Club of Rome report put uncontrolled economic growth and the environmental issue on the agenda. Hans Magnus Enzensberger criticized the media's one-dimensional agenda, and instead of the passive sender-receiver model he advocated for the media's potential to empower people.

21. B. Chorus, "Ondergang van de elite in Delft," *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 6 June 1970.

In the visual arts all sorts of new forms emerged, such as land art, body art, street art, happenings, and conceptual art. Jean Leering, Van Abbemuseum director between 1964 and 1973, pursued the museum's social relevancy as an institution, its connection with society, and a broader audience for art. He sought to open his museum to the people and, vice versa, to bring society's vibrancy into the museum, a view that was completely at odds with that of Edy de Wilde at the Stedelijk Museum, who felt museums were sites for fine art. Starting in 1969, Leering experimented with new exhibition topics, such as "the street," and with new forms of presentation, often realized in collaboration with Jan van Toorn. Leering also revived attention on the interwar avant-garde through exhibitions about Theo van Doesburg, El Lissitzky, and Dada. While this avant-garde inspired Crowel to develop a geometrical formal language, it inspired Van Toorn to rely on collage technique and cultivate a penchant for anarchy and agitation.

During the 1960s the Dutch design world was equally preoccupied with changes and issues. The GKf, the design profession's umbrella organization, was disbanded in 1968, in favor of associations per sub-discipline, such as the GVN (*Grafisch Vormgevers Nederland*, the group of Dutch graphic designers). Its chairman, graphic designer Jurriaan Schrofer, had already noticed "a polarity in the GKf between proponents of *art* and those of *design*, between the *artist* and the *engineer*. This represents our basic problem. Where one emphasizes analytical elements (the

22. "Hersens niet op nachtkastje. GKF Jurriaan Schrofer," undated *Federatiebulletin*, 1968 or 1967. Benno Wissing talked about the difference between made-to-measure tailors and creators of surprises. Van Toorn cooperated with Schrofer at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy.

23. "Wat maak je ervan? Inleiding van Jurriaan Schrofer tijdens de studiedag 'Welzijn en erbij zijn,' a workshop of Nederlands Cultureel Contact held on September 12, 1970. Archive Schrofer/Special Collections UvA, item 279.

engineer), the other stresses the imagination (the artist)."²² Although he favored a professionalization that could be achieved through a larger professional organization, as a designer he mainly adopted the stance of a creative, while earlier he also expressed reservations about the use of grids.

Interestingly, in 1970 Schrofer gave a lecture on magazine design that in essence anticipated the debate between Crowel and Van Toorn extensively.²³ He described the two different approaches as the achievement of order by means of form or by departing from content. "With the first—formalist—principle," he claimed, "one will achieve clarity, balance, detachment. It aims to be 'objective,' making a professional impression. However, it also comes across as cold, if not sterile. On the other hand, it allows the reader/viewer a great measure of freedom to interpret the content; he is not pushed into a particular direction. Yet it remains questionable whether this objectivity is merely the gloss of an authoritarian attitude, suggesting reliability and security while rejecting the imagination, or calls on the imagination, thus excluding participation."²³

Where the formal designer was an engineer, the designer led by content was more like an editor or a film director, "who creates an ambiance in which the different components can be articulated, ranging from hilarity to high drama." The director, running a great risk of failure, was more involved and would therefore bring about a greater participation on the part of the viewer. Schrofer also characterized this approach to design and the use of images as "amateurish" and associative,

whereby he, too, referred to the Provo and underground press. The informal model, however, ran just as much risk of being experienced as manipulation as the formal model did.

Likewise, Rolf Mager addressed the concerns and issues at stake in the world of graphic design prior to the notorious 1972 debate, in an article about an exhibition of calendars in the De Bijenkorf department store in The Hague. In Mager's view, designers had been asking themselves since 1968 if it was "still meaningful to go on providing beauty, optimal clarity, and delicately balanced order—in a traditional sense?"²⁴ By 1968, the politicization of the Dutch world of design played a major role indeed, as evidenced by, among other things, the catalog of that year's Type Directors Show, whose motto was: "Think of your work and think of what's going on around you." In the exhibit hall of the printers Sigfried in Amsterdam, graphic work was displayed alongside photos of race riots, Vietnam, hunger, and poverty. As Mager argued, making nice and perfectly printed materials hardly reflected any political commitment. Such a commitment was expressed at the international Icoграда Conference of 1971, where the younger designers argued that the focus should be on the designer's social role, a classless society, and the critical monitoring of industry. At this meeting, the Dutch graphic designer Teun Teunissen van Manen, wearing a beard and overalls, actually called on his students to take over the conference organization.

According to Mager, by 1972 Jan van Toorn, Swip

24. Rolf Mager, "Honderd bestverzorgde kalenders bij De Bijenkorf in Den Haag," *Drukkerswereld* 3 (1972) 5, pp. 104–106.

Stolk, and Anthon Beeke were the new top designers, whose output was rife with doubts, protests, reassessments, iconoclasm, shocking elements, and foolishness. "Over the last years, Jan van Toorn and Swip Stolk, having started out as pure decorators (both very sharp typographers and good at the decorative-illustrative), became ever more bizarre in their subtle and dim-witted graphic jokes, working with increasingly 'ugly' letters and increasingly 'stupid' photo and illustration materials. They experience and prove the charm of the cliché, the awkward, the kitsch. Put in new contexts, ugliness or stupidity turns into a wonderful wry humor or a kind of Pop Art in their work."²⁵ In other words, it seems, the era of postmodernism had arrived, even if the term was not used yet. Interestingly, Mager positioned Crouwel as a contrast, as a designer who worked purely typographically: "In his rigor, however, Crouwel, who is as much of a perfectionist as Van Toorn and Stolk but less a man with a message, is outright nonconformist and continues to renew himself." As Mager also noted, the antiauthoritarian and anticommmercial designers were still aesthetes at heart, and their work needed text and explanation to be understood.

THE DEBATE IN FODOR

In his debate with Jan van Toorn, Wim Crouwel put forward a specific view of graphic design as a discipline: he considered it a professional activity for the purpose of communication. This communication had to be free of noise, geared to reducing visual chaos, and designed clearly and transparently in order for the

25. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

message to come across. The designer should not interfere in the information to be conveyed or the content of the message. He would keep his distance and merely try to do justice to it as best as possible. A rational, scientific approach served as the best guarantee, provided proof of professionalism, and, when used as basic principle, was also proof of a personal style, instead of the changeability and the randomness of forms and individual opinion.

In contrast, Van Toorn argued that a rational approach preprogrammed and conditioned the public, was neither neutral nor objective, and insufficiently expressed aspects like meaning and identity. Being a technocratic approach, it led to uniformity without being suitable to visualize a particular mentality—for example of a visual artist's work. He felt that applying chaos and images of everyday life improved communication with the public, while also offering space to viewers and readers to form their own opinions about the message. In his view, design should enable criticism and empowerment.

ISSUES DISCUSSED

When considering the work of Crouwel and Van Toorn, it is impossible to determine whose visual language was the best guarantee for successful communication. The effectiveness of the communicative level of their modes of design is hard to prove, as is true of the claims that a sanserif is most fitting in the modern era (Crouwel) or that the typewriter letter, through its informal character, is closer to the public (Van Toorn).

Moreover, many of their claims fall apart when applied to their work: their positions were largely theoretical ones. But that does not make them any less important or relevant, as both of them actively sought to articulate and underpin their practice and their work as designers.

A problem that contributed to the confusion triggered by their debate is the issue of the nature of a museum. Crouwel conceived of it as an organization or institution and Van Toorn saw it as a medium for presenting art, while both considered it to be an intermediary between art and the public. A museum's identity was directly linked up with the leadership and policy of its director. Crouwel shaped the institution's identity by means of a logo and a uniform design of its catalogs, and he tried to accommodate the work of the artist involved by translating it in a graphic way. In contrast, Van Toorn's museum's identity actually coincided with the designer's unique, recognizable style, while he would also adjust his mode of design according to the exhibition topic.

In this regard, graphic designer Walter Nikkels once said that the museum designer serves two masters, the artist and the museum, and that the diversity of its exhibitions is at odds with the uniformity of the museum as institution.²⁶ In other words, a museum was neither an empty vessel or a mouthpiece (Crouwel), nor a manipulative medium or "an information channel in that market" (Van Toorn). Art cannot be reduced to being information or having an identity. Moreover, as Ad Petersen suggested in the *Lecturis* publication

26. Walter Nikkels, "Grafische vormgeving in het museum," *Museumjournaal* 24 (1979) 4, p. 157.

Om de kunst (All about Art, 1978), there is no such thing as *the* content of an artwork. Because art involves an experience, there is nothing to be "conveyed." Unlike a business or company, a museum has no agency in the market.

If Jan van Toorn wanted to tell stories and reveal interpretations in his work for the Van Abbemuseum, Wim Crouwel instead wanted merely to present and order materials. In the museum of Leering/Van Toorn the visitor was a researcher, in that of De Wilde/Crouwel he was a viewer. It is evident that fine art exhibitions are of a different order than those about architecture or social issues, and that in the 1970s the attention shifted toward exhibitions with a wider, "environment"-like scope, while at the same time the character of catalogs, as books in their own right, changed.

Crouwel denied that his own work reflected a style that was visibly positioned between assignment and the public. Rather, he identified with a design method. In his text for the book *Museum in Motion*, however, he gave a double message and took the edge off his own claim when writing that "even the 'coldest' and most 'objective' approach may lead to great expressiveness, with a good chance of itself becoming the message; while the most subjective approach may lead to a highly objective information transmission, whereby form is a subordinate factor."²⁷ Oddly, Crouwel's "expressiveness" was denied any expressiveness, and therefore it was considered—in line with his own statements—to be absent. Only later on, in an interview with the artist Peter Struycken in a 1986 issue of

27. Carel Blotkamp (ed.), *Museum in Motion/Museum in beweging*, Staatsuitgeverij, The Hague, 1979, p. 231.

28. Cf. note 9 and "Wim Crouwel interviewed" by Kees Broos in D. Quay and K. Broos, *Wim Crouwel Alphabets*, Uitgeverij BIS, Amsterdam, 2003. Interestingly, as early as 1964, professor G.W. Ovink assessed Crouwel's work for Van de Geer as "self-projection, regardless of the simultaneously embraced functionalist ideas." Anonymous, "Prof. Dr. G.W. Ovink sprak te Amsterdam voor de Dr. P.A. Tielestichting over de schreefloze letter," *Drukkersweekblad* 52 (1964) 7, pp. 178-180.

Kunstschrift, was the expressiveness in his work in fact articulated.²⁸

Ironically, Van Toorn, too, took the edge off his own arguments in *Museum in Motion*, where he observed that the Van Abbemuseum operation had in fact failed. His double agenda of a design that both presented the content critically and turned the viewer into a critical consumer proved less easy to realize in practice. One rarely saw evidence of the designer's "commentary," while a major goal like empowerment of the public remained shrouded in mystery. His strong guiding presence may actually have prevented viewers from developing their own opinions.

Professionalism, according to Crouwel, was skill and workmanship, and this was reflected in employing a detached gaze, in ordering and organizing (and reasoning) by means of grids, and by applying the latest scientific insights. Professional meant rational and technological, an approach that in the 1960s was pursued by Crouwel's studio, Total Design, in order to respond to the changing world of business and industry. It was marked by internationalization and expansion, partly in response to the emergence of the European market, and this resulted in larger businesses that no longer turned to individual designers but to design studios while the design processes themselves were increasingly grounded in research, rather than based on the artist's intuition and sensibility for form.

Professionalism, team work, and interdisciplinarity also began to serve as keywords within design associations, and while Crouwel believed in them, Van Toorn

reacted against them. Within Total Design there was much grumbling and discussion about it as well at the time, and in 1972 this studio was in crisis. In reactions such Van Toorn's, Crouwel saw a threat to the discipline. "But when you start from what is now the prevailing trend," he said in a 1977 interview, "which is that you have to approach the people in what is assumed to be their own language, at their so-called level, this implies that we as specialists will be sidelined. In our field...professionalism is not accepted."²⁹ His fear of "amateurism" and trends was largely a fear for the discipline's erosion.

Amateurism, for Crouwel, coincided with applying the visual language of the common man or of non-designers such as action groups. It was marked by not keeping enough distance and a designer who overly identified with the content and interfered too much in it. To Crouwel, operating instinctively was altogether wrong, just like using trendy design. After all, he sought to move beyond timeliness and temporary trends, while Van Toorn in fact tried to find his clues there—he also found the prevailing professional standards to be outdated after he noticed the effectiveness of designs emanating from the protest movement.³⁰ According to Crouwel, changing trends fitted the world of advertising and did not reflect consistency, or a design oeuvre. In due time, however, Van Toorn's output would reveal itself to be precisely that: a design oeuvre.

Both felt that through their work they were outside the dominant world of advertising and visual culture, Crouwel because he did not go along with the hodge-

29. Bibeb, "Wim Crouwel en de discriminatie van de professionalist," *Vrij Nederland*, September 10, 1977.

30. As he explains in a retrospective newspaper interview. See Margriet Vromans, "Jan van Toorn over kleur bekennen en objectiviteit," *Het Parool*, January 30, 1982.

podge of styles and random forms, and Van Toorn because in his view he in fact commented on that media dominance, broke with conventional codes, and was averse to the "intoxication" in which advertising design immerses the public.

Crouwel rejected and avoided ambiguity, as well as symbolism and indistinctness. If he wanted to evade noise at all cost, Van Toorn on the contrary cultivated noise, calling it chaos. Crouwel wanted to promote clarity and one-way communication, whereas Van Toorn sought to fight it. In a sense, however, Van Toorn also rejected ambiguity. By opposing a modernist visual language, the information industry, and stereotypical codes and clichés, he made it appear as if there existed "a single prevailing ideology" rather than pluralism, while he himself did in fact rely on ambiguity/pluralism as a reply. Although they accused each other of "imposing form," both assumed that information could be separated from its representation.

THE 1970s

By all means the tone of the dialogue between Van Toorn and Crouwel had been a reasonable one, yet into the 1980s Crouwel's work continued to trigger resistance, at times expressed quite harshly, for example by graphic designer Piet Schreuders in *Lay in, lay out* (1977) and by Tamar, penname of Renate Rubinstein, a leading columnist of the major critical weekly *Vrij Nederland*. In 1979 she launched the term "New Ugliness" to refer to the degradation of the public domain, in which modernist values were too dominant. The presence of Total

Design's prominent output and this studio's influence were also denounced by others at the publication of the retrospective book *Ontwerp: Total Design* in 1983 and subsequently.

That Van Toorn's work during the same period also met with criticism is less known, partly because he seemed to have "won" the fight. In January 1974, Rolf Mager put the differences between Crouwel and Van Toorn into perspective, after they again responded to each other by means of their calendar designs. "I do not regard Van Toorn," Mager concluded, "as the passionate, order-evading, subverter of values, nor do I see Crouwel as the experiment-fearing, dispassionate, born aesthete. In my view, both are and remain actively searching and highly talented designers who continue to renew themselves, and I do not recall ever having seen a weak piece of work from either one."³¹

In the course of the following years, however, his annoyance with respect to Van Toorn's Spruijt calendars increased. One of his critiques he even presented as an open letter to the designer, in which he argued: "Jan, this is going the last time I want to reflect on the deeper meanings you pursue as calendar designer."³² Mager felt that Van Toorn's intentions remained too vague and that he kept the audience at a distance with the exceedingly artistic nature of his work. In 1976 he claimed to be fed up with it: "All right, Jan, you have it your way...Once more I don't get it. My God, how stupid I am!...All right, Jan, you succeeded again."³³ Still, Mager packpedaled, characterizing the 1977 calendar as a "gem" by "perhaps a complicated, perhaps dualist,

31. Rolf Mager, "Wim Crouwel en Jan van Toorn zetten tweegesprek van '72 voort per kalender," *Adformatie*, January 31, 1974, p. 15.

32. Rolf Mager, "Open brief aan Jan van Toorn naar aanleiding van zijn 15e kalenderontwerp voor drij Spruijt," *Adformatie*, June 5, 1975, p. 17.

33. Rolf Mager, "Jan van Toorns Spruytkalenders: Cryptogrammen met 'n rood steunkleurtje," *Adformatie*, July 15, 1976, p. 10.

yet very intelligent, conscientious, and militant artist, who never just does something out of folly, arrogance, nastiness, professional blindness, or some tiredness resulting from potato sickness."³⁴ In Van Toorn's wake, Mager saw designers such as Swip Stolk, Willem de Ridder, Piet Schreuders, and Paul Mijksenaar, "who believe that there is an audience, or there will be an audience, that is also sick and tired of that effective, balanced, proven typography—an audience that is yet more sensitive to a kind of manifesto-like, to-the-barri- cades typography with amateurish slips."

Meanwhile, Crouwel and Van Toorn entered into another debate with each other in 1977, this time about exhibition design in the Gemeentemuseum (The Hague), whereby the familiar arguments were marched out again. This event was followed by the two *Lecturis* publications (see pp. 116–17) and the volume *Museum in Motion*. The next episodes in their discussion appeared in *Kunstschrift*, in which both designers formulated how they related to art, and in the catalog about Jan van Toorn's work published by De Beyerd in 1986. Each time, however, their claims were linked to art and the art museum context, which significantly limited the scope of the discussion. Furthermore, at the time post-war modernism was being hotly debated, as both a style and a method of design. Wim Crouwel held on to it, as also became clear in 1988 in his inaugural lecture as a professor at Delft, a declaration of his love of functionalism.³⁵ In the meantime, the field itself had become quite diverse and postmodern, while its profusion of different and personal expressions met with appreciation both at

34. Rolf Mager, "Wat zal nu weer 't lot zijn van Van Toorns Spruyt-kalender?," *Adformatie*, August 25, 1977, p. 13. Potato sickness is caused by the ingestion of solanine, a toxin found in members of the nightshade family, such as potatoes.

35. Wim Crouwel, *Over functionalisme en stijl*, Erasmus University (Arts and Culture), Rotterdam, 1988.

home and abroad. Of course, Crouwel and Van Toorn contributed to this success: the former because his work elicited so many counterreactions, and the latter because he put forward the model of the designer as author or editorial designer.

The debate that night in 1972, however, was as much about an issue that is still on the agenda: political commitment (or, in Dutch: *engagement*). Although Crouwel did not let himself be pushed into the corner of big capital, while he did not consider himself at all to be non-committed or "rightist," on the part of the audience there were loud calls for a discussion about politics and commitment. Because designers had not participated in protest movements such as the one of May 1968 or in making posters for political parties, the audience seemed to conclude that designers merely fulfilled a marginal role and that the profession failed to contribute in an essential way to a changing society. The interruptions and questions that came up after the break testified to frustration and confusion in this respect. Questions such as, "For whom does the designer work?" "Can he truly choose his clients?" and, "Can he truly contribute in any way?" have been posed again and again to this day.

In the Netherlands, the "commitment" of designers is often interpreted as their personal vision on a problem, because their training is geared to developing their expressive abilities and a style of their own. The designer is invited and encouraged to provide his individual "commentary," as reflected in the 2005 project

on "Symbols for the Netherlands" and the interrelated publication *De publieke zaak van de grafisch ontwerper* (The Public Role of the Graphic Designer).³⁶ But this aspiration toward "individual commentary" seems at odds with the objective of connecting with widely shared values and social concerns. The flags and symbols resulting from the project, then, mostly had a cartoon-like quality and failed to produce their intended effect. This view of "commitment" does not tie in with social realities and reduces the contribution of designers to merely offering a visual commentary in the margins that we can admire in books and in museums. In this same vein, one may have doubts about the effect of slogan-like activism against brands and logos.

In the case of designers, social and political awareness is frequently put on a par with doing work for a political party/action group, or with being "against" something. This underscores that the activist impulse of the 1960s seem to be a thing of the past and that "commitment" or idealism is no longer at issue, which some will observe with regret and others with relief. At the same time, as a discipline, graphic design is still very much linked to our social space—to a social role and the public domain. The awarding of the Erasmus Prize 2006 to the French graphic designer Pierre Bernard was a clear example,³⁷ as is true of projects around websites and the creation of "communities" and possibilities for participation. The arrival of the computer and the Internet and the call for more democracy have fostered this development. Another example is the work of Felix Janssens with his Team TCHM, which

36. Annelys de Vet et al., *De publieke zaak van de grafisch ontwerper*, Design Academy, Eindhoven, 2006.

37. See Hugues Boekraad, *My Work is not my Work: Pierre Bernard – Design for the Public Domain*, Lars Müller Publishers, Baden, 2006.

concentrates on structures of communication and the public domain.³⁸ For this reason, commitment is bound to be a major concern, and many a debate will be conducted about the graphic designer's aims and means in the future.

38. Graphic designer Felix Janssens became known through a critical manifesto on the purpose of design, "De zin van design," which he published in 1993 with his colleague Mark Schaiken, and by the "Beyond" project for Leidsche Rijn. Janssens works as creative director at Total Identity.

PRACTICE



Dingenus van de Vrie

CHRISTMAS ISSUE OF
*DRUKKERSWEEKBLAD EN
AUTOLIJN*

DESIGN: Wim Crowwel, 1961

DESIGN: Jan van Toorn, 1968

The tradition of the Christmas issue (*Kerstnummer*) of *Drukkersweekblad en Autolijn* started in 1913 with the publication of issue 13 of the fourth volume of *Het Tarief*, the official publication of the Dutch association of book printers. Another special Christmas edition appeared a year later, but due to the scarcity of materials during and right after World War I, it would take seven years before another special Christmas issue was published, in 1921. Different printing firms, paper suppliers, binders, and copy editors contributed to the realization of these calendars. It is a tradition that continues to this day, now known as *Kerstnummer Grafisch Nederland*. This publication is still considered a showcase of the technical skill of the Dutch graphic industry.

For many years, the Christmas issues basically presented a Christmas story, supplemented with technical treatises and essays about print and design. It wasn't until the 1960s that a series of publications on quite

diverse subjects garnered any attention outside of the industry itself. For each issue a team of editors was appointed to develop a theme, to which a designer was added to do the layout.

The subject selected for 1961 was "assignment-design-realization." It showed users of print media all that happens before the actual printing takes place, emphasizing in particular the role of the designer. As stated in the introduction: "His role is intrinsically problematic, one that comes with struggle, as was also the case in the context of this issue. Many mutually incompatible views collide. But it is a source of joy to us that there is struggle indeed and even more that the designer's contribution has evolved from being a seemingly erratic and superfluous luxury to a much valued and indispensable link in the production of print."¹ The text of this issue was written by Jan Kassies, and Wim Crouwel was responsible for the layout.

The first section of the 1961 Christmas issue provides a nice overview of print design since the nineteenth century, illustrated by wonderful examples and several characteristic quotations. The final section, comprising a third of the total publication, is filled with ads and was created in cooperation with different designers. In the middle section, several graphic designers give their opinion of their profession. A brief series of quotations provides an impression of their concerns: *Otto Treumann*: "I consider the machine an extension of my hand and my mind."² *Alexander Verberne*: "I do not meet my printers; I contact them by mail or phone...As soon as I'm gone they print too scantily again, which makes

1. From "Verantwoording," in *Kerstnummer Drukkersweekblad en Autolijn*, 1961, p. 4.

2. Otto Treumann, graphic designer (1919-2001).

me cry in bed."³ *Pieter Brattinga*: "They should organize an exchange class between the graphics school and the applied arts school."⁴ *Benno Wissing*: "I work with printers who enjoy what they do."⁵ *Wim Brusse*: "The field of commercial graphic design is nearly unlimited."⁶ *Jurriaan Schrofer*: "The first creative act is in the formulation of the data."⁷

At the end Wim Crouwel and Jan Kassies articulate their own view: "We also believe that it is unnecessary to know what beauty is...Nor is the design of printed matter a sales argument. Off beauty—there it is, at last—there is no money to be made." This perfectly ties in with the issue's motto, a quote from the medieval artist Albrecht Dürer: "Die Schönheit, was das ist, daß weiß ich nit, wiewol sie viel Dingen anhangt" (What beauty is I do not know, even though it belongs to many things).

The text of Crouwel's *Kerstnummer* was set in Helvetica (8 pt), with no justification and a wide line interval, which creates a clear textual picture. The headers were set in the same typeface, yet in bold to ensure a clear difference in emphasis. The quotations were set in a larger typeface, and sporadically, such as in the chapter indication, the type size is slightly larger still. The use of a limited number of letter sizes automatically creates a balanced textual form, which is reinforced by the wide margins in the upper and lower part of the page.

The layout of the text pages comprises three columns. The same grid is used for pages with illustrations, and their width and height do not exceed the grid. A page of text is typically juxtaposed with one of illustrations.

3. Alexander Verberne, graphic designer (1924-2012).

4. Pieter Brattinga, printer, graphic designer, teacher (1931-2004).

5. Benno Wissing, graphic designer (1923-2008).

6. Wim Brusse, graphic designer (1910-1978).

7. Jurriaan Schrofer, graphic designer (1926-1990).



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Another important feature of the page layout is the use of white space. The pages' three visual elements—text, illustration, and white space—are well balanced, giving them a clear and transparent look.

The cover in matted red comes with a white lineation and black print, while the text is repeated upside down in embossed form, in capitals, and in a larger typeface. The embossed text was probably rendered in capital letters for technical reasons, while the designer decided to repeat the same text legibly on the cover. It is rare for Crouwel to use capital letters in this way.



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Jan van Toorn, the designer of the 1968 Christmas issue, took quite a different approach, as was also in line with the issue's subject: Dutch museums. This issue addresses many different aspects of the museum: from their building and their different collections to the "display of faces" on the wall of the museum staff cafeteria. This is a subject that calls for a strong visual approach indeed. No wonder, then, that Van Toorn was selected as designer. His designs can be experienced as a true visual adventure. Many of them are brimming with visual information, and the reader may wonder at times what to do with it. That paper is made to be printed on must be a basic tenet of his.

Each chapter deals with a specific kind of museum. At the start of each one, an overview is given of museums in that category, followed by several pages with images of items on display. While the pages with text or captions are organized in a clear grid, using the sanserif Mercator designed by Dick Dooijes, those with illustrations

are not structured according to a clear grid. The designer has mainly chosen images that freely relate to each other from the many materials available for illustration, thus creating an attractive lookbook.

Apart from the size of the issues (315 x 240 mm) and the number of pages with text, there are hardly any similarities between the two designs. The advertising section, still prominent in 1961, completely disappeared in 1968. This last *Kerstnummer* looks in fact more like a book than a special issue of *Drukkersweekblad en Autolijn*.

CATALOGS

Jan Dibbets

DESIGN: Jan van Toorn, 1971

DESIGN: Wim Crouwel, 1972

Around the same time, Jan van Toorn and Wim Crouwel each designed a catalog for an exhibition of the work of visual artist Jan Dibbets (b. 1941). Van Toorn did so in late 1971 as the in-house typographer of the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven,⁸ while Crouwel did so one year later in the same role for the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.⁹ The character of each catalog differs significantly: the Van Abbemuseum catalog looks much like an artist's book, while the Stedelijk one has a retrospective character. Similarly, the typographic views expressed are quite divergent.

8. *Jan Dibbets*, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, December 3, 1971, to January 16, 1972.

9. *Jan Dibbets*, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, November 17, 1972, to January 14, 1973.

On the back cover of the Van Abbemuseum catalog there are two brief comments on the work of the artist. Museum director Jean Leering starts off as follows: "In this catalog, Jan Dibbets would prefer not to see an introduction to his work. The work should have to be plain, as such, or rather, the meaning of the work only reveals itself by looking at it—through visual observation instead of verbal consideration."

The front cover shows a field of two shades of blue, the surrounding white serving as passe-partout. Inside the booklet, it is revealed that the two shades refer to a blue sky over a dark blue sea. The images are printed in black-and-white, but in the same size and position as on the cover. They show, however, the horizon fading from view while the sea is on the rise. A loose insert lists the works on display.

Jan van Toorn worked as graphic designer for the Van Abbemuseum from 1965 to 1973. Each catalog he designed for Eindhoven has a markedly individual character and realization. Each time the specific topic of the publication had a strong influence on his typographic approach. For this reason, the designs all leave a different impression, making them distinctly recognizable.

Aside from two essays about Dibbets and his work, the unpaginated *Stedelijk* publication comprises a biography, a listing of selected solo and group exhibitions, a concise bibliography, and an overview of film and video works. The elaborate list of works on display is added separately.

Crouwel considered the *Stedelijk* Museum catalogs as items in a series, requiring that each one be instantly



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recognizable as coming from that museum. He strengthened this identity through the rigid typographic views he systematically applied. For example, he always used the same typeface, Univers, always in the same size. Although Crouwel relied on bold or italics for typographic emphasis while avoiding variations in type size and underlining, he did experiment with color and different kinds of paper. His catalogs always had the same height, but their width could vary.

Crouwel designed catalogs for the Amsterdam museum for twenty years, from 1964 to 1984. His rigorous system to a certain degree neutralized the personality of the individual artist, the catalog's actual subject. His preference for grids stands out. This layout plan for both typography and the placement of illustrations defined every design's basic principles. He handled the opportunities provided by the grid in a highly disciplined way, creating a recognizable yet always unpredictable result. At the same time, each publication looked like an issue of a journal.

Within Total Design, the studio Crouwel set up with others in 1963, he further developed the notion of grids with such like-minded practitioners as Benno Wissing and Hartmut Kowalke. In the end, the development of grids and the standardization of typefaces, typesetting, and paper sizes not only saved time when working on assignments, it also ensured their quality. With the ready availability of grids on preprinted sheets, assignments could be executed quickly. And because all sorts of typographical problems were thought out in advance, not much time was lost in making design decisions.



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As a result, it was possible to work on many assignments simultaneously, while the elaborated designs still had a uniform appearance. It was colleague Jurriaan Schrofer who once labeled Wim Crouwel as the "system-general."¹⁰

10. See Jurriaan Willem Schrofer, *Een kwestie van verhoudingen*, 1965.

Ger van Elk

DESIGN: Jan van Toorn, 1973

DESIGN: Wim Crouwel, 1975

Both designers also produced a catalog for exhibitions of works by visual artist Ger van Elk. Jan van Toorn in 1973¹¹ and Crouwel in 1975.¹² Strikingly, the two booklets look very much alike, not just outwardly—size and images—but also in terms of their text. Both include an essay by Rudi Fuchs, who later became director of both the Van Abbemuseum as well as of the Stedelijk Museum. It seems evident in this instance that the two designers tried to take into account the artist's views and wishes.

The Van Abbemuseum booklet measures 210 x 135 mm, comprises 46 pages, includes mostly black-and-white images and a concise list of catalogs, and offers limited biographical information. It appeared only in Dutch and looks like a brochure, a correspondence further emphasized by the use of the same paper for cover and interior. A pamphlet stitch holds the pages together. The title page of this modest, unassuming publication shows one of the three artworks included in color. It is as if the artist likes to see his work presented rather than his name.



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The Stedelijk booklet looks more like a pocket book. Measuring 210 x 145 mm, it is half the usual Amsterdam catalog size. Comprising 96 pages with images largely in black-and-white, it includes a list of works and offers a little more biographical information. As a matter of fact, the color images from the Eindhoven booklet are reprinted here. The Amsterdam booklet has twice as many pages, mainly because it features text in both Dutch and English, as was common in the Stedelijk Museum's publications. A striking element is that the text is typeset in a standard serif, an exception in Crouwel's work.

Generally, Crouwel and Van Toorn adopted quite different typographic approaches, but these catalogs show that they were also capable of moderating their own views, albeit temporarily. As designers, in other words, they were not always pushing their individual agendas. And, apparently, they both liked the work of Ger van Elk.



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Bouwen '20-'40. (Construction 1920-1940)
De Nederlandse bijdrage aan het Nieuwe Bouwen
(The Dutch contribution to the new architecture)
 DESIGN: Jan van Toorn and Geertjan Dusseljee, 1971¹³

Het Nieuwe Bouwen (The New Building, 4 catalogs)
 DESIGN: Wim Crouwel and Arlette Brouwers
 (Total Design), 1983¹⁴



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13. Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, September 17 to November 7, 1971.

14. Various locations, April/May 1983: "De Stijl," Gemeentemuseum, The Hague; "Amsterdam, 1920-1960," Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; "Rotterdam, 1920-1960," "Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam; International: "Social Housing and Urban Development," Krölller-Müller Museum, Otterloo.



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Because as many as twelve years separate the publication of the Van Toorn catalog from the four Crouwel catalogs, it may seem hardly logical to compare them. But given their subject it is still worthwhile. At various occasions Crouwel and Van Toorn have said that their hearts went out in particular to design principles formulated in the 1920s and 1930s. When comparing the covers of these catalogs, it is striking that the earlier publication looks very much like a design from that era, because of its use of color for the cover photograph and the lettering's Iris print. The same influence can be seen in the four covers designed by Crouwel. His design principle here, characterized by a lack of color (silver) and the sanserif, also refers back to this period.

The differences begin to appear in the books' interiors, especially in the placement of the photo material. Van Toorn merged it with the running text, catering his design to the reader. The architecture section looks adventurous through its mirroring layout. In contrast, Crouwel grouped photos on either the left or right page or placed them on subsequent pages, thus stressing their objective dimension. It is quite possible that this was done at the request of Delft University Press, the publisher.

For the interiors, both designers used one typeface only, Helvetica and Univers, respectively. Crouwel turned to this lettering quite often, Van Toorn less so. While the latter chose a different art deco-style font for the cover of his catalog, Crouwel maintained the same typeface for both cover and interior.

For this project Crouwel was assisted by Arlette

Brouwers, one of the many designers who worked at Total Design over the years. She further developed the grid invented by Crouwel. Although Van Toorn was a self-employed designer, he would regularly hire assistants, including Geertjan Dusseljee from 1970 to 1972.

THE LECTURIS PUBLICATIONS

Vormgeving in functie van museale overdracht
(Design at the service of museums' educational role)

DESIGN: Jan van Toorn, 1978

TEXT: Jean Leering and Jan van Toorn

Om de kunst (All about art)

DESIGN: Wim Crouwel, 1978

TEXT: Edy de Wilde, Ad Petersen, and Wim Crouwel

In 1974 the printing and publishing firm Lecturis in Eindhoven started a series of printed "documentaries" that centered on the broad field of graphic design and its realization. The first volumes were edited by Wim Crouwel. They each measured 297 x 210 mm (A4) and had a maximum of 36 matte pages, with a sewn cover. The first volume, inventively entitled *Heeft grafische vormgeving nut?* (Does graphic design have a purpose?), was written by graphic designer Paul Mijksenaar. In 2004 the twenty-seventh and final volume of the series appeared.

Volume 7 came out in 1978: *Vormgeving in functie van*

15. Jean Leering (1934–2005) was director of the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven from 1964 to 1973. During this time he managed to acquire major works for the museum. He sought to make art less elitist and link it more closely to forms of social commitment.

musaele overdracht (Design at the service of museums' educational role), written by museum director Jean Leering¹⁵ and Jan van Toorn. Using the format of a dialogue, they discuss their basic views on such themes as the museum's role as intermediary, its building, its design, and the effect of graphic means on a museum's activities. The authors offer ample illustrations and examples of exhibition design that they either like or dislike. Although the dialogue form is accessible and the two men know what they want to communicate, their conversation is not always straightforward or easy to follow. At the very beginning, for instance, Van Toorn claims: the role of design and graphic means is determined by the *goal* for which the museum employs these means and also aspires to do so. That role, then, cannot be seen separately from the museum's objective to pass on information—of a cultural nature—to an audience. Questions that are central therefore pertain to which information, for whom, with what intentions and, in line with this, designed in which way. A museum can only give answers to these questions if it has a clear image of its social/cultural position. And not just of its position, but rather of its social position. This tone resonates throughout the argument, which concentrates on social-critical views rather than on personal-moral experience. Museum policies should be more audience-oriented and start less from the art on display. This publication by Leering and Van Toorn accurately reflects the spirit of the times, marked as it was by the democratization of higher education, environmental worries, the squatters' movement, and economic setbacks—issues of concern to many academy students.

Van Toorn's design is certainly adventurous and challenging. A review in *NRC Handelsblad* characterized the brochure as a "biased illustrated pamphlet composed by typographer Jan van Toorn and former art lover Jean Leering." Van Toorn made use of a two-column grid, with columns partly overlapping. Leering's words are printed in red, his own in blue. The text is typeset in a rather generously spaced Univers. The black-and-white illustrations look deliberately casual and are spread across the pages loosely, generating a varied layout. The captions are placed in various ways as well: sometimes directly below an image, but in other cases at an angle of 45° below, above, or even *within* the image. The cover consists of sturdy, transparent plastic that evokes a sense of openness—perhaps also to symbolize the contents?

That same year Lecturis released *Om de kunst*. In it, Edy de Wilde,¹⁶ Ad Petersen,¹⁷ and Wim Crouwel, all employed by the Stedelijk Museum, address the views of their colleagues from Eindhoven. Their contributions deal generally with modern art, museums, and the role of designers, and they are in part a direct response to the views of Leering and Van Toorn. From the angle of their own disciplines, the three contributors each write a summarizing essay, advocating in particular the full autonomy of both the artist and his work.

Crouwel's argument consists of three short, lucid sections. His first observation firmly characterizes his view:

All design within the context of a museum of fine art should be geared to doing full justice to that fine art, as a way to serve



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16. Edy de Wilde (1919–2005) was director of the Stedelijk Museum from 1963 to 1984.

17. From 1960 to 1990, Ad Petersen (b. 1931) worked at the Stedelijk Museum in various positions, including that of chief curator.

the visitor and the artist best; this applies to the architecture and the exhibition design, but also to the design of the various printed matter involved. Two data thereby play a decisive role: the museum's separate activities and its comprehensive pattern of activities.

Crouwel avidly addresses various aspects of exhibition techniques and printed materials. In particular he clearly describes the concept of house style, which in his view tends to be deliberately misinterpreted as a "design gloss" on matters of diverse natures. He discusses six features, then concludes by putting his argument into perspective:

Design may nestle somewhere between two extremes. One extreme involves the highly subjective deployment of the elements to be shown, in order to come to a highly personal form of information that is highly recognizable and therefore becomes the message itself; the other extreme involves employing the elements to be shown as objectively as possible, in order to come to unobtrusive and hence maximally service-oriented information, which has a subdued power of expression of its own. This indicates the range within which the designer takes up a position. Often, however, the two extremes are only perceived as such at first sight, for the coolest and most objective approach may lead to great expressiveness with a good chance of itself becoming the message, while the most subjective approach can lead to a highly objective transfer of information.

The brochure's design is fully recognizable as one of Crouwel's designs: objective, lucid, and transparent. Crouwel applied a simple grid consisting of two text columns: one for the main text and one for quotes from



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the Leering/Van Toorn brochure, printed in magenta, in slightly smaller type. The headings above the main text and the other headings are set in the same font, sometimes in bold or italics for emphasis. Crouwel uses Helvetica as the typeface, which he applied in most of his designs for the Stedelijk Museum. He placed the illustrations either in the same grid or bleeding off the page.

CALENDARS

Today calendars are still a commonly used PR tool and promotional gift. A perfect playground for printers and designers, calendars allow them to show the scope of their expertise. Designers like Swip Stolk¹⁸ and Jan Bons¹⁹ made such special calendars that each year people were excited to see their new designs for, respectively, De Boer & Vink²⁰ and Van Ommeren.²¹ This also applied to the calendars that for years Jan van Toorn designed for the Amsterdam printing firm Mart. Spruijt and the calendars that for years Wim Crouwel designed for printing firm Erven van de Geer.

In an interview in 1986, upon leaving his teaching post at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy, Van Toorn explained the significance of these calendars for his career: This is why it has been so important to me that in 1960 I got [to design] the Spruijt calendars. At that time, I had not yet done much work in typography; in fact, it was the very first time, and I immediately won a prize! I was quite amazed; typography

18. Swip Stolk (b. 1944), graphic designer and instructor at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam and the AKI in Enschede (Academy for Arts and Industry).

19. Jan Bons (1918–2012), graphic designer.

20. In the 1960s and 1970s, Stolk produced stunning calendars for the printing firm De Boer & Vink in Zaandijk.

21. For many years Bons designed the annual calendar for the Rotterdam transport company Van Ommeren. His son Jeroen would continue the series.



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22. See Max Bruinsma/Pjotr de Jong, *Het Boek*, Gerrit Rietveld Academy, in collaboration with Steendrukkerij de Jong & Co., Amsterdam/Hilversum, 1987.

23. The calendars from Spruijt started on April 1 instead of January 1. The production of the annual calendar, the first one of which was done by graphic designer Harry Sierman in 1956, always ran late. As Frans Spruijt commented: "So we continued to be out too late. It also drew extra attention to our calendar of course." See Titus Yocarini, *Frans Spruijt, [Z]OO Producties*, Eindhoven, 2007.

24. Ibid.

is an art you can copy, and I simply copied it so well that it earned me a prize.

That calendar allowed me to experiment increasingly and realize all sorts of ideas about content and aesthetic issues. In the 1960s other factors were at play as well, of course. You start seeing your position as designer more clearly because the social processes become clearer. [Think of] Provo, the student movement. As a result, I experimented in that calendar from a critical attitude regarding the visual use of language in the media. Based on this work I was asked to teach at the academy.²²

In the course of the seventeen years during which Van Toorn designed calendars, he was indeed wildly experimental. They appeared in all sorts of sizes and shapes (the one for 1969/70 was even round²³). He also used dozens of different typefaces, turning out a completely different one in each new calendar. At first he paid the most attention to the calendar's lettering, but in the 1970s the images he inserted into the calendar pages grew equally important. The two began to constitute an inextricable whole. The calendars also grew much more personal. Printer Frans Spruijt felt that Van Toorn should be free to make whatever he wanted. Yet in retrospect he concluded that he "increasingly felt troubled by the political road Jan was taking in design." He even claimed to have lost clients as a result.²⁴ After nineteen editions, Van Toorn was succeeded by Paul Mijksenaar.

Wim Crowwel also produced calendars, such as the ones for Stadsdrukkerij Amsterdam (the municipal printer)

and two other Amsterdam-based printers, Den Ouden and Erven E. van de Geer. For the latter he designed calendars for more than twenty years. Each one reflects the assumptions underlying Crowwel's design practice: their design is clear, transparent, and consistent, and each calendar looks like a part of a series. While there may be traces suggestive of the era, what prevails is the designer's great love and attention for letters and typography.

That Jan van Toorn's calendars inspired Crowwel to an extent can be seen in the 1974 Spruijt calendar. In his preface on its first page, he writes:

Your work goes up like a flight of stairs, I rather let my work go down...[S]even is a number that is so easy to take in at a glance, I feel, that I did not find it necessary to accentuate it by [stressing] Wednesday...[T]he Monday outline that you framed in a little box I arranged in exactly the same way as the week's designations; this seemed more logical to me...[Y]ou apply lines as autonomous elements of equal importance as letters and numbers; I partly agree but they have to have a function: lines in typography may demarcate a specific domain, lines can separate, lines can interrupt...I basically use one typeface for everything whereas you use about six...[Y]our typography derives its visual power from conscious inconsequentiality and often expresses, with a kind of emphatic casualness, a fear of aesthetics; in my typography aesthetics play a role that cannot be denied."²⁵



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25. Spruijt calendar 1974-75.

STAMPS

DESIGN: Jan van Toorn, 1971, 1975

DESIGN: Wim Crowwel, 1976



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26. Paul Mijksenaar (b. 1944), graphic designer. From 1992 to 2007 he was professor of Visual Information Design at the Faculty of Industrial Design, Delft University of Technology.



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Wim Crowwel and Jan van Toorn both designed postal stamps as well. In the 1970s Van Toorn did a few assignments for the national postal service, PTT. In 1971 he designed a stamp for the Prince Bernhard Foundation, while in 1975 he created three stamps on topics related to Amsterdam (together with Paul Mijksenaar²⁶): two commemorating the capital's seventh centennial and one on the Portuguese-Israeli community that had been in the Netherlands for three centuries. The original idea had been to design a sheet of one hundred stamps featuring images of Amsterdam residents from the last seven hundred years, with the overall color of the sheet changing from red to yellow. Unfortunately, this idea was not feasible for technical reasons. The stamps Van Toorn ultimately designed are structured as a collage, showing a map, a procession of Amsterdam residents, and an image of the Portuguese Synagogue. Although the design of these stamps was a collaborative effort, they still look like typical Jan van Toorn designs.

The next year, Crowwel designed two series of stamps: one on the occasion of the Amphilex stamp exhibition, and the other to replace the famous number stamps by Jan van Krimpen from 1946. Crowwel used a modified version of his own typeface, Gridnik, which he had originally designed for Olivetti for use in typewriters but

that was never implemented as such. The name refers to a nickname given to Crowwel, Mr. Gridnik. The series of eleven variants printed in two opposite gradients remained in circulation until 2002.

The stamps concisely illustrate the preferences of both designers: while Van Toorn mainly pursues the use of images, Crowwel prefers employing purely typographical means.



OCTOPUS FOUNDATION

Poppetgom, Jan van Toorn, 1970*Dutch details*, Wim Crowwel, 1971

In 1969 art historian Hein van Haaren established the Octopus Foundation with an eye to publishing a series about art. The plan was to realize "at least three" publications each year, in the shape of books, prints, and spatial products (objects, do-it-yourself kits, etc.). The board was composed of Frits Becht,²⁷ Joop Hardy,²⁸ and Fred Parée,²⁹ and there was also an editorial board consisting of Wim Crowwel, Paul Brand,³⁰ and Hein van Haaren. Octopus wanted "to make its creative publications accessible to everyone. This is why the editions are unlimited, which will also allow us to keep prices as low as possible."³¹

Unfortunately the Octopus Foundation issued only six publications, yet all six are very special indeed. One of the most striking is *Poppetgom*, from 1970, designed



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27. Frits Becht (1930–2006), art collector and founder of Intomart, a marketing research firm.

28. Joop Hardy (1918–1983) taught at the AKI (Academy for Arts & Industry) from 1951; he served as its director from 1968 to 1981.

29. Fred Parée, director of printing firm De IJssel in Deventer, which produced and funded the publications. Their distribution frequently met with challenges.



30. Paul Brand
(1921–2009),
publisher.

31. Announcement
brochure from 1969,
Octopus Foundation.

by Jan van Toorn. It is the script of a 1969 stage production by the theater company Scarabee, rendered as a 224-page book.

The play was based on “A Theologian in Death” by Jorge Luis Borges, which is a series of impressions rather than a straightforward short story and therefore quite suitable for imaginative representations on stage. The performance, then, consisted of a series of picturesque “tableaux” in which the actors did not so much perform as became part of a composition, just like the set and stage props. The play was directed by painter Adri Boon, with help from, among others, poet/painter Lucebert for the text, Woody van Amen and Peter Blokhuys for the sets, and Otto Ketting and Bruno Maderna for the music. Scarabee had a movable theater at its disposal with all sorts of facilities, including a complete lighting installation, so that it was possible to perform even in halls without a stage. In this way the theater company traveled Paris and elsewhere.

Van Toorn arranged Adri Boon’s script into a book, presented in a tin can covered by a wrapper depicting a head of lettuce. When looking at the interior, one is immediately struck by the absence of a structure for arranging text and images. Much is left to the reader’s imagination, meaning that looking at the book actually becomes a means of re-experiencing the theatrical production. Yet this task wasn’t made easy for readers, who first had to open the tin can with the accompanying opener. It also contained an inflatable head pillow to keep the book in place, which could also be used to read in a reclined position.



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In the context of the 1971 “Sonsbeek buiten de perken,” a large-scale arts event held in Arnhem, the American artist Ed Ruscha³² presented a project at the Groninger Museum. In the first part of the general catalog that accompanied the project, he explains: “I really had no idea what I should do before I came to this country. When I was on the airplane, the pilot said he didn’t know what the weather was like in Amsterdam but that he would provide us the details as soon as possible. This word ‘details’ immediately stuck with me, and I more or less let it guide me in my project. I instantly thought of ‘Dutch details.’ This put me on track for the entire project.”³³

In an activities brochure of “Sonsbeek buiten de perken” produced by the Octopus Foundation in the context of this arts event, his concept is described as a photo project about the connecting roads between the Groninger Museum and art centers in the nearby towns of Veendam, Ter Apel, and Stadskanaal. The report of the project is documented in a tall, narrow, oblong booklet of 11 x 38 cm, with a cover hinged on the top edge. Each page features a series of six photos, each one zooming in more closely on a detail, in keeping with a system of documentary reporting, whereby the camera chooses to focus on a detail from a specific environment. After the sixth “zoom in” the series ends. It is also quite possible that the series came into being in reverse: from a narrow angle to a wide overview. Gatefolds opening to the right show the same series in reverse order. “The photos were all taken near bridges so that the bridges themselves could be used by the artist as a walkway for

32. Edward Ruscha
(b. 1937), American
Pop artist.

33. Catalog of
“Sonsbeek buiten
de perken,” Part 2,
1971, p. 53.



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34. *Dutch details*,
1971, foreword
(unpaginated).

making photos with a loosely hand-held camera."³⁴

Although the name of the designer was not indicated, the booklet was made according to graphic and technical instructions by Crouwel, as the Foundation's editor. Ruscha's systematic approach undoubtedly appealed to him, and this is reflected in the plain, straightforward layout. The booklet is characteristic of Ruscha's production of artist books since the early 1960s.

IN CONCLUSION

In the catalog *Jan van Toorn, Ontwerpen*, which was published to accompany an exhibition of his work at De Beyerd in Breda,³⁵ Van Toorn says: "For quite a few people that discussion [in Museum Fodor in 1972] was a kind of clash. For at that moment I represented the rebellious attitude as opposed to the new-objective, functionalist approach. I was more concerned with meanings, rather than form primarily. Moreover, typography advocated the objectivity of the means, of which Wim Crouwel was a major proponent at the time. Very straight. While to me that was sheer nonsense. But I believe that Wim sees it slightly differently today, and that he is able to put it into historical perspective a little more."³⁶

In the same publication Crouwel states: "Jan and I had known each other a long time already. We had debated issues more often and noticed that we were quite different in our views of our discipline. In Jan

35. The exhibition
ran from December
14, 1986, to
February 1, 1987.

36. E. Rodrigo et al.,
Jan van Toorn,
Ontwerpen, De
Beyerd, Breda,
1986, p. 18.

van Toorn it is possible to see a clear development from beautiful, very aesthetic work, perhaps designed according to classical views, to what I would like to call a more social attitude, which was dormant already of course...In our debate about our vocation my view at the time was that the designer should take a neutral stance—as an intermediary between that which needed to be told and the viewer...In our field, Jan van Toorn was the exponent of the opposite view. He felt that typography as such had to be narrative; it had to express what preoccupied you...In public we always defended *our views vehemently...Meanwhile an evolution has taken place. My basic attitude has not changed; I still have that view of the typographer and I am still very much a child of functionalism. But with regard to the actual work I have become milder in my judgment. I have fewer objections to work that at the time I fervently opposed...Work with a strong identity always comes with the risk of saying more about the designer than about the assignment. But the other extreme is a kind of neutrality that communicates poorly.*"³⁷

Today the basic assumptions of the two designers do not fundamentally differ from those of 1972. They would hold on to their divergent views, each with his share of admirers and imitators. They regularly testified to their views in various discussions and gatherings. Both were a source of inspiration for an upcoming generation of graphic designers, whom they forced to reflect on the function and responsibilities of their vocation. This process of raising awareness started, it seems, at the Museum Fodor on November 9, 1972. The fundamental

37. E. Rodrigo et al.,
Jan van Toorn,
Ontwerpen, De
Beyerd, Breda,
1986, pp. 24–25.

discussion that followed provided a foundation for two modes of graphic design that have long set the tone of the industry.

It is telling perhaps that after 1972, Crouwel felt the need to hire designers with divergent views at Total Design, to give the studio new incentives and a fresh élan. For a while, less technologically minded and less dogmatic designers, such as Anthon Beeke, Jurriaan Schrofer, and Paul Mijksenaar, defined the identity of this design studio. Crouwel cautiously retraced his steps and became a professor at what is now the Delft University of Technology, concluding his active career as director of the Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam. After his retirement he took up the practice of design again, no less ambitiously than in the 1960s and 1970s, but as a one-man business and a milder man.

Jan van Toorn continued to teach at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy and later at the Rijksacademie (Royal Academy), both in Amsterdam, thus siding with the individual, artistic designer. Later, he became the director of the Jan van Eyck Academy in Maastricht, a post-academic institute. After his retirement he continued to teach abroad, such as at the Rhode Island School of Design in the United States. He fashioned himself in particular as a theorist of visual culture. But he also continued to be active as designer and set up a design practice again, though he seemed less ambitious in doing so than Wim Crouwel.

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CREDITS

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