



jan van toorn

wim crouwel

the debate

*het grafisch ontwerp is eigenlijk
niet iets om aan een museumwand te bekijken
het krijgt daarmee al gauw teveel waarde op zichzelf
- ontwerpen zijn toch al vaak dominant t.o.v. de inhoud,
of hebben vorm als doel op zichzelf -
bedenk dat drukwerk gemaakt wordt om
in een situatie te functioneren.*

de waarde wordt daar dan ook in de eerste plaats bepaald

09.11.1972 the famous debate between wim crouwel and jan van toorn was taking place in museum fodor, a part of the stedelijk museum in amsterdam. they discussed their opposite views on typography and graphic design. wim thought the designer shouldn't interfere into the information to be shown, but only care about how it looks 'the best'. a rational, scientific method of working was therefore the best. instead, jan thought the designer should care about the shown information and make his public think about this. for him the use of images improved the communication with the public and gave them space to form their own opinion about the information. they both worked for musea (wim crouwel for the van abbe-museum and the stedelijk museum, jan van toorn also for the van abbe-museum) and for different companies and printing offices. their calenders were really famous and are a good example for the difference of the two styles (see above).

the cause of this debate was a discussion about making a catalogue. jan van toorn and his students were having an exhibition about vietnam-war-posters in the stedelijk museum. the museum where wim crouwel was the designer. when they were making the catalogue for this exhibition, jan and wim start to discuss about how to design it. they decided to continue their discussion in public and that ended up as the famous debate.

the catalogue became a big foldable white sheet with printed photos of faces and some lines of jan van toorn (see on upper side of the page).

crouwel versus van toorn. objectivity versus subjectivity.

the discussion never stopped and caused a clear line between the two views. as designer you were either working in the crouwel-style or in the vantoorn-style. nowadays this difference is not so big anymore. 02.11.2008 they once again had a discussion in front of a small audience.

it wasn't so intense anymore as in '72 and especially wim crouwel is less stubborn now. he can more or less understand van toorn's view on designing, but still they will never totally agree with each other. recently there is published a book about the debate that contains the total discussion. also a lot of other books are published about jan van toorn and wim crouwel. if you want to read more about wim crouwel, i consider you should read wim crouwel - mode en module (available at the library of the rijksacademie). there are more books about him of course. a few examples of books about jan van toorn; critical practise and design's delight: method and means of a dialogic approach. you can also find a lot of information about them in the van abbe-museum, where they both worked for.

