

**>Could you please introduce yourself? Where are you from? What are
>your backgrounds?**

We're Experimental Jetset, a small graphic design studio based in Amsterdam, consisting of three persons: Marieke Stolk, Danny van den Dungen and Erwin Brinkers. We focus mostly on printed matter and installation work.

Danny and Erwin were both born in Rotterdam; Marieke was born in Amsterdam. We started working together while studying at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy (Amsterdam). Marieke and Danny graduated in 1997; Erwin, who was in a different class, graduated in 1998. Since 2000, we teach at the Rietveld Academy.

>How do you work on a project? Alone, collective?

Always collective, never alone.

>Why did you choose the Helvetica typeface as your primary tool?

We started using Helvetica around 1995/1996, while we were still studying at the Rietveld Academy. The first time we used it on a large scale was in 1997, when we were asked to redesign the Dutch lifestyle magazine 'Blvd', also known as 'Boulevard'. (We were still students at the Rietveld around that time; we managed to do the whole redesign as our graduation project).

Blvd used to have this really layered, baroque style. We stripped it down completely, using only Helvetica, and trying to separate text and image as strictly as possible.

The critics hated it. We were still students, not even graduated, and already the large newspapers completely attacked the redesign, saying that Blvd now looked like a medicine packaging. (A few years later, all these newspapers had glossy weekly style supplements that looked exactly like our redesign of Blvd).

At first, the reason why we used Helvetica for the redesign of Blvd was purely practical. Because Helvetica consists of such a large family (different weights, and different styles: extended, compressed, etc.), it enabled us to use all these different sorts of Helvetica for all the different sections of the magazine, while the magazine still looked consistent. (Remember, this was in 1997. Nowadays, we usually only use two weights for each project).

The moment we first used Helvetica, it felt like coming home. In the early Nineties, a lot of students, including us, were really interested in the more 'deconstructed' look of magazines like Raygun and Emigre, and designers such as David Carson, Frank Kozik, etc. As much as we found that whole movement interesting, we still also felt slightly disconnected from it; it was a way of designing that was heavily linked with the Californian surf scene, skate magazines, grunge, etc. All things that hugely fascinated us, but still, it felt too much like a 'borrowed' heritage to us.

When, in the mid-Nineties, we first started to use Helvetica, we suddenly felt connected to our own roots, the environment we grew up in: Dutch society in the Seventies, our own education, the institutions of our youth, social democracy in general. It was as if we were suddenly reunited with our own heritage. Fact is, we didn't grow up near the beach, or near Las Vegas neon signs; we grew up in cities such as Rotterdam and Amsterdam, cultural environments designed by people such as Wim Crowel, heavily relying on Dutch social democratic thinking. To us, using Helvetica was a way to be true to that heritage, but also to come to terms with it, and to investigate it actively.

Now, after using Helvetica intensively for over ten years, we still find it an intriguing typeface. What we find interesting about Helvetica is its paradoxical nature: on the one hand, it is a neutral typeface, or better said, it is perceived as such. On the other hand,

it carries this very heavy ideological baggage. There is this really interesting tension between its functionality, and the meaning that it gained over the years. It is a typeface that is empty and loaded at the same time.

**>You've just won the competition for the new identity of the RMN
>(National Union of French Museums). How did you manage to win this
>competition? How is your relationship with French cultural
>institutes?**

Well, first of all, we like to state that we usually don't do competitions, as we find the concept of design competitions really problematic. This was our first competition, and it will probably be our last. We decided to participate in this competition for very specific reasons... It's kind of a long story; people who are interested in this, should read issue two of graphic design magazine 'Marie Louise' (published by F7, in 2006). In that issue, there's an interview in which we precisely explain our views on competitions. In that same interview, we also give our views on working for French cultural institutions versus working for Dutch cultural institutions. So people interested in these matters should definitely check out this particular issue of Marie Louise.

Maybe it's more interesting to show, and explain, the logo that we did for RMN. We are actually really happy with the solution we came up with. The question was quite simple: RMN asked us to redesign their logo (and part of their graphic identity), while keeping the old logo intact. In other words, we were asked to design a new 'graphic environment' for the old logo.

The solution came to us immediately. We discovered that the old logo (a circle with the letter M in it) already contained the two other letters (R and N). So we cut the old logo in half, liberating the R and N, and placed them alongside the M, thus completing the RMN acronym.

The old logo looked quite static, as the dynamism of the slanted M was completely neutralized by the circle. By adding the diagonal slashes, the logo becomes dynamic again: it suddenly gets a rhythm, a movement, a specific form.

When designing this logo, we were thinking all the time about the role of slashing and cutting in art: Modernist collages, the cut buildings of Gordon Matta-Clark, Lucio Fontana's slashed paintings. We constantly had to remind ourselves that cutting something in half doesn't have to be a destructive statement; it can also be a very constructive gesture.

Shown below the two RMN logos. On the left, the old logo, designed in 1969 by Adrian Frutiger. On the right, the new logo, designed by us, in 2006.



**>Can you explain your relationship with Wim Crowel on the last
>projects you did with him?**

Crowel is such a friendly man. He is already in his seventies, but he is one of the most open-minded persons we know, always interested in other people's ideas, in young designers, in new developments.

Over the last couple of years, we crossed paths three times: A few years ago, we had a long talk with him, a conversation organized and published by Graphic, an English design magazine (not to be confused with Grafik, another English magazine). This conversation took place in January 2003, and was published a few months later in the first-ever issue of Graphic.

Last year, we were photographed with Crowel for the magazine Wallpaper. Wallpaper were about to publish a review of 'Drip-dry Shirts', a book by written Lucienne Roberts, and because both we and Crowel appear in that book, the editors of Wallpaper wanted to have a group photo of us all together, to illustrate the article. As a matter of fact, the photo was taken by two of our favorite photographers, Anuschka Blommers and Niels Schumm. We can't seem to remember the exact issue of Wallpaper in which the photograph was published. All we know is that a few months later, the photo was also published by Dutch art magazine Metropolis M.

And a couple of months ago we were asked by French gallery Anatome to design the invitation (and catalogue) for 'Wim Crowel: Architectures Typographiques 1956-1976', an exhibition that is taking place in Paris right now.

For that last project we photographed Crowel in our studio. We built a typographic environment, loosely referring to a classic calendar that Crowel designed in 1963/1964, and photographed Crowel standing in the middle of it. (The actual photo was taken by photographer Johannes Schwartz).

With the photograph, we tried to refer to the title of the exhibition, 'Architectures Typographiques'. We found the gesture of creating a spatial typographic installation, literally a 'typographic architecture', a very interesting way to translate the title of the exhibition.

There's also the more universal theme of modernism, the idea of 'man in a manmade environment'. This is a concept that has always interested us, and is a running theme through all our work: the idea of living in a world that is built by humans, can be interpreted by humans, and thus can also be changed by humans. Showing Crowel standing in the middle of a (more or less) self-designed environment

(an environment loosely based on one of his own designs) sort of fits within this theme.

Other than purely practical matters (technical specifications, the format of the invitation, the given title, the actual text, and a couple of sponsor logos that we had to include) there wasn't really a brief given by the gallery.

We more or less formulated the brief ourselves: How to design an invitation on the subject of Crouwel, without falling in the trap of designing an invitation 'in-the-style-of' Crouwel? That's why we introduced the photographic element; after all, photography is not something you would associate with Crouwel's work.

As for the photography itself, we collaborated closely with Johannes Schwartz, head of the photographic department of the Rietveld Academy, and a really good friend of us. We have collaborated with him quite often, for example on the publications High Noon (2003), High Nature (2004), High Light / High Bold (2005) and High Rise (2005).

>How do you get clients?

Always through earlier projects, and sometimes in very indirect ways. We never actively search for clients; they usually track us down, after having seen our past work.

>What are your favourite projects?

Right now, we would answer: The 'Elysian Fields' catalogue we designed in 2000 for Centre Pompidou, the 'We Are The World' catalogue we designed in 2003 for the Venice Biennale, and the graphic identity we designed in 2004 for Stedelijk Museum CS (SMCS). We're also quite proud of 'Kelly 1:1', an installation that we created in 2002 for Casco Projects.

But we're sure that if you would ask us tomorrow, we would come up with a different set of favourite projects. In other words, it changes.

>What do you think of the graphic design community?

The design community as a whole is not really something we think about a lot. We feel much more motivated by the tiny community of people around us. There's a small group of befriended designers who we feel really connected with. There's a small group of clients, who believe in us, and continue to give us assignments. Then there's a handful of critics and curators who seem to like our work. And then there's the Gerrit Rietveld Academy, where we studied, and now teach. And that's it, basically. That's all the community we need.

We try not to pay too much attention to what the magazines and weblogs write. There seems to be a lot of sarcasm and bitterness around: Designers attacking other designers, without any sense of solidarity. Critics who do absolutely nothing to challenge the status quo, just writing cynical pieces, for readers that are already cynical. We cannot really stand this atmosphere; we try to keep as far from it as possible.

Dutch design magazines and institutions are especially depressing. Their agenda seems to be the 'commodification' of Dutch Design, to put Dutch Design 'in the market', as a 'brand'. We disconnected ourselves from that scene completely.

In the end, the only thing that matters to us is the designed object. Critics come and go, trends fade in and fade out, weblogs appear and disappear; the only thing that remains is the designed object, and its aesthetic/conceptual integrity.

>Any upcoming projects?

We have been asked to work on the graphic identity of a new French cultural institution that will open in 2008. It's still not 100% certain, there are some bureaucratic details that still have to be solved, but if everything goes according to plan, we'll start working on it soon. It's in a very confidential phase, so we cannot tell you more about it right now.

>Last words?

We don't really have anything to add, but maybe it's nice to end this interview with a poem by the poet Emmett Williams (1925-2007). It's a beautiful poem that says a lot about our design process. We thought these would be nice last words. (Image taken from the website of the University of California, Santa Barbara).

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the typewriter

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