

VISUAL STRATEGIES

DUTCH NEWSPAPER DESIGN BETWEEN TEXT AND IMAGE

1900-2000

Marcel Broersma

The relationship between text and image has given rise to much debate in recent decades.¹ Academics even refer to ‘the pictorial turn’. Once it was accepted that language structures reality, they realized that this was also true of imagery. ‘It is the realization that *spectatorship* (the look, the gaze, the glance, the practices of observation, surveillance, and visual pleasure) may be as deep a problem as various forms of *reading* (decipherment, decoding, interpretation, etc.) and that visual experience or “visual literacy” might not be fully explicable in the model of textuality’, wrote W.J.T. Mitchell in his *Picture Theory*. Whereas until a few decades ago pictures served mainly to illustrate written or spoken texts, so the argument runs, they have now developed their own codes and conventions.²

Some commentators, such as the American media historian Mitchell Stephens, believe that pictures will supplant text, creating a new, dominant discourse, a fast-moving video language. With its combination of sound, spoken text and fast-moving images, video is better able to evoke direct, instantaneous experience than the printed word. This, so it is said, makes it easier for us to fathom the ever more complex reality. Others, such as the sociologist Neil Postman, while agreeing that we are moving towards a visual culture, envisage the opposite result, with the ‘fall of the word’ causing cultural and intellectual degeneration.³ Whereas imagery mainly makes a suggestive appeal to feelings and association, words appeal to reason and analysis.

Making a sharp antithesis between text and image, written and visual culture, is not a very productive exercise, however: there is no linear trend

¹ Translation of this article has been generously funded by the Translation Fund for Scientific Articles of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences. It first appeared as Broersma, ‘Vormgeving tussen woord en beeld’.

² Mitchell, *Picture theory*, p. 16; Mirzoeff, *An introduction to visual culture*, pp. 1-33.

³ Stephens, *The rise of the image*; Van Dijck, ‘Geen beelden zonder woorden’.

by which one is inevitably supplanting the other. The large number of photographs in the American press in the wake of the death of John F. Kennedy in 1963, for instance, did not result in fewer quotations from eye-witnesses or avoidance of a pictorial style of writing – on the contrary. It is rather a case of interaction: pictures make text easier to understand more quickly and effectively. The reverse is also true: photographs are made comprehensible by the accompanying text, just as subtitles and commentary enable us to interpret television pictures. New media are appropriating elements of older media, and vice versa.⁴

The strength of the newspaper as a medium lies mainly in the analytical power of the word. This is why journalists attached little importance to visual elements until well into the twentieth century. They saw them as frills or mere illustrations, of secondary importance. They even regarded them as threatening for the existence of journalism and their papers. However, eventually newspapers did not manage to keep the rising tide of words and pages comprehensible to readers without visual cues. They had to create a new infrastructure, a logical and appealing design of the information landscape, with clear signposts enabling readers to find their way around quickly and efficiently. Paradoxically, to remain attractive and accessible as a textual medium newspapers had to develop *visual* strategies.⁵

The blueprint for this visual infrastructure is the organization – the layout – of the newspaper and the individual pages. To guide readers through the flood of information quickly, design uses two visual elements, typographical devices (e.g. headlines, lines and vignettes) and photography. These are designed to make the text easier to understand quickly, but both of them also have their own visual language, which developed during the course of the twentieth century.

The relationship between words and pictures – between reading and seeing, or picture-gazing – was a subject of debate among Dutch journalists throughout the century, and this was based on a constant fear of sensationalism and superficiality. Journalists were not sure to what extent they should hold the reader's hand. The vast majority of the Dutch newspapers had political or cultural objectives; they aimed first and foremost to train and educate their readers, expecting the latter in turn to be willing to make an effort. Imagery was associated with new media such as illustrated magazines, cinema and television. The Dutch press regarded them with suspicion, as carri-

⁴ Mirzoeff, *An introduction*, p. 6; Barnhurst and Nerone, *The form of news*, pp. 10-11, 150-151; Van Dijk 'Geen beelden zonder woorden'; Verschraegen, 'Het onbewuste medium.

⁵ Barnhurst, *Seeing the Newspaper*; Barnhurst and Nerone, *The form of news*.

ers of ephemeral entertainment. The trade unions did not even consider these media to practise any such thing as journalism.⁶

The rise of pictures in the press was a long drawn-out and complex process, as this article will show, with three factors playing a major role: the development of printing and typesetting technology, competition, and socio-cultural factors. No aspect of a newspaper is so dependent on the state of technology as its layout. Technical innovations made visual elements such as photographs and headlines spanning more than one column possible. Competition, both between newspapers and with other media, was the main spur to innovation. As graphic designer Paul Mijksenaar posited in 1992, 'Nowhere did photographs and graphics come on the scene so belatedly as in the daily press, and then only hesitantly and in dribs and drabs, because people were scared of lagging behind the few successful daredevils among their colleagues who gave it a try'.⁷

The rate at which pictorial matter in the press increased was determined mainly by socio-cultural factors, however. On the one hand, ideas about the role of newspaper journalism played an important part; on the other, the needs of readers and the way they assimilated news changed. Newspapers were forced to anticipate this with visual strategies. That was not just a question of form. Because they changed their visual infrastructure, the representation of reality that newspapers presented to readers also changed.

1900-1945: vertical layout

R. van der Meulen considered that the external appearance (or 'clothes') of a newspaper was almost as important to its success as its content. In his handbook *De Courant*, published in 1885, he stated that the format, the size of the print and the organization of a paper were what gave it its individuality. The layout had to conform with the taste of the readership. For a popular newspaper, of course, it was important not to have articles that were too long, and to indicate a new item or department with a heading, a word in bold or spaced type. For an educated reader, on the other hand, this was superfluous and above all annoying. 'He can find a pithy passage without being pointed to it by the editor and can find something that corresponds to his particular taste and his particular needs without eye-catching printed legends (signpost words or phrases).'⁸

⁶ Wijffjes, *Journalistiek in Nederland*, p. 195.

⁷ Broersma, *Beschaafde vooruitgang*, pp. 281-283; Mijksenaar, 'De vormgeving is er klaar voor'.

⁸ Van der Meulen, *De courant*, pp. 2-3, 13.

In the early part of the twentieth century the vast majority of the Dutch dailies targeted the latter kind of reader, expecting him to read the paper from start to finish, with a mature interest in all the news and opinions offered to him. They did not consider it necessary to hold the reader's hand and make it clear to him what was important and what was not so important by the way the news was presented. Putting news in the shop window, as it were, by drawing attention to it with typographical devices, was regarded as uncultured. 'They did nothing in the way of "layout"', recalled reporter Piet Bakker of the 1920s. 'The newspaper was stuffed like a sausage, measured by composing stick and otherwise left to fend for itself.'⁹

In the composing room lead letters were composed into lines and then columns, at first by hand, then mechanically. They were locked into place inside an iron holder the size of a page (the chase) on a laying-out table (the composing stone). Layout was above all a practical affair. A 'technical' editor would fit as much type as possible into the frame in consultation with the compositors. The pages only had a general structure: there was a more or less fixed succession of sections, but what was put in them depended on the number of pages available – which could vary from one day to the next – and the copy available. The foreman of the composing room put the written copy in order, section by section, and then called out all the articles. The compositor filled in each column in sequence with the items. Later a layout editor would do the daily jigsaw puzzle using sketchy plans, a few rules of thumb (e.g. bigger items at the top) and his improvisational skills.¹⁰

This job was made easier by the fact that the dailies had a vertical layout, in other words the successive columns were filled with text from top to bottom. Items were separated by a short line, the first word in bold or spaced type, or a dash before the first sentence. It was almost impossible to see quickly where a new item began, let alone what it was about. Also, to finish reading the last article on a page you often needed to turn the page, as in a book. A horizontal, or modular, layout – which was much more difficult for the layout editor, as the text had to be precisely the right length – was only used for a few light sections such as the serial or an informal piece: these were printed at the bottom, separated from the rest of the text by a horizontal line that ran the full width of the page.

Dutch newspapers, like those in most European countries, were organized in departments, combining a geographical and thematic classification of reality. Most Dutch papers thus had Foreign, Home and Local sections, followed by Art, Finance and Economic News, Church and School, Shipping and Sports. Most of them also had a few departments based on a par-

⁹ Bakker, *Zo was het* (Amsterdam, 1961), p. 28.

¹⁰ Peereboom, *Het dagblad*, pp. 165-166; *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 5-1-1928.

ticular genre: telegrams, the leader, the serial, or reports and guides. Small headings showed what section the reader was looking at, enabling him to find his way around the grey mush of type to some extent. 'We are not here to give people white space to read', as the layout editor of the *Algemeen Handelsblad* used to say.¹¹

This organization was based on an iron logic. The creed was 'all items are assigned to particular sections and we do not depart from this system'. The regional *Leeuwarder Courant*, for example, was very wary of a fragmented departmentalisation, publishing the sports news in the Home section until well into the 1930s.¹² The news value of an item did not affect its positioning in the newspaper. So the *Algemeen Handelsblad* in 1913 was happy to open its front page with a five-column report of the General Deliberations in the Upper House of Parliament. That filled up the Home section. The remaining column was devoted to Local News and Latest News.¹³ This practice was encouraged by the fact that, thanks to the subscription system, the Dutch dailies were virtually independent of single-copy sales. They did not need to sell their wares again every day with enticing reports on the front page.

In contrast to the section system was the Anglo-Saxon system, sometimes referred to as the 'American system', in which the organization of the paper was based on the news value of the items, with most prominence being given to the main news. This was underlined – sometimes literally – by the use of headlines, enabling readers to see at a glance what the main news was. This was regarded as a serious danger to the Dutch system, as it would most probably deter readers from systematically investigating all the other news. It would also encourage editors 'in the absence of important matters to elevate less important ones to weighty ones', and this would soon result in sensationalism, a quality with which the Dutch press did not want to be associated.¹⁴

As I argued somewhere else, the First World War was a catalyst in the development of journalistic culture towards the Anglo-American approach, and this was also expressed in the organization and design of the dailies.¹⁵ *De Telegraaf* led the way here, being one of the few newspapers in the Netherlands to use an emotionally involved style. It took the needs of its readership as its first criterion. It did not focus primarily, as most other papers did, on readers' sense of reason but targeted their emotions. Its motto

¹¹ *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 5-1-1928.

¹² Broersma, *Beschaafde vooruitgang*, p. 279.

¹³ *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 17-2-1913 (evening edition).

¹⁴ Van der Hout, *Over de krant*, pp. 114-115.

¹⁵ Broersma, 'Botsende stijlen'.

was ‘news, news and more news’ – preferably presented in such a way that readers could identify with it. Even before the war it used large headlines by Dutch standards, and it consistently put the main news on the front page.¹⁶

This attitude attracted a lot of criticism of *De Telegraaf*, from both journalists and the bourgeois elite. The majority of Dutch papers used a controlled, detached style. They wanted to guide their readers in a sensible manner, which they did by providing news and reports of all sorts of meetings and events, and above all commentary and background information. Suitable genres were reflective ones such as leaders, background articles and reports. Most Dutch dailies assumed the character of a *journal d’opinion*. The newspaper was above all a ‘device for educating the public spiritually, intellectually and socially’, as the Nederlandsche Journalisten-Kring (Netherlands Association of Journalists) put it in a motion in 1923.¹⁷

The hunger for news during the First World War and the great success of *De Telegraaf*, however, forced the press to copy elements of the emotionally involved style, albeit ‘hesitantly and usually not entirely’.¹⁸ The *Algemeen Handelsblad* and *Leeuwarder Courant*, for instance, cautiously started using headlines, sometimes spanning two columns, indicating the most important developments: ‘English steam ship sunk. – A speech by Maximilian Harden. – A British Official Warning’. Even the socialist newspaper *Het Volk* started putting important news on the front page, its signboard, formerly set aside for party political discussion.¹⁹

This trend continued between the wars. Competition grew, not only between newspapers but also from illustrated magazines and the radio. As a result the dailies felt obliged to offer their readers more for their money. They rapidly increased in size and introduced extras such as Sunday papers and children’s newspapers. The number of editorial pages in the *Leeuwarder Courant*, for example, almost doubled from 1903 to 1933, as fig. 1 shows. The dailies offered more in terms of quality too: they turned into department stores where you could buy literally everything. They developed more and more areas of interest and started providing diversion as well as news and background information. ‘Is it not a typical complaint of many a reader that there is “far too much” in my paper?’, wrote Doe Hans, the President of the Nederlandsche Journalisten-Kring, in 1932.²⁰

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 45-46; Plemp van Duiveland, *Journalistiek in Nederland*, p. 15; Kooy, *Het boek van de pers*, pp. 84-85.

¹⁷ Broersma, ‘Botsende stijlen’, pp. 42-52; Wijffjes, *Journalistiek in Nederland*, p. 186.

¹⁸ Kooy, *Het boek van de pers*, p. 85.

¹⁹ Broersma, ‘Botsende stijlen’, pp. 56-64.

²⁰ Hans, *Journalistiek*, p. 69.

With all this excess came the notion that daily life seemed to be getting constantly faster. According to a well-known journalist, P.H. Ritter Jr, there was a 'growing demand for clarity from a public who are living increasingly hurried lives and to maintain those hurried lives increasingly need to synthesize their impressions and knowledge instantaneously'.²¹ Dutch newspapers realized that they had to hold their readers' hands and guide them through the columns. They put a table of contents on the front page to make it clear to readers at a glance what they could expect in the way of important news in the various four-page sections of their favourite newspaper.

They tentatively tried to achieve more clarity in the typography. Department headings were more often printed in banners to make them stand out, and it was clearer where a new item began, with short lines, circles and other separators being used more and more often. This substantially increased the amount of white space on a page, creating a more airy layout. In addition, the papers made increasing use of the headlines they had hitherto scorned. Often every article had a heading.

The vertical layout still dominated, but with frequent exceptions. An article that the editors considered merited particular attention was laid out horizontally – at the start of a page or as an inset – and separated from the remaining (vertically laid out) text with lines. This also enabled a headline to span a number of columns, as was increasingly the case. In the case of important events like the burning of the Reichstag in 1933 papers such as *De Telegraaf* and the communist *Volksdagblad* even printed fat letters across the full width of the front page.²²

In the 1930s the layout of the Dutch dailies shifted gradually and cautiously in the direction of the Anglo-Saxon system. Books by Dutch journalists tentatively championed this. While it was true that, taken to excess, the Anglo-Saxon layout was cheap and sensational, so they judged, it did meet the needs of the busy modern age as it was extremely efficient: readers could see at a glance what was important. 'The fact that many American editors display little taste and refinement in choosing the items they consider worthy of special attention cannot be laid at the door of the system they use', wrote John Kooy, for example, in his *Book of the Press*.²³

The front page increasingly became the newspaper's signboard. In many papers it still had a fixed layout, with the same items every day. The *Leeuwarder Courant* from 1879 to 1940, for instance, always started with an overview of foreign news, but if something important happened this

²¹ Ritter Jr., *Journalistieke geheimen*, p. 40.

²² Broersma, *Beschaafde vooruitgang*, p. 281.

²³ Kooy, *Het boek van de pers*, p. 85.

would now be printed on the front page, under an eye-catching headline. The news would increasingly be summarized above an article, where formerly it had only been hinted at. 'The Seven Provinces surrender', printed the *Leidsch Dagblad* over three of its five columns on 10 February 1933. '18 mutineers killed and 25 injured by a bomb', reported a subheading. The item on the mutiny on a Dutch warship was additionally larded with no less than twelve running heads in bold type. This kind of heading became common practice.²⁴

The *Leidsch Dagblad* printed two photographs and a map to accompany its article on the Seven Provinces, thus reflecting a major trend in the design of the Dutch dailies; they included more and more illustrations during the inter-war years. Since the development of the halftone process in the 1880s it had already been technically possible to print photographs on newsprint, but the first news photograph did not appear in a Dutch paper until 1890. The *Amsterdamsche Courant* showed its readers the city theatre in flames. Some of the limitations of photography were demonstrated by the fact that the photograph did not appear until four days after the fire. Not only did it take a lot of time and effort to print a good photograph in a newspaper, above all it was expensive, and most dailies considered that the investment was out of proportion to the pulling power that photography would exert on their sales.²⁵

The first decade of the twentieth century saw the odd photograph being printed. The *Algemeen Handelsblad* printed its first news photograph, of a railway accident near Purmerend, in 1905. The *Haagsche Courant* jumped on the bandwagon in 1909 with a ceremonial portrait of the Royal Family, followed a few months later by a news photograph of a ship split apart on the River Maas. This picture had been taken several days earlier, and it had taken all that time to prepare it for reproduction on the rotary presses. In those early years photographs were often enclosed on separate sheets of thicker glossy paper. The reverse of a page in a daily containing a photograph was sometimes left blank, as the print quality suffered badly from double-sided printing.²⁶

The introduction of photographs in the columns of the dailies gave rise to fierce debate. Some people regarded photography as a suitable way of providing an objective representation of reality. Photographs, considered

²⁴ *Leidsch Dagblad*, 10-2-1933. Published in Van de Wijngaard *et al.*, *120 Jaar wereldgeschiedenis*, p. 12.

²⁵ De Zoete, 'De doorbraak van de illustratiedruk'; Kester, 'Onder vuur', pp. 243-244; Broos and De Bruyn, 'De foto in dagblad en tijdschrift'; Wisman, *Argusogen*, p. 15.

²⁶ Jan van der Plasse, *Kroniek van de Nederlandse dagbladpers*, pp. 39, 41; Broersma, *Beschaafde vooruitgang*, p. 281.

the Leiden Reader in Press Studies A.J. Lievegoed, enabled 'an objectivity to be achieved that, practically speaking, can be achieved hardly if at all in descriptive journalism'. On top of this, unlike words they could convey information in a few seconds. This was increasingly important now that modern life, as many people perceived it at least, was getting faster and faster.

Most journalists, however, were still very resistant to photography. Of course there was a fear that photographs could be manipulated – a justified fear, as it often turned out – but this was not the main reason for the negative reception of photography: a more serious danger, it was thought, was that pictures would appeal to readers' emotions, resulting in superficiality and sensationalism. 'Imagine the subscriber. Just read the Contents, just look at the pictures, is there anything sensational? No? rrrrr... Goodbye paper!', wrote leading journalist Doe Hans in 1932. 'We contemplate the "replacement" of words with pictures, of newspaper reading with picture-gazing, with great regret.'²⁷ Photography appealed to the masses' thirst for sensation – which the majority of Dutch journalists wanted to avoid. 'The surest way of ruining a newspaper is to provide it with illustrations', wrote the journal of the Nederlandschen Journalisten Kring in 1912. Journalism should uplift readers through the analytical power of the word, and editors were expected to acknowledge this responsibility and take it.²⁸

In spite of the aversion and harsh words about 'cultural degeneration', however, photography gained ground rapidly in the Dutch dailies between the wars, encouraged by the rise of illustrated magazines that concentrated entirely on reproducing photographs, with text as an ancillary. These were extremely popular as reading for the whole family. Photography, which brought all sorts of strange places and events into the living room, attracted readers, as the dailies noticed. *De Telegraaf* introduced its first photo page, a whole page of photographs with brief captions, on 12 July 1921. By 'isolating' photography from the rest of the paper the publishers were able to devote more attention to the technical production of this particular page. Even then, though, with the high speed of the rotary presses it was difficult to make sharp prints from the copper plates, and the quality of the prints in many dailies left a lot to be desired until well into the 1930s.²⁹

Other newspapers soon followed in *De Telegraaf's* footsteps, but not always with conviction. They feared that 'their dignity and sobriety' would be affected. The *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* was particularly hesitant. 'Apprehensive of losing its reputation for respectability, this paper made so many apologies when it timidly started printing pictures that people were

²⁷ Hans, *Journalistiek*, pp. 80, 82; Ritter Jr., *Journalistieke geheimen*, p. 15.

²⁸ Quoted in Wijfjes, *Journalistiek in Nederland*, p. 42.

²⁹ Peereboom, *Het dagblad*, pp. 169-170; Kooy, *Het boek van de pers*, p. 93.

amazed', wrote journalist Robert Peereboom. The *NRC* solved the dilemma by printing photographs in a separate supplement. Readers who were offended by the pictorial matter could thus simply set it aside.³⁰ Competition was an important argument for investing in a photo page, which was usually bought off the shelf from a press agency. The *Leeuwarder Courant* came round in autumn 1924, when its principal competitor, the *Leeuwarder Nieuwsblad*, introduced one. A paper could increase its pulling power by having its own photo-reportages.³¹

On the photo page, pictures had an independent function. Brief captions indicated what they showed, but the photographs were left to tell the story. Sometimes this was newsworthy, but often it was not. By now a 'recipe' had been invented, wrote W.N. van der Hout in 1928: 'a few portraits of anniversary celebrants, of people who are being talked about, a snap of a landscape, a few faces abroad, a few celebrities, a bit of everything'. Van der Hout referred to this as a 'diversion' and a 'pick-me-up' that, relatively speaking, took up too much space and cost too much money.³² At the end of the 1920s, however, newspapers had gained more experience of printing photographs quickly and some technical problems had been solved, and pictures took on an increasingly illustrative function. In the 1930s editors increasingly printed photographs with articles: in 1933, for example, 6.3% of the items in the *Leeuwarder Courant* were illustrated (see fig. 2).³³

Although many journalists regarded photographs as culturally degenerate and the photo page as a triviality, readers liked them. They were interested in gazing on the great and the good and lapped up the pictures of accidents and murder scenes that the papers printed. Pictures could say more in a shorter time than pictorial descriptions, and they also fitted in with the tendency to make newspapers easier to read. Important news was now printed on the front page, often in a horizontal layout, with a headline, sub-headings and running heads and photographic illustrations. A table of contents and clear typographical separations between the items equally increased the clarity of the layout. This became more and more important in the competition with other newspapers for the public's decreasing time and attention. By the eve of the Second World War the Dutch dailies had developed a clear visual infrastructure.

³⁰ Peereboom, *Het dagblad*, pp. 171-172.

³¹ Broersma, *Beschaafde vooruitgang*, pp. 281-282.

³² Van der Hout, *Over de krant*, p. 120.

³³ Wisman, *Argusogen*, pp. 50-52; Broos en De Bruyn, 'De foto in dagblad en tijdschrift', p. 90.

1945-1985: the Anglo-American model

After 1945 Dutch journalism increasingly adopted the Anglo-American conventions, which meant that the emphasis shifted to news value. Journalists were no longer expected merely to record happenings but to extract the news from an event. 'Drop the traditional style of reporting. Pick out the main decision of the meeting and use it as an introduction', wrote the *Leeuwarder Courant* in 1947, for example, in a manual for its correspondents. It did not want long-winded reports that noted the course of a meeting or an event literally but a 'short, matter-of-fact, appetizing report, stripped of most of the official trimmings'. Readers were no longer left to draw their own conclusions; the journalist now told them what the most important information was.³⁴

This focus on news value was dictated partly by the paper shortage: with limited space and the great post-war hunger for news it was essential to be selective and write concisely. The news lead and the inverted pyramid became the norm. News items had to be able to be 'rolled up', so that, when editing or laying out an item, text could be scrapped from the bottom up without obscuring the gist. Also, the crux of an item had to be presented to readers clearly with headlines and a lead. The focus on the relevance of news significantly raised the status of layout editors, who stood by the stone and ultimately decided which items would be printed and which would be held over till the next day. If those items did not make it into the columns then, they would be thrown into the melting pot to be melted down as type for fresh copy.

The second factor was that a younger generation of journalists came to power after 1945. Less hidebound by pre-war conventions, they were determined to shape the free press with unbridled energy and enthusiasm. Flushed with the Liberation, and increasingly aware of Anglo-American journalism, they lost their fear of 'American fuss'. Innovations that had been set in motion before 1940 were now rushed through. The Dutch press was no longer dominated by the *journal d'opinion*; the new standard was the *journal d'information*.

De Volkskrant was illustrative of this trend. Its Editor-in-Chief, Joop Lücker, had received his journalistic training in England in the 1930s. He was imbued with the Anglo-American approach to journalism, as regards both content and news presentation. Having become Editor-in-Chief of *de Volkskrant* in 1945 he transformed this dull, mainly opinion-based organ of the Catholic Labour Movement into a scintillating newspaper. He sent his editors to *The Daily Telegraph* to take a peek at the inner workings of An-

³⁴ Broersma, *Beschaafde vooruitgang*, pp. 413-414.

glo-American journalism. 'A paper that does not recognize the prerogative of the news, a journalist who passes over that prerogative, betrays the true nature of his profession', stated Lücker.³⁵

He wanted a scoop every day, pithy accounts with tempting headlines and interesting photographs. After the major flood disaster of 1953 his paper chartered an aeroplane to survey the extent of the flooding in the province of Zeeland. The next day the front page had a large aerial view of a breached dike and a map of the route 'that the special aeroplane carrying *de Volkskrant*'s reporters flew over the disaster areas'. The news was reported under the banner headline 'Water overwhelms the Netherlands', with the subheadings 'Tonight: 138 reported dead; Coast and many dikes breached'.³⁶ Even the extremely conservative Father Bonaventura Kruitwagen, former spiritual adviser to the Netherlands Association of Roman Catholic Journalists, understood in 1946 that *de Volkskrant* was the future: 'In the style of the former *De Telegraaf* – of cursed memory – it is providing just what a newspaper should provide.'³⁷

This focus on news had serious consequences for the layout of the Dutch dailies. The Anglo-Saxon system was implemented in its entirety. From now on newspapers presented the main news prominently, not only on the front page but on all the other pages too. The various sections (Home, Foreign, Finance, Sports) were all given a regular page—and thus a more or less defined amount of space. The primacy of the vertical layout was over. The horizontal layout became ubiquitous, albeit alternating with vertical elements. The *Leeuwarder Courant* in the early 1950s, for instance, tried to find a compromise between the 'stiff old-fashioned layout' and the 'modern informal one'.³⁸ Articles were now set over several columns, in a block or L shape, alternating with single-column ads. One formatted item often cut into or wrapped around another. Items were separated with horizontal and vertical lines, and some of them had borders. This resulted in a somewhat cluttered-looking page, but this was regarded as a good thing, as the pages, especially the front page, would attract attention.³⁹

Each article now had a headline that no longer indicated the subject of the report but summarized the news. It was also made attractive if possible, so as to encourage readers to read the article. A lead (in many cases spanning two columns), following the example of the American summary lead,

³⁵ Van Vree, *De metamorfose van een dagblad*, p. 29; Bibeb, 'Interview met J.M. (Joop) Lücker'; Sommer, *Krantebeest*.

³⁶ *de Volkskrant*, 2-2-1953.

³⁷ Marcel Broersma, 'De hand van Romme', p. 567.

³⁸ Broersma, *Beschaafde vooruitgang*, p. 421.

³⁹ Spelbrink, *De jas van de krant*, p. 20.

answered the main news questions. Not all newspaper readers were taken with the new approach. They missed the clear-cut departmentalisation that they had grown up with: a reader of the *Leeuwarder Courant* in 1952 wrote: 'Your editors (budding editors?) waste a lot of time and space on nice headings or what are supposed to be nice introductions woven in here and there. Heading above "Lost Property", very nice, or is it. Once upon a time you knew where to find Lost Property, now you never do.'⁴⁰

The new visual infrastructure of the paper also called for a change of attitude on the part of the readership. While newsworthiness as an organizational principle was convenient, it also required more intellectual effort: 'news consumers' had to identify with the way the editors were thinking. The switch to the Anglo-Saxon system made for a new representation of reality. The content and presentation of reports showed that papers were no longer concerned to provide as truthful a picture as possible of what had literally happened on a day; with life 'speeding up', as it was perceived, they merely tried to select the most important elements from the increasing overabundance of information and make these clear to their readers. In this way newspapers embodied the belief in the analytical power of written journalism, which was able to explain and interpret events in the world with the aid of language and the support of logic and rationality.

Articles were increasingly illustrated with photographs, maps or drawings; in 1953, for example, 11.7% of the articles in the *Leeuwarder Courant* were illustrated, rising to 20.5% twenty years later (fig. 2). This increased both the information value and attractiveness of a report. Poor-quality plates or poor printing, however, meant that the photographs were not ideal. As late as 1983 the *Brabants Dagblad* printed an interview with two Tilburg girls who had been attacked in Barcelona along with a photograph of them. 'José (left) points at the wound on her sister Hilde's arm', said the caption, but it took a lot of imagination to see José's injuries. As the photographer Philip Mechanicus dryly observed a year later, 'The era of the press photographer is probably still to come'.⁴¹

Photographs were often used to illustrate an article. 'To brighten up the excessive literary greyness they scour the archives for the same Lubbers, the same Reagan, the same Cruyff and the same Sophia Loren', sighed Mechanicus. The quantity of up-to-date pictures available was limited in the pre-computer age, and a suitable picture could not always be found in the archives. To illustrate an article on the increase in economic jargon in daily parlance owing to the recession in 1983, for example, *Tubantia* printed a

⁴⁰ Broersma, *Beschaafde vooruitgang*, p. 409.

⁴¹ *Brabants Dagblad*, 4-8-1983; Mechanicus, 'Moord is journalistiek', p. 64.

portrait of politician Anne Vondeling who stressed the importance of clear language in parliament.⁴²

Until the 1980s the portrait was the most common genre in press photography (see Figs. 3 and 4). For one thing, portraits were easy to take, and they could be used frequently and found quickly in the archives. News photographs required photographers – who often had to work through a list of subjects during the day – to invest far more time in them. In a regional paper like *Tubantia* atmospheric shots enjoyed great popularity, whereas news pictures were often not so dynamic: in 1983 it illustrated a story about an elderly man who had been robbed and murdered with a patchy photograph of his remote cottage, for example. Jan van de Plasse showed that only 21% of the photographs in the national dailies in 1989 were news photos, and nearly of third of these were on the sports pages.⁴³

1985-2000: from layout to design

The 1970s and 1980s saw the arrival of graphic designers in the international newspaper world. There was even talk of a design revolution.⁴⁴ This was founded mainly on technological advances that could almost be described as a paradigmatic shift. Little had essentially changed in the printing and compositing of newspapers – an extremely conservative branch of the printing industry – from 1900 to 1970; it was all about improving, refining and speeding up, ‘consolidating old inventions’.⁴⁵

In the 1970s, however, lead disappeared from virtually all printing offices. The dailies switched over to photographic compositing, which was automated, flexible and above all fast. The text now came in on strips of paper, which were made into pages using scissors and sticky tape. Compositors were no longer restricted to the typefaces and fonts in the typecase, they had an almost unlimited choice. Photographic compositing, however, turned out to be the prelude to digital compositing, which was made possible by the introduction of computers in editorial offices in the mid-1980s. This was the great breakthrough that designers had been waiting for. Now copy on the screen could be compiled to form a page directly, using an editing system, and photographs could be added in digital form. The typo-

⁴² Mechanicus, ‘Moord is journalistiek’, p. 64; *Tubantia*, 7-10-1983.

⁴³ *De Journalist* 40/8 (1989), pp. 41-43.

⁴⁴ Barnhurst and Nerone, *The form of news*, pp. 202, 208-216.

⁴⁵ Ovink, *Kastanjes uit het vuur*, p. 8; De Wit, ‘Zetten en drukken’; Van Lente, ‘Mechanisering en modernisering’.

graphical options were substantially increased, in terms of both quantity and quality.⁴⁶

The layout process moved from the printing staff in the composing room, and an editor posted there, to journalists in the editorial office. Papers increasingly recruited layout editors who had been trained as graphic designers. Photocompositing, and above computers, made a more creative but at the same time standardized layout possible. The daily jigsaw puzzle – just how much effort it had taken to fit the pieces together was now clearly apparent – made way for a more restful page layout, which was the same every day. The supplements provided room for a frivolous touch.

This process took place ten to fifteen years later in the Netherlands than in the Anglo-Saxon countries. As leading designer Gerard Unger wrote in 1981, 'The question is whether people in the newspaper world are sufficiently aware of the existence of designers'. But the as yet 'unexplored land' was rapidly developed in the next couple of decades.⁴⁷ The quantity-based approach – where the aim was to put in as much as possible – gradually made way for one based on aesthetics: newspapers should be clearly organized, more visual, and attractive to a large readership.

The introduction of computer systems enabled a design to be enforced rigorously. 'They used to do too much by feel', said designer Peter ter Mors after the restyling of the *Algemeen Dagblad*. 'If they thought something was a fun piece they would use a fun typeface for the heading. There needed to be more system. There are a variety of journalistic items that require a standard design.' In practice, though, after a while a new design often tailed off. When he noticed this, designer Koos Staal would send the journalists a note or a fax or go along and see them and point out that 'his' design was being watered down. The *Brabants Dagblad* solved the problem by selecting a computer system that did not allow 'user graphics'.⁴⁸

The growing popularity of television encouraged the dailies to use more visual elements. Nowadays people watch television from an early age and are thus trained to understand complex information conveyed using pictures. Also, newspapers increasingly cover 'soft' topics that involve atmosphere and emotion and are often difficult to describe in words. Papers wanted to keep their readers and developed new visual strategies to climb on the developing visual culture bandwagon. The glorious rise of *USA To-*

⁴⁶ Van Triest and Zijlstra, 'Van lood bevrijd', pp. 223, 227; Unger, 'Overlevende letters'; *De Journalist* 35/3 (1984), pp. 88-91.

⁴⁷ Barnhurst, *Seeing the newspaper*, p. 14; Unger, 'Voorwoord' in: Spelbrink, *De jas van de krant*, p. 1.

⁴⁸ *De Journalist* 47/15 (1996), pp. 14-16; Van der Meulen, *Dichtbij*, pp. 217, 219.

day, the newspaper that wanted to look like television, in the early 1980s seemed to prove that this imitative strategy worked.⁴⁹

Changes in layout and the use of pictorial matter were often seen as a way of remaining attractive to a younger readership. Research among young people in the mid-1980s confirmed that they were more visually oriented than older people. The recipe for newspapers was thus more colour, more photographs, more infographics. A reader survey conducted by the *Utrechts Nieuwsblad* in 1989 showed that younger subscribers had more of a preference for more visual matter, and they also said they wanted shorter articles. In addition, it pointed to the importance of clear layout: the visual infrastructure could be made more apparent using colour and vignettes.⁵⁰

Once the American dailies had moved in this direction, the Dutch ones followed after the mid-1990s – but not without further ado. Dutch journalists agreed that visual culture was on the march, spurred on by television, but how to anticipate this? Two schools of thought developed. The first, of which Max Snijders, Editor-in-Chief of the *Utrechts Nieuwsblad* and later on a professor of journalism was an example, wanted to set themselves apart from the audiovisual media, seeking to do so with journalism that focused less on news and more on reflection. ‘We have to realize that we are competing with television. That means going into subjects in depth and providing background information. For that we need words, and lots of them.’⁵¹ The second school, which came to dominate, wanted to hook up with the development of a visual culture, so these dailies opted for less text and more photographs and infographics – thus fitting in with an international trend, as a study of three British newspapers (*The Times*, *The Guardian* and the *Daily Mirror*) over the 1952-97 period shows.⁵²

Subscribers were getting a lot of information from other media.⁵³ The newspaper press to some extent became a safety net: readers had already seen the major news events on television or heard about them on the radio. Newspapers provided regional news and background information, often illustrated with photographs. Also, subscribers had less and less time to read their daily papers. Used to zapping, they wanted to be able to find the information that was useful or new to them quickly.⁵⁴ The compact newspaper

⁴⁹ Iggers, *Good news, bad news*, p. 82; Hutt and James, *Newspaper design today*, pp. 157, 168-170; Barnhurst, *Seeing the newspaper*, pp. 15-16.

⁵⁰ Cebuco, *Jongeren, een segment apart*, pp. 62-63; R&M, *Onderzoek B.V. Utrechts Nieuwsblad. Rapport I and Samenvatting resultaten*, 1989.

⁵¹ *De Journalist* 43/10 (1992), pp. 14-19.

⁵² McLachlan and Golding, ‘Tabloidization in the British press’, pp. 79-81.

⁵³ See Broersma, *Tegen de trend*, pp. 18-34.

⁵⁴ Cf. *Resultaten kwantitatief lezersonderzoek onder abonnees en niet-abonnees van het Eindhovens Dagblad; Nieuw profiel voor de Haagsche Courant*, p. 104;

gave way to one divided up into loose supplements. Papers added all sorts of thematic supplements in the 1980s and 1990s, first at weekends, then on other days of the week. The regional dailies had already experimented with regional supplements in the early 1970s. Pages that had been scattered throughout the paper were brought together in a clearly organized manner. This also enabled them to have a regional front page that differed from one edition to another.

Readers wanted to be able to find what they were looking for instantly, so clarity became the trend among designers. The appearance of newspapers became more restful, as embellishments such as a variety of typefaces (especially for headlines) were abandoned. On top of this, fewer words were printed on each page and white space was used to create more 'air'. The number of articles on a page, especially the front page, was reduced. Fewer stories, and above all fewer continuations, meant that more articles could be read more effectively.⁵⁵

Attempts were made, however, to vary the look of pages, for example by playing with column widths, and to improve readability a seven-column layout was replaced with an eight-column one. Many papers also used a modular or 'block' layout in which the articles on a page had roughly the same position and design every day, with only the length varying. Brief items, which had previously been used to fill in gaps – scatter material – were printed in a column (a 'ladder' or 'foot') at the side. This also made for a restful look.

Clarity was also achieved by making the layout act as an index. This was all the more important as the number of editorial pages gradually increased. Fig. 5 shows this for the *Brabants Dagblad*, *Haagsche Courant* and *TC Tubantia*, but the same trend was found in all the Dutch dailies. Readers were shown how to find their way around the news with the aid of teasers, logos and tables of contents. In the early 1990s the celebrated American designer Mario Garcia, for example, made the *Haagsche Courant* more consistent, tighter and more clearly organized, but also more dynamic and more contemporary.⁵⁶ His guiding principle was less text, more image, which meant larger photographs and identifiable icons alongside articles. 'A flag, Olympic Rings, that sort of thing works – as I always say – like the 26th TV commercial, attracting readers.'⁵⁷

Tangram, *Lezersonderzoek. lay-out Dagblad Rivierenland en Utrechts Nieuwsblad*, October 2002.

⁵⁵ Bain, *Newspaper design*, pp. 4-7.

⁵⁶ *Nieuw profiel voor de Haagsche Courant*, pp. 3, 36, 100-101.

⁵⁷ *De Journalist* 43/7 (1992), p. 27.

Most of the Dutch dailies implemented this approach strictly. The structure of the paper was clearly shown, based on a tree model, with indexes for the whole paper, each supplement, each page and sometimes even each article. Nowadays almost every paper has a banner under its title containing a number of teasers illustrated with small photographs.⁵⁸ At the end of the 1990s newspaper layout developed in the direction of web design. The layout of the *Limburgs Dagblad*, for instance, was based on a computer interface: there was a bar at the top of each page containing various coloured tabs indicating the content of each page, with an arrow pointing left or right, enabling the reader to see whether he needed to thumb forward or back. If he was on the right page the tab had an arrow pointing down, under which was an 'outline' bar with stories summed up in two sentences. Longer articles had a logo with two arrows (fast forward) over them and a short reference to a passage in bold type that briefly developed the topic.

Far more colour was used, thanks to technological innovations. The prepress process was faster and cheaper, and substantial investments were made in printing capacity. The quality of colour printing also rose sharply. Advertisers increasingly asked for full-colour ads, and readers, mainly under the influence of colour television, became more and more accustomed to media representing reality in colour.⁵⁹ More illustrations, borders and grids were printed in colour. The *Groninger Dagblad* and *Drentse Courant*, for example, became very colourful after their restyling by designer Koos Staal in 1988. Street polls had shown that readers appreciated this. As Editor-in-Chief George Vogelaar said, 'It's the printing press that restricts us, otherwise I would have all the inner pages in colour straight away as well'.⁶⁰

On the eve of the 1990s there was still a fierce debate on whether newspapers should print photographs in colour. Theo Audenaerd of *de Volkskrant* considered that a good news photograph should be a powerful image in its own right. Colour photos did not possess that quality; 'they're not images, they're just pictures'. Fellow journalists such as Engel Lage-meyer of the *Winschoter Courant*, the first Dutch paper to use colour, disagreed. Dramatic effects could also be achieved in colour, but this required more technical expertise on the part of photographers.⁶¹ For many papers the argument that finally swung the balance was that fact that reality also happens to be in colour.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 185-254. Cf. Hutt and James, *Newspaper design today*, pp. 34-57.

⁵⁹ *De Journalist* 102/8 (1997), pp. 24-26.

⁶⁰ *De Journalist* 43/10 (1992), p. 17.

⁶¹ *Reporter* 3/17 (1989), p. 10.

Subscribers increasingly preferred colour photos in the 1980s, as a study conducted by the *Utrechts Nieuwsblad* showed: 55% of them were in favour in 1985, whereas four years later the percentage had risen to 79%. Seventy percent said that colour photos made the paper 'more attractive'. The Dutch dailies were generally cautious in their use of colour, however. They had the impression that a loud, multicoloured paper would lose some of its journalistic credibility. Subscribers shared this opinion, as for example a study by the *Haagsche Courant* showed: excessive use of colour was regarded as 'cheap' and undermined the paper's authority.⁶²

Pictorial matter gained in importance in the press, under the influence of television. The percentage of articles in the *Utrechts Nieuwsblad* that came with a photograph rose from 27% in 1985 to 34% in 1989, for example. The average size of photographs also increased, and visual matter accounted for a larger proportion of the paper, 27% as against 21%.⁶³ Image became even more important in the 1990s. 'Eight years ago a newspaper revolved around text, now it is more design and image to make the written word accessible', said Jan van Kooten, Assistant Editor-in-Chief of the *Groninger Dagblad* in 1995.⁶⁴ This illustrates the volte-face that took place in ideas on the relationship between text and image in the last decade of the twentieth century.

Newspapers attached much more importance to photography. 'You use photos to position your paper', said Toon Schmeink, Assistant Editor-in-Chief of *Het Parool*, in 1992. 'They show what kind of paper you're trying to create...'.⁶⁵ Other newspapers used the same argument. The introduction of computers, electronic databases and on-line links to press agencies made photographs more available. Digital cameras enabled them to be printed more quickly. Many firms also purchased expensive new printing presses that could print better-quality photographs and had more colour facilities. This encouraged the use of image. The *Brabants Dagblad*, for example, bought modern offset presses in 1993 and was then able to include colour photographs. The editors told the readers that they intended to print more and larger photographs, as 'a good illustration is often quicker and clearer than a solid argument.'⁶⁶

Many papers started printing a large, telling colour photograph in the middle of the front page – ideally above the fold. According to Schmeink

⁶² *Onderzoek B.V. Utrechts Nieuwsblad. Rapport I*, 1989; *Nieuw profiel voor de Haagsche Courant. De strijd tegen de grijze regenjas* (Rijswijk, 1991), p. 102.

⁶³ R&M, *Onderzoek B.V. Utrechts Nieuwsblad. Rapport III*, 1989.

⁶⁴ *De Journalist* 46/7 (1995), p. 21.

⁶⁵ *De Journalist* 43/10 (1992), p. 17.

⁶⁶ *De Journalist* 102/8 (1997), pp. 24-26; *Brabants Dagblad*, 19-3-1993.

you could not have any other pictures around a photograph if you wanted to draw attention to it. Photographs had to do more than just illustrate the text; they increasingly needed to be expressive in their own right, be 'strong images' that could 'stand' being printed across four columns.⁶⁷ News photographs needed to capture an event in a single clear, dramatic image – the crucial moment. Press photographers were expected to have an 'original outlook, a pithy or unusual composition', to add something to the pictures people had already seen on television. Atmospheric shots – generally pictures of beautifully lit landscapes – which were a constant undercurrent in newspapers, had to have aesthetic value.⁶⁸

The focus shifted from quantity to quality. Research by Dick Boersema into the *Leeuwarder Courant* and *Limburgs Dagblad* shows that the number of photographs on the front pages of these newspapers, which had risen since the 1980s, fell back from 1994, but the size of them increased enormously (see fig. 6). In a word, newspapers were now tending to opt for a single, powerful photograph rather than a number of small ones. The types of photograph also changed, with portraits making way for news photographs in the mid-1980s (see fig. 3).⁶⁹ These were supplied by international press agencies and the Dutch national press agency ANP, as well as by the papers' staff photographers, who were expected to take more initiative than before. The days when a journalist decided what should be photographed were over. Press photography became a profession.

Infographics combined text and image (photographs and drawings), enabling complex information such as technical, geographical or statistical data to be presented to readers clearly. The introduction of computers, modems and drawing programmes made this possible. Newspapers used infographics to appeal to both the visual culture that was on the rise and readers' increasing lack of time. Here again *USA Today* was a pioneer, publishing colourful graphics even on the front page.⁷⁰ The ANP and Associated Press started producing infographics in 1989, when some newspapers were already experimenting with them, albeit often as a result of a particular writer's personal interest. Readers seemed to appreciate this way of presenting information: two-thirds of subscribers to *Tubantia* in 1993, for example, considered that infographics made the content of articles clearer.⁷¹

⁶⁷ *De Journalist* 43/10 (1992), p. 17.

⁶⁸ Caujolle, 'Semantiek van de toegepaste foto', p. 69.

⁶⁹ Boersema, *Mediaconvergentie*, pp. 16-17. Boersema analysed every two years between 1970 and 2002 the frontpages in the first week of february.

⁷⁰ *De Journalist* 40/1 (1989), pp. 18-21; Ames, *Elements of newspaper design*, pp. 153-176.

⁷¹ *De Journalist* 40/1 (1989), pp. 18-21; *Krant en lezer. Resultaat van een lezersonderzoek in opdracht van Dagblad Tubantia* (Enschede 1993).

Conclusion

The Dutch dailies started producing a rising tide of words and pages in the twentieth century. Newspapers became more bloated and covered a wider variety of areas of society. Readers, increasingly pressed for time, had to find their own way in the growing flood of information. To keep newspapers accessible and clearly organized they had to develop visual strategies. Papers needed an infrastructure that would guide readers through the stream of words, and this network of signs was essentially visual. The first steps in this direction were taken in the inter-war years. Attempts were made to make the organization clearer, while retaining the traditional vertical layout, by using typographical devices such as headlines, lines and functional white space. This trend set in after the Second World War, when the Dutch dailies adopted the Anglo-American layout. With the introduction of photographic and especially digital compositing, the press started employing professional designers. The 1970s saw the beginning of a shift from layout to design.

Paradoxically, the newspaper infrastructure came to be based on the use of image – typographical devices, icons and photographs. The dailies copied elements of both form and content from other media, first from the illustrated magazine, then mainly from television, and in recent years increasingly from the Internet. They also realized that some news stories could be told better in pictures, or with the aid of pictures. More and more space was given over to photography, which took on an independent role, as can be seen for example from the kinds of photos that were printed, with illustrative genres such as the portrait and the atmospheric shot losing ground to the news photograph.

The introduction of visual elements in the newspaper was made possible by technological innovations. Competition, both between newspapers and with other media, was often the driving force behind innovation. For a long time this was confined to speeding up and refining the production process, but the introduction of computers in editorial offices unleashed a design revolution, resulting in far more images, and graphical and typographical techniques, becoming available. Improvements in printing presses made it easier to use colour. This was used functionally in the design of newspapers: the layout became more attractive and above all clearer.

Socio-cultural factors played a major role in the speed with which visual elements were brought in. Journalists debated to what extent image could supplement text – and whether it would supplant it – for a large part of the century. It was thought to result in superficiality and sensationalism. For a long time photography was not regarded as part of the profession of journalism. Readers, on the other hand, who had less and less time for their increasingly bloated dailies and were growing accustomed and attracted to

pictures (in colour), needed a visual infrastructure to improve both the clarity and attractiveness of their dailies. Pictorial matter has come to take up more and more space, and this trend is likely to continue in the coming decades.

The rise of the image in the twentieth century reflects the gradual development of the bourgeois newspaper that wanted to be a (political) educator into market-oriented papers which aim to fulfill reader's needs. It is not just a change in form; the change is more fundamental, and it also makes for a different representation of reality. Pictures appeal above all to the emotions, hence 'hard' factual, analytical representation of the news gives way to a 'soft', empathetic, narrative style. This trend has been clearly apparent in Dutch journalism during the past decade: there is more focus on the things that move people, on health and feelings, on human interest, in short 'lifestyle' in the broadest sense. This might be the superficiality and sensationalism so feared by critics of increasing pictorial matter in newspapers at the beginning of the twentieth century.