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SUMMARY

The subject of this book is the work of the Dutch filmmaker Bert Haanstra (1916-1997) as seen within a historical, film-history and biographical context. It surveys the influences and circumstances under which his films took shape: his talents, his character, the milieu from which he came, and the film world and society of which he was a part. And it assesses the influence that his work has had on film history, on society and on his immediate environment. No other director has focused so sharply on capturing the Netherlands and the Dutch people on film, nor struck such a sympathetic chord in the attempt. Therefore, this study also aims to contribute to our insight into the history of the Netherlands, especially during the 1950s and '60s.

Bert Haanstra – Filmer van Nederland ('Filming the Netherlands') appears to be a logical title for the book. Yet it can be misleading. Haanstra looked beyond the Netherlands – he was what is referred to in this book as a typical 1950s humanist, someone who believed in the equality of all world citizens. His gaze focused on the entire world. He was a humanist who, following the horrors of the Second World War, nurtured a measured trust in a more humane society, in some part based on modernisation and technology. Only to a very limited degree was he a part of the Dutch cinematographic tradition. He was a self-educated filmmaker who was especially influenced by British film.

In this study, a range of sources were used. First and foremost, the films of Bert Haanstra and those of his Dutch contemporaries and predecessors. Also foreign films, especially those from Great Britain. The most important written source tapped was the Bert Haanstra Archives, that is to say, Haanstra's personal archives that were passed on by his heirs to the Filmmuseum in Amsterdam. In addition to containing a nearly complete documentation of his productions, these archives provide insight into his contacts within the film world and produce a reasonable picture of the distribution and reception of his films. A number of other archives and private collections was used. Interviews supplement both the written and film sources on two points in particular: Haanstra's work method as a filmmaker and his personality. The study of the available literature primarily focused on post-war history in the Netherlands and on Dutch and British film history.

The structure of the book is partly chronological, partly thematic. It begins with several chapters that are largely biographical, followed by chapters in which the focus shifts between a context within film history, a social context, the production history of certain films and biography.

The first two chapters focus on the years in Bert Haanstra's life prior to his professional film career. He was raised in an environment in which cultural socialism was a dominant factor. His parents were both from simple backgrounds, but believed in (self) improvement through culture, art and work for the common good. As a professional photographer and a painter, Haanstra focused on images from a young age. In some part due to his experiences as a member of the resistance during the Second World War, he became a confirmed pacifist, a theme that returns in Chapter 7 in the context of a discussion he had with the writer Harry Mulisch. Haanstra's films bear the stamp of a world view that he developed in his youth and during the war.

Haanstra was relatively unfamiliar with the films of other filmmakers when he was awarded the Grand Prix du court métrage at the Cannes Film Festival in 1951 for his short film *Spiegel van Holland* (*Mirror of Holland*). Chapters 3, 4 and 5 reveal how he became a professional filmmaker in the span of a few years without having much background in film. On the strength of his personal talents, he managed to gain practical experience rapidly during this time, particularly at the Denham Studios in Britain, at Forum Filmproducties in Amsterdam and working for the Shell Film Unit operating out of London. Throughout his career, his work was characterised by a creative approach to the film medium, by superior editing that appealed to a sense of aesthetics and was simultaneously used as a means of conveying content, by an exceptional eye for revealing detail, by a personal, optimistic, sympathetic and involved look at his fellow man and, significantly, by a sense of humour.

The clear and practical character of a number of Haanstra's documentaries from the 1950s is discussed in contrast to the (industrial) films produced by the pre-war Dutch avant-garde. Utopianism lay at the foundation of these latter films. Haanstra's work expressed a much less ideologically inspired, matter-of-course belief in progress, which led to greater realism and objectivity.

His work from the first two decades after the war fluctuates between nostalgia and modernisation. His vision of his native country, from one perspective, pres-

ents 'old Dutch' pastoral landscapes and old traditions - and from another, shows a rapidly changing 'society in the making'. Usually he combined these two poles without problem. Nostalgia and modernisation in Dutch society during those years appeared to walk hand in hand relatively easily. Under the warm blanket of nostalgia, trust in the compatibility of old values and modern life was apparently widespread.

The Dutch citizens that Haanstra shows in his films are friendly and simple people - sans grand gestures, yet enterprising, inventive and energetic, particularly in their battle against the sea. They feel at home in their native water dominated landscape where the community finds its strength from unity in diversity. The director shares a penchant with his countrymen for uncomplicated humour. This was perhaps an expression of the liberation that many Dutch people felt during the years of reconstruction after the depression of the 1930s and the Second World War. Countless ordinary Dutch people recognised themselves in the picture Haanstra presented of them. These films were a confirmation of their self-image and their image of the Netherlands. Because his films were shown abroad on a large scale, they also contributed to creating the world's image of the Netherlands. The interaction between image and selfimage through Haanstra's films is further explored using historian Willem Frijhoffs views on the origins of identity.

In *Bert Haanstra – Filmer van Nederland* several prevailing perceptions from Dutch film historiography are abandoned. Firstly, the thought that Haanstra continued or followed the pre-war documentary tradition that was closely linked to international avant-garde aesthetics. As mentioned previously, he was relatively unfamiliar with this body of work and, as a self-taught artist, followed his own path and was particularly influenced by British film. Haanstra and his colleague Herman van der Horst are often considered as the leaders of the 'Dutch documentary school' which, it is said, dominated Dutch documentary film in the post-war period up through the first half of the 1960s. This book contends that this 'school' is simply a myth in the annals of film history. Only a limited portion of Haanstra's own work from this period contains the characteristics that are attributed to this 'school'. And the total sum of Dutch documentaries produced at the time is much too diverse to lump into a single school. From another perspective, the cinematic differences between the supposed 'typical Dutch' documentary and the documentaries from other countries is smaller than the term 'Dutch documentary school' would lead one to believe.

The one-sided image of the post-war Dutch documentary was strongly influenced by the struggle fought in the Netherlands in the 1960s between the new wave and the 'cinéma de papa'. To the extent that it affected the documentary film, this struggle for artistic renewal, cultural change and power is analysed in this book. Haanstra played a significant role in this struggle because he was considered as the pre-eminent Dutch representative of the 'cinéma de papa'.

The feature-length documentary *De stem van het water* (*The Voice of the Water*, 1966) became a pivot point in Haanstra's film career. It is the last work from his classical period, as it is called in this book. The hopeful look at humanity that had characterised his work disappeared into the background and compared to image, language took on a relatively greater role in his next films. In the 1970s he became more critical of society. In his large documentary *Bij de beesten af* (*Ape and Super-Ape*, 1972) he sounded the alarm of an impending ecological disaster and fell into a dispute with Shell concerning the company's attitude towards the environment. Although the visuals always remained important in Haanstra's films, *Bij de beesten af* was an express plea to the world and in the feature films that he made in the 1970s his sense of aesthetics began to serve the storyline and the acting more than it had before - seen in his use of 'invisible' continuity editing, for instance.

Following the criticism of the young guard in the 1960s and an informal ceasefire in the period that followed, the 1990s saw a renewed appreciation and reconciliation between the generations. Bert Haanstra is now generally considered as one of the Netherlands greatest filmmakers.