

Changes within financial markets, state policies, the architectural profession and a more self-aware society have demanded a new attitude from architects in the Netherlands – even before the financial crisis in 2008 made it clear that the concept of ‘Super Dutch’ needed an overhaul. Having embarked on a thorough search for a new rhetoric, the Dutch are not yet at that point in time where solutions can begin to be discussed. Not even three of the nation’s leading men are prepared to do this (see p. 44), something which shows – given their respective positions – how fundamental the collective Dutch conceptual and intellectual crisis in architecture actually appears to be. The good news is that this instalment of *Eurovision*, guest-edited by Saskia van Stein of Bureau Europa, offers ample insight regarding the most crucial areas of debate, not to mention where and how architects are themselves taking responsibility.

From Fisher-Price to Cedric Price

Dutch architecture in 2014 and beyond

TEXT: FRANCIEN VAN WESTRENNEN

‘Bankers’ pay rises sharply,’ read the front page headline of the *NRC Handelsblad*, reminding us that the wages of some in the Netherlands have only increased since the crisis of 2008 – it’s as if there never was one. Recently, Dutch bank ABN AMRO announced that, in anticipation of the mandatory re-trenchment of bonuses, their management would be compensated with a twenty per cent pay rise. There was nothing in the rules about exorbitant wage increases. The same day, The New Institute announced *Designing Scarcity*, an exhibition about design and innovation in times of scarcity. The press image was the WoBo, the ‘World Bottle’ designed by architect John Habraken in 1963 for Heineken’s African market: a beer bottle that, once empty, could be used as a building block. Both reports are a sign of the times in which, unfortunately, the power of money rarely coincides with that of the imagination. It’s business as usual versus a diligent search for alternatives to current methods of working, constructing, producing and living.

There’s still a long way to go before banks are the institutions of service they once were, which enabled people to do something extraordinary. In architecture, however, one

senses that the power of the imagination is stronger, and the usual business – like making a profit on land allocation for large-scale field developments and standardized solutions – is becoming weaker. In recent decades, alternative forms of urban development have evolved and been advocated (and ignored). The ones based on small scale, openness, reuse, temporality, flexibility and self-initiative are now gaining increasing attention. The belief that the situation will return to how it used to be gives way to the confidence that things can (and must) be done differently. However, something extra is still needed, something that encourages the alternative to rise above exception without nullifying its particularity. For that, we must leave the familiar, comfortable world of Fisher-Price and enter the uncertain one of Cedric Price.

Over the past five years, what we have seen in the Netherlands has been a drastic reduction in scale, budget, assignments, size of architecture offices and municipal planning departments, number of completed projects and diversity of contract portfolios. The only thing that has increased is the number of agencies, because virtually everyone who has been fired starts their own. This,

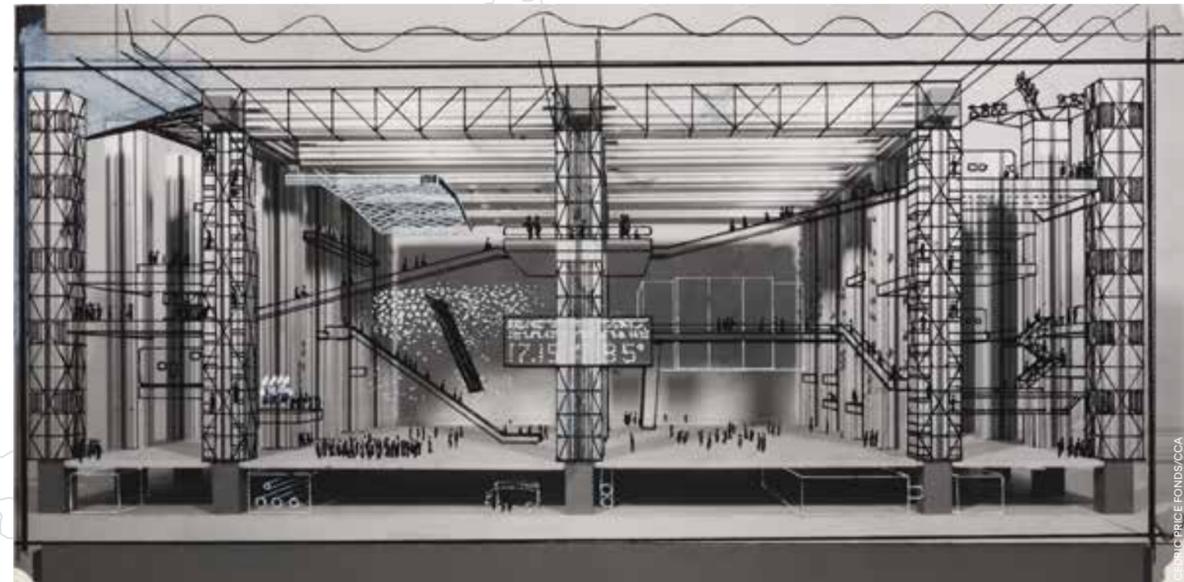
in principal, undesirable situation has also had positive effects. More attention is given to slow forms of urban planning, there is increased resident involvement in the development of the city, more space is available for self-build projects, special areas are preserved due to cancelled demolition, and there are legitimate question marks regarding the financing of spatial developments. But this is only one side of the story.

The danger of impoverishment and simplification lie in wait. Impoverishment because the national government and local municipalities are making cuts to the public domain and services while relying upon the willingness and participation of citizens, expecting this to free up money. It also threatens a simplification of the city’s image due to a one-sided emphasis on bottom-up solutions. As a result, there is a fixation on small, cute, friendly and participatory (neighbourhood) projects. For every neighbourhood, its own vegetable garden, a private meeting shack, its own beer, its own currency, its own research, its own festival... It’s grist to the mill for many municipalities that, since 2010, stopped building and developing (thus invoking a crisis and money shortage), to instead rely on organic area development



Interior perspective of Cedric Price's Fun Palace, 1964

Fisher-Price Family Village, 1973



© CEDRIC PRICE/FONDS/CCA

and offer space for bottom-up initiatives. However, the city needs more than just ‘self-initiatives’. Without a substantive, long-term vision regarding the relationship between the city and self-initiative, there remains something very personal, pragmatic and provisional surrounding the so-called participatory society. This is reinforced by the fact that many people have decided to take matters into their own hands, due to the failure and loss of confidence in large structures. Charles Jencks and Nathan Silver described this tendency in their book, *Adhocism: The Case for Improvisation* (1972, reissued in 2013). They advocate what they call the art of ad hoc life. By this, they mean: ‘Tackling problems at once, using the materials at hand rather than waiting for the perfect moment or “clean” approach.’ This starts with small daily improvisations, such as using bottles as candleholders. But adhocism goes further, because it bypasses the usual delays caused by specialization, bureaucracy and hierarchical organizations. Therefore, the strategy of making do, improvisation and self-reliance undermines the approved methods and established results in various domains: from everyday life to architecture, from urban planning to political revolutions.

Adhocism fits both small-scale initiatives and – what I believe is necessary – the visionary. Instead of embracing adhocism as a strategy, and thus further developing it, there is the tendency to bring specific and exceptional improvisations to the table and reduce them to toolboxes, creating generalized answers that can be applied to all kinds of spaces. This is the Fisher-Price in us. Fisher-Price shows us the world as it is, but much simpler. A stove has two burners, doctor’s bag has six instruments, and the village consists of two houses, a hairdresser, a garage and police station. This makes it simple and understandable to everyone. In the company’s own words, Fisher-Price stimulates the imagination and hopes that a happier Toyland might help make a happier world. A beautiful wish, of course, but the world is more complex than that, and changing at a very rapid pace. And so, we need people who can imagine what could be by formulating questions for which we have to define answers, through scaling-up without wanting to be a large scale, and by designing structures whose uses we cannot even imagine yet.

In short, we need to find the Cedric Price in ourselves. Price advocated architecture that was adaptive, which contributed to

the quality of life, and enabled people to do something extraordinary: an unpredictable and complex architecture of the many technological possibilities, and one that offers space and structure to an ad hoc and daily life. It is then that architecture becomes the support structure that it could be, and the city a public Fun Palace: a generous and intelligent support structure that ensures uncertainty, variability and simultaneity can provide an enjoyable individual and collective experience. ◀

Fran cien van Westrennen is a cultural scientist who works as architecture curator at Stroom Den Haag, a centre for art and architecture in The Hague.



Bureau Europa's layered agenda

TEXT: GOVERT DERIX

When it comes to urban planning and landscape architecture, Bureau Europa is a provocateur. The institute is involved in numerous initiatives that give shape to the living environments of the future. [Saskia van Stein](#) is its director since a year ago.

How does the geographical situation of Bureau Europa reflect recent developments in Dutch architecture?

We're in the Euregio – an urban network with lots of potential that's also facing (architectural) issues arising from a shrinking demographic and monetary contraction. Our institute could be seen as a metaphor for the question of how to deal with financial stagnation: a 60 per cent cut in our funding meant we had to downsize and relocate. Bureau Europa moved to a derelict area, the Belvedere, around the old ceramics factories of Maastricht. Here, urbanity is developing in a way that Maastricht is missing. From this perspective, we can tell a compelling story of how this city and region can shape its search for a new future. Farewell to old times. We're facing new issues. Maybe, we can even revitalize the concept of 'heterotopia': the realization that the 'other' has the agency to provide innovative impulses to the city and the region. Now, the 21st century really begins.

Your first exhibition was called *Radical Locality*.

It was an investigation into the consequences of a globalized world and revaluing the local, as well as the implications a cultural institute like ours can have on the gentrification of an area. What is its identity, what are the new business models, and how does social cohesion work within it? We were inspired by an essay by architecture critic Kenneth Frampton, in which he argues for the greater importance of an 'arrière-garde': a rear-guard that reflects upon society's values. In a time where the threat of everything fragmenting and changing is accelerating, he asks for the minimum. What do we want to maintain as a society? In *Radical*



↓ Mansholt, Landscape in Perspective (Bureau Europa, 2014)



Locality, we showed a generation in architecture that is reinventing itself. Since little is being built, they broaden the architectural profession and empower citizens, while others concentrate on the export of their craft.

So you held a mirror up to society with the message: This is the area and the past that we should deal with.

But without wishing to be pedantic. Not top-down. The question is how you want to position it as a cultural institute. It's also a search, navigating the current cultural political landscape. Nothing can be taken for granted; redefinition and legitimacy are the order of the day.

Future societies will depend more on self-reliance and unified strength. People will increasingly have to shape their lives and environments. Does Bureau Europa want to be a player in this movement?

In the new reality, no one has a monopoly on wisdom. So we seek a conversation with as many parties and citizens as possible. It's worth noting that Dutch citizens were once self-reliant, but that changed during the welfare state. They became consumers with decreasing responsibilities. Now, they must suddenly participate in an economically motivated 'do-ocracy'. Like in other places, the rediscovery of the (social) city and the rediscovery of architecture go hand in hand.

Can you give an example of an initiative that makes these issues visible?

Take Sphixpark, an undeveloped part of Maastricht, which we activated together with several parties. We specifically asked the public to participate, but you also have to take people seriously. Don't get me wrong, I'm not anti-market. We want to empower and connect people, and therein lies the significance. I'm resistant without the false rhetoric of instrumentalization that often leads to a kind of veiled, sham-democratic process, immediately behind which is usually just another kind of market thinking.

When will Bureau Europa's mission be achieved?

When the self-consciousness that we arrive at in the new era becomes widespread, and a process of emancipation that is more socially inclusive regarding the significance of how the built environment is activated. If successful, I'll be very proud.

Inventing new forms of solidarity and expressing this in architecture? Or architecture as a breeding ground to give this a chance?

Our agenda is layered. The discipline itself is in sharp focus. Rem Koolhaas introduced the concept of 'Fundamentals'. The fragmentation of meaning, lack of hierarchy and crumbling of authority force a reflection on the foundations. It's the realization



↑ Saskia van Stein, director of Bureau Europa

that we are facing an important and promising time: the dawn of a new vivacity.

Might this also mean changes to the role of (local) government and those working in urban planning departments?

We're closely involved with the Stad.Academie, a temporary initiative to develop new approaches and ideas on how we can give form to the metropolitan region together. In conjunction with the city of Maastricht, cultural institutions and other partners, we hold traditional organizational functions to the light. It appears that the new reality calls for a different set of functions for the role of all of those involved in programming or designing the city. More fundamentally, we have to reinvent how we can financially sustain our cities now that ground exploitation has become obsolete.

Any further plans?

We continue to raise social community issues at various levels of scale – the city addressed as a metaphor and a reality. From urban agriculture to the European Union's common agricultural policy. From designing a productive future to educational strategies.

I'm a great admirer of the work of architect Cedric Price, in my opinion, one of the 20th century's greatest minds. He made a plea for 'non-planning' and stretched architecture's definition. At Bureau Europa, we show that architecture is not just about stone buildings, but also about oral history, or food. From the outside, many don't realize that architecture and urbanism are also about the opportunities of vacant buildings, the temporary use of empty space and many other approaches.

Is it goodbye to the 20th century, and a departure from the philosophy of social engineering?

Yes, but I'm wary of the bottom-up as a new utopia. It doesn't work without large structures. It's a process whereby bottom-up and top-down repeatedly meet. A search that shows no end, and is the heartbeat of the new reality. ◀

Govert Derox is a Maastricht-based philosopher, writer, advisor and columnist.

Take the **red pill**.

www.denieuwegeneratie.nu

OFFICE FOR
IMMATERIAL
ARCHITECTURE
www.non-fiction.nl

PRODUCTIVE
DYSTOPIAS
www.failedarchitecture.com

We give meaning to the new function of the landscape.

Based on landscape as a living, infinite source of energy and inspiration, we address major current challenges and the changing meaning of the public domain.

delva.la

To create an architecture that is open to multiple interpretations; stimulating debate and social interaction that forms successful communities

www.APpLusE.eu

MICROMAPPING

The ideal home perfectly relates to the everyday life of its owner.

The home is a 'landscape' for every piece of furniture and personal belonging. We meticulously study the owner's routines and behaviour and collect feedback throughout all stages of design.

www.mkhome.nl

'We aim to create all kinds of environments at every imaginable scale. As architects we should explore space, challenge science, socio-economics, political systems, even nature.'

www.studiomaks.nl

Today's problems ask for tomorrow's answers. The Cloud Collective combines expertise and crosses disciplines to help evolve the world of the past into the future.

www.thecloudcollective.org

Can we design sustainable solutions for the future 9 billion global citizens? DUS links design with digital techniques and online communities to revolutionize the building industries and bring affordable tailor-made architecture worldwide.

WWW.HOUSEOFDUS.COM

Craftsmanship is to architecture what rhetoric is to ideas. It determines the logic of our architecture; producing quality by giving attention to detail.

Powerhouse Company International
www.powerhouse-company.com

Make no empty buildings...!

Before configuring space, understanding sociocultural processes adds relevance to our designs; connecting people with their environments. Spaces as initial conditions instead of end results.

space&matter
www.spaceandmatter.nl

LOLA

for all your life lines, cosmopolitan nature and funky fringes.
(TOPOS landscape award 2014)

www.lolaweb.nl

Shift

for hardcore architecture and urbanism where space, form and matter matter the effortless is intensely pursued the self – evident is surprising the question is questioned the simple is complex the known is new one plus one is one

www.shifta.nl

We develop sustainable, just, and resilient societies.

Together we craft flourishing cities and business, using systems-thinking, science, business, IT, and design.

www.except.nl

GO HYBRID!

By integrating the *natural* and the *economic* world, we create full hybrid landscapes wherein *nature* can be **productive** and *economics* can produce *nature*.

studiohybridlandscapes.wordpress.com

For anything spatial, anything complex, anything simple, anything heavy, anything light, anything loud, anything quiet, anything large, anything small, anything ambitious, anything humble, anything nice:

WWW.DEKORTVANSCHAIK.NL

RAAAF

Rietveld Architecture-Art-Affordances

What others say about our work

Jury Architectural Review Award:
"It clearly stood out because of its simplicity, beauty and capacity to situate itself between art, landscape and architecture."

Jury Prix de Rome:
"Rather surrealistic"

Edwin Jacobs, director Centaal Museum:
"They are genuine new-thinkers in images."

Aaron Betsky, American Institute of Architects:
"RAAAF is bringing a necessary poetry of absence to a world of built clichés and unnecessary objects."

What we do: www.RAAAF.nl

Bringing the modularity of LEGO, the efficiency of IKEA and the scalability of WordPress to the building sector through digital technologies.

www.eco-nnect.eu

Driven by a fascination for aesthetics with substance, DoepelStrijkers seeks to generate works which transcend the spatial by creating social, ecological and economic value. A firm belief that design can act as an agent for social renewal leads to strategies that contribute to a 'circular' and 'inclusive' economy.

www.doepelstrijkers.com

Zecc Architects: *Grounded Architecture*
"The deeper the roots, the higher the vision."
www.zecc.nl

'Designing and building for the future with methods and convictions that are present just now.'

OSCity / CHMOD architects
www.oscity.eu

Superuse, the best strategy to lower your embodied energy!

www.superuse-studios.com

In search of a new rhetoric

TEXT: BRENDAN CORMIER AND SASKIA VAN STEIN

Whatever happened to Dutch architecture? It's a common refrain. A decade ago, the Dutch promotional machine was at its height, advocating terms like 'Super Dutch' and branding the nation's approach to creative problem solving. Following the economic crisis and a sustained austerity regime, practitioners and institutes alike are scrambling to find new footing.

To better understand these changes, we gathered three figures heavily implicated in the country's changing cultural landscape: Guus Beumer, director of The New Institute, Wouter Vanstiphout, Chair of Design as Politics at TU Delft and member of Crimson Architectural Historians, and Nanne de Ru, co-owner of Powerhouse Company and director of The Berlage. Here is their take on the changing relationship between the Dutch state, the institutions that rely on it, and the culture that is ultimately produced.

Brendan Cormier: How would you describe the current state of the Netherlands?

Nanne de Ru: In the professional field, we're still suffering from the crash. But I feel that the healthy mechanisms are coming back. People are willing to invest, and there's a real need for things to be built. The only question is, did we throw out all the mechanisms that make it culturally interesting? Before the crash, of course, we had the market mechanisms that made it possible to make architecture, but we also had debates and projects – like Wimby – that looked at how we could experiment with new ideas. There was a mechanism that supported curiosity. **Wouter Vanstiphout:** Well, to add some caution to that, one tendency I see is for the state to go too deep into controlling and shaping the culture that they still pay for today. There used to be what was called the Thorbecke principle – the idea that the state has no interest in culture except that it exists. The state would create and subsidize a free zone in which culture or architecture could be practiced. This was the dominant principle practiced by the state for decades. Today, however, the state no longer practices that principle, and instead enacts cultural policy through the creation of agendas.

Guus Beumer: But is the only answer the suggestion of autonomy and a hands-off approach from government? We are trying, for instance, to see if a relationship with a (local) government or private party can be based on an assignment instead of subsidies or sponsorships. This type of relationship can realize public legitimacy for a cultural organization, beyond media coverage or the amount of visitors, but also introduces questions of competition, etc.

wv: If the state would have a richer rhetoric, then there could be an interesting mutual interest between culture and the state. But the only rhetoric that the state has now is one of economics. So it ends up getting applied to culture as well.

GB: You can't just blame the state; it's also architects, designers and artists who struggle with a lack of legitimacy outside the market economy. They are also dying for a new rhetoric, or one better formulated for a new public assignment. **wv:** When this institute was founded – the NAI [Netherlands Architecture Institute] – it was founded on a consensus that architecture is enough as a goal in itself, like 'of course we need architectural quality'. That doesn't exist anymore, but when it did exist, it took away the need to talk about culture at all. There was no need for rhetoric. There was no need to explain it; no need to form coalitions; no need even for it to renew itself, because it was a goal in itself. So architecture, as with many other cultural fields, forgot how to explain itself, how to create a rhetoric, and we have to learn that again – although we're not doing a tremendously good job. It's not just about finding legitimation, it's also trying to describe its role.

BC: Doesn't that relate to the whole agenda-setting tactic that Ole Bouman introduced when he was the director of the NAI?

NdR: The NAI started precisely at the moment that the whole VINEX policy began, which was in the end nothing more than a larger economization of land value in the Netherlands, and there was definitely a deal that was made where the socialists said, 'Okay, we agree with the fact that we are going to sell all this stuff but, in return for that, we are going to make sure there is a cultural infrastructure that can guide that whole process.' The VINEX process was an agenda, a very clear 'über-agenda' that created all these things, and the whole Super Dutch came out of that. There's no 'über-thing' anymore. **GB:** I agree with this analysis. In fact, this year our institute lost its disciplinary background at the Ministry in connection with an earlier 'über-agenda', and operates, for instance, under Creative Industries, which is, of course, the current über-agenda.

wv: What I find problematic about agenda setting as a method, is that often architecture becomes a medium with which you can set an agenda, but says very little about how architecture itself can play a role. I think when architecture just addresses the political issue, as if it is a kind of art, then there are other design professions that do at least as good a job as that. So architecture should gaze much deeper into its own workings and the way it really works in the world, not holding up a mirror to the world. That's the problem I have with architecture as a part of the creative industries.

BC: So far, you've described a dramatic shift pre- and post-crisis. Do you see any positive remnants that still drive Dutch design and architecture today?

NdR: Yes. Some good tendencies still remain. Working with public clients like the Rijkswaterstaat, for instance, you see a very classic Dutch attempt to think about all the unknowns, and how to design all the parts. There's still a feeling that people are willing to think across borders, willing to engage in areas that they are not normally trained for, and are still willing to think in the large-scale combined with the small-scale.

↓ Erasmus Pavilion by Powerhouse Company, Rotterdam



CHRISTIAN VAN BERKOOY



Nanne de Ru (1976) is co-founder of Powerhouse Company. Previously, he was associated with OMA/AMO in Rotterdam as a senior researcher and designer. In 2011, he received the Maaskant Prize for Young Architects, and from 2013 he has been director at the Berlage Center for Advanced Studies in Architecture and Urban Design. As a guest lecturer, he remains active in various international educational institutions.



Guus Beumer (1955) has been director of The New Institute since 2013. He was previously the director of Marres, the Centre for Contemporary Culture in Maastricht, between 2005–2013. Since 2006, he has also served as artistic director of NAIIM/Bureau Europa in Maastricht. He made a name as initiator and art director of fashion labels orson + bodil and SO by Alexander van Slobbe. In 2011, Beumer initiated *Out of Storage: The Largest Temporary Art Museum of Europa*. The same year, he was appointed curator of the Dutch Pavilion at the Venice Biennale.



Wouter Vanstiphout (1967) is an architectural historian specializing in 20th-century urbanism and architecture. He is co-founder of Crimson Architectural Historians and professor of Design and Politics at TU Delft. In addition, he is a member of the Council for Environment and Infrastructure, the government advisory board that oversees the physical environment. He was also co-curator of the British Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, 'A Clockwork Jerusalem'.



MARIA-AUSTRIA INSTITUTE/SEMPRESSER

↑ The New Institute's exhibition, *Sicco Mansholt: A Good European*, an examination of the life of the farmer, social democrat and influential Dutch postwar agricultural minister, opens late summer 2014.

wv: We just made a book about the role of design in the Dutch Railway over the past 40 years. What we found is that design still keeps the rhetoric and practice alive that the train is a public experience. People still consider trains and train stations as public space. So while there was this completely mismanaged process of privatization which caused the problems of the railway system, and now the government is more or less taking it back, all that time it was the design that had this depoliticized presence and consistency that represented old modernist ideals of transparency. It's interesting that design can also function as a deep memory.

Saskia van Stein: How do you think people look at the Dutch context from the outside?

NdR: The Netherlands is still a guiding country when it comes to attitude and curiosity, and this is something we can be proud of. We manage to maintain – despite our misfortunes and stupidities – this culture of curiosity, playfulness and willingness to venture into new areas.

wv: I'm much happier with the situation of Dutch architecture now than I was ten years ago. The problem with Super Dutch was that, at its height, it was such a nasty guiding presence. Other countries would say, I wish we would have this, but we don't have the infrastructure, we don't have the money, etc. Now that the Netherlands is wrestling with the same problems other European countries have, you could argue that architecture has become relevant because we're on equal footing. If there's such a thing as a Dutch approach or attitude, now we can really prove that or test it because we're dealing with big problems that are similar to other countries.

GB: It's funny because, despite the fact that everybody says there's no critical discourse at all in the country, we continue to project an idealistic and even utopian notion of a guiding country on all

of its design disciplines, and therefore also on The New Institute. But, I agree, at the moment most disciplines seem to look for new ways to frame and recalibrate the ideas of what exactly it is that they are good at. And let us not forget: the cultural legitimacy of architecture and design is permanently reconstructed, from the architect as author, to multidisciplinary actor and agenda setter. Today, the rhetoric's move towards an idea of integrality – an integral design perspective – is being promoted as the surplus value of Dutch design and architecture. It's too early, though, for conclusions, I'm afraid; we need to repeat this discussion in one year's time. ◀



CRISTIANO CORTE/BRITISH COUNCIL

↑ British Pavilion in Venice, co-curated by Wouter Vanstiphout

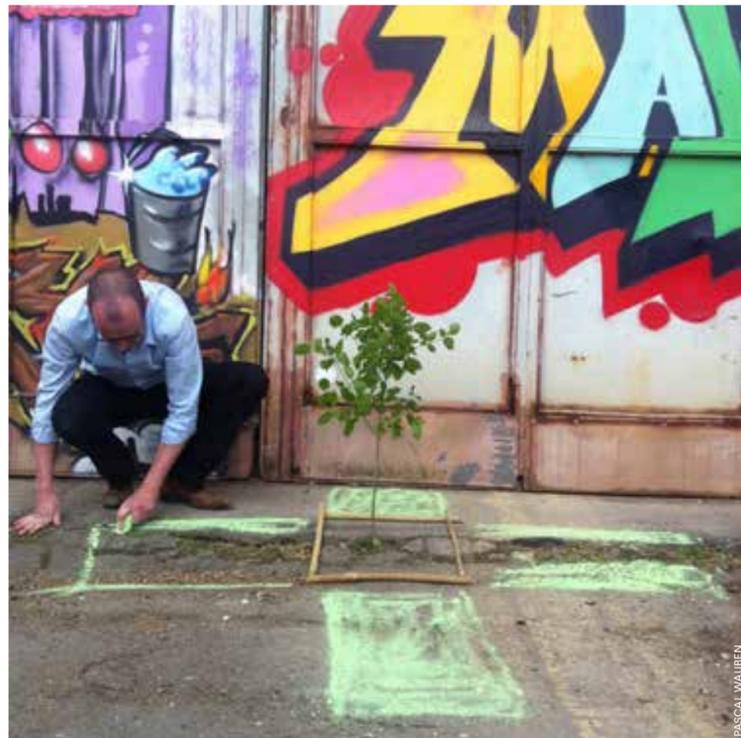


CRISTIANO CORTE/BRITISH COUNCIL

Learning to decentralize

TEXT: TIM PRINS

When official institutions fail, we need to find new ways to adapt society. Architect Tim Prins is co-founder of the City Academy, which cooperates with the municipalities of Maastricht and Aachen on new models to reshape society, by learning from experience instead of books and theories.



↑ Students of the Stad.Academie (City.Academy) in Maastricht activate temporality.

Our society finds itself in a radical reorganization. The 175-year-old book, *On Democracy in America*, is still relevant because, according to its author, Alexis de Tocqueville, democracy is more than a form of government; it's a societal model. The impending decentralization of health and welfare by shifting collective responsibility onto the individual seems to be proof of his assertion. But in order to implement a just democracy, certain conditions must also be met. Can a government impose equal obligations without equality of knowledge?

Society admits an inequality of knowledge. A successful life is a choice in our Dutch culture; indeed, everyone has equal opportunities in education. Again, Tocqueville refutes this modern myth because people come into the world with different capacities for thinking. The vast majority of highly educated people currently in politics actually deforms the representation of the people. Professor Evelien Tonkens, like others, expresses

her concern that decentralization strengthens diploma democracy:¹

'If all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail.'

The education system intensifies the inequality of knowledge. A dream schooling is to regularly pass tests, progress to the right level of education, and enter the market as a specialist, all within the given time of study. Science in Transition opposes the economization of education and the measurement of learning outcomes.² The education system trains people for specific tasks. A designer designs. A researcher researches. An investor invests. However, the shifting influence of the market and government provokes other divisions of roles. Should not an investor be able to research and design, and vice versa? The division of labour is ambivalent in times of social transition.

The lack of adaptation can also be evidenced in spatial studies. Course material romanticizes the grid of Descartes and the shaping of an empty world. *Tabula rasa* remains part of the vocabulary in the formulation of design tasks. However, in the direct vicinity of educational institutions, vacancy, redevelopment or demolition become visible challenges. Architectural assignments are not limited to physical planning; they include financial and social awareness. The new generation of design firms understands this, and seeks loaded contexts for their respective practice.

The education system has to change with the transition of society, but institutionalization creates an obstacle. In 1968, it took massive student protests to enforce reform. The uprising began due to dissatisfaction with the curriculum, which was alienated from social affairs.³ Educational institutions respond too slowly. Innovation comes from outside of the existing system, where information is no longer

a monopoly. There is a need for a curriculum where contemporary communal issues are discovered and formulated, because through decentralization an encounter between society and space is inevitable.

In South Limburg, we have set up the Stad.Academie (City.Academy) initiative, which is developed through an informal process. The curriculum's theme negotiates the gap between retreating government and powerless markets, and was set up by a partnership that includes the Department for Cultural Heritage and the municipalities of Maastricht (NL) and Aachen (DE). Lesson information does not come from books, but from first-hand sources: leading artists, associated councillors and residents. We work on location, such as in Vrieheide, where a neighbourhood has created a semi-official service to independently counteract the devaluation of their homes. There is no diploma awarded at the end of the academic year, and academics continue being part of a knowledge network.

Stroom Den Haag uses a similar formula for its Stadsklas (City Class). The curriculum is composed based on an examination of the skills required for the changing nature of spatial design. Referring to the alternative practices of artists and architects, the course discusses how these skills can play a role in everyday design practice. It includes researching other ways to identify, communicate, participate and democratize. Like the Stad.Academie, the objective of Stadsklas is to share current methodologies and to continue developing collectively.

The pressure from below to be able to participate in the process and influence the design of one's own living environment is encouraging. On the other hand, there's a lack of enthusiasm when the same question is asked about the care of people. The redevelopment of curricula mainly focuses on the attractive problems of urban development. There is still a long way to go when it comes to linking the spatial with programmed social

challenges. For example, combining building vacancy with accommodation for the Salvation Army, or making undeveloped plots productive.

Before a government proclaims the equality of responsibility and divides its tasks onto society, it must also comply with an equality of knowledge. Political education is necessary in order to avoid mass amateurism, which also applies to the designer. His or her work is not autonomous, but connected to public space and public interests. With a new curriculum, the spatial studies can no longer ignore their responsibilities. The focus of architecture will increasingly shift from beta to gamma science. ◀

Tim Prins is an architect and founding principal of Studio Stad.

1 See: www.stadacademie.com/2013-2014/sprekers/evelien-h-tonkens
 2 See: www.scienceintransition.nl
 3 Jean-Louis Cohen, *The Future of Architecture Since 1889*, Phaidon, 2012, p. 404.



↑ Situated on disused land in Maastricht's centre, Sphinxpark served as a temporary laboratory for experiments in innovative urban planning.



↑ In 2011, ZUS transformed a disused 1970s office building, dubbed Schieblock, into an incubator for young creative practices.



↑ Inhabitants co-design a district in the city of Heerlen (Masterplan Vrieheide – De Stack).



↑ Led by Pop-Up City, Mariska van den Berg and Luc Harings, the Stadsklas (City Class) spring session turned Amsterdam-North into a classroom.

Guerrilla with good cause

TEXT: SASKIA VAN STEIN AND FRANCIEN VAN WESTRENNEN

In a conversation with space&matter and LOLA Landscape Architects, the question of what generates design in the nation today is raised.



↑ Space&matter, together with Smeearchitecture, Delva Landscape Architects and Metabolic, transformed a polluted brownfield site into a creative hub of renovated houseboats (De Ceuvel, 2014).



'I'm not so worried about our social compass, but more about the design skills of our generation and those who come after us,' says Peter Veenstra, one of three partners at LOLA Landscape Architects in Rotterdam. This was the somewhat saddening conclusion to a more optimistic and realistic discussion about practicing within the current social and economic fields of influence. Also at the table were LOLA partner Cees van der Veecken and Marthijn Pool from space&matter in Amsterdam. Before returning to that conclusion, the beginning: What's the current state of play for both of these practices?

At space&matter, the practice is very diverse: from hands-on projects with residents, to self-initiated research projects and concrete realization. Sometimes these strands merge, though often not. It results in a fragmented and broad practice in which design sometimes plays but a small part. They also take on the roles of coach, psychologist, fundraiser,

inventor and project manager, but always 'in the service of' space and architecture. As an example, Marthijn mentions the De Ceuvel project in which, together with a large group of creatives, they built a cultural 'breeding ground' on a once heavily polluted area that must also be sustainable within ten years (see A10 #53). They've done this by giving a second life to discarded houseboats, using planting schemes for soil purification and developing a range of activities to galvanize the area. Such projects require skills not learned during their studies. 'I wouldn't even know how to teach this. It's the things I take for granted that make me realize what I stand for in architecture.' Marthijn also thinks there's too much discussion and attention given to the changing role of the architect. For him, the assignments may change, but how to translate them into architecture remains the same.

Cees and Peter also see broadened interpretations of their roles as a necessary evil, rather than as

something that benefits them as designers. It leads to de-specialization and an erosion of the profession's skills. 'We'd rather spend time on designing and researching, than on managing the process.' Unfortunately, these kinds of designs increasingly have to be done without extensive research. A dichotomy has emerged between progressiveness and reality: ideas that have a long-standing connection. In the Netherlands, there was plenty of room for experimental, investigative and interdisciplinary approaches that were also directed towards execution. But too much pragmatism, and too many commercial interests, has ensured that it is those who produce that dominate – leaving creativity and design in the margin.

This also has to do with the client. Whereas space&matter regularly work collectively on private contracts, sitting at the table with the end users, LOLA's practice operates at a level where there is no place for long-term, direct working relationships



← LOLA's winning design for the Singelpark in Leiden follows the old walls that once surrounded the city.

↓ Along the Singelpark route are green zones, gardens and lush green bridges that will be planted with assistance from the Hortus Botanicus of Leiden.



with residents. LOLA doesn't have many private clients: municipalities and provinces are still the 'custodians' of public space and landscapes. However, the Singelpark in Leiden is a good exception. There, local residents suggested developing a linear park in the city. Since winning the subsequent competition, LOLA is now developing a programme for the park in collaboration with the residents and municipality. Cees also recognizes that this is a tendency: the shift from designing structures to colourizing them with programmes. Marthijn raises the question as to whether such audience interaction provides a different aesthetic. Peter thinks so. The result is more 'pluriform' than if they'd only worked with the municipality and contractors. 'Here, we're mainly active with channelling the wishes of residents, which they wrote down at the beginning on twenty A4 sheets of paper.'

Although space&matter often works with private clients, that's not the future, according to Marthijn.

He believes the one-sided emphasis has more to do with the failure of demand from large market players. Project commissions from collectives are too small and specialized to change peoples' thinking. However, the task is more interesting if you work directly with and for the end user, and honour their individuality within a collective situation. This also contributes to the rationale of the building design. He sees the facilitation of dialogue through specific instruments, such as www.crowdbuilding.nl, and meeting more individual needs as achievements of this situation. In the end, it's about making instruments developed on a small scale more widely applicable, so that specific architectural solutions are also feasible for larger, complex assignments.

But until that happens, there's still a lot of educational work to be done. Marthijn states that the one-sided emphasis on cost reduction and standard mathematical solutions is key for many markets. Peter wants to keep fighting for a good cause,

but underground, like a guerrilla. And it's with good cause that he refers to the achievements of the Super Dutch generation of architects, where a conceptual approach, combined with curiosity and provocation, led to innovative designs. The stalling engine of spatial development and the government's retreat have marginalized this achievement. Instead of developing a new vision for governmental roles, shared interests have been discarded in favour of money.

For architects and landscape architects, the task of investing their moral and social awareness currently lies in small-scale projects. There's nothing wrong with that, but it will affect the design skills of a new generation. 'When Ben van Berkel was our age, he built the Erasmus Bridge. At that scale, our generation has little opportunity to design and produce, or to develop and manifest themselves.' What impact this will have, we shall only see in a few years' time. ◀