

In 1981, when I started my architecture degree at Delft University of Technology, Dutch architecture was in a very sorry state. The number of first-year students barely reached 200, and even this small number of first-years were told that less than half of them could expect to actually find work as architects. After all, the Netherlands was completely built up and the only area with any kind of future was urban renewal – that is, replacing the existing collection of buildings. Whereas the international scene was experiencing a postmodernist wave (reaching its peak with the first Architecture Biennale in Venice in 1980), this was given little chance in the Netherlands. Both the older Forum generation, spearheaded by angry old man Aldo van Eyck ('Rats, Posts and other Pests'), and the younger, politically minded public housing proponents saw a plea for such a populist architecture as evidence of a despicable flippancy.

1988 – the year this interview was published – saw a glimmer of hope. Student numbers were on the increase. Slowly but surely, Dutch architecture was climbing out of its deep well of self-chastisement and slowly building a new self-confidence. And postmodernism managed to make an impact after all. Weeber and Meeuwissen are important players in this development: Meeuwissen as a representative of the Eindhoven School, which sought to put architecture back on the map by incorporating auteurism within a cultural-historical context, and Weeber as a representative of a postmodernism that argues in favour of an autonomous architecture that does not revolve around originality but around the application of architectural rules and regulations derived from the history of architecture. For this reason the handbook – the interview's central theme – means different things to the two men: Weeber sees it as a collection of recipes capable, at least on paper, of solving any problem, while Meeuwissen views it as a product of history which – like other forms of culture – can be used as a source of inspiration during the design process. This difference, incidentally, is

never clearly articulated in the interview. The two men may be discussing the same theme, but they are also talking at cross-purposes. But they certainly agree on their common enemy – the Delft functionalism and its thirst for originality.

It is worth noting that in the year this interview was published, Rem Koolhaas was appointed visiting professor at the Faculty of Architecture. The enormous success Koolhaas and his followers were to enjoy in the 1990s meant that even before it really got off the ground, postmodernism in the Netherlands was overtaken by the supermodernism of Koolhaas and co. This supermodernism was particularly adept at dealing with the media boom: not just the proliferation of books and magazines on architecture and the development of the Internet, but even more so the need for non-stop presentation: every architect is a participant in a never-ending competition that determines his or her success or failure. As with the presentation of any other product, the innovation decreed by Meeuwissen and Weeber is decisive in this respect. While the grumpy old men are talking handbooks, the modern student is preparing for this endless struggle for survival. And an architectural handbook here will be just as ineffectual as the soldier's handbook in a cyber war.

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