

THE LOST YEARS?

I believe history is a discipline that produces new knowledge grounded on evidence to be found in material things, in texts and in visual records. This implies digging into documents, mining archives, and, if and when needed, using analytical methods and information technology. Last but not least, writing about history must avoid being driven by biases and vested interests in making judgments and drawing conclusions, as well as in indulging in trivia and anecdotes. Alas, life is too complex and full of limitations to satisfy all the above. Working as a historian, one is forced to talk and write about the past, not only looking into documents in a skimpy and inconsistent way but also not being able to avoid a subjective point of view and consequently running the danger of producing texts with very low knowledge value. Hopefully, the following text, although fulfilling too few of the above prescriptions, can still provide some useful information about the interesting period of the first five years of *OASE*, a period which, by accident, coincides with the first five years of my involvement with the School of Architecture (known as 'Bouwkunde') of Delft University (then College) of Technology, a period of major shifts in architecture as well as in world developments.

By way of introduction – mixing two identities, the historian and the witness of the period – I would like to say a few words of about how I became acquainted with Bouwkunde and how this acquaintance led to my long-term involvement with the TUD and subsequently to writing this piece. This appears to be exactly the wrong thing to do if one wants to avoid an anecdotic narrative. Yet, my intention in narrating this story is exactly the opposite, namely to offer through a particular case an entry to the understanding of the situation in the School of Architecture in Delft in the context of broader historical events.

The year was 1968 – a period of major political, cultural and social upheavals in the world and particularly in the USA, where I was teaching at that time, especially among students – when, as a young faculty at Yale, I was asked for advice by a small group of my students responsible for preparing the forthcoming issue of the yearbook *Perspecta* (no. 12). A key person in these discussions was Stuart Wrede, who was reporting on his experience with Indesem, (INternational DEsign SEMinar) a meeting that had taken place the previous year in the School of Architecture in Delft. Indesem was founded in 1962 by a group of architecture students at the TUD in collaboration with Wiek Röling and Jaap Bakema. Aldo van Eyck, Peter Smithson and Herman Hertzberger also participated in this event. The 1962 conference was very much driven by the humanistic ideas that dominated Team 10 and the *Forum* magazine group at that time, anti-functional and mildly regionalist-populist. A great number of these European architects were known already in the USA. Smithson had taught at Yale in the 1950s, Bakema in St Louis, and Van Eyck, invited by Jerzy Soltan, was visiting critic at Harvard and I, as a student, had lunched with him in the spring of 1963.

On the other hand, the Indesem meeting that Wrede had taken part in 1967 was not a repeat of the 1962 gathering, and the ideas discussed there had not yet circulated in the USA. Partially influenced by sociopolitical developments of the time – the war in Vietnam, the anti-colonial and peace movements, as well as by the awareness that post-Second-World-War architecture, the architecture of 'reconstruction' or 'urban renewal', whose schemes claimed to be based on the orthodoxy of the Modern Movement,

were a failure – the participants of Indesem 1967 were highly polemical and politicized. They disapproved of the established professional architectural practice, mainstream ‘functionalist’ theories, and, more importantly, blamed the profession and professional education for being subservient to the social and economic ‘establishment’, the ultimate villain.

Although the names associated mostly with the meeting were those of two Dutch architects, Aldo van Eyck and Herman Herzberger, the names Wrede brought back included those of Walter Benjamin and Herbert Marcuse, whose ideas apparently were very much discussed during the Indesem get-together. Soon after, Wrede met Marcuse. The result of the meeting was a unique contribution by Marcuse in the *Perspecta* issue of 1969. As a result of this meeting, Wrede also conceived, commissioned and installed *Lipstick*, a large-scale sculpture by Claes Oldenburg on Beinecke Plaza, at Yale, a clear monumental statement of cultural protest in the spirit of the nationwide free speech and antiwar movement. Interestingly, behind the Colossal Keepsake Corporation of Connecticut was Philip Johnson, anonymously backing the project, which without doubt was inspired by the debates of the Delft meeting. As for Wrede, he would become, in the 1980s, director of architecture at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Delft remained in my mind when I left Yale to move to Harvard and it came back during discussions with Graduate School of Design students. As Yale students were busy at that time with *Perspecta*, the GSD students were busy preparing their 1969 issue of *Connection*, their review of architecture. The architecture Aldo van Eyck and Herzberger was part of their discussions, as their approach to architecture, together with that of Giancarlo de Carlo and Shadrach Woods, was perceived – in contrast to that predominant in the USA, which was seen as mechanistic and formalist – as being humanistic and socially committed. Among those students, the most enthusiastic for Van Eyck and Herzberger was Bob Maltz, an excellent thesis student with whom I had long discussions as co-supervisor of his project. Unsurprisingly, soon after his graduation, Maltz moved to the Netherlands to become a teacher at Delft and assistant to Hertzberger. Soon after his arrival in Delft, I received an invitation to lecture in the School of Architecture there.

The lecture, orchestrated by Maltz, took place in the early summer of 1971. Much to my disappointment, the place was not the old building of the School of Architecture on Oude Delft, where the Indesem meetings took place and, a little more than two years before, on Friday 9 May 1969, the ‘democratization’ meeting that was to overturn the structure of the School. My lecture, however, happened in the new building, Berlageweg 1, designed by Bakema, where the school had moved in 1970. Given the time of the year, only a handful of people attended (the most vocal among them Henk Engel), enough to fit on one of the balconies of the building. The talk went on for two hours and was followed by a highly inspired discussion with many references to the 9 May meeting, still on the balcony. After that a tour of the building ensued, huge for a school of architecture by American standards of that time and remarkably under-occupied. Later, the discussion continued in the house of Sjirk Haaksma, in a wonderful room overlooking a canal, overcrowded by our group. What was characteristic, and for me impressive, about the discussion was, on one hand, the critical stance towards architectural practice, daring enough to censor even

the work of Van Eyck and Herzberger, on the other, the excellent knowledge of the members of the gathering of the European avant-garde movement of the 1920s and ’30s, which they approached not as a ‘modernist’ style but as an architecture ‘agent provocateur’ dedicated to the cause of a new society, a new way of life.

For many reasons, this kind of approach to modern architecture was not present in the USA at that time. The history of modern architecture was still dominated by the Gideon-Pevsner reductive technophile paradigm, even at Harvard, where the Design School was headed by the formidable Jose Luis Sert, a collaborator of Picasso in 1937. My Delft friends assured me that the School of Architecture of TUD was on its way not only to teach these ideas, but also to teach them through a new pedagogical approach, one free of traditional dogmatic, ‘elite’ standards, at the same time not ‘autonomous’, but made relevant through planning action such as Luud Schimmelpenninck’s (activist elected in 1967 to the Municipal Council of the City of Amsterdam) and the Provo’s *White Bicycle* urban transportation plan. The idea of the university as a ‘critical’ – referring to the Frankfurt School terminology – institution coupled with that of ‘democratization’ was no longer a utopia. Because, my company assured me, contrary to what was happening in other European countries, the administration in Delft not only believed in architecture ‘in the name of the people’ but also possessed the material resources to make it happen.

The story of Bouwkunde of the 1960s and ’70s was extreme but not atypical and did not take place in a vacuum. Most schools of architecture suffered from a similar crisis. During this period the Western economy, society, culture and their institutions were undergoing tremendous changes affecting architecture, its practice and its education. The Netherlands was not an exception. By the end of the 1950s, the task of massive post-Second-World-War reconstruction being accomplished, there was an equally massive investment in the so-called welfare state improving the level of social welfare, culture and education. Part of this process was the transformation of TUD from a university of 1000 students, during the first decade of the 1900s, to 5500 by 1950 (13,650, by the 1980s). Bouwkunde, having a handful of students before the war, became a school of about 500 students in the mid 1950s, (2766 by the end of the 1970s). This growth required a different kind of education and administration rules and regulations, and one of the reasons of the furore of the students and young faculty at that time was the failure of the official ‘authorities’ not only to solve the emerging problems, but even to comprehend the nature of their complexity. Facing this vacuum of leadership, the reaction was very often out of the ordinary and discordant. Such were the attempts of the ‘democratic’ power of the new administrative structure of the school to control the ‘aristocratic’ behaviour of the ‘elite’ faculty, their teaching style and the content of their instruction. An extreme case was the clash that developed between Carel Weeber, as Dean, together with the Board of Directors, and Aldo van Eyck and Herman Hertzberger – who, with Bakema, were the only internationally prestigious members of the faculty at that moment – in 1976. The conflict left deep scars which made cohesion, collaboration and ‘cohabitation’ impossible, imperative conditions during periods of major institutional change. Members of the

stuff did not perceive each other as resources within a win-win game, but as competitors in a fatal zero-sum strife, resembling Frederico Fellini's comic-tragic *Prova d' Orchestra*.

It is unfair to say that the School was not truly struggling to set up a programme of excellence meeting its multifaceted goals, professional quality, cultural worth and social accountability. Towards this end Bouwkunde moved with set of new appointments – Andreas Faludi in 1974, for planning methods, Stanislaus von Moos, at the beginning of the 1980s, for architecture history, and H.M. Höfler, a little later, for design process, Jurgen Rosemann for urban renewal – to fill in positions related to new domains that Bouwkunde did not include before.

Thus, the second Tuesday of September 1981 – ten years after my lecture in the new building of Bouwkunde, I was resting in my hotel room in Delft, watching television with my wife, after a meeting at the School of Architecture of TUD, involving my future tasks as Professor of Design Methodology, a chair formerly occupied by H. Brower, who had died in 1974. Brower had particular interest in developing a systems approach to design, but at the same time he had played an important role in the development of the new direction of studies in social housing during the democratization debates in the School. I was expected to continue in this direction, even more rigorously and on an international platform.

In the room, our attention was drawn by the television programme: Queen Beatrix giving a speech, what we later understood was the speech announcing the plans of the year, in front of the Dutch Parliament. Despite our limited understanding of the language, it became clear that the Queen was outlining a rather grim economic condition of the country announcing a programme of austerity and economic discipline. Indeed, we were witnessing an event signalling the beginning of a new period in the Netherlands, part of a transformation that was occurring in fact around the world at that moment, and an event with major consequences for the future of Bouwkunde.

It took some months for the speech to have an impact on the School of Architecture, which, it seemed to me, was carrying on its lavish, Titanic-style, trip. But when the impact was felt the shock was great. And the agent who transmitted the impact was a politician with special interest in education, W.J. Deetman.

On 11 September 1981, Deetman was appointed Secretary of State for Education and Science and soon after, on 29 May 1982, he was appointed Minister of Education and Science. He was the minister responsible for coordinating scientific policy and he was greatly supported at that time. On 5 November 1982 and again on 14 July 1986, he was reappointed Minister of Education and Science. In his function as Minister he undertook to confront the Bouwkunde challenge, its high cost, its plush style, and – as some people saw it – its eccentric ways. It is not the place here to analyse the efforts of the ministry to reform education of architecture not only in Delft, but all over the Netherlands, including the School of Architecture in Eindhoven and the Academies. Deetman was a conservative, but many of the plans that were discussed and brought out during his tenure were radical, ranging from splitting up and re-concentrating programmes in a small number of centres for building engineering education, to completely terminating architectural programmes and eliminating chairs. These put into question the very existence of Berlageweg 1.

Once more the new crisis of Bouwkunde was severe but not uncommon among the schools of architecture around the Western world and again did not take place out of context. By the end of the 1970s, the welfare state appeared to be running out of money around the world. From the State of California to New York, to the UK and the Netherlands, there were diagnoses of 'fiscal crisis' in most domains of public services and social programmes, followed by remedial acts of massive cuts of welfare-state budgets, and, if not elimination, a shift of such services and programmes from the state to the private domain.

For example, in New York, while federal and state assistance grew between 1962 and 1974 from 25 to 48 per cent every year, by the end of the 1970s it had shrunk dramatically. At the same time, the growth of 'Great Society' intergovernmental funds was reduced from 35 per cent during the period of 1966 to 1969 to 12.4 in the following three years. Paradoxically, as salaries increased during the same period, the real value of income from taxes decreased, assuring the bankruptcy of the city's programmes of architecture and urbanism.

This is not the place to analyse or judge these developments. It is enough to say that they projected not only a different set of priorities for architecture, but also an educational programme drastically different from the one planned during the 1960s and '70s, such as the one dreamt by the young students and teachers in the USA and in Western Europe and in Delft. It was the end of an era, the era of architecture of the welfare state – populist architecture being its last phase – which was characterized to a great extent by public buildings, social housing and mass urban development projects, taught in well-funded schools supported, directly or indirectly, by public money.

But soon after there was also a beginning, the beginning of a period of building driven by private development and private cultural sponsorship, dominated by high-middle-class housing and homes, tourist facilities, headquarters and museums, which required different architectural skills and knowledge from those called for by the welfare state. Thus, the whole curriculum of schools of architecture had to be re-orientated together with the means of their financing.

Once more, Bouwkunde was not prepared. The new administrative structures put in place through the process of democratization were the worse kind of organization to face this kind of crisis. The result was ineffectual confusion combined with activist inaction that dominated during the first five years of the 1980s.

The exhilarating, notorious and tumultuous 1960s were followed by a period of orderly but also depressive cultural reaction in most of the Western world. It is dangerous to match such shifts in *Weltanschauung* with specific architectural products. Buildings appear years after they are commissioned, expressing the aspirations of a client, and it might take years between an architect's sketching of a scheme on the drafting-board that articulates certain desires of the period and its construction on a site that might have imposed constraints at that moment. However, one can safely illustrate the change that occurred between the 1970s and '80s by pointing to the elating *La Mémé* by Lucien Kroll and the exploding *Mummers Theater* by Johansen and Bhavnani and contrasting them to the sedating San Juan Capistrano Library by Michael Graves, the mausoleum-like

Architectural Museum by Oswald Matthias Ungers, and the pharaonic *Les Colonnes de Saint Christophe* by Ricardo Bofill.

If the architecture of the 1960s and '70s was extrovert and dominated by the populist movement, the 'in the name of the people' architecture of the (end of) the 1970s and '80s was one of introversion and professional 'narcissism'.¹

We employed the term narcissism to portray the architecture of this period not so much to indicate the introversion of architecture of the period, but more in the psychoanalytic sense of the term. Accordingly, narcissism, we wrote, demonstrates 'the confusion between the consciousness of control of the self over the self and of the self over the outside world. This is the state in the development of a child where the self is not yet detached from the things of the external world when the "omnipotence of thoughts" dictates a great deal of his/her acts. A person may regress to this state of denial after facing an acute disaster, such as the death of a loved one, when it is obvious from the outset that no measures can redeem the catastrophe.' In social groups, a professional group for instance, a grave loss or a major frustration can provoke similar symptoms of regression: denial of reality and a take-over of the 'omnipotence of thoughts' in its collective thinking, expressed in the 'preoccupation with formalism, hedonism, graphism', helping practitioners to face up to a 'recent frustration and to deny the separation between reality and desire, turning inward for approval to the closed world of peers or of the drawing board, where everything is possible . . . enabling a feeling of omnipotence to replace the sense of wretchedness.'

Today, one feels that these comments are referring only to one of the aspects of architecture of the 1970s, the other being the shift towards a disciplinarian approach, a 'rappel à l'ordre' – as in the case of the Fellini movie – responding to the need to save architectural knowledge from extinction.

Almost no school of architecture managed to escape this shift, and Bouwkunde was no exception.

In several schools of architecture in the USA, France and West Germany the crisis led to the production of new design prototypes, new design education paradigms, to research and book products that provided new knowledge for immediate use, but also usable in the long term. By contrast, by the end of the crisis proper, Bouwkunde had very little intellectual output to demonstrate. Why this absence of product?

Pragmatic and severe as most of Deetman's ideas were, they ironically resembled the predominant ideas of the radicals of the previous decade. Both Deetman and Bouwkunde, the school he wanted to reform, paid too much attention to organizational details of architectural education and very little to *design*; design, as knowledge and as a force of-and-for creative innovation, was absent from their vision – which explains the poverty of intellectual yield during this period.

Were these years lost out of the lives of both the students and staff of Bouwkunde?

To some extent I think they were. On the other hand, as the crisis threatening the very existence of Bouwkunde carried on in the first part of the 1980s, the new generation of students that had arrived in the school during these gloomy years began to respond. This was the generation that

1
'The Narcissist Phase in Architecture' (with L. Lefaivre), for the *Harvard Architectural Review*, no. 1, 1980.

by the end of the twentieth century would make Dutch architecture once more world famous. But at that time, none of their actions, lacking the drama and bravura of the 1960s and '70s, hinted at such things to come.

Stylos, Bouwkunde's student association, searched for ways to open new discussions about real buildings and cities, beyond the world of committees and their fantasies of administrative diagrams. A driving force in this direction was Peter Loeraker, a unique individual who combined charisma, enthusiasm and great talent in design, as was demonstrated in his graduation design, a real house he built in Almere. In a very short period he initiated and organized a series of events and lectures bringing back the question of design to the Bouwkunde community. In contrast to the intolerant cliquishness and meanness of the previous generation, Loeraker had largess and vision. Within a period of less than five years he worked with the two most notoriously antagonistic personalities of Bouwkunde, undertaking his thesis with Carel Weeber and organizing one of the very best shows of Aldo van Eyck. If not for his tragic death in 1991, he would have had a major influence on Dutch architecture and architectural education and perhaps been an ideal Dean of the School.

One of the student initiatives to bring back design to Bouwkunde was the journal *OASE*. How successful it was and according to what measures is a story and history for another writer, my mission being to provide some kind of contextual framework to understand better these first steps of *OASE*.