

In the graveyard of good intentions Ole Bouman

Archis 5
Layout Global

Text Ole Bouman

In the graveyard of good intentions

Due to circumstances beyond its control, *Archis* intends to embark on a new direction in 2005. From then on, it will be an entirely international publication, thus ending a period of 75 years of Dutch introspection such as was possible in the columns of this journal, under its present and previous titles – the *Katholieke Bouwblad*, *Goed Wonen*, *Wonen TA/BK* and finally *Archis*.

There are various reasons for taking this step, the most obvious being that as you become increasingly international you're faced at a certain point with the question of whether it is still useful to voice one specific national situation, especially at a time when both architecture and culture are subject to globalisation. When your readership is also increasingly coming from abroad, it is surely high time to propagate the ideal at a global level of an independent publication on the social and cultural importance of spatial design.

Unfortunately, there is also another factor at play. The above-mentioned reason has already been our guiding principle in *Archis* in recent years, and it proved perfectly possible to combine it with research into and commentary on developments in Holland. Both in the field of design and at a broader social level, Holland was enjoying a period that people were eager to learn about. About an extraordinary crop of talent. About the celebrated 'polder model' that so successfully masked conflicts of interest in a post-capitalist society. About thinking in witty or playful design concepts that could make something plausible out of any and every reality. This was Holland at its best – pragmatic, tolerant, open, clever, bold, good humoured and businesslike – and these are the values it is generally known for internationally. It is not surprising then that presenting Dutch culture abroad was no problem at all.

Today, however, it is rapidly becoming one. Another aspect of the country is emerging for all to see. It is a side of the national character that, while it is less known abroad, has just as long a history. For insiders it is all too familiar, and it has been identified and denounced by free-thinkers down the ages. By Joan Derk van der Capellen to den Pol. By Multatuli. By Eduard du Perron. By Gerrit Komrij. By Ramsey Nasr.

In architecture we find this current in the criticism of the national culture by names such as De Stuers, Wijdeveld, Van Tijen, Habraken, Weeber and Koolhaas. They are all people who were driven crazy every now and then by the pettiness, the nationalistic self-importance, the nit-picking, the patronizing, the thriftiness, the circumspection, the indifference, and the wet blanket of consensus-thinking.

When producing an international magazine during such a reversal in the cultural climate, it is obviously not wise to present it as a specially Dutch publication. There is also less to be proud of. But honesty requires us to say that it would be impossible for us to do this anyway, due to a decision by the *Raad voor Cultuur* – the Dutch Arts Council – that, rather than energetically combating the cultural reversal just mentioned, prefers to provide a political and administrative justification for it. There is therefore no longer any place in Dutch cultural and architectural policy for this publication.

When we think how far-reaching the good intentions of ten years ago were (see 'Dutch Courage, Dutch Comfort', in *Archis* 4, 1994), then a short review of their present state is like having a picnic in a graveyard. Read on and shudder: you are about to enter the graveyard of good intentions.

RIP: Modernism without Dogma



New themes determine Dutch architecture.

It was a great name for a great idea. It meant a rejection of all those unrealisable Utopian ideologies. Instead, it proposes a beautiful abstract style, with key phrases such as simplicity, transparency and a good concept. It was also a unique export package, that made Dutch architecture internationally famous in next to no time, with names like Wiel Arets, Ben van Berkel, Benthem and Crouwel, Willem Jan Neutelings and Mecanoo.

It was not to be.

The names are still there, and their architecture still has something of its former flair. But has it changed the face of Holland? Today, it isn't Modernism without Dogma that calls the shots, but Tradition with a Dogma.

Archis 5
Layout Global

Text Ole Bouman
Photo Arjen Oosterman

In the graveyard of good intentions

RIP: Egalitarianism

Archis 5
Layout Global

Text Ole Bouman
Photo Ad van Denderen / Hollandse
Hoogte

In the graveyard of good intentions



Architecture by Praxis, Hoekse Waard, The Netherlands.

It was a noble aim for a national policy for architecture – architecture for everyone. They declared architecture to be the most democratic art form. In the spirit of 100 years of social housing as the task most worthy of architecture, an attempt was made once again to present it as a social question that concerned everyone. A final flowering of the post-war reconstruction mentality.

It was not to be.

‘Architecture for everyone’ has come to mean everyone meddling with architecture. The idea of *Wilde Wonen* (deregulated housing) has become synonymous with everyone for themselves. All that remains of a good idea for encouraging people to be creative is: the DIY fence estate, the fungus-growth of outlying estates and the rise of gated communities

RIP: Architecture policy



Landscape architect Adriaan Geuze placed 8-meter-tall inflatable animals beside the motorway as a protest against spatial planning policy.

Three government policy documents have been issued. A definition of architectural quality was arrived at. The scale level this quality referred to was expanded from building and complex to (urban) space, city and landscape. Great Projects were proposed where noble aims would be realized in solid results. The whole world looked on as an entire arsenal of instruments was brought into play for implementing the ideals. A Chief Government Architect saw it, and it was good.

It was not to be.

The policy documents have remained almost a dead letter. Brave attempts were made to preserve something of this boundless ambition intact – as a paragraph in the *Nota Ruimte* (National Spatial Strategy). But this wasn't about 'quality' but about 'development' – something completely different. Funding is melting like snow in the sun.

RIP: Faith in the attainable society



Former Minister for Housing and the Environment, Jan Pronk, is now a UN representative, here in a refugee camp in Darfur, Sudan.

Less than five years ago, Jan Pronk, Minister for Housing and the Environment, a model of the left-wing idealist, announced that 'not everything everywhere was permissible any more'. He made a dramatic appeal to the tale of Hans Brinker, in the context of the heroic damming of the rising tide of neo-Liberalism. He spoke of red and green contours that one had to defend with vigilance. He spoke of preserving open spaces. Of a national orchestration of the development of the environment.

It was not to be.

Government is currently backing away from any responsibility for organizing the environment, leaving it to municipal and provincial authorities as to how the country is allowed to change. Instead of talking about what can be attained, we are told to do something, no matter what. Holland has dePronked.

RIP: National self-awareness



Ton Matton created the mobile nature reserve 'Jungle Bus' for the Architecture Biennial Rotterdam 2003.

Archis 5
Layout Global

Text Ole Bouman
Photo Arthur Wortmann

In the graveyard of good intentions

Holland was crawling with idealistic go-getters and can-do people. A Joost Schrijnen, an Adriaan Duivesteijn, a Maarten Schmitt, a Riek Bakker, a Ben van Berkel, an Adriaan Geuze, a Tjeerd Dijkstra, a Fons Asselbergs, an Ypke Gietema, a Jaap van Rijs, a Bart Lootsma, a Ton Schaap. Where have they all gone to? Weren't they supposed to be changing Holland?

It was not to be.

Their dreams didn't come true. Some have retired, some have moved abroad, some have started on a new career, far away from architecture. And some are still bravely struggling in the committees and firms they have stayed with. But now with the wind against them. Instead of running the scene, they have become consultants. Or else they are amusing themselves with the light-weight projects they are still considered capable of.

20
Research

RIP: Tolerance

Archis 5
Layout Global

Text Ole Bouman
Photo Sake Elzinga

In the graveyard of good intentions

21
Research

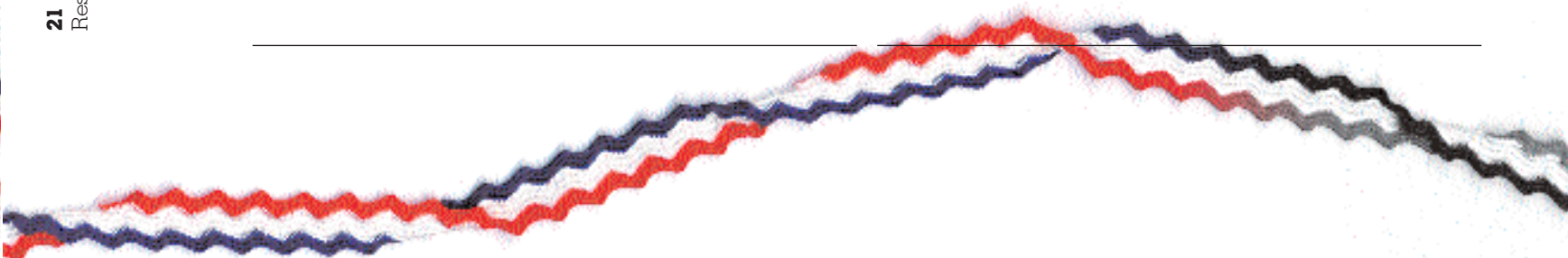


Minister Verdonk for Immigration and Integration opens the departure centre for asylum seekers at Ter Apel, 31 July 2004.

Holland was famous for its open-door policy. Foreign workers, refugees, Amsterdam as a 'free city'. Few people here dared openly to call themselves racists.

It was not to be.

Holland today has one of the harshest policies in the world with regard to asylum seekers and illegal immigrants. Families who have been living here for years are being sent back 'where they come from' without any possibility of appeal. The attitude of 'equal opportunities for all' and of permissiveness has been replaced by its opposite – by compulsory assimilation for immigrants and cold turkey cures for addicts. The public space is being cleansed by urban design and zero tolerance. Centres for asylum seekers and departure centres are being erected in a full-blown *Heimatstil*.



RIP: The concept



Festivities celebrating the sale of the millionth Senseo coffee machine in The Netherlands.

Holland was clever in thinking up the most fantastic design concepts. Small budgets, a poor soil, excessive regulations – no obstacle was so great that Dutch architects did not see it as a ‘challenge’ to come up with an even more astonishing solution. If need be, new materials were invented, and unprecedented floor plans were designed. Entire social planning systems were overhauled in order to produce architecture. Droog Design achieved world fame with its impossible, unimaginable projects.

It was not to be.

How many playful plans and fantastic ambitions are gathering dust now under the pile of future scenarios that are also no longer looked at? Thinking in concepts is now associated with arty-farty permissiveness. Get rid of them!

RIP: The polder model

Archis 5
Layout Global

Text Ole Bouman
Photo Gerhard van Roon

In the graveyard of good intentions



Flevo gold resort, Lelystad 2004. Inhabitants of the detached villas live literally on the golf course.

Holland, the country where conflicts were concealed behind common goals: full employment, prestigious waterfront developments. The Dutch version of the Third Way, the Rhineland Model in the polder. All hands on deck, as though the country was one big Sesame Street. And everyone grew rich from shares on the stock market.

It was not to be.

Polarisation, excommunication, ostracizing, measures against everything and everyone who failed to conform even for a moment. The only room left for discussion was over results already dictated to you by the authorities. Self-interest and the series of scandals where big business and government worked hand in glove have eroded every trace of social solidarity.

RIP: National pride



Former occupants take a look at their old house reconstructed in its entirety at the Open Air Museum in Arnhem. The house was displaced due to the construction of a high-speed railway.

In the graveyard of good intentions

Text Ole Bouman

Photo Koen Verheijden / Hollandse Hoogte

Archis 5
Layout Global

Holland was the country of large-scale interventions in the landscape, of spectacularly daring plans and engineers as artists. The Delta Works, the polders, Schiphol Airport on the Sea, the Rotterdam port expansion project, the Ooijevaar Plan. The country had set its sights on the year 2050.

It was not to be.

Come 2004, and no one dares stick his head above the parapet any more. The whole country is covered with half-finished mammoth projects like the Betuwe Goods Line, the High Speed Rail, the Amsterdam North-South Underground Line, the IJburg Amsterdam extension neighbourhood and others that take years too long to complete and predictably exceed their budgets. Nobody feels proud of them. The strongest emotion is disgust at the forcing through of plans that were undermined by their flaws before they were even built – flaws that plenty of people had warned about from the start. The prognoses today are all of unattainable returns, enormous cost overruns, mediocre spatial quality, disappointing demand, ecological impoverishment.

RIP: Holland as a model country

Archis 5
Layout Global

Text Ole Botman
Photo Arthur Wortmann

In the graveyard of good intentions



The culture of prohibitions creeps nearer. Rotterdam 2004, Paul Krugerstraat.

After the Second World War Holland's remarkable mixture of modest political and military power, economic success and a society that was basically egalitarian and consensus-minded gave it the position of a model country. Freedoms were experimented with here which were unthinkable elsewhere (soft drugs, an enlightened attitude to marriage, abortion and euthanasia). Both the state and the law were dependable here. In short, it was a country that thought itself morally superior to the rest of the world.

It didn't last long

This country is now riddled with fraud scandals. Government and big business stumble from one scandal to another. The country's function as a social and institutional example is being so furiously debated from within, that the outside world has also started to have doubts about whether this was ever really such a paradise.