

## The end

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**The End**

— after

seventeen

years

**Bernard**

**Colenbranco**



—

# **The End** after seventeen years

prof.dr. **B.J.F. Colenbrander**



The End



Panel discussion 'Architecture in a hyper-liquid world' (AIR),  
Stadsgarage Kruisplein, Rotterdam 26-6-2021

I had to reach 65 years of age before I had the experience of moderating a 'panel discussion' in, of all places, a subterranean parking garage. A panel discussion is the expression used these days for an interview with more than one person and I had done this before, but this was the first time in my life that I was expected to do it in such an unfitting location. To repeat: it was a subterranean parking garage, and it was located below the heart of Rotterdam. The topic of the meeting was not, as could have been defensible, 'how to survive in the underground', but was announced as 'architecture in a hyper-liquid world'. Difficult issue, hard to cope with, I say, but the description 'hyper-liquid world' contained a hint of cultural avant-garde.

This does not explain why I had to chair a discussion on it in an environment that is meant to store cars rather than a sensible conversation with people in front of an audience. So, why was it that I was not expected to chair a meeting like this in a conference room, an auditorium or something similar which is available for functions like this? Nobody knows. But the consequences were harsh. The result was that there was nothing for me to chair or moderate, as I could literally not understand a single word of what was brought forward by the participants, who were also not able to hear what their conversation partners were saying. Instead, I could hear cars come and go and I felt a headache coming.

The organizers of the meeting had covered the floors of the parking garage with tons of grey gravel. On it, architectural models were placed to suggest a surrealist version of an exhibition. Was it perhaps to create a gloomy, sublime atmosphere, as if a parking garage did not have enough of that? It was noisy, very noisy. The sound of engines and tires was far more audible than the desperate mumbling of the speakers. To make matters worse, the ramps of this particular parking garage had been discovered by youngsters on skateboards, who also moved from floor to floor, clearly enjoying themselves. I heard them scream as they descended from the ramps at high speed.

It was a total disaster, this so-called panel discussion.

I did not enquire, when everything was over, why the organizers had come up with the brilliant idea to organize all this in a spatial setting which was worse than inappropriate.



I think that I was far too angry with myself, that I had been so stupid to accept the invitation to be there without assuring myself beforehand that the location would be convenient. I returned home, angry indeed, prepared to kill anyone who would dare to ridicule in my presence the continued and eternal relevance of clear and sensible typologies: typologies in which an office is treated as an office, a house is a house and a parking garage is, of course, nothing else but a parking garage. Architectural types are not there to make a travesty of.

Now that my anger has had a chance to subside, I have started to realize that this experience tells me something. It tells me that a theme has increased in cultural importance, one that I could have foreseen when I started here in Eindhoven more than 17 years ago. I could have foreseen it, but I did not. But I could have because aspects of the trend were already present much earlier – to be precise, I suppose that they relate to the liberating and disrupting program of culture of the 1960s. Organizing a panel discussion in a parking garage shows kinship to how, in those days of flower power, the inherited categorizations to understand social phenomena were consciously called into question or even ridiculed. For instance, hippies felt attracted to the idea that a medium chosen for communication could not be segregated from the message involved, following the cue of the philosopher Marshall McLuhan. The medium is the message, so it resonated. If such a discrimination could be made obsolete, distinctions in social hierarchies could just as well disappear. So why not overturn architectural hierarchies in the free development of culture as well?

Since those legendary 1960s, culture has developed more than ever into mass culture. As the name makes clear, this is a huge collective, but its composition falls apart in many individuals, each filled with the desire to distinguish themselves from other individuals. So, mass culture is double-faced; it feeds the collective just as the fragment. To stand out and shine in mass culture, people have to learn how to entertain an audience. There is no entertainment without the effects of surprise. Routines and traditions are therefore to be questioned. Being new and novel, presenting the unexpected, is considered a quality. It may even yield a fortune when you know how to sell it.

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Being original, also understood as being 'authentic', is a quality of distinction in our time. This refers to social constructions in general, but in particular to the personal level, where the exploration of one's personal identity has grown into a prominent feature of social life and culture.

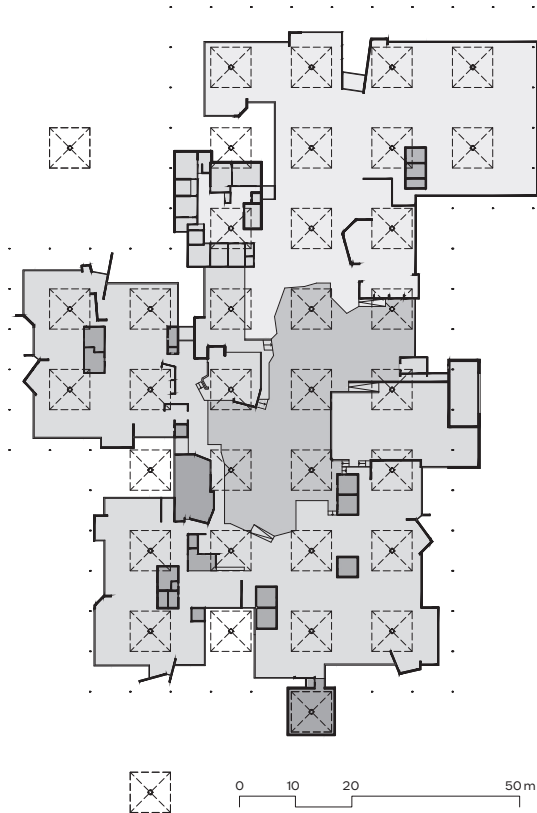
What I unwillingly learned in the parking garage was that an experience nowadays should preferably avoid what can be expected and that it should offer a surprise at any cost, even when the surprise prevents the usual convention of understandability and even when the experience of it is straightforwardly uncomfortable. But, as stated, none of this is new and I could have known it at any time that I was present in Eindhoven - and I would not have to go far to find precedents.

Near this campus, in Eindhoven, one can find a building called 't Karregat. It was built in the early 1970s following the design of Frank van Klingereren, an architect with a certain prominence at that time. I had the honor of meeting Van Klingereren a decade later. My impression of his person was of a colorful and rustic character, not overtly refined in manners but convinced of himself like experienced craftsmen can be.

The construction of 't Karregat that he invented can be described as elementary but effective as it mainly consists of a continuous roof supported by steel 'umbrellas' placed in a regular grid. The umbrellas are connected by trusses and wooden beams and it is in there that all the necessary pipework and the sprinklers are integrated. The outer facades are a simple steel structure that can be filled with glass or multiplex panels, depending on what is necessary.

Nothing unremarkable so far, one might say; these kind of pavilion-like buildings can be found anywhere in post-war Europe.

Also conventional were the functions that were to be accommodated here: a supermarket, two schools, a library and some other social functions for the neighborhood. The miracle starts when one realizes how Van Klingereren brought these functions together, because he did as little as he could to separate the functions but consciously kept connections open. There were no clear demarcations of where the school started and the other functions stopped.



ground floor

Frank van Klingereren, 't Karregat, Eindhoven 1971

exterior



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The outcome was predictable: noise and disturbance caused enormous annoyance among the users.

It was not caused by mistake, such annoyance; Van Klingereren created all this on purpose. He explained that "I am not interested in form and architecture is irrelevant for me. What interests me is that life must be able to function optimally in a building. The question is always: can I cope with making a shelter for a well-functioning social mechanism."<sup>1</sup>

I am convinced that many of the users will not have agreed that the social mechanism functioned well in 't Karregat, because they had to live with exasperation caused by their neighbors. It is also questionable if Van Klingereren spoke the full truth when he said that he was not interested in architecture. I doubt this. I appreciate this building not despite but *because* of its architectural qualities: the clear grid, the sophisticated umbrella structure and the clever flexibility of the outer façade.

The problem of the building was not so much its basic architectural approach as the chosen attitude towards articulating – or rather *not* articulating – the social program. When an architect refuses to separate functions that cause noise from functions which demand concentration and silence, there is a problem indeed. What happened to the building later was predictable. After decades of improvised actions to separate functions in order to make it livable, the architectural features of the building were carefully renovated in recent years by a team led by my colleague in the department, Paul Diederer, who simultaneously restructured its interior to functional conditions that are currently seen as acceptable and normal.

Frank van Klingereren was not a man of theory, but his ideals and solutions clearly came from a culture-critical agenda. It started with a diagnosis of modern life, relying upon specialization, rationalization and division of functions. These may have led to perfectly organized building and cities – but, according to Van Klingereren, the downside was loss of community and the fading of the public domain. A counter-movement was urgent, he argued, to offer imperfection instead of perfection, public instead of private, disorder instead of order.

The consequences for architecture were clear. In terms of both the functional organization of the program

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from the very instructive monograph on Van Klingereren: Marina van den Bergen, Piet Vollaard, *Hinder en ontklontering. Architectuur en maatschappij in het werk van Frank van Klingereren* (Rotterdam 2003), p. 190.

and the building structure, architects should do less instead of more. This would leave room for the unexpected. Of course, nuisance and disturbance may be the result, but the contact may lead to friendship in the end.

The ideas of Van Klingereren, brought to life in 't Karregat, leave me with mixed emotions. When I read that his buildings were received at the time as "a milestone on the way to the final elimination of architecture", these emotions turn negative. I think that this man, Van Klingereren, was betting on the wrong horse. He misappropriated and ridiculed the value of architecture, offering instead a hopeless social agenda; hopeless, because I do not see the attraction of nuisance and disorder, not even if they would lead to friendship in the end. But even then, I confess that I appreciate the architectural qualities of 't Karregat, which the man himself claims, ironically enough, are irrelevant.

My problem with the approach of Frank van Klingereren towards his profession is the masochism of it. In his fanatic appreciation of informal social behavior, he sacrifices the value of architecture. But why should one be at the expense of the other? I don't see the argument, only a pointless abandonment of expertise. Therefore, when looking for favorite building in the architecture produced in the latter half of the previous century, I appreciate buildings where the exact opposite approach is followed by their creators. Such buildings are 100% architecture and, while they may be based on profound agreements between builders and clients, they do not exceed or make statements about territories that belong to a different authority, like the territory of social interaction.

This suggests a category of architecture that strives for autonomy - which applies quite fittingly to the oeuvre of Wim Quist, the architect who, between 1968 and 1975, was one of the earliest architecture professors of our department in Eindhoven. He left to become chief government architect and after that was able to create an impressive series of buildings.

Quist died in the summer of this year and I would like to honor his legacy. My favorite building of his is the Randstad head office in Diemen, finished in 1990, which stands as a composition that has so little need of anything outside itself that it is close to perfect autonomy: a self-

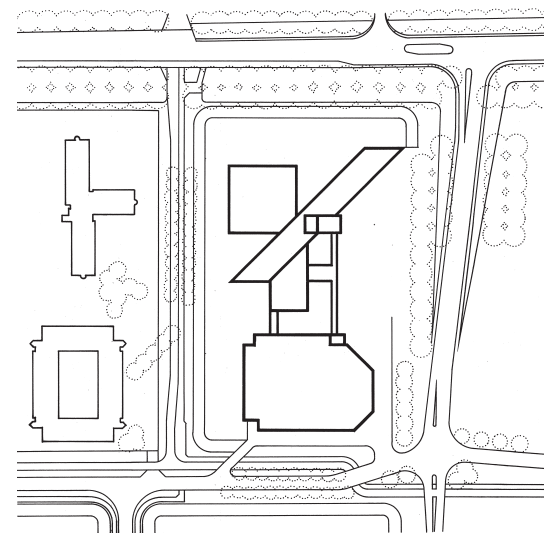
2  
I am paraphrasing myself in what follows: Bernard Colenbrander, 'Static sensations', in: Ruud Brouwers et al, *Yearbook Architecture in the Netherlands 2011-12* (Rotterdam 2012), p. 20-25.

contained world. This world has an origin in which there were no formal certainties.<sup>2</sup> Only the building site was known; there was a program but the design sheet started blank. Instead of relying on a traditional type or other architectural convention, the building was based on an independent creative exercise in order to arrive at an arrangement that is valid only for this specific project.

The process of independent form-finding resulted in a sharply drawn diagonal across the flank of the plot, indicating the central axis of the office slab. At its foot, the diagonal is united with the remaining functional components of the program, with the lift shaft used as a compositional hinge. The car park, which could not be put underground in this marshy location, is a full-fledged element of the composition with a characteristic Quist concentration on how columns and beams connect. Finally, the facade panels fill in the framework provided by the architectural structure. What has been done here architecturally shows a perfect sequencing from big to small.

I do understand that the experience of this Randstad building of Wim Quist may cause irritation of a different

Wim Quist, Randstad Head office, Diemen 1987-1990, site plan





10 Wim Quist, Randstad Head office, Diemen 1987-1990



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category than what I went through in the subterranean parking garage in Rotterdam or the users' anger about the permanent disturbances and noise of the original Karregat before its renovation into a 'normal' building. Also, architectural perfection as the result of obsessive designing can be a reason to get peevish. Ultimate perfection, without anything that slightly disrupts or deviates from the scheme, causes discomfort or even claustrophobia. Perhaps this is because we, as humans, have to cope with the unpredictable course of life in which nothing can be realized without being disturbed underway. So, we cannot allow buildings to ignore our imperfection and show us how things could be in an ideal world of harmony.

Architecture must not be *too* perfect. But even then, from the perspective of an architecture's interests in this first quarter of the 21st century, I would argue that the approach chosen by the late Wim Quist is absolutely relevant given the current circumstances. It is because he didn't give up on architecture, like Van Klingereren, and he remained devoted to architecture and nothing else from beginning to end. His approach shows full-fledged respect for the autonomy of the discipline, including its traditions and methods, and above all its typical language (which is not the same language as the language that we speak or the language of our social behavior). Such an approach has become very rare and it may even be in danger of extinction.

In recent graduation studios in Eindhoven, we have explored how the autonomy of architecture in recent decades has slowly become overgrown, more than ever, with interests and themes from beyond the borders of the discipline.<sup>3</sup> For Van Klingereren, a building was no more than a neutral vehicle to realize the social frictions which he thought would lead to friendship. The message turned into the medium here. Since then, this phenomenon has found many more new beddings, including beddings that I meet with less sympathy than I still have for Van Klingereren.

As we discovered in our graduation studios, architecture has become instrumentalized by forces strong enough to make architecture fully subservient. In Western society, we have reached the stage where buildings are expected, most of all, to deliver safety, to support health and to be sustainable. This is what we have embraced as our holy trinity: safe, healthy, sustainable.

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Bernard  
Colenbrander,  
Hüsnü Yegenoglu,  
*The instrumental  
building* (Eindhoven 2020)



It is remarkable to note that almost all architects that we know of have fully identified themselves with these programmatic instructions, and it is as if they feel relieved from the duty of discussing architecture at all. Their buildings are explained and defined with the main focus on their practical performance, no more, no less. The building contributes to a healthy life, doesn't it? Of course, it is realized with sustainability as its main compass. And it goes without saying that it guarantees the safety of its inhabitants. Nothing more to say. The holy trinity ensures total camouflage.

Traditionally, we are used to understanding architecture as an applied art serving social needs, but what we now experience is that these applied functions fully hide from view what architecture itself has to say.

A hilarious, but not exceptional, recent example of the latter comes from the architect Ben van Berkel, explaining the intentions of his new Echo building on the Delft university campus.<sup>4</sup> This building has a spiral staircase as an eye-catcher. It could have been instructive to learn how this staircase serves in the routing of the building or how it contributes to the typological ratio of this department building. Maybe there is something in the chosen material and how it relates to the tectonic principles of construction. But that is not how Van Berkel approaches it. The staircase is meant to serve no less than “three layers of health”, he explains. The stair invites movement up and down and that is why it contributes to one's *physical* health, he states. On the stairs, it is possible to have a free view of all sides and it is spacious enough to meet someone, which makes it beneficial for your *social* health. Finally, the stairs supply a “pleasant and safe feeling”, so your *mental* health will also get a boost there.

Taking note of such an explanation, it is hard not to think of the emperor's clothes. What the example illustrates is that architects are ready to drape their buildings under any camouflage that seems opportune without the feeling of it being necessary to explicitly refer to the methods, linguistic codes and traditions of the architectural discipline. A building is a vehicle for a message of any kind, however incidental or volatile.

<sup>4</sup>  
See <https://architectenweb.nl/nieuws/artikel.aspx?ID=52128>



UN Studio, Echo Interfaculty building TU Delft, Delft  
2017-2022, staircase

after seventeen years

The ease with which architects these days adopt the camouflage of, for example, the sustainability discourse, forgetting about their own, makes it predictable that they will also soon put on the robe of the latest trend in Western culture: the sensitivity to issues of gender and race. With its liberating aims, the diversity culture may also be a late consequence of the culture of the 1960s. Culture politics have adapted very quickly to the trend, if only to avoid being ‘cancelled’ because of having missed the latest fashion or delusion.

Recent examples show the international museum council ICOM struggling with the definition of a museum. Must it perhaps be added to the definition that a museum should be a “democratizing, inclusive and multi-voiced space” or is it enough that a museum acquires, preserves, researches and documents?<sup>5</sup> It needed years of extensive consultation between the international partners before a conclusion was reached that anyone could live with.

The national government also heard the bell ring and concluded that our spoken and written language should be adapted to the values of new times. Therefore, a ‘code of diversity and inclusion’ was established, which published a ‘handreiking waarden voor een nieuwe taal’ (‘guiding

<sup>5</sup>  
‘Ideologische  
angel lijkt eruit:  
musea stemmen  
over definitie’, in:  
NRC Handelsblad  
(17-8-2022)

values for a new language'), promoting "decolonized, inclusive and accessible language."<sup>6</sup>

With such eminent predecessors, architects can only follow soon.

The appeal of architects to the rhetoric power of camouflage refers to the message that a building has to convey; it may also seep into the physical characteristics of the building. These days, we are getting used to buildings that pretend to be something else, falling back on the tricks of travesty. My experience in the parking garage that temporarily lent itself as disastrous accommodation for a panel discussion gave only a glimpse of what this might mean. We have buildings that aim to be something else forever. Take, for example, Stefano Boeri's *Bosco Verticale*, Milan, which attracted enough attention to be repeated elsewhere. The Eindhoven version is called *Trudo Vertical Forest*, and that name tells you exactly what this is about: a building that acts like a forest, be it quite a lousy forest.

This is no incident: it is fashion, and fashions behave infectiously.

An influential reference has probably been BIG's

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Stefano Boeri, Trudo vertical forest, Eindhoven 2017-2022



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[https://codedi.nl/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/WAARDEN\\_VOOR\\_EEN\\_NIEUWE\\_TAAL.pdf](https://codedi.nl/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/WAARDEN_VOOR_EEN_NIEUWE_TAAL.pdf)

Amager Bakke waste-to-energy power station in Copenhagen. As a building type, a power station may be a necessary evil, but that does not mean that we tolerate it near us. This is why BIG came up with the idea to hide it under a dry ski slope of the local mountain activity center. The slope is 400 meters long and starts at a height of 90 meters.

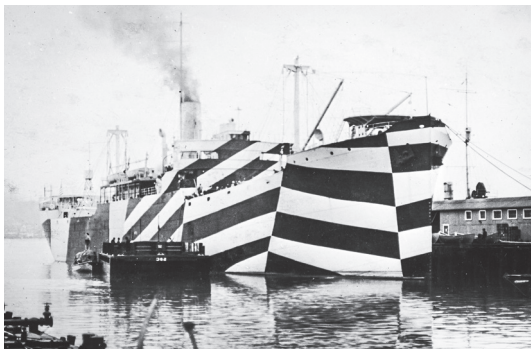
There are credible and less credible examples of recent architecture based on the tricks of travesty. The depot building that MVRDV created for the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen is far from what tradition has to offer for this typological category. Rather, it presents itself as a shiny bowl, or perhaps a flowerpot, and there is not much else that we can say about this building, at least not in the linguistic universe of architecture.



BIG, Amager Bakke waste-to-energy plant with ski slope, hiking trail and climbing wall, Copenhagen 2013-2019



MVRDV, Depot Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam 2017-2021



Norman Wilkinson, dazzle painting ship camouflage (distortion of perspective), USS Mahonet, 1918

Why on earth would an architect choose a tactic for his or her building based on misleading conventional expectations? I can only associate it with a rather absurd reference, namely that of *dazzle painting*. More than a century ago, in the final episode of the First World War, the British navy relapsed into the trick of dressing up to protect ships that faced the risk of being hit at sea by torpedoes fired by German submarines.<sup>7</sup> To mislead the German captain, peering through his periscope, the British ships were painted in patterns that made it hard to distinguish the shape and sailing direction of the ship. Here, camouflage served as a means to survive.

Such a motive is, of course, absent in the camouflage tricks relied upon by BIG or MVRDV. I assume that their intentions must come from the urge to entertain us, treating us as if we are an audience with an unstoppable desire for excitement.

When these kinds of motives have taken hold in the expertise of an architect, it helps to explain why the same BIG office, and the just-as-famous office of OMA as well, not only rely upon camouflage but also call on acrobatics as a trick. We must be entertained at all costs.

Apart from the fact that OMA's recent RAI hotel in Amsterdam is a bland mockery of an advertising column nearby, it also plays a funny game of stacking and floating. I don't know what else to say about it. With a similar gusto, BIG's recent Sluishuis in IJburg, Amsterdam, exploits the limits of technological machismo with its double cantilever

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<sup>7</sup> See the entertaining exhibition catalogue produced by Albert Roskam, *Dazzle painting. Kunst als camouflage - Camouflage als kunst* (Rotterdam 1987)

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OMA, Nhow Amsterdam RAI hotel, Amsterdam 2014-2020



BIG, Sluishuis housing project, Amsterdam 2016-2022

of a height of 52 meters without any supporting columns. Again: I do not know what more to say about it. But surviving a power test does not turn a building into architecture; it reaches halfway at most.

I realize that it may not be fully justified to draw conclusions on the state of architecture on the basis of the examples given, because these obviously do not represent the whole picture. Who searches well will still be able to discover here and there recent buildings not lacking in subtleties. But I do think that important disruptive trends which have ideological origins in the 1960s have found a wider reach. They characterize an architectural discourse that, perhaps for survival's sake, has shaken off many of the conventional conceptions that we used to attribute to architecture as a discipline. Instead, we are getting used to a logic which does not require an intrinsic sequence from the primary layout of buildings to their tectonic realization down to the last detail.

We learn to live with buildings that fully coincide with health, safety and sustainability. We also learn to accept that camouflage and acrobatics have become embedded in the architect's toolkit. Buildings can be funny. And we can expect that the threshold for the newest fashion in culture politics will be crossed soon: architecture that seeks to be inclusive, decolonized, gender-neutral or, if required, gender-specific. I have no idea yet how that will look, but it will be entertaining for sure.



These are the forces pushing buildings to become flexible and volatile in order to adapt to whatever message is required. It is symptomatic that, in recent Dutch policy documents, the concept of architecture has been replaced with that of the creative industry. The discipline is supposed to merge completely into a market sector.

With all the understanding I try to bring to what this market requires and asks for, I do experience this development as a loss. It is even true that a certain nostalgia came over me. There is a famous short aphoristic text that I have to quote here because it illustrates what seems to be lost. It dates from the early 1970s as a hybrid combination of a poem and a prayer and its author is the American architect Louis Kahn. Kahn used to mumble it surrounded by a circle of his pious followers at the university. It goes as follows:

*If you think of Brick, you say to Brick: "What do you want, Brick?" And Brick says to you: "I like an arch." And if you say to Brick: "Look, arches are expensive, and I can use a concrete lintel over you. What do you think of that, Brick?" Brick says: "I like an arch." And it is important, you see, that you know the material that you use. You can only do it if you honor the brick and glorify the brick instead of shortchanging it.<sup>8</sup>*

When I first came across this poem in the 1980s, I dismissed it as too sentimental to be taken seriously: "Yes, Uncle Lou, you are completely right. But shall we proceed now to the order of the day? Get back to sleep." But 40 years later, I understand that this kind of primitive logic in architecture makes sense. It helps to understand a building according to its own parameters. It also helps to remember that a building is different to, or *should* be different to, a random utensil. It helps to maintain architecture's territory in the hierarchy of the arts and between other social phenomena.

So, as far as I am concerned, Louis Kahn is here to stay, although one may have serious doubts about what the answer will be these days when a brick is asked what it wants to become. There is a serious risk that he/she will answer: "I would like to be a flowerpot in Rotterdam's Museumpark."

I assume that my honored audience will understand by now why it seems a very appropriate moment for me to retire. It is because I am getting out of step with my own

times. It is because I tend to defend a position from the past. Having become aware of that, the moment has arrived to draw up the balance of what I was able to do in my 17 years in Eindhoven and what I refrained from and did not do.

First of all, this has been an environment that, for me, quite naturally led to a personal disposition of servitude. My chair of architectural history and theory (abbreviated to AHT) here was not supposed to be cultivated in academic solitude. From the very beginning, it was clear that it would be stupid to raise up the fences between history and theory and its environment in the department. The natural tendency towards the integration of disciplinary fields in Eindhoven is no myth, it is real. There may be differences in interests and differences between personalities, but no fences. I instantly felt happy with this, at least as long as architecture was allowed to be the middle ground.

Meeting in the middle ground of architecture is also fostered by a substantial workload. The Eindhoven architecture unit is relatively small when one takes into account the constant influx of students. When I started working here in 2005, this population was completely Dutch and this has changed to a completely international profile, but the number of students has remained more or less stable and high. Having to cope with the educational demands of this high number quite naturally causes cooperation.

The graduation studios in particular have served as useful platforms to address the variety of topics relevant in architecture. It has been a pleasure for me to chair many of these studios, choosing the topics carefully to explore architecture from the perspective of AHT.

In these studios, it was inevitable that themes would arise that are currently deemed important in society, from the issue of sustainability to the issue of social inclusiveness. But what is the real architectural potential of such trends? Just as it irritates me when professional architects play hide and seek by avoiding explaining their performance in architectural terms, students can postpone addressing core issues for a disturbingly long time. It is as if architecture lends itself very well to being postponed forever, as both students and professionals tend to give priority to contextual issues instead of design.

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Louis Kahn, quoted from a recorded master class at the University of Pennsylvania, 1971, included in Nathaniel Kahn's documentary *My Architect. A Son's Journey* (min. 46-47) (2003).

after seventeen years

I am afraid that my engagement with architecture as a design practice has been so dominant that I forgot to cultivate a close-fitting definition of what 'history' should contain, and the same is true for how we understand 'theory'. It depends on the situation or the assignment. Perhaps our pragmatism sometimes borders on opportunism; so be it. It is in the application that the value of history and theory is constantly proven or unmasked.

AHT's responsibility for historical themes particularly came to the fore in cases in which we chose to explore heritage issues or the influence of biographical inheritances. But much more often, our contribution is directed at raising theoretical issues, in particular the critical investigation of purely architectural problems. This is what we did, for instance, when we explored the complexities and contradictions in an architectural composition, drawing our primary inspiration from Robert Venturi's famous book on it.

By omitting the setting of clear boundaries to define the domains of history and theory, AHT was, in the daily practice of the department, fully ecumenical, prepared to engage with almost everything, working with everyone.

20 It also meant that AHT accepted many responsibilities in administrative roles. In retrospect, I must note that all this cross-border behavior has come at a cost: AHT has neglected to properly mind its own core business. Our contributions to academic history in particular have remained limited, and I regret that.

Being committed to education in all kinds of cooperation and also to management in a variety of roles inevitably leads to an indoor existence. 'Floor 7' in Vertigo has been for me, just as for quite a few colleagues, the center of our working lives, leaving hardly any time for free exploration or serious study. Perhaps this is also something that I regret. Being so homely may make you more introverted than is sensible and it may cause a certain narrow-mindedness. But I am pleased to note that even for such a deviation, there is an appropriate reward: the artist John Körmeling once invented a medal for people who excelled in not knowing how to get away from home, calling it de 'thuisblijf-held'. If there is someone who deserves this medal, I present myself as a good candidate.

The availability of 'Floor 7' as a stable address has certainly supported the progressive development of AHT as

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John Körmeling,  
Medal for the  
stay-at-home  
hero (Medaille  
voor de thuisblijf-  
held), 2014

the homebase for a substantial number of research projects. Frankly, this hardly occurred as a process that we fully controlled and guided. Rather, we followed a liberal or even eclectic course when our noses smelled good research. This meant that we judged intended projects on their own presuppositions. If general patterns between projects can be distinguished, they only arose gradually. There is good reason for such pragmatism. We did not have the luxury of a safe filled with euros somewhere. We depended on what presented itself of its own free will – and that appeared to be a lot.

In general, research in history and theory differs from research in the natural and technological sciences in that nobody wants to pay for it. This is especially true when the chosen topic raises fundamental issues and does not easily fit under the camouflage of fashionable social trends. Being hospitable to exactly those topics that deviate from fashion has made AHT into a kind of a resort for research which is valuable on its own terms, although we are not able to offer funding.

In the meantime, researchers know how to find us. AHT currently serves as the basis for about 20 PhD projects, with which our capacity – offered by two assistant professors, one associate professor and me (now leaving) – is more than reached.

I will not mention all projects, but they range from historical morphological studies to explorations of pheno-

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menological issues to research into the institutional background of architecture. Even the art of historical biography is kept alive in our resort.

Half of the 20 PhDs of AHT have found a home in our Curatorial Research Collective (CRC). Here, we inquire into the effects of culture politics and media and, with the abundance of research energy brought together in the CRC, we have gradually grown confident enough to state that we are bringing about something.

In what AHT became over the years, it also spoke for itself on the fact that we could offer a basis, or at least a reference, for the research ambitions of our architect colleagues of Floor 7. Two splendid PhD projects have been completed; a third is on its way. That AHT was able to adopt such a role is one of the greater satisfactions of my years in Eindhoven. Allowing a chair group to become a resort for research projects that will not easily find accommodation elsewhere may seem exotic. But in fact, it is crucial in order to be able to assume the critical independence through which academic discourse thrives.

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AHT has definitely not created a research school with a strict ideological definition, which would also have been impossible with our dependency on coincidences. Rather than a school, the resort of AHT can be characterized as a climate. This climate is, in principle, liberal and open-minded, but we simultaneously demand methodological discipline and, not least, good writing.

Up to a point, our type of cultural environment benefits from a critical distance from the world outside. Such distance also applies in the most literal way to the physical environment of our university campus. Originally, in the 1950s, our campus was designed to simulate an idealized factory complex. This was supposed to be the perfect environment for the people who were educated here and who would later be responsible for the further development of the nation's industry.

In concrete terms, it meant that both the landscape and the buildings should be perfected and stylized versions of purely industrial environments. With its idealizing intentions, the campus was also meant to be a kind of a resort: an environment where the atmosphere was just a little more perfect than in the everyday environment outside.

The End

after seventeen years

That is indeed how it started in the late 1950s. However, in the passage of time after its completion, this quality fell into disrepair and oblivion. The campus was still attractive, but the usual treatment of real estate property had done no good.

It was not very long after my arrival in Eindhoven that I slowly but surely became more deeply involved in what was taking place here on this campus. It started with the demolition plans that were disclosed by the university's Executive Board, concerning one of the main buildings on the campus, the so-called W-Hal. To cut a long story short, students of ours started a campaign against these plans, drawing me into it; the Executive Board initially attempted to counter resistance, but then gave in and created the basis for a far more fruitful follow-up. With a new Real Estate director, Veronique Marks, and the commissioning of my colleague Christian Rapp to prepare a masterplan for the campus, the right conditions were created to do something very special here. From there on, my involvement grew.

The campus was carefully redesigned from landscape to infrastructure and from infrastructure to buildings. A quality team was founded to advise the university on what to do and what to avoid. What to do connects clearly to the intrinsic architectural logic of the initial campus plan of the 1950s. What to avoid are the camouflage tricks or the acrobatics of the fashionable architects of today. What is also to be avoided is the consciously created absence of order as can be seen, for instance, at the Uithof campus of our colleagues in Utrecht. Such characteristics do not fit a resort where things are just a little bit more perfect than they are in the outside world.

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Tenable ideas will never be realized without the right conditions of governance – and I think that we have come quite close to a model that is exemplary. In any case, it turned out to be helpful when a tender project had to be set up for the renovation of the main building, and many projects followed after that. Besides being a member of the quality team, I had a specific responsibility for the preparation of value assessments for buildings that were eligible for treatment.

The working model that was invented during the first masterplan also remained in place when Veronique Marks left as director and Dorine Peters came in. I think

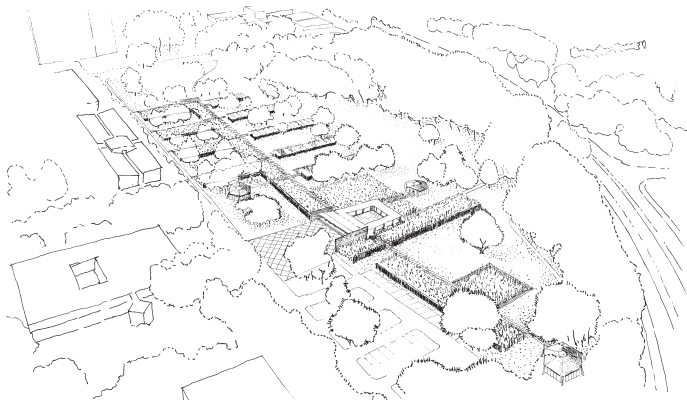


that is rare these days that consistency, including staff consistency, of this level turns out to be possible, even when it is not the cheapest way to act.

The outcome that a building should be maintained at any cost was not reached in all cases that were investigated in the realization of the masterplan. The very building complex where the university began its existence in the later 1950s, the so-called Pavilion, had to be given up to make room for new developments on the flank of the campus. While dealing with this problem, it was fortunate that I was also appointed as chair of the university's art commission so that we could invent a perfect alternative for the original Pavilion: a *lieu de mémoire* and a sculpture garden to be developed in the near future.

My final few years at the university were quite substantially dedicated to art policy and art projects – and I took that as a wonderful gift. The Pavilion project is still on its way to being realized in the years to come, but the painting project of Gijs Frieling in the new main building was successfully delivered during the COVID pandemic and we are now busy preparing Hella Jongerius' *loom room* in the new Neuron building, to be finished in spring next year. Each of these projects comes with a publication that explains what we are doing and, although none of these activities come close to fitting what a professor is supposed to do at this university, I am glad that they were tolerated. And with this final confession, I bid farewell.

Paul Achterberg, First sketch for Pavilion location as *lieu de mémoire* on Eindhoven university campus, 2019



The End

## Colophon

This lecture was held on 18 November 2022 at the Technical University Eindhoven on the occasion of the farewell of prof.dr. B.J.F. Colenbrander

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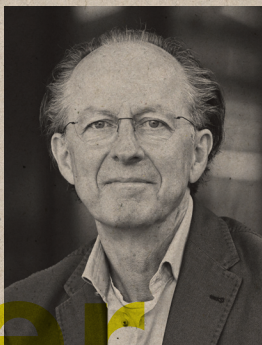
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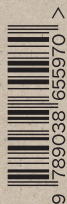
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