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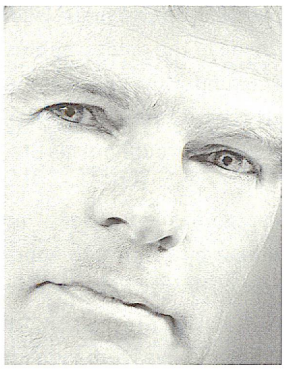
ARCHITECTURE, CRISIS AND CATHARSIS

Winy Maas



During the fabulous golden years before the crisis, life was exuberant. We made enormous pieces of art, we developed hotels that went beyond five stars, we spoiled the climate by interiorizing it, we gave managers such enormous salaries that we could not afford it, and we started to take decadent holidays.

What was architecture doing before the crisis? The New York Times wrote that during those days we did not use our family names, we said Zaha, Rem, Norman and we behaved almost like pop stars. We made proposals that were outrageously beautiful in some way, and they were copied by an entire generation of people who wanted to make flashy funny things. How funny should we be? How far can Hedonism go? How much can be afforded for leisure?

We were shocked about what happened. We did not grasp the size of the crisis and we cannot yet understand the social implication that this is going to have. Some say it is finally a break, a moment to consider what can be, what we were and what should we lead to. We have to discuss again our design and we have to reconsider what is good again. Does it lead to new architecture? It will definitely lead to objects that try to discuss, and want to go beyond superficial shape and beauty. Beauty is not any more about spending, it is about construction of ideals. I am aware that I am partly guilty as well. So I have to learn as well. Anyway, what to do is the issue today, but I do not have the proper and correct answer yet.

Recently I started The Why Factory, an institute at Delft University of Technology to make research not only about analyzing the past but about trying to imagine how to develop the future. It is an attempt to collaborate in a public and private partnership to stimulate both sectors to reinvest together in education. We want to give argumentation back to the architectural and urbanistic world, especially now when things are unclear. We concentrate on future city models. This is a perspective of trying to grasp this lack of knowledge because the future city is not one single typology. We have defined a series of projects to research, we want to wonder about the world of wonders. I will write about the death of the leisure city, I want to go on with automation and explore the issue of prosperity. We have to publish books, films on TV and software.

This is in a way new, but not new either. I wanted to start a discourse, because maybe we expected a catharsis but probably it will redirect partly our work, it will not fix it. I want to evaluate that we have to know that we cannot escape and what we already can do if the potential architecture is still limited.

Solar Flowers