



Flexible workspace and authoritarian surveillance

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The Case of the TU Delft Faculty of Architecture

Notes containing additional information (numbers 1 -12) can be found at the top of the pages.

Notes referring to literature (numbers 13-42) can be found at the end of the article, in alphabetical order.

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After The Great Fire in the spring of 2008, the Faculty of Architecture of the TU Delft (Bouwkunde) has equipped its new, temporary lodgings with flexible workspaces for students, teachers and researchers. Together with organisational changes, this spatial solution involves an acute change in what was before a university department based on principles of academic freedom and liberal institutions. Protest was waved aside. This combined intervention involves a 'revolution from above', a 'carte blanche' is used by the transformation of an 'old-fashioned' faculty into an authoritarian organisation.

HYPOTHESIS AND CONCEPTS

More generally we suppose that *any* revolution produces its own kind of anarchy, and consequently its fitting form of authoritarianism. In this perspective 'Bouwkunde' represents a case study. First, we give a short theoretical introduction.

Although a revolution in a political regime is sudden by definition, there is always - structurally and/or willfully - a period of preparation. In our case a text by the present Dean, Wytze Patijn, written while still our 'State's Architect', is clarifying. He presents 'The Hotel Office', 'The Satellite Office' and 'The Dynamic Office' as three variants of a flex architecture that solves "hidden empty office space" and as an alternative to "the traditional cell office." Bouwkunde's former 'space' - before the fire of spring 2008 - must have been 'under-used'; the private studyrooms

were obviously 'cells' - thus 'wrong'... Patijn demands more attention for "humanism, flowering as never before" and for its "individualism." Away, then, with "the average office" stained with its "hierarchical control."³³

Although the new form of the faculty-system also has stabilising elements, Bouwkunde seems to have become less dynamic, because this form is incapable to function well for its original content: the critical-intellectual medium.³¹ The more open the faculty's system seems to function *after* a revolution, and is presented to function in that way, the more authoritarian it is indeed. The seemingly looser 'coupling' of people involves a stricter and less flexible coupling of the system's elements. Thus, the more vulnerable will be the system as a whole, and the sterner the reactions of the regime to those who jam it. Academic

Images

1 The flexible workspaces of staff members Bouwkunde (2009), photograph by Hans Shouten, faculty of Architecture, TU Delft

2 The desk of students Bouwkunde (2009), photograph by Hans Shouten, faculty of Architecture, TU Delft

Footnotes

1 Awe, by the way, is the stupid version of authority - based on defective insight of inferiors in the qualities of their chefs.

authoritarianism seems to be a risky type of stabilization of its self-produced flex-anarchy. This complex we define as the system's authoritarianism.

'Authority' and 'authoritarianism' are quite different matters. We define authority as reciprocal recognition of valued inequality. Authoritarianism, by contrast, implies the one-sided presentation of the practice of one-sided power as if it were authority; the carte-blanche of power presented as self-evident consensus amongst 'almost' equals. Authoritarianism involves 'normally' hidden means for disciplining or even excluding inferiors.¹ Old-fashioned Academia functioned in terms of true authority, inferred from the chef's and colleagues' evident capacities in academic research and teaching. This order, we argue, is now subverted.

Strikingly, the last two Bouwkunde Deans were imposed by The Board of the Delft University – parachuted that is. Both have no record of scientific research and/or teaching abilities.² Thus, their faculty influence derives from the power of the appointing institution. We use terms, though, that eliminate the connotation of caprice from this new universitarian authoritarianism. An academic functionary is formed more by the social context of requirements, than being a dictator inflicting his will on others.

Our analysis is an extended comment on one of the Dean's misunderstandings: "If the introduction of flexible workplaces makes the faculty *less* 'compartmentalised', then that's a big bonus; but it is not the main reason why we're doing this."³⁴ 'Compartmentalization', here, is doubly and mistakenly connotated: spatially, in contrast with the 'cell office'; socially, as cocooning to be countered by 'flex'. This we shall explain.

THE 'NEW BOUWKUNDE'

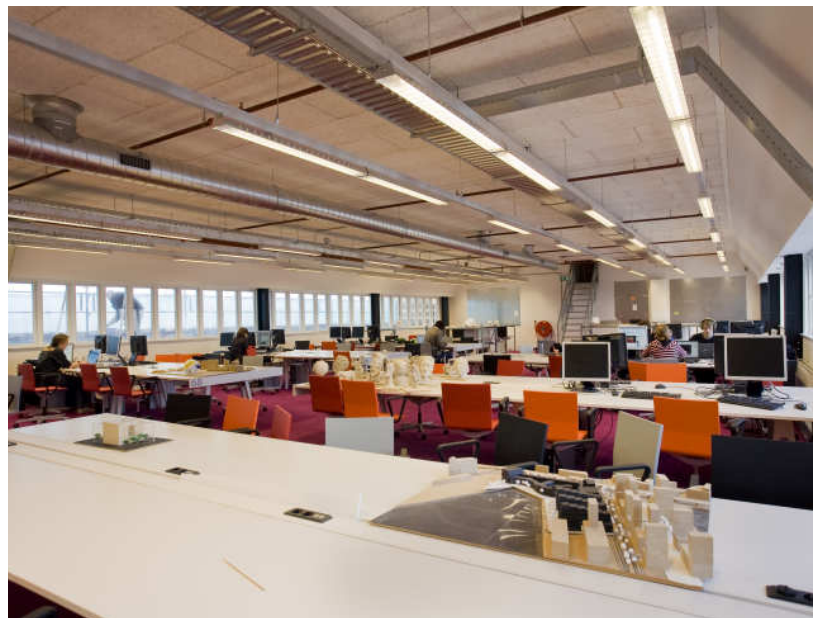
In the 70's Bouwkunde was like a beehive: only seemingly chaotic, in fact with an underlying structure that facilitated full communication between students and staff, and between staff member of various professions. This showed itself in for instance long, daily lunches at long tables, in which students and staff participated. In the next period Bouwkunde became segregated in compartments ('vakgroepen'), which communicated more internally than externally, certainly a result of internal strife since the early 80's when the Minister forced a measure of reducing or even eliminating whole departments in Dutch universities (TVC). The next ministerial intervention, the introduction of the Anglo-Saxon Bachelor-Master system worsened this cocooning; again colleagues were transformed into competitors. Then, in the new millennium, the last two Deans colonized the faculty. A few professors, considered 'special', got a staff of their own, as well as a visually recognizable separate space in the building. Departmental cocooning became complete.

2 First Prof. Ir. H. Beunderman (1998-2005), then Prof. Ir. W. Patijn (from 2006); both did not write a PhD. Before Beunderman there was Prof. Ir. C. Dam (no scientific pedigree either); Prof Dr. Ir. J. Rots, was dean ad interim in 2005-2006, then again since October 2008, during the long illness of Patijn.
3 Integral management' matches the abolishment of the faculty's Council in the early 80's. First (1998- 2006), delegation of powers was used. With its collective debate the board still functioned as 'Management team'. Patijn ended this in 2007; he became the first Integral Manager, the 'Management team' being reduced to talks with the chairmen of the Departments.

Since the autumn of 2008, the new lay-out of the temporary building was accompanied by *The BK City Guide*, lying at each flex spot. Practical things like telephone numbers are indicated, but it also includes a set of behavioural instructions. The principle is clear enough: "No longer than two hours at this spot; clean up (Clean Desk Policy)." "Clean desk policy involves that one leaves desk and chair 'clean and empty' for the next user." A happy perspective is all-present: "A cleared desk is good for everybody." The guide is like a sales brochure for an academic furniture store. Another rule: "Don't take away belongings of others"; nor is it allowed "to smoke or to use drugs." What was self-evident becomes explicit; what was an inner value, is now degraded into an external rule.

Already before The Great Fire 'topdown' elements in the new Dean's approach could be noted. This is now intensified by the new system of academic flex labour. 'Integral management' had already been introduced a decade ago, involving the Dean's one-man jurisdiction over education, research, and personnel and material policy. In the intermediary period this was implemented half-heartedly, although institutions for staff influence were already abolished. Suddenly, integral management matches the authoritarian regime all too well.³ Only the meetings of full professors remain of academic democracy but even those meetings are restricted to advice.

The traditional, Humboldtian university combined research and teaching in each academic's task. Qualified staff, often with a PhD, had great freedom in the choice and the organization of teaching material and of their research topic. Most of them



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Images

- 3 Centraal Beheer (1972-1974), Van Meel, 2000, p. 41
- 4 Larkin Building (1904), Van Meel, 2000, p. 41
- 5 Bürolandschaft Osram (1963), Quickborner Team, Albrecht et al., 2000, p. 60

had their own study, or they shared a room with a colleague with similar academic interests. A chosen council and a chosen board represented all echelons of the department, striving for compromise on earthly matters and guaranteeing academic freedom.

From September 2008 on, the outline of a new research policy involves the staff members' application for one of a list of topics prepared by the Dean's office. If there is no theme that fits one's expertise – bad luck; you may become a full-time teacher. Obviously, the program of topics will be related to departmental pay-off. Research topics financed by outside institutions and corporations will be favoured; truly academic interest becomes less important. Thus, criteria for which work will be done are also stipulated top-down.

TRANSPARANCY AND SURVEILLANCE

At the end of the 18th century the Utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham developed his 'panopticon system', consisting of a perfect visual control over detailed actions of 'inmates' of school, prison, office or factory. He also invented the gem-concept of 'the eye-servant' and was convinced that under permanent control "someone becomes at length what he is forced to seem to be."¹⁶ Without control, or without being conscious that one *might* be monitored, a man tends to deviate from norm and rule.¹⁷

In the past academic work was only in part 'labour', most of it was inner-motivated. However, the New Bouwkunde is very much concerned with visibility. A comment from the responsible architects: "The faculty wanted a more transparent office concept. It wanted to get away from the cubicle mentality, to create a more open organisation in which everything is more visible and employees and students interact with each other."²⁸

One must keep in mind that the couple of 'suspicion' and 'a feeling of being threatened' are part and parcel of all kinds of authoritarianism. Surprising was the skewed representation of signatures under a protest petition from the four departments of Bouwkunde, although recruitment was quite intense. Some staff did not sign from fear of retaliation. There was no signature at all from the largest department 'Architecture'; only two from 'Real Estate and Housing'; a quarter came from 'Building Technology'. Nearly 70% came from 'Urbanism'.⁴ A majority of the signers wrote a PhD.

The cause of this seems clear: 'Architecture' is completely design oriented; its staff works comparatively as part-timer – Architecture's staff members outnumber its fte twice.⁵ For part-timers, who also work for an architectural office, the 'exit' option is greater than for full-time staff. So their 'voice' is comparatively

Footnotes

4 Our source: interviews and several talks with various Bouwkunde colleagues from different Departments. For this article we also interviewed one member of the FLEXteam (Trijntje Kraak) and one member of the Supervising Committee of the forthcoming survey research (Theo van der Voordt).

weak. This combined reduces their 'loyalty' to Bouwkunde, especially under conditions of an intensified authoritarianism.²⁶

FLEX WORKSPACES

'Centraal Beheer' (1967/72), one of Herman Hertzbergers master pieces, affords an early example of a Dutch flex office advertised as "office garden." The move to the new Apeldoorn location was too far away for half of the 700 Amsterdam workers, who stayed home. Within three years, though, the business grew again to a staff of 800. A silent acceptance of the new flex labour must certainly have been an unintended result. Supposedly "more freedom" was produced, but it remained administrative labour, now fitted in a context of "contract-control groups in a flat organization", including "delegation." Tasks were designed at the top; and subsequently distributed within the groups.¹⁴

According to Hertzberger en Van Eyck a good office building must facilitate "informal encounters"; the causal nexus between office design and democracy was self-evident. These 'humanistic' years considered "inhuman, impersonal corridors" anathema. Patijn's august 2008 text, quoted above, relates the same ideology. Hertzberger perhaps equated 'garden' with 'English Garden': the office became an amaze of paths and open compartments. "In this way, the building was the architectural answer to the democracy wave at the end of the 60's."¹⁵

Interestingly, the development in office architecture on the European Continent for along time differed from its Anglo-Saxon version.³² As a result, the Continental office plan, being embedded in an urban context and answering demands for



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5 For an interesting parallel between academic Bouwkunde and the commercial office of Elsevier, compare: Femke Hekking, Flexplekken voor tijdelijke werkrachten, thesis/essay Facility Management, Haagse Hogeschool, May 2004.

6 Such 'architectural determinism' is a basic element in the architect's ideology. A funny example: Van Huut, an 'anthroposophical architect', claimed that a school designed according to his principles would

"realize 40% of the educational task." Quoted in: I. Haagsma, 'Het avondrood der rationalisten', in: De Architect, vol. 11, 1980, no. 9, p. 83. As usual, any causal argument is wanting.

7 For the distinction between 'function' and 'task', compare R. Sennett, The Culture of the New Capitalism, New Haven/London, 2006.



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daylight en ventilation (no airco!), was more elongated. Holland, Germany and Scandinavia preferred offices with separate rooms, thus Great-Brittain and the US used an open office plan much earlier.

This difference may also be ascribed to factors like workers' participation and the real estate market. Anglo-Saxon countries have more hierarchically organized labour relations; they trade real estate like a separate 'product', not as the property of the principal, as was and often still is the case on the European Continent. Offices with larger, open spaces resulted Britain and the USA. Our Continental workers' participation matches a more general egalitarian culture and a greater need for privacy. The German *Bürolandschaft* and the Dutch Garden Office, then, broke with this trend, an ideological move from 'external surveillance plus routine', to 'cooperation plus creative work'.

'Centraal Beheer' and the recent 'New Bouwkunde' are not very different. Their respective architects, Hertzberger and Fokkema, are both convinced that their designed workspace contributes to the quality of work.⁶ There is a difference, though: the quality of surveillance. Hertzberger encouraged workers to take their own belongings into the office; this is a sin for Fokkema Architects. Their 'clean desk'-policy produces 'clean', thus 'unused' workplaces.

It would be interesting to hear more from our 'creative

communication' ideologists on issues like *actual frequency* of, and more specifically the *kind* of communication and the *type* of knowledge exchanged in the flex office. One does not read much about all this, though. Already in 1985 Brill en Margulis concluded that communication within an organisation depends on the level of privacy: little privacy produces far less communication.²² Probably, only a personal study or 'work space' provides for true academic discussion between self-chosen partners.

FLEX COMMUNICATION

Until recently, academic work was function-related and also directly linked to a well defined task. The new top-down research program separates topic formulation (Dean) from the actual performance of (staff). Thus, staff's activities become task-related.⁷ The faculty's research-staff stands merely for 'capacity'; the researcher's task is forced-fed by the Dean, himself a professor-manager and not a researching professor.

Staff members cannot find one another anymore. Some time ago it was the student who complained about the non-presence of teachers; now this phenomenon is spreading. Numbered spaces do not have regular inhabitants. Each contact between teacher and student, or between two staff members, takes place within a digital envelope. First, you must read and answer your mail or use your mobile; only then may actual contact result.

Cocooning thus acquires a new form. That narcissistic seclusion from the world, already promoted by walkmans, by an avalanche of mails, intensifies. The faculty helps, in format

endeavouring to force you to 'participate': output registration,



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Images

6 Phone spot Bouwkunde (2009), photograph by Hans Schouten, faculty of Architecture, TU Delft

Footnotes

8 Research 'output' is used within Delft University to distribute research budgets to faculties and research units (based on an average of three years). Also, in the context of the 'Resultaat & Ontwikkelingscyclus', staff members

are required to offer their quantified 'results'. Dean Patijn, recently, decided to use the output money for his own budget only and skipped the general rule that the research unit that produced the research output in the past will be paid for its effort.

9 Much of this was already predicted in 1983: R. Sierksma, 'Tweefasenstructuur als universitair panopticum: de geboorte van de normstudent, de normdocent en de normonderzoeker', in: Universiteit en Hogeschool, series 29, nr. 5, March 1983, pp. 268-275.

10 Amongst others: W.F.E. Preiser en J. C. Vischer (eds.), Assessing



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automated Results&Development-cyclus et cetera.⁸ Everything becomes 'self-service' and 'self-help, real support from the service departments is dropping.

CONCLUSION

Some things are quite clear, now.⁹ Autonomous scientific research is threatened by extinction, at 'Bouwkunde' it is simply not facilitated anymore. Top-down organized research topics, waiting to be implemented, will make this worse. 'Research capacity' is only considered in terms of execution, not in terms of originality of actual research. One must expect routine results: less variation in topics, as well as in research partners. Also, the separation of research and education will become larger.

It is not difficult to predict higher absenteeism. This phenomenon amongst 'lower' educated staff has always been explained from lack of autonomy in their taskdesign and execution. We must now conclude that such conditions apply to the academics as well.

The simultaneous introduction of flex places and top-down research themes is the keystone of the architecture of

Bouwkunde's authoritarian capacity system. It completes the demise of academic democracy, the system of output financing, and the downfall of interdisciplinary teaching. The Committee for Exam Systems disappeared; the Exam Committee was dismissed entirely, with no proper chance of the needed passing on of experience.

Sennett has analysed all this as a more general social trend: the quality of labour is devalued; job-rotation, tele working and flex labour produce more rules.⁹⁹ Received insights gathered from professional literature need to be reviewed, for instance the theorem of 'user perspective' as found in the works of Preiser, Vischer, Lindahl, Brill, Worthington, Van der Voorde, Van Scheijndel en Horsten and others.¹⁰ Designed office interior is *supposed* to be evaluated from the perspective of the user; however, in new research this is not any longer the case.

Lindahl's distinction between 'serviceability' and 'performance' is of interest here.³⁰ Performance concerns measured 'achievements' of real estate. 'Serviceability' refers to the relation between a building and its users. When, like in our case, this user is not taken seriously, analysis may leave out 'serviceability', only 'performance' will do. The remaining question is who is served by such 'performance'? When in the analysis of workplaces 'organization culture' is often situationally defined, the evaluation's conclusion is already routed in a utilitarian direction.¹¹

Bouwkunde is an exemplary case – it is not exceptional. The Central Library of the TUD is to be turned into a 'learning center' with flex workplaces. Outside the university there are already many 'innovative concepts' in action, so-called 'dynamic offices': e.g. the insurance company Interpolis in Tilburg, the projects in Haarlem, Den Haag and Arnhem of the Rijksgebouwendienst. From this perspective the 'New Bouwkunde' is historically speaking a *controlled revolution* - though transplanted from commercial office into Academia.

Evaluation of the new academic office is yet possible. When the temporary building came into use in Octobre 2008, the Dean announced such a review, done by an external office and within three months. Still as our 'State's Architect', Patijn wrote: "Continuing to experiment and listening to the users of these new offices, we shall need to discover ideal proportions."³³ Until now he had no time to listen, reading the one-line reaction to his critics in 'B-Nieuws'.¹² Perhaps a thorough evaluation might change that. ☹

Building Performance, Oxon, UK, 2005; J. Worthington (ed.) Reinventing the workplace, Amsterdam, 2005; P. van Scheijndel and F. Horsten (eds.) Succesvolle kantoorhuisvesting - bouwstenen voor een optimaal resultaat, Den Haag, 2008 (7e edition, originally titled 'Kantoorinnovatie'); Th. van der Voordt et al. (eds.), Integrale plananalyse van gebouwen. Dynamischkantoor Haarlem, Delft, 2007; Th. van der Voordt and H. van Wegen, Architectuur en gebruikswaarde, Thoth (3e edition), 2005.

11 G. Hofstede's definition of 'culture' is often quoted: "Culture is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members

Reference

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of one group or category of people from another"; G. Hofstede, Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind, Intellectual Cooperation and its Importance for Survival, New York, NY, 1997.

12 The Dean, while writing then, was still in good shape. His illness since Octobre 2008 may have been cause for delay, however; yet, his replacement Rots has not reacted either.

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34 Patijn W., B-Nieuws, Special edition, 22-08-2008, p. 3.

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Dr. Ir. Kooijman studied and now works at Bouwkunde. His PhD (1999) concerns the history of western shop design.



Dr. Sierksma, a sociologist-philosopher, was pensioned from Bouwkunde in 2008. His PhD (1991) concerns the history of American 'pragmatism' and labour management.

The authors have written this article as private persons.