

Making the Road by Walking

A Timeline of Ideas, Articles and Interviews

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In the contemporary world of architecture, design and media, we hardly ever reflect on what we see or read. We live life with our finger on the fast-forward button and one-liner texts rule. The deeper significance and value of texts and images disappears in our zapping culture. This publication gives the reader room to contemplate the content of the work, such as a photographer creates Stills on the set of a film under production. This time we are not presenting a monograph of projects, but a textbook instead. The development of Arets' ideas is shown in their multitude of thought and action, and the reader is given a set time to contemplate specific themes. On various fronts the different texts enter into a dialogue with the context from which they originated. The chronological development and discussion of Wiel Arets' work, collected in this compilation of the best texts, articles and interviews, forms the backbone of this book. Arets, and many other authors, speak about the work while in the background architecture photographed by Jan Bitter unfolds along a horizontal timeline of realised buildings in silver, black and white. Moreover, the dialogue will also be carried out another way. This timeline of texts, articles and interviews does not only contain official texts, but includes lecture notes, short statements, conversations, critical observations, significant readings, radio interviews, an inaugural speech and for example texts written with colleagues, in order to give an overview of the context in which Wiel Arets developed his thought.

1. BERLAGE INSTITUTE
POSTGRADUATE LABORATORY
OF ARCHITECTURE, ROTTERDAM.
WWW.BERLAGE-INSTITUTE.NL AND
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARTS, BERLIN,
WWW.ARCH.UDK-BERLIN.DE
2. ARTICLES BY BART LOOTSMA
(PERSONALITY, CRAFT AND
TRADITION. THE ARCHITECTURAL
ROOTS OF WIEL ARETS) AND
THE ARTICLE BY XAVIER COSTA
(TOWARDS AN ARCHITECTURE OF
MEDIATION) TALK EXTENSIVELY
ABOUT DEVELOPMENT AND THEME
WITHIN ARETS'S WAY OF THINKING.
3. SEE ALSO THE ARTICLES BY STAN
ALLEN, GREG LYNN, ANTHONY
VIDLER, KENNETH FRAMPTON,
ROEMER VAN TOORN AND BART
LOOTSMA IN THIS PUBLICATION.
4. WWW.ORAS.COM/EN/
CONSUMER/PRODUCTS/
PRODUCTFAMILIES/PAGES/
ILBAGNOALESSIDOT.ASPX

Sketchbook of thoughts

Having words, provocative titles, challenging themes, critical analysis and theoretical considerations are an intrinsic part of architecture according to Arets. Mapping landscapes, portraits and travel impressions are, according to architect Álvaro Siza, the ideal tool to develop acuity of vision. However, Wiel Arets believes that sketching with words is the ideal architect's tool, enabling him to see and understand. It is not the architect's artistic pencil that is crucial, but an architectural thinking that develops and reacts to a cultural context is what matters to Arets. It is about the power of knowledge you can develop as architect in dialogue with others; how a meeting with a mayor, a banker, a contractor, a resident, a curator, a philosopher, a colleague architect, a student, an architecture critic, an investor or project developer, drives the way of thinking forward and presents new opportunities in architecture. I have no idea whether Wiel Arets, like the architect Le Corbusier, describes the architect in his passport as a *Homme de Lettres* (Man of Letters); in any case, Arets' architecture is about ideas and he writes just as much as he builds. This is why Arets is of the opinion that the creation of architecture magazines, publications and research at architectural institutes such as the Berlage Institute¹ and the University of the Arts are an intrinsic part of the profession.

If you are prepared to theorise about your work, it means that your work contains ideas. Arets believes that architecture without ideas is no Architecture at all, but just building. The photographer Jan Bitter creates Stills of the buildings Arets has produced, and so the reader is invited to *stand still* before the body of thought Arets has developed over time. Ultimately you do not arrive at architecture unless you are inspired in one way or another by a culture of film, literature, art, or another discourse that forms your architectural ideas. In his early years, the local context crucially influenced Arets' ideas. It was through Peutz's architecture in Heerlen, the Italian and Japanese architecture he loved so much, or the Technical University of Eindhoven, that Arets broadened his horizons after familiarising himself with the ideas of Geert Bekeart, Hans Tupker, Joost Meuwissen and a generation of acquaintances such as Wim van den Bergh and Bart Lootsma² in the 90s. Arets' experiences as a teacher in America and London brought him into contact with the international discourse of architecture. Architects and theorists such as Anthony Vidler, Stan Allen, Greg Lynn, Hani Rashid, Alvin Boyarsky, Kenneth Frampton and many others, who later taught at the Berlage Institute Postgraduate Laboratory of Architecture when Arets was dean, influenced and analysed his work³. Arets believes that ideas do not exist in isolation, but flourish in dialogue with reality, along with such things as various disciplines including philosophy, technology, film and photography have to contribute to your ideas. It is this power of thought that we have documented in this book in the form of a chronology where reflection and critical observation complement each other. Arets speaks, but also enters into dialogue with others, while his work is critically discussed. At the start of his career, Arets gave lectures and wrote analytical articles about leading architects such as Aldo Rossi, Giorgio Grassi, Luis Baragán, Frits Peutz, Tadao Ando, Kazuo Shinohara, Itsuko Hasagawa and Fumihiko Maki. He worked with Hans Tupker to organise the first Tadao Ando exhibition in the Netherlands. Together with Joost Meuwissen, Wim van den Bergh and Kim Zwarts, Arets opens new avenues into theory, architecture and architectural photography respectively. Arets winning the Maaskant prize in 1989, inspired international architects and architectural critics such as Anthony Vidler, Stan Allen, Greg

Lynn and Bart Lootsma to write about Arets' work. The first monographs about Wiel Arets began to appear even before any large project – such as the library in Utrecht – was realised. In the year the library in Utrecht was completed (2004), several important articles appeared which critically analysed the uniqueness of his public work. Articles describing the development of Arets' early thought and work faded into the background in favour of recent projects. The closer we come to the present, the more complete and perfect Arets becomes – he becomes a true all-rounder. Today Wiel Arets Architects acts on every design and architecture scale. Whether designing an espresso cup for Allesi, developing the dOt⁴ bathroom line or a new idea of what the city of the future could be, they all are part of a consistent line of thought developed over time.

Inserting a story

As Cesare Zavattini, the famous screenwriter for neorealist film directors such as Vittorio De Sica, Federico Fellini, Michelangelo Antonioni and also Bernardo Bertolucci, once said⁵ "...reality as such will continue to appear uninteresting as long we are not able to overcome some moral and intellectual laziness. One should not be surprised that the cinema has always felt the natural, unavoidable necessity to insert a story into reality to make it exciting and spectacular. All the same, it is clear that such a method evades a direct approach to everyday reality, and suggests that it cannot be portrayed without the intervention of fantasy or artifice". Wiel Arets, inspired partly by Jean-Luc Godard, started to investigate a whole series of estrangements strategies to break reality open, just the fantasy and artifice of Zavattini did. Without the texts *An Alabaster Skin*, *Grid & Rhizome*, *Defining A Void*, *The Architecture of Freedom* or *The Destruction of Simplicity*, which are included in this compilation, the library in Utrecht would never have become a building full of narratives, surpassing conventional reality. The aesthetic language (even style) of Arets' architecture – in negotiation with the program of events – plays an essential role in communicating and allowing certain stories to unfold. The library in Utrecht, by its relative autonomy (through its blackness and other means⁶) will never fall prey to fashion or sentimental scenographies. It escapes the everyday of the cliché through its relative autonomy, the distance it takes from the domestic without ignoring it, but instead, amplifying it. These stories and other related ideas unfold in Arets space-time sensoria to set the power of thought against a backdrop of built work. The deliberate nature of this chronology of texts and background images has been created to show the complex correlation between words and things. Texts never stand on their own, but are contextualised within the discourse of thought. Connections and patterns become visible; how critical analysis and future ideas influence each other becomes apparent. While walking, this chronology informs and challenges the reader to make connections between the written and the built work.

The architect as a public intellectual

According to Edward Said⁷ the intellectual is an individual with a specific public role in society that cannot be reduced simply to being a faceless professional, a competent member of a class just going about his/her business. The central fact, says Said, is that the intellectual is an individual endowed with a faculty to represent, embody, articulate a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public. Furthermore, this role has an edge to it, and cannot be played without a sense of being someone whose place is it to publicly raise

embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than produce them), to be someone who cannot easily be co-opted by governments or corporations, and whose *raison d'être* is to represent all of those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the carpet. Traditional academic intellectuals uphold eternal standards of truth and justice that are not precisely of today's world. Architects in pursuit of practical solutions cannot be traditional intellectuals, but could be called organic intellectuals⁸ working within a discipline, and who are able to use their expertise and organise space using their ideas and material practice. Wiel Arets' ideas and propositions are always bound to a context and are purposefully linked to our actuality. According to Arets, thinking and action do not occupy separate spheres: it is thinking and action, instilling a non-linearity in the process of creating. In this sense Arets creates the road as he goes; in search of a public architecture. Wiel Arets' appeal for a new role for the architect in his recent lecture in Washington⁹ proves that he indeed sees the architect as a public intellectual: *Architects will have to become inventors, storytellers and directors again, capable of meeting, creating and directing their clients. It will be their task to contribute to shaping our new society, in which contradictions will have to be accepted, and where a new élan will be claimed that lies hidden within a world that is no longer tangible.*

There is much more to discover than I can mention in this introduction, it is up to the reader now to start walking, to join Wiel Arets while walking, and contemplate his concepts together with those of the other authors; how through the power of thought the creation of architecture creates new opportunities and discovers its public responsibility.

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7. REPRESENTATIONS OF THE INTELLECTUAL: THE 1993 REITH LECTURES, EDWARD SAID, 1994.

8. AFTER ANTONIO GRAMSCI: THE PRISON NOTEBOOKS: SELECTIONS, 1971.

9. WIEL ARETS: A WONDERFUL WORLD, WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY LECTURE, 2010. PUBLISHED IN THIS PUBLICATION.

5. SEE ALSO THE DOCUMENTARY ON SCREENWRITER AND LONG-TIME VITTORIO DE SICA COLLABORATOR CESARE ZAVATTINI, DIRECTED BY CARLO LIZZANI, 2003.

6. SEE ALSO MY ARTICLE IN THIS PUBLICATION: THE QUASI OBJECT. PURITY AND PROVOCATION IN THE LIBRARY OF WIEL ARETS.