

**Team 10 and its Topicalities**

Dirk van den Heuvel

To begin with, a picture of Team 10 by Peter Smithson, who died only three months ago. Looking back in 1989 he writes:

'a children's television programme fragment, a playground, recalled Team 10 to mind:  
every child playing by his or herself, inner-concentrated  
each in their own private game  
a small boy puts on roller skates he teeters away,  
falling frequently  
he works his way round the edge from support to support  
he is seen by another child who gives him the end of a skipping rope and pulls him  
along  
other children join in the pulling  
they see it as something only possible if they join together  
six or seven pull, one small boy is pulled  
suddenly the pulling stops  
each resumes his private play.'

A few years ago we started to put our long standing interest in Team 10 into an actual research project. Since then we have been asked, why? Not all the time of course, but we met some skepticism on our way: why Team 10? We already know everything about them, it is said, there are hundreds of publications on them, as well as numerous ones by themselves. So, what news could there be? Even more critically some of our colleagues remark: they never built a lot, and eventually their impact on mainstream production seems quite modest. The rhetoric answer to these equally rhetoric questions I would say, is: we don't know yet, and this is the very reason why we start the project altogether.

One of the reasons this question – why Team 10 – is asked, I believe, is that we had and sometimes still have, contact with the circle of Team 10 on a personal basis. Even though, the architects of Team 10 haven't been on the covers of architectural magazines for more than two decades now, their presence has always been felt. For some of us, here, members of Team 10 were our teachers, even intellectual parents. And so, although Team 10 is history, Team 10 thought and work, at least parts of it, have become an intrinsic part of the way we speak and think without actually being conscious of this.

This is a problem of distance, or lack of it. It means that we may overlook the obvious and, at the same time, that we are uncritical about the familiar stories surrounding Team 10.

This is not just a problem for the ones who are sincerely interested in Team 10. It is also a problem for the ones who identify with Team 10 in a negative way. There is a lot of myth around this loose group of kindred souls.

In contrast to the people who think everything is already known about Team 10, we think the research into Team 10's thought and work has only just begun. While organising this congress this point was proven almost immediately. Many of the issues we wanted to be addressed, puzzles to be solved, will still be there after this congress. Looking for speakers for specific subjects, we found they were simply not there.

One obvious handicap for our research into Team 10 is the fact that we tend to focus on the

## Team 10 and its Topicalities

break with CIAM and the 1950s. What happens afterwards has not been investigated exhaustively yet. Also for us this is true. I think the majority of the contributions to this congress will focus on the formative years of Team 10. A few contributions will paint a larger picture. Eventually we shall have to go beyond that to come to a more complete reevaluation of Team 10.

Or, to put it more viciously, as art historian Kees Vollemans did so provokingly, when he got entangled into one of those terrible disputes with Aldo van Eyck at our Faculty:

‘Not a single historical movement can be explained solely on the basis of its previous history; its subsequent history is also – and precisely – determinant for a proper understanding, no matter how hard such a movement tries to suppress the subsequent history.’ (1975)

This was said in 1975, and I mention it to stress once again, that the research into Team 10 has only just started. Apart from numerous archives waiting to be disclosed, completing our factual knowledge, one of the bigger questions is, how to situate Team 10 and its members within their time and place, from the late 1940s probably up until the 1980s; may be even 1990s, when one considers for instance that Peter Smithson remained in touch with Giancarlo de Carlo by lecturing at the latter’s summer school of ILA&UD in Urbino. Obviously, individual positions shift during such a period, also within Team 10. So, which connections are actually there? Which purposeful parallels can be drawn, and also, which not? Because sometimes, upon closer inspection, hypothesised connections and parallels seem to be non-existent. Tempting as it may be, we have to be careful not to merge the various neo-avant garde groups of the post-war period into one grand narrative, blurring their differences and individual contributions. On the other hand, the insistence on a history of sheer individual, singular trajectories leads to a crumbling of the larger picture we need in order to understand those individual trajectories.

Reading through the latest publications on the postwar period and the presupposed positions taken up by Team 10 architects one cannot help but feeling lost. Some authors stress the search for authenticity and ordinariness, whereas others include Team 10 projects within a tradition of an ever accelerating modernism. Team 10 thought is said to be connected to our culture of tourism and consumerism, even precursing our contemporary world of simulacra, and much in contrast with this it is also said that Team 10 demonstrated a proto-ecological awareness, and aimed for creating identity on the basis of patterns of daily use by way of experiencing space in a corporeal way, and not a visual way.

So, apart from asking, why Team 10, apparently we can also ask: which Team 10?

One reason for this, is the nature of the group. As we all know, it is a loosely organised group of individuals. It is hardly possible to speak of ‘membership’, or ‘movement’. Ultimately one can detect an ‘inner circle’, and ‘invited participants’, but in some cases a clear distinction is hard to make.

There is only one manifesto produced within the older CIAM organisation, the Doorn Manifesto of 1954, nothing more. And even this one manifesto was a matter of dispute between

the Dutch and English younger members of CIAM.

After leaving CIAM no new programmes were drawn, no Charter of Habitat, or any other 'official' document. Most of all, questions were posed, and criticism was ventilated, towards mainstream building and planning, as well as within the meetings among the group members themselves.

The only public evidence of Team 10 as an autonomous entity are the publications edited by Alison Smithson, self appointed chronicler of the group. May be we still speak of Team 10 because of her reports – even when they evoked criticism at the time, and still do.

According to one of the introductory texts of the *Team 10 Primer*, the individual members 'sought each other out, because each has found the help of the others necessary to the development and understanding of their own individual work.'

In this sense, I would say Team 10 represents a collection of individual careers, a web of interactions and exchange between architects.

Looking from a conventional historiographical perspective there is hardly a 'product', or let's say an 'object', to research. The individuals within the group emphatically maintained their autonomous position, with the many clashes between them as a result and demonstration of this. Yet, at the same time they persisted in calling Team 10 a 'family', expressing their close bond. Thus, Team 10 history challenges conventional historiography, and the historiography of Modern Architecture in particular. Apart from the notion of 'object' Team 10 history challenges notions like authorship and historic development.

The picture becomes even more complicated, since Team 10 members themselves turned out to be quite adequate 'historians', rewriting the history of Modern Architecture and further establishing the paradoxical phenomenon of a tradition of Modern Architecture, even when their tradition was quite different from the one Sigfried Giedion forged with his various editions of his *Space, Time and Architecture*.

Because of this web of individual positions and development another question becomes important, namely how to approach Team 10?

Once again looking at recent publications, too often the position of the author seems to be decisive which Team 10 comes afore. On the other hand, this may be one of the things that Team 10 invites, even demands, to become personally involved, and to explain one's own position.

In 1991, Alison Smithson published her final document on Team 10, *Team 10 Meetings*, produced here at our Faculty by Max Risselada, to point out one more line of the web we are looking at.

Concluding her introduction Alison Smithson writes:

'... As to people who are interested in Team 10, Team 10 might ask a few serious questions: "Why do you wish to know?" "What will you do with your knowledge?"'

and perhaps most interestingly she writes down a final question:

'Will it help you regenerate the language of Modern Architecture so that it would again be worth inheriting?'

So, once again, this question: why Team 10? Why should we look into its history today? A lot of things can be mentioned here, like the ways in which Team 10 continued as well as transformed Modern Architecture; the ways by which they tried to redefine the relationship between the individual and the larger whole; the steps they made to move away from universal solutions towards solutions specific to situation; the first answers provided to the question how to deal with the rising consumer society; how to re-use and re-energise our old cities in a modern age; and the inspiring and still exemplary way by which they presented a European perspective after the devastation of the Second World War.

But first of all, I would say, the obvious thing would be Team 10's ethos, and the way this is related to their practices. Of course, this is the most difficult thing at the same time. It is why much of Team 10 was rejected by younger generations. However, it is there at the very core of Team 10 thought.

John Voelcker said it quite aptly: '[Team 10's] programme is simply "what needs to be done".'

This is in such sharp contrast with today's opinions of leading architects. After the deficit of the 'grands récits', and after the so called 'end of history' caused by the neo-liberal triumph the general assumption is that architecture and planning are largely autonomous practices, free from any nagging of an uneasy conscience. Many architects today seem to revell in sublime uselessness, surfing the waves of *Zeitgeist*. Bringing up morality is said to lead to unnecessary political correctness, and to impose inconvenient restrictions.

Only two fields related to architecture and planning still allow for moral issues to be openly discussed. They are of course gender studies and (post) colonial studies. And even there is a lot of suspicion.

So, why bringing up the issue of morality? Everyone knows when that happens you can say goodbye to humour and a social atmosphere. However, one should realise, it is not simply a matter of bringing up the issue, it is simply already there. Also, or may be especially, in those cases when we say we shouldn't look at something in a moral way, but be practical about it. One must keep in mind, there is always a reason for this, to be practical. And with that reason there is a function, a value and a morality. May be a different kind of morality, but a morality nonetheless.

The philosopher John Searle explained this quite convincingly in his book 'The Construction of Social Reality', the way human and social practices are always intertwined with cultural and moral functionalities.

When I bring up the issue of morality, it is not to be judgmental, nor is it to re-install the ethos of Team 10. On the contrary, I would probably disagree with many of the postulations that are expressed within the Team 10 discourse. Yet, these postulations are necessary and intrinsic parts of that very discourse.

The repressed issue of morality brings up quite something else, namely the question to its function as a postulation, or a set of postulations within architectural practice and within the discourse of Team 10 specifically.

And of course, on reflection, it poses to us the question, how do we ourselves deal with this issue of morality.

The re-surfacing of the issue of morality with regard to the practice of architecture is something of recent date. It is prepared in the recent revisionary studies of the history of Modern Architecture, most notably by Hilde Heynen and by Sarah Williams Goldhagen.

With regard to the historiography of Modern Architecture Sarah Goldhagen claims in her book *Anxious Modernisms* that we should try and identify and analyse what she calls 'the interlocking cultural, political, and social dimensions that together constitute the foundation of modernism in architecture.' In her profound study 'Architecture and Modernity, A Critique' and the anthology 'Back from Utopia' Hilde Heynen comes to a re-conceptualisation of the utopian dimension of the Modern Movement. She draws the conclusion that after the obvious failures of many of the social claims of Modern Architecture, it is no longer valid to think of Utopia as an ideal future to be actually realised by architecture and planning. However, this does not mean any social ambition falls outside the realm of architectural practice. To Heynen the idea of Utopia may still figure as a critical and energising moment within that realm of everyday architectural practice.

So, what about Team 10, their discourse and the functionality of their ethos and a possible Utopian moment?

My speculation is that Team 10 holds an ambiguous position towards the Utopian. Partly due to their experience of the war, and partly due to the rational, technocratic course Modern Architecture and urban planning was following with the reconstruction of the bombed European cities. In this sense Team 10 spoke of the necessity of a 'new beginning'.

In their Primer Team 10 speaks of a Utopia that is directly linked to the present. They somewhat mysteriously formulate the following:

'[Team 10 is] Utopian about the present. (...) their aim is not to theorize but to build, for only through construction can a Utopia of the present be realized.'

From this onwards Team 10 speaks of 'responsibility', a moral imperative geared 'towards the individual or groups [the architect] builds for, and towards the cohesion and convenience of the collective structure to which they belong'.

This is necessary for 'society's realization-of-itself', as they put it, and to come to 'meaningful groupings of buildings (...) where each building is a live thing and a natural extension of the others. Together they will make places where a man can realize what he wishes to be.'

For Team 10 this requires in their words: 'a working-together-technique where each pays attention to the other and to the whole insofar as he is able.'

The ambiguous link between the Utopian and the present, and the construction of the present, is critical I believe. It complies with the idea that everyday practice and the issue of morality are inextricably linked. To locate the Utopian within the construction of the

## Team 10 and its Topicalities

present has to do with the idea that better choices can be made, and that it is the architect's responsibility to make these better choices with the larger whole in mind.

To know what is the better choice Team 10 devised this so called 'working-together-technique', their meetings and publications. They felt they needed to discuss their own position, to put themselves and their convictions on the line. Even though, this meant becoming vulnerable, and sometimes heavily criticism. All this was part of their ethos.

So, trying and following the Team 10 discourse over the years, we can see that these initial ideas lead to different conclusions. To mention only one striking instance: three of the core members of Team 10, Alison and Peter Smithson and Aldo van Eyck quit drawing large scale urban schemes at some point in their career. Ideal schemes like the one for Nagele and the Golden Lane competition entry are not repeated, or further elaborated upon.

Concerning Team 10's ethos and their idea of the Utopian within the present, I would like to point out two more strands within the history of Team 10.

First of all, their interest in the everyday situation of street life and children's games. I am not sure whether these situations comprise the actual Utopian moment for Team 10, since Team 10 links the Utopian with the building of the present. In any case, within Team 10 discourse these situations do figure as critical moments – critical towards the processes of modernisation and our condition of modernity, that threaten to push aside, or even abolish these everyday situations.

As such the everyday is not something idyllic, it is a locus where a different kind of morality is to be found, and secondly, it also becomes a locus for a political and social struggle, a contestation of values.

As is well known, Team 10's interest for street life and children's games is paralleled by an interest in developments of the arts, especially CoBrA and Art Brut of course, presenting a similar kind of alternative, or critical position towards modernisation and modernity.

The other line I would like to point out with regard to Team 10's ethos is their involvement with education. I believe without exception, all members of Team 10 were, or in the case of Giancarlo de Carlo, still are, substantially involved with teaching, all over the world. Next to their own meetings, publications and architectural careers, this practice constitutes a many-branched web. This interest in teaching is paralleled by the numerous remarkable school buildings Team 10 architects designed and built: from Hunstanton to the University of Urbino, from the schools in Nagele to the Free University in Berlin.

And this, I would say, brings us back again, here, to our Delft Faculty, a building designed by Van den Broek and Bakema, and to our own practice as teachers.