Dutch architecture has become as prominent at the end of the 20th century as it was at the beginning of the century; perhaps more importantly, it is as responsible for developing a new approach to contemporary modernity as it was in helping to initiate the heroic period of modern architecture. Following in the wake of Rem Koolhaas's emergence as one of the most influential architects in the world today, a host of young Dutch architecture offices are now themselves gaining worldwide attention. Like Koolhaas, these offices are interested in the BIG. They focus, however, not on the big building – though they are certainly fascinated by its potential – but on the possibilities offered by exploiting a new emphasis on quantity in the Netherlands and elsewhere in the world. As a result of Vinex, *The Fourth Report on Physical Planning* in the Netherlands, the Dutch government has mandated that 1.100.000 new dwellings be built by the year 2005. This is quantitatively equivalent to the entire post-war reconstruction effort in Holland. Such a turn to the BIG has necessitated in Holland the development of a new disposition towards the practice of architecture itself. There is, among these Dutch offices, for example, a de-emphasis on the kind of aestheticized form generation that dominated architecture in the 1980s and early 1990s, and a renewed emphasis on the analysis and manipulation of material and immaterial processes, logics and codes. Indeed, the growing importance of scenario planning, profiling, as well as other temporally-based steering mechanisms signals an emergent SOFT approach to the practice of architecture prevalent among all four offices featured in this exhibition.

Just such an approach guided the Rotterdam-based MAX.1 office their master plan for Leidsche Rijn, a development of over 30,000 houses near the city of Utrecht which is to be completed by year 2015. In collaboration with Crimson, an office of architectural historians also based in Rotterdam, MAX.1 focused on what they called the 'orgware', or organizational ware, a term borrowed from economics that refers to administrative and other policy-related factors which organize the implementation of ideas (software) and the deployment of physical elements (hardware). Analyzing and making use of orgware, they argue, is the only way to steer and direct a plan of such immense size and duration, and one 70% of which ultimately will be controlled not by the state but by the market. 21,000 of the 30,000 houses must be privately developed. MAX.1's interest in a more dynamic, soft urbanism, is thus not driven by a set of political or philosophical directives, but by a market economy dominated by the concern for quantity, the new driving force of urbanism from Utrecht to Singapore.[1] Having discovered the orgware of Vinex, MAX.1 and Crimson developed their own in the form of indices (building regulations, boundaries, person-space index, mixture, distribution, program and ux) and corresponding maps. For MAX.1, however, density, and other traditional urbanistic concerns have been reformulated and reentered into a new calculus dictated more by opportunity than by obligation: 'Density is defined as the number of square meters a single individual has at his disposal, that is, the number of square meters divided by the number of people, rather than the surface area divided by the built floor area.'[2] Here, as elsewhere in the plan, individual choice and freedom are not attached to or confined by architecture, but are allowed free expression and movement. But form does not disappear altogether as a concern; it just becomes one factor among many. Acknowledging the impossibility of predicting how the market will transform such a huge chunk (70%) of the program, MAX.1 reintroduces form as powder, as a field of opportunities that they insist will help retain the coherence of the scheme over time, without it becoming a gelatinous colored blob on a map of predetermined choices and possibilities. Part of this powder is the series of 26 bridges that MAX.1 have just completed, some of which are included in this exhibition. Because the canal waters of Leidsche Rijn cannot be navigated by large boats, the bridges are all stationary with non-liftable spans. This constraint on the waterway, however, opened a degree of land traffic freedom and allowed MAX.1 considerable flexibility in designing according to road and motorway layout. This resulted in remarkable bridge hybrids in which, for example, two bridges join together then separate according to traffic requirements. It should be noted that all 26 of these bridges are quite beautiful; they are so, however, not because of their intrinsic formal qualities, but because of the elegant vehicular and pedestrian ballet that they script and perform on a daily basis. Operating more like parallel processing traffic units, it is the soft but insistent coaxing and massaging of traffic flows that makes these bridges infinitely more powerful than the hyper-designed signature bridges that have been cropping up lately in the Netherlands.

The most poignant and indeed the most profound examples of this soft approach, however, are to be seen in the current work Crimson is conducting on the orgware implications of Rotterdam harbor and its surrounds. While this work is not officially part of the Leidsche Rijn plan, it does extend Crimson's orgware analyses in such a way that over time the results will be fed back into the Leidsche Rijn plan to allow continued adjustment and alteration; without being overly theoretical, one can say that Crimson and MAX.1 have built into the masterplan a temporally-driven feed-back design mechanism that allows the plan to adapt to new conditions as though it were itself an urban life-form.

Crimson has pursued its research into the relatively unknown territories seen only by those attentive to orgware, because, as they write, only there

will the soft, immaterial, hybrid urbanism necessary to actively intervene in the contemporary metropolis be found: "Somewhere between the besieged territories of urbanism and the immense arteries and non civic territories of the conurbation lay the hunting grounds for another urbanism. It is here that we find the most maddening sedimentations of power disguised as powerlessness, and the most exciting collection of possibilities disguised as impossibilities. Between the clear cut territories of the refinery and the middle class neighborhood lay areas that do not derive their logic and filling from one single authority or owner but from the fact that they are filled to the brim with the political, functional, and physical left-overs of the city." In several projects they have discovered zones of planned urban irresponsibility where illicit sex and drug trafficking, fed by the seemingly irreconcilable forces of Calvinism and mercantilism, are left to fester into new urban forms and typologies such as the toleration zones for street prostitution. These urban exotica are forms of urban planning that are officially unplanned and indeed take no recognizable cartographic or official representational form because they exist only after dark and function only to siphon off petty criminality that would otherwise make life unpleasant for the average citizen. Crimson's most recent work, some of which is featured in this exhibition, focuses on how municipal authorities, urbanises, and architects can actively intervene in this newly discovered orgware landscape; how, in other words, practitioners at every level can approach even the most small scale design problem as a problem of urbanism.

Another, related feature of this soft approach, is an avowed post-avant-garde attitude accompanied by an acceptance of the market as a reality of contemporary architectural and urban practice. Unlike early 20th century avant-gardes who wanted to clear away what was already there in order to establish a new social order, and unlike the avant-gardes of the 1980s which sought to resist what they found already there, these offices focus very precisely on what is "just there", on the constraints and limitations of a global market which they see not as an evil to be resisted but as a new condition of possibility. They thus prefer to deal pragmatically though aggressively with the ORANGE reality of commercialism and artificialization, those two preeminently "Dutch" historical concerns which today are rapidly becoming the concern of huge patches of the globe. Such is the case with Amsterdam based NL Architects who have developed a series of striking projects many of which feature the automobile as the prime player in an ongoing attempt to rethink density and urban and suburban infrastructure. Rather than banish the car to suburbia, NL takes it as a given of urbanism itself, as its lifeblood. Rather than relieving the city of its auto stress, NL intensifies and refocuses that stress, transforming a liability into an asset.

They argue that without the movement provided by the automobile the inner city would become a theme park and cease to exist as a vibrant commercial district. NL has drawn on the beauty of automobile in other projects such as a parking scheme where instead of paying you are paid to park in a configuration that from above spells 'M' 'A' 'Z' 'D' 'A'. Like many of these new offices, NL Architects attempt to turn adversity into opportunity; they accept what is there and try to transform it, often by making what they find more intense. This is precisely the approach they took in WOS 8, a heat transfer station for Leidsche Rijn. Taking into account the temporal dimension of the masterplan, NL treated this relatively small industrial unit with care and attention. Because it begins life in the picturesque farm landscape and will eventually find itself in the middle of a very dense suburban development teeming with youth culture, NL was required to create a rural/urban hybrid that could wallow in the mud and still be fresh and sporty. In an attempt to avoid the kind of vandalism visited upon this type of peripheral industrial building, NL makes use of a Plexiglas basketball window, mountain climbing pegs, a spy door, and a series of buried automobile reflectors which spell "WOS 8" to create a building that will be harmonious with the future inhabitants of Leidsche Rijn. And because its neutral skin and soft, organic form are constructed of a chemically inert, superstrong polyurethane developed for parking roofs, the pigs and cows that are now its closest neighbors feel equally at home.

Employing an idiosyncratic brand of empiricism as a primary design principle, Amsterdam-based One Architecture develops a similar, "just there" approach in their Leidsche Rijn housing scheme. Lazy design they call it, because it requires them to do nothing more than intensify what is already there. They accomplish this by an almost unnatural attention to certain elements that are already there, such as power lines, which become literal structural elements in the project as well as structural elements in their design logic. Following this logic, One focuses on and intensifies the strongly felt, but characteristically unexpressed, desire in the Netherlands for suburban life, with its emphasis on cardriven mobility, youth, sport, and consumer culture. In the Netherlands, public and private space are normally defined oppositionally. Public space is identified with both the urban and the pastoral, while private space is identified with the objectionable, though desirable, amalgam of urban and pastoral, the suburban. This is all complicated by the famous Dutch "green heart", a mythical pastoral zone encircled by the urban ring of cities known as the Randstadt. The green heart and the Randstadt are meant to function ideologically as a single, dialectical, public space unit the major function of which is to limit the spread of the suburb, the reservoir of private spaces for the masses. There has

been and continues to be considerable debate about whether or not to develop the "green heart" for housing and industry, debate which has become more heated and confused with the new Vinex requirements.

One's tennis court house project intervenes in this debate and argues that the "green heart" is no longer (if it ever was) a pastoral landscape, but is already a hybrid mixture of public and private space: with the numbers of renegade vacation houses and motor traffic rising each year, it is clear that the suburban is already there, and so also is the Dutch desire for suburban life. Soberly and empirically, One set out in their project to bring these two "already there" orange realities together. The results are exciting and visually stunning. In their project, design elements such as tennis balls, nets and court surfaces, are linked together to form a series of repetitive frames-tennis ball, tennis ball lighting on power lines, orange tennis ball "sun" – which are meant to retain while redefining the categories of public and private space. It is significant that One is not interested in resolving the tension created between public and private space, but rather in exploiting this tension to produce design solutions for a market-driven world in which pure public and pure private space have given way to a variety of new spatial hybrids. Ultimately, One's aim is to produce private housing with the verve and sense of "being live" generated only by public spaces. Television is their model because the kind of live feeling it engenders in the viewer and the viewed alike is the closest approximation they see to an ideal private experience of public life. The point, as they see it, is to provide the cultural, municipal, and design infrastructure that will enable individuals to make their own private decisions. To use the Deleuzian language favored by One, public driven repetition that engenders private difference – 100% private and 100% public, as they say. In more recent projects, such as their urban plan for Salzburg, Austria, One has begun to offer more complex solutions to the problems framed here in their tennis housing project. As their singular visual style and enigmatic language become more developed, the solutions they offer will surely become more direct, though it is likely we will continue to stutter. Given the poverty of real thinking in architecture today, that can only be a good thing.

Author:
Dr. Michael A. Speaks
Southern California Institute of Architecture

Notes:

1) Ed Taverne's and Rem Koolhaas's insistence that we recognize the importance of quantity sould be noted as a historical precedent for all of these offices.

2) *Archis*, 8, 1995, p. 80.