

TALKING CRITICISM  
A dispatch from Holland

By Arjen Oosterman

Last March, an expert meeting in Rotterdam (The New Institute) discussed the initiative to create two new prizes in the Netherlands: one for architecture criticism and one for design criticism. The group consisted of architects and designers, critics of various backgrounds, educators, publishers, magazine makers, researchers and an online architecture platform. Since the initiative came from concern for the level of architecture criticism today, the first question for the two groups was: do we have a problem? The next round discussed differences between the function and practice of architecture criticism and design criticism today, including its role in education. And a last round was dedicated to practical recommendations for the actual prizes. Such gatherings don't produce clear-cut conclusions, but they do signal ideas that are in the air.

In the Anglo-Saxon countries, writers are (almost) always designers themselves.

**The critic supplies words for architects who are not into that business.**

Design criticism is more fragmented, architecture criticism more academic.

**Are these times in which one can disagree, in which one can take a stand?**

There is a difference between opinion and position. In ten years time you won't remember your opinion on a certain issue, but surely you'll remember your position.

Academic design critique must have a place in architecture and design school programs.

**Twitter produces 'co-criticism': very serious and also very restricted.**

Architecture has become a global practice, in which prestige rules over context. Next to that there exists a local practice of supply and demand in which convention is very important. It is hardly possible to formulate meaningful criticism that bridges the distance between these two cultures.

Art, architecture or design, they cannot be serious without reflection.

Stop whining, just do it; criticism has to be done even without pay.

Criticism plays a major role in the creation of meaning.

Usefulness and necessity? One could also defend that criticism does NOT need to be useful for practice – art criticism doesn't produce better art, does it?

Art criticism and design criticism converge, architecture and design criticism hardly.

How much do the fields of architecture and design value criticism? How much are they prepared to pay?

**Criticism requires precision. We need (a) language for that.**

**Writing on architecture is increasingly PR.**

Students of architecture and design spend ever more time writing over the course of the years, but there seems no relation with the development of criticism.

In a not too distant past it was generally received that writing and reflecting were part of being a good architect.

**Twitter doesn't replace architecture criticism.**

There once was a time without architecture criticism. It is conceivable that at some point we'll do without again.

The youth develop a different style of learning; they're more into associative thinking. That doesn't go well with profound writing.

These days design is a collaborative effort. Co-creation asks for another kind of critique, a different vocabulary and set of concepts.

Discourse creates architecture. Without discourse it's hardly more than tinkering in your shed.

**On Twitter, designers discuss with users.**

Criticism for what purpose? Is the critic a do-gooder, inherently conducive to society?

Students orient themselves today by collecting snippets: a culture of gathering.

Architecture criticism has a different objective than design criticism: design criticism informs and opinionates consumers, architecture criticism targets producers.

In countries without architecture criticism, there still is architecture, no?