Developing public taste, mobilizing the public: the Architectural Exhibitions of the MBB and AetA

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system that had so far consisted of architect and client only. It investigates the coverage of the
exhibition and its accompanying catalogue both in general-interest titles, such as The Times, The
Morning Chronicle and The Spectator, as well as in special-interest papers, such as John Loudon’s
Architectural Magazine, the Transactions of the Royal Institute of British Architects and the
Mechanic’s Magazine. This paper argues that it was through a combination of printing and
exhibiting, of words and images on the gallery wall as well as on the printed page, that
architecture took over a new, more dynamic role within the civic society of the Victorian age.

Developing Public Taste, Mobilizing the Public: The Architecture Exhibitions of the
MBB and A et A Sergio Miguel Figueiredo, Technical University Eindhoven

In the 19th century, continued reforms and the industrialization of Dutch economy resulted in
substantial economic prosperity. With such improved economic outlook, the Dutch government
undertook a structural reorganization of the arts with direct implications for the production of
architecture. Most notably, it established and appointed the first College of Government Advisors
for Historical and Artistic Monuments (College Rijksadvieures voor de Monumenten van
Geschiedenis en Kunst), which was mandated to elaborate policies in the preservation of historical
monuments and the construction of new governmental buildings.

Architects, however, were noticeably marginalized from the process, since the College of Advisors
was entirely composed by non-architects. As such, both the past and the future of the discipline
were to be determined by a restrict group of laymen and antiquarians, as they decided on the
merits of historical monuments and entries to invited architectural competitions for new state
buildings. With the very future of Dutch architecture at stake – and powerless in the decisions of
this body – the Amsterdam architecture societies increased their efforts to broaden public
discourse on architecture by actively engaging with a general public.

Accordingly, this paper will both argue and demonstrate how the public exhibition of architecture
was approached as a fundamental instrument for developing public taste in order to elicit public
debate on architecture in the Netherlands. Specifically, it will be claimed that both the
Maatschappij tot Bevordering der Bouwkunst (Society for the Promotion of Architecture) and the
Genootschap Architectura et Amicitia (Society Architecture and Friendship) instrumentalized
architecture exhibitions to educate the public on the issues, processes, and ambitions of
architecture, ultimately, to mobilize its support. These exhibitions in which architecture was
presented in its artistic-cultural and technical-practical dimensions became the frontline for
architecture, shaping public taste and eliciting an inclusive, informed debate that the state hierarchy simply could not ignore.