

DESIGNING SOCIAL INTERACTION

THE ARCHITECTURAL COUPLE HENK THIEME
AND BRITA THIEME-DOMELA NIEUWENHUIS

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'You ... need to remember that buildings will form people's surroundings for a very long time,' wrote the architect Henk Thieme in 1984.¹ Today, almost forty

years later, the oeuvre of Henk and his professional and life partner Brita Thieme-Domela Nieuwenhuis is gradually being erased. The town hall in Haren has been pulled down and the Nij Ylostins residential centre in IJlst is threatened with demolition. The rural library in the province of Groningen is barely recognizable since its renovation, and the raw concrete of

▲ 1. Henk Thieme and Brita Thieme-Domela Nieuwenhuis with their dog Bobbie in Delft, 1992 (private Thieme family collection)

the Havenschap office in Delfzijl has lost much of its power thanks to over-zealous painting. The treatment of the buildings designed by Henk Thieme and Brita Thieme-Domela Nieuwenhuis is common to a lot of architecture from the Post 65 period. There's a saying in aesthetic control circles that 'Quality often only becomes apparent when it is no longer there or, conversely, when it is decidedly different.'² This article aims to describe the merits of Henk and Brita's body of work in order prevent yet more of their buildings from being compromised or, worse still, from disappearing.

Much has already been written about architecture in the Netherlands from the period 1965-1990. However, most of those publications focus on the Randstad urban region and the design practices based there. One exception is *Architect Jan Sterenberg and het wonen in de jaren '70* (2021), in which Michiel Kruidenier describes one of the biggest architectural practices in the post-war Netherlands. It was based in Ter Apel in the northernmost province of Groningen. The two best-known architects from the northern Netherlands have been the subject of monographs, namely *Gunnar Daan, architect* (1995) by Bernard Colenbrander and *Abe Bonnema, architect* (1998) by Marijke Martin. The only publication about Cor Kalfsbeek is the DAAD Cahier *Een zitkuil voor het dorp; Een toekomst voor de jaren '70 architectuur van Cor Kalfsbeek* (2016). A recent publication, *Bruut, Atlas van het brutalisme in Nederland* (2023) features a hundred examples of brutalist buildings, only six of which are from the three northern provinces.³

Still less has been published on women architects from the northern Netherlands in the Post 65 period, even though as Erica Smeets-Klokgieters has shown in her groundbreaking doctoral thesis '*Hulde aan onze kranige architecte!*' (2022), the number of practising women architects had already increased dramatically before 1945. In the monograph on Cor Kalfsbeek, the role of his wife, interior architect Sibylle Kalfsbeek, received little attention. More recently, several women received long overdue acknowledgement of their place in the history of Dutch architecture in *Vrouwen in architectuur* (2023). Present-day women designers are brought to public attention in the *Mevr. De Architect* column of the online magazine A.Zine.⁴

The architectural couple Hendrikus Pieter Thieme (1926-2020) and Brita Thieme-Domela Nieuwenhuis Nijegaard (1929-1995) were active from the 1950s to the turn of the century (fig. 1). From their office in Groningen and their home in Glimmen they collaborated on over two hundred designs for new buildings, renovations and restorations. To date, with the exception of a 1982 thesis, *Vrouwen in de (stede)bouw wat doen jullie nou?* (Women in architecture and urban design what

are you doing now?), nothing has been written about the work of Brita Thieme-Domela Nieuwenhuis. This article attempts to redress that neglect. I introduce them in the order in which they presented themselves: Thieme – Thieme-Domela Nieuwenhuis architecten. This article documents part of the couple's body of work for the first time. The research is based on a list of projects, literature review and archival research, and conversations with the couple's children and with their most important former assistants.

The first part of this article introduces the couple and the practice. It focuses in particular on the collaboration between the two designers, because the precise division of tasks between architectural couples is not always clear. Henk and Brita were professionally active for half a century, largely during the Post 65 period, with the result that a number of developments and themes typical of that period are reflected in their work. This is not the place for a detailed portrait of this period or for a description of their oeuvre as a whole. Instead, I focus on a few highlights of the Thieme – Thieme-Domela Nieuwenhuis architecten oeuvre, presenting six case studies divided into two themes. There is also a brief discussion of the relation between societal developments and architecture. The first theme is a building type, namely the office. It underwent a substantial evolution in this period and that also finds expression in the couple's work. The second theme is a phenomenon that grew in importance in the Post 65 period: intensive collaboration with other designers. In the 1970s and '80s, Henk and Brita entered into several collaborations with colleagues. The benefits of such teamwork are described with reference to some of the results of these collaborations.

THE ARCHITECTURAL COUPLE

Henk Thieme was born in 1925 in Bussum. He studied architecture at the technical school in Amsterdam and then at the Institute of Technology (TH) in Delft. He gained practical experience in the office of the architect J.A. Lucas (1917-2005) in Voorburg, subsequently graduating under the supervision of Professor J.H. van den Broek (1989-1978) in 1957. During his studies Henk lived in lodgings on the Oude Delft and was a member of the Sint Jansburg Delft Student Corps. It was thanks to joint gatherings with other student corps that he met architecture student Brita.⁵ Brita Domela Nieuwenhuis Nijegaard was born in 1929 in Groningen.⁶ After finishing high school she wanted to study architecture, but her mother insisted that she should work for one year. If at the end of that year she still wanted to go to Delft, that was fine by her mother, even though many people advised against it.⁷ In 1947, after a year as a home help in Sweden, she enrolled in



2. Thieme – Thieme-Domela Nieuwenhuis architecten, own house in Glimmen (1964), exterior (private Thieme family collection)

the architecture course at the TH in Delft. She had lodgings on the Korte Geer in Delft and was a member of the Women's Student Corps. Brita gained her practical experience with the architectural practice of E. van Linge (1895-1964) in Groningen and with Thunissen and Kranendonk in The Hague. In 1954 she passed her bachelor's exams and called a temporary halt to her studies.⁸

Henk and Brita married in 1954 and went to live in a villa on Jan Thijssenweg in Rijswijk, just south of The Hague. The first of their six children was born there. Even before they had graduated, they worked together on housing designs for Leidschendam. Their first project was signed only by Henk, but from the third design onwards both Henk and Brita the drawings bore both their names as the responsible architects. In 1959 the couple relocated to Groningen where they lived with relatives on Pelsterstraat in the city centre. Their office was located on the upper floor of the house.⁹

In 1964 Henk and Brita moved again, this time into a

self-designed house on Nieuwe Kampsteeg in the village of Glimmen, built by the local building contractor, Groeneveld (figs. 2 and 3).¹⁰ The two-storey dwelling is rectangular in plan and built of brick, with one entirely glazed facade to maximize solar access and views over the landscape. The very shallow-pitched roof, a recurrent feature in Henk and Brita's designs, was in this instance the product of compromise. They had originally wanted a copper roofing, but the associated roof shape with low gutter was not permitted by the zoning plan. The elevations and internal walls of fair-face brickwork, the dark-stained timber floorboards and the elements in fair-face concrete – all of which they would go on to use in other designs – lend the building a Scandinavian appearance. The house has an open plan, with all the living spaces oriented towards the landscape. From the dining room there is an unimpeded view into the sunken living room, the play area, the kitchen and the garden. Similar open plan arrangements crop up in other dwelling designs.¹¹



3. Own house Glimmen, interior (private Thieme family collection)

4. Own house in Glimmen, bedroom and study with drawing table in front of window (private Thieme family collection)



Brita said of their designs: 'a building must be placed logically, naturally and functionally in its surroundings. The building services, pipes etc. must be organically distributed within it. ("Like arteries, muscles etc. in the body.") A building should also look robust, not hastily "knocked together". The layout of the internal space must likewise be logical and clear.'¹²

THE COLLABORATION

In the early years Henk and Brita worked alone, but later they took on assistants in the form of a draughtsman, works supervisor and interior designer. It was not their intention to become a large practice and there were never more than four employees at any one time, sporadically supplemented by a trainee. The longest-serving assistants were Hans Groenewold (1970-1987) and Ch'ing Sze Liem (1973-1986).¹³ There was no fixed division of tasks between Henk and Brita. Instead they took turns with the elaboration of the drawings, the specifications and the budget, and with the contacts with contractors. Final responsibility was always shared.¹⁴ This even-handed collaborative practice was also reflected in how the office telephone was answered: 'Thieme - Thieme-Domela Nieuwenhuis architecten'; quite a mouthful, but both names were always cited.¹⁵

Drawings, too, were consistently signed by both Henk and Brita and there is no initialling, by them or by assistants. This makes it difficult to determine the author of individual designs. There was no competition between them, nor any need to propagate their own architectural views. They did have personal preferences, for example for certain types of commission. Restorations and renovations were carried out by Brita, who was interested in finding solutions for existing structures and who had an affinity with older buildings. In her designs she focused on providing good and practical floor plans with particular attention to light penetration. Henk had a clear preference for new-build projects and gravitated more towards aesthetics and design. He did not like ornamentation and preferred bright, hard colours, especially blue, and local materials like red Groningen brick.¹⁶

Just because their in-house collaboration was on an equal footing did not mean the architects were viewed as equals by the outside world. In 1982 Brita was interviewed about her experience working as a female civil engineer. She stated that as a woman architect she was constantly having to prove herself. Clients evidently assumed that she did no more 'than ... choose the colour of the curtains and suchlike'.¹⁷ On building sites she was sometimes asked when the architect would arrive. To which she replied: 'the architect is standing in front of you!'.¹⁸ In 1974 Brita took a year out from the practice to complete her architectural

studies in Delft. She worked on her graduation project at the drawing table in the bedroom-cum-study (fig. 4).¹⁹ Henceforth she was able to cite her engineering degree on all blueprints, just as Henk had been doing for years.

THE WORK

The Thieme and Thieme-Domela Nieuwenhuis practice's body of work comprises over two hundred projects designed between 1954 and 2003. There is a preponderance of new-build projects, in particular dwellings, offices and schools. Added to these are conversions and extensions of existing buildings and a few restorations and renovations. Most of the commissions came from within their own network: family, acquaintances, fellow architects and builders. The houses were often for private clients from the area around Groningen and Glimmen; some clients returned more than once for follow-up designs. Among the big clients for whom the practice worked on a regular basis were the Rijksgebouwendienst (Government Buildings Agency) and the PTT (Post and Telegraph Office).²⁰

In addition to their work as architects Brita was active in local politics and Henk in education. From 1978, Brita represented the PvdA (Labour Party) on the Haren municipal council. Between 1988 and 1994 she was an alderman whose portfolio included Welfare and Housing. She entered politics because as an architect she had little influence over matters like zoning plans and urban development even though they played a pivotal role in her work; 'after a while I wanted some say over that as well'.²¹ For a short while she also taught mathematics at a girls' secondary school, sat on the board of the Stichting Vrouwen Overleg Ruimtelijke Ordening en Volkshuisvesting (VOROV, a women's network on spatial planning and housing) and was a member of the Rooie Vrouwen, a feminist group within the PvdA.

Whereas Brita was keen to improve the guidelines within which she worked as an architect, Henk focused on the discipline itself and their fellow designers. In the 1960s and '70s he taught building materials science at the higher technical school in Groningen. At the Groningen Academy of Architecture he taught structural design, among other subjects. He was also active in both local and national organizations for architecture and architects (Groninger Vereniging tot Bevordering der Bouwkunst, vbb, and the Bond van Nederlandse Architecten, BNA). In the early 1980s he was chairman of the Groningen branch of the BNA (Royal Institute of Dutch Architects). He was also a member of the Groningen Rotary Club, which netted the practice a number of commissions. Finally, both Henk and Brita served for a short time on a design review committee.²²

OFFICES

After housing, the practice's most common design commissions were for office buildings. The clients reflected various societal developments in the Post 65 period. There were new types of organizations, such as rural libraries, that required a specific kind of building. And there were existing organizations that were in need of new offices that met the changing demands of the time, such as the registry office of the provincial government or the social services department of the municipality of Groningen. Finally there were organizations that were expanding rapidly, like the Havenschap (port authority) in Delfzijl with the construction of the Eemshaven, or experiencing sweeping changes, like the NASK insurance company with its introduction of computers. These developments translated into a great many new office buildings. The three case studies, which are high points in the oeuvre of Thieme – Thieme Domela Nieuwenhuis architecten, also showcase several developments in Post 65 architecture.

CENTRAL RURAL LIBRARY, GRONINGEN (1964-1965)

One early design is the Central Rural Library in Groningen (fig. 5).²³ The concept of the rural library arose from the 'travelling libraries' in the form of boxes of books that were sent out to smaller, more remote places that did not have a library. In the 1960s the organization was centralized, leading to the construction of storehouses from which the books were dispatched. The library bus service also started in this period.²⁴

The Central Rural Library was built on the outskirts of the city, on Laan Corpus den Hoorn. It was officially opened by the minister of culture, who praised its 'simple, but highly functional design'.²⁵ The central

element was the storeroom for some 120,000 books; it was flanked on three sides by the dispatch area, offices and spaces where books could be repaired. The design was based on the distance between the storeroom book racks. This produced a fixed grid of five by five metres, which dictated the dimensions of the steel structure. The external walls consisted of dark pine-wood elements and panels of toughened glass. Visible in the interior were timber-framed glazed partitions, walls of fair-face brickwork and pine-panelled ceilings.²⁶ The design, together with the materials used, lent the library a Scandinavian appearance.

Thanks to its modest height, the building was on a human scale. The low, box-shaped volume, the rational layout and the transparent shell are typical of modernist office buildings in the early Post 65 period. The rural library was a huge success, and the collection of books grew significantly in a short space of time. In 1974, a mere seven years after the opening, the building was already too small and was consequently sold.²⁷

HAVENSCHAP OFFICE, DELFZIJL (1974)

One of the most striking buildings in Henk and Brita's oeuvre is the brutalist office building they designed in 1974 for the Delfzijl Port Authority (fig. 6).²⁸ It is one of the few projects that Brita is known to have regarded as her own design.²⁹ In 1972-1974 Henk and Brita worked on a new high-profile office building to house the port authority's senior management, administration and civil engineering department. During the 1960s and '70s the port authority developed new industrial and dock areas along the estuary of the River Eems. As a result the company was a catalyst for the growth of Delfzijl. The small fortified town underwent a huge development in this period and grew exponentially.

5. Central Rural Library in Groningen (1965), book repository shortly after the opening (*Jaarverslag 1965 Centrale Plattelandsbibliotheek voor de provincie Groningen, Groningen 1965, 4*)





6. Havenschap Delfzijl office building in Delfzijl (1974), photo 1983 (photo M.A. Douma, Groninger Archieven)

The office was built on Noordersingel, between the port, the new shopping centre and the railway line. Both the function and the surroundings informed the design, which according to Brita meant ‘that the outcome could be none other than a square, distinctive block’.³⁰ This in turn determined the material, namely fair-face concrete. The client specifically requested a sheltered position and adequate parking spaces. The latter was resolved by raising the building above the ground, allowing space beneath for parking. The building’s footprint was a ten by ten metre square based on a structural grid of 4.8 metres. A central core contained stairs, circulation space and wet services. The offices were arranged around this core on the upper floors.³¹ On the outside, continuous balconies with concrete balustrades provided the requested buffer against noise and wind, while also doubling as an emergency escape route.

The Port Authority office can today be seen as one of

the few examples of compelling brutalist architecture in the province of Groningen. Thanks to the sculptural use of the concrete structural skeleton, the building makes a grand gesture, typical of office architecture of the 1970s.

**DISTRICT OFFICE OF THE NATIONAL POLICE,
GRONINGEN (1987)**

The architectural practice acquired national fame with the design of the district office for the national police in Groningen when it featured in the very first *Architecture in the Netherlands* yearbook (fig. 7).³² In 1980-1981 Henk, Brita and Hans Groenewold designed the new offices for the Rijksgebouwendienst, the government buildings agency for whom they had done other work, including designing staff living quarters at the Veenhuizen penitentiary.³³

The building, which was completed in 1987, was located in a new office park on the city outskirts, less



7. District Police Office in Groningen (1987) (photo Siem van 't Zet, Groninger Archieven)

than a kilometre from the Rural Library. The parcel of waterlogged peatland – ‘onland’ or waste land – was a major determinant of the construction and the architecture. Henk commented: ‘I wanted the building to break free from the Onland. It should alight like a bird.’³⁴ The building was placed on angled pilotis above the water and could only be accessed via a single, central flight of stairs. This had the dual advantage of saving on the cost of site preparation and considerably simplifying security. Because of the waterlogged substratum the steel structure was made as light as possible and the elevations were clad with stainless steel, a material the couple had seen used in this way during a trip to Sweden. The floor plan is an optimized version of the classic cellular office, with offices opening onto long corridors. In addition to offices the building contained prison cells, interview rooms and ammunition store. There was a firing range on the upper floor rendered soundproof by a box-in-a-box construction.³⁵ The building was lauded for its excep-

tional design: ‘The reflecting walls accentuate the slight weight of the construction and call up associations with the technical aspects of the police force. The low height of the building and the horizontal articulation temper a possible expression of power’, according to the Yearbook.³⁶ The design review committee considered it a model plan: ‘Clear symmetrical layout; reflection of surrounding colours makes it both contrasting and harmonious; varied in appearance: interesting structural design; a rarity.’³⁷

COLLABORATING ARCHITECTS

Henk and Brita’s small architectural practice entered into various collaborations, often with regional practices. Increasingly complex building commissions called for collaboration between specialized designers. By the same token, collaboration offered relatively small practices the opportunity to work on major commissions, and also resulted in a greater variation in formal idiom. For clients it was an affordable means

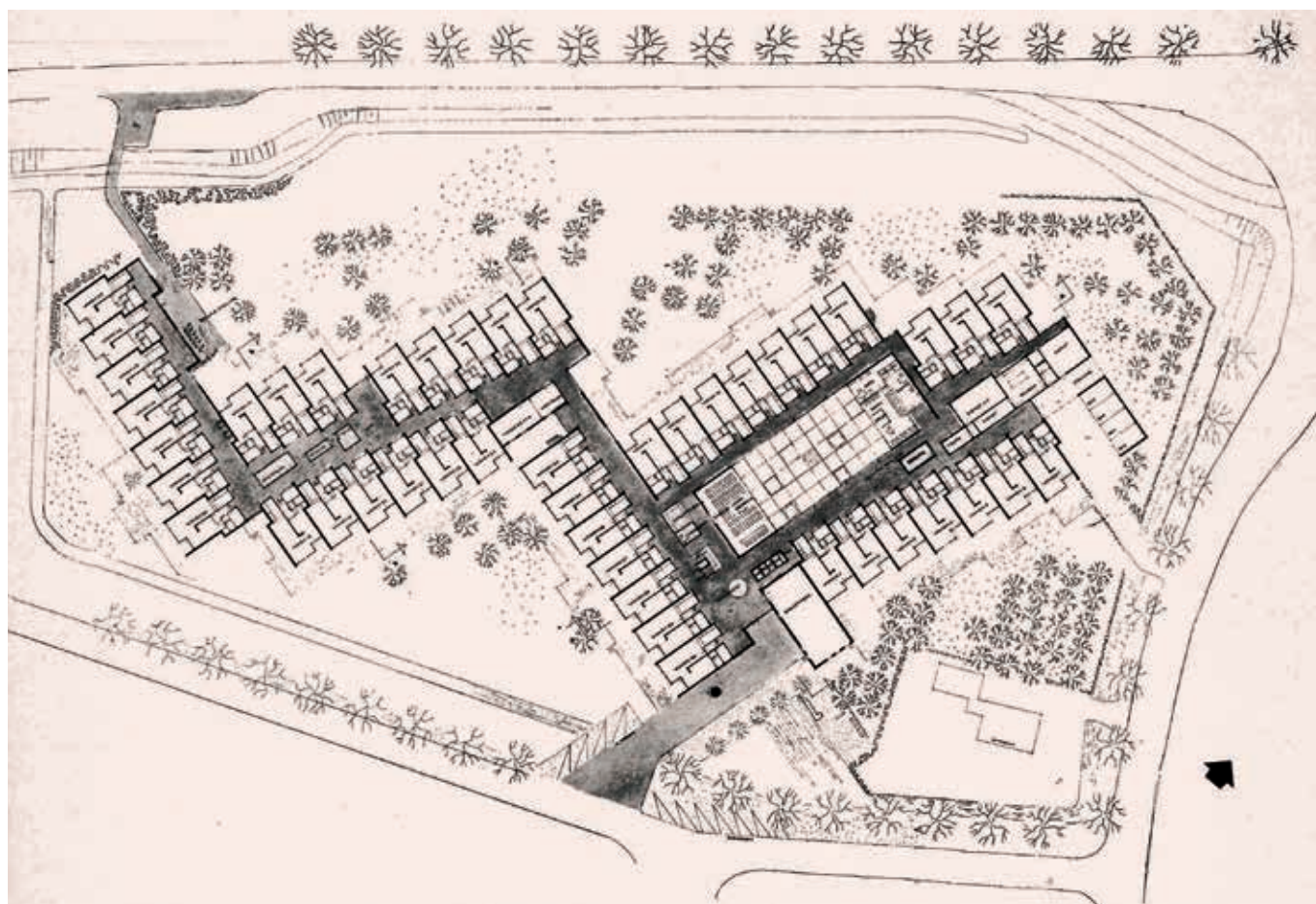
of tapping into the combined knowledge and experience of several experts. Such collaborations are interesting for research into Post 65 architecture, because they bring to light a wider range of designers and reveal the connections between architects. The projects described below represent the most significant products of Henk and Brita's collaboration with other architects. In addition, in 1983 they were for a short while part of the Plan 3'82 combination along with the Groningen architectural practices Algra & v.d. Broek, and Olsmeijer, De Graaf.³⁸

NIJ YLOSTINS, IJLST (1972)

For the construction of a new 'residential centre' in the Friesian town of IJlst, the Thiemes collaborated with the architectural and engineering practices of Nijenhuis & Ebbing, Timmer, and Van Manen & Zwart, assisted by project architect E. B. Haag.³⁹ In 1969-1972, at the behest of the Stichting Bejaardenzorg IJlst en omstreken, the group worked on the design of Nij Ylostins (fig. 8). The complex is typical of the approach to housing the elderly in the 1970s. It began with a needs survey among local residents, regarded as the best means of getting people involved in building plans and much used during that decade. Following

the survey the aforementioned design team was selected because together they had ample experience and the right expertise for this groundbreaking commission.⁴⁰ The complex consists of 59 residential units grouped along publicly accessible, covered 'internal streets'. Various amenities were incorporated into the residential centre, including a Groene Kruis centre, a library and a recreation room where contact between residents and locals was encouraged. To keep the cost of constructing this new living arrangement affordable, the designers opted for a limited number of spans and modular repetition. Varying the positioning of the modules enabled them to avoid the monotony associated with system construction. They also strove to create a varied spatial profile, a dynamic basic form and individually recognizable dwellings. The design was designated 'Experimental Housing' because it was largely open to the public and was intended for both the elderly and small families. This integration of target groups and functions was not standard practice in the 1970s; indeed, it was only made legally possible by the designation.⁴¹ The residential centre was a huge success. In the end there was no mixing of target groups because the demand from elderly people in the area was so great. In 1974 an architecture critic

8. Nij Ylostins residential care home in IJlst (1972), site plan (municipality of Sudwest-Fryslân)



wrote of Nij Ylostins: 'Everything here is so confident, so genuine and so normal that criticism of details degenerates into nitpicking.'⁴² While the collaboration between Nijenhuis & Ebbing, Timmer, Van Manen & Zwart and Thieme remained a one-off, the housing concept was emulated in several towns.⁴³

TOWN HALL, HAREN (1973-1975)

In the 1970s Henk embarked on a collaborative venture with architect Harm Nijenhuis (1926-1987) from Gieten and architect Henk Timmer (1913-1975) from Winschoten under the name 'Samenwerkende archi-

tekten- en ingenieursbureaus Nijenhuis en partners, Timmer, ir. Thieme b.v. Team voor ruimtelijke vormgeving BNA'. In 1970-1971, working out of a temporary office on Raadhuisplein in Haren, Harm and Henk (Thieme) designed a new town hall for Haren (fig. 9).⁴⁴ The town council's decision to commission a team of architects was motivated by a preference for reliable local designers following the recent withdrawal of the commission awarded to an Amsterdam architect. Added to which, 'some six architects would be providing their expertise, while the fee would be no higher than for a single architect'.⁴⁵

9. Haren Town Hall (1973-1975), void with stairs beside pedestrian route through the building, photo from 2007 (photo Kris Roderburg, Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed)





10. Bekemaheerd housing estate in the Groningen district of Beijum (1980) in 1985 (photo K.A. Gaasendam, Groninger Archieven)

Achieving a sense of community and a human scale were all-important in the design; ‘we tried to accommodate and give shape to the added dimension and social interaction’.⁴⁶ The building was located in the middle of the village and incorporated a pedestrian route that allowed for spontaneous encounters between residents and council officials. It was made up of office modules the dimensions of which were based on desk size. The exposed, modular concrete frame was infilled with brickwork. The partition walls were relocatable in order to maximize the flexibility of the internal layout. The possibility of a later extension was also explicitly taken into account.⁴⁷ After this project, the three architects collaborated on housing projects in Zuidlaren and Steenwijk. There the collaboration ended, probably due to incompatible personalities. The Haren town hall was not destined for a long life either. A mere 36 years after the opening the building was demolished because the political will to invest in its renovation and extension was lacking.⁴⁸ Brita had worked in the building for sixteen years as councillor and alderman.

BEIJUM VLEK III, GRONINGEN (1980)

Built in the 1970s on grasslands on the outskirts of Groningen, Beijum is a classic example of a Dutch ‘cau-

liflower’-plan district. In order to satisfy the wishes of future residents as much as possible, the designers created a wealth of differentiation in street pattern and architecture as well as in the typology and price of dwellings. Also typical of this period was the departure from the prevailing zoning plan, widely regarded as too rigid. Urban design supervisor Coen Bekink (1922-1996) divided the plan area into thirteen sub-plans or ‘sectors’ that were then elaborated by different regional architectural firms.⁴⁹ Between 1976 and 1981 Thieme – Thieme-Domela Nieuwenhuis designed a gymnasium in Beijum I and two primary schools with community centres in sectors v and vii. For Beijum III they designed a total of 147 dwellings (fig. 10).⁵⁰ The urban design plan for this sector was drawn up by the municipal town planner, the Bekink architectural practice, and Henk and Brita’s practice. Both practices subsequently designed housing schemes within this spatial framework. On Bekemaheerd and Kremersheerd streets, Henk and Brita each designed their own dwelling type: Brita back-to-back houses and Henk staggered housing. Brita’s houses have a distinctive roof shape combining flat and pitched sections. It appears in other designs by their practice, in both housing and schools. Henk’s houses have a staggered configuration that maximizes the

privacy and outdoor space enjoyed by each individual dwelling. This was something they had also done previously in housing schemes in Veenhuizen and the village of Winsum in Groningen. Henk and Brita seized on Beijum as an opportunity to apply their own individual design ideas in a co-designed section of this new residential district.

CONCLUSION

The architectural couple Henk Thieme and Brita Thieme-Domela Nieuwenhuis are relatively unknown, and their buildings have not always been well treated. Yet their body of work is of outstanding quality. This is evident, for example, in their use of materials, which was tailored to suit each individual commission. And also in the meticulous detailing and the functional floor plans, as can be seen in their own house. This first documentation of part of their oeuvre is intended to draw attention to their work in order to avoid it only attracting notice when it is no longer there.

The three office buildings designed by Thieme – Thieme Domela Nieuwenhuis architecten discussed here reflect an evolution in office architecture during the Post 65 period. The rural library was designed as a modernist flat box whose structure was determined by the storeroom book racks. In the 1970s, they made

a brutalist grand gesture in the Eems estuary with their port authority office. The district police office exhibits high-tech architecture on stilts in waterlogged land on the outskirts of Groningen. Henk and Brita's collaborations with other architects from the northern Netherlands also produced some typical Post 65 architecture. The IJlst residential centre was designated 'Experimental Housing' because of its attempt to encourage contact between different target groups. Beijum is a classic example of a 'cauliflower' district in which maximum differentiation was achieved through the collaboration of several regional designers. Meanwhile, the Haren town hall, thanks to its demolition, has become emblematic of the present-day appraisal and treatment of buildings from the Post 65 era.

The collaboration between Henk Thieme and Brita Thieme-Domela Nieuwenhuis was exceptional. They were one another's equal when it came to designing, something that was highly unusual in the period in which they worked. Owing to the closeness of their collaboration it is mostly impossible to determine which of them made the definitive design decisions. The individual signatures of these separate designers merged into one; Henk and Brita were not *two* architects, but *one* architectural couple.

NOTEN

- 1 Royal Institute of Dutch Architects, Groningen division 1984-85, Groningen [1984]. I would like to thank the children of Henk and Brita Thieme with whom I have spoken for this study: Sven Thieme, Arne Thieme and Karen Thieme. Many thanks also to former associates of the practice, Hans Groenewold and Ch'ing Sze Liem, for our conversations, and to Johan van der Beek, one of Henk's former colleagues. Last but not least, I would like to thank architect Rob Hendriks who brought me into contact with the Thieme family.
- 2 W. Havik and H. Meindersma, *Geen top zonder berg*, Arnhem 1997, 39.
- 3 M. Kruidenier, *Architect Jan Sterenberg en het wonen in de jaren '70. Groei-kernen en woonmilieus*, Rotterdam 2021; B. Colenbrander, *Gunnar Daan, architect*, Rotterdam 1995; M. Martin and J. Versnel, *Abe Bonnema, architect*, Rotterdam 1998; R. Hendriks (ed.), 'Een zitkuil voor het dorp. Een toekomst voor de jaren 70 architectuur van Cor Kalfsbeek', *DAAD Cahier 9* (2016); A. den Boer et al., *Bruut. Atlas van het brutalisme in Nederland*, Zwolle 2023.
- 4 E. Smeets-Klokgieters, 'Hulde aan onze kranige architecte!' *De opkomst van de eerste vrouwelijke architecten van Nederland*, Rotterdam 2023; E. van Kessel and M. Kuperus, *Vrouwen in de (stede)bouw wat doen jullie nou? Over werk en werkervaringen van vrouwelijke bouwkundig ingenieurs in Nederland*, PhD thesis Art History VU Amsterdam 1982; C. Edens et al., *Vrouwen in architectuur*, Rotterdam 2023; www.a-zine.nl/category/mevrouw-de-architect/ (Mevr. De Architect column in online magazine A.Zine, accessed 29 May 2023).
- 5 Information kindly supplied by the Thieme children; J. van der Beek, 'Aantekeningen gesprek H. Thieme en J. van der Beek', 5 December 2019; *Delftsche studenten Almanak voor het jaar negentienhonderd een en vijftig*, Delft 1950, 415, 490.
- 6 Brita's full surname was Thieme-Domela Nieuwenhuis Nijegaard, but she herself always wrote her name as B. Thieme-Domela N.N. (Information kindly supplied by Karen Thieme). On drawings her name appears as 'B. Thieme-Domela Nieuwenhuis b.i.' (until 1974) or 'ir. B. Thieme-Domela Nieuwenhuis'. The brother of Brita's grandfather was the well-known clergyman and politician Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis (1846-1919).
- 7 Van Kessel and Kuperus 1982 (note 4), 155.
- 8 Information kindly supplied by Karen Thieme; Van Kessel and Kuperus 1982 (note 4), 154-155; *Delftsche studenten-almanak 1950* (note 5). The Domela Nieuwenhuis Nijegaard family hailed originally from Denmark and still had immediate family members living in Denmark. Why Brita opted to work in Sweden rather than Denmark is unknown.
- 9 Information kindly supplied by the Thieme children; Architectural archives of the municipality of Leidschendam-Voorburg, dossier nos. 15120 and 95238, Prins Bernhardlaan 15-73 and 75-133 Leidschendam.
- 10 Private Thieme family archive, list of projects, Thieme family home: Nieuwe Kampsteeg 7, Glimmen, design Henk Thieme and Brita Thieme-Domela Nieuwenhuis, built 1964, builder: Bouwbedrijf Groeneveld BV of Glimmen.
- 11 Private Thieme family archive, drawings and photos. They often worked with the local Groeneveld construction company.
- 12 Van Kessel and Kuperus 1982 (note 4), 158.
- 13 Information kindly supplied by Hans

- Groenewold and Ch'ing Sze Liem.
- 14 Van Kessel and Kuperus 1982 (note 4), 156. This was also intended to prevent them being played off against one another, a lesson learned from experience.
- 15 Conversation with Ch'ing Sze Liem, 22 April 2022.
- 16 Private Thieme family archive, drawings; information kindly supplied by the Thieme children, Hans Groenewold, Ch'ing Sze Liem and Johan van der Beek; Van Kessel and Kuperus 1982 (note 4), 156-158.
- 17 Van Kessel and Kuperus 1982 (note 4), 159.
- 18 Conversation with Karen Thieme, 11 October 2021.
- 19 Van Kessel and Kuperus 1982 (note 4), 157.
- 20 Private Thieme family archive, list of projects.
- 21 'Thieme deed het op eigen kracht', *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 31 January 1994, 9.
- 22 Information kindly supplied by the Thieme children, Ch'ing Sze Liem, Hans Groenewold and Johan van der Beek; Bond 1984 (note 1), 1; Van Kessel and Kuperus 1982 (note 4), 156-158, 189; Groninger Archieven (GA), 1084 Provinciale Groningse Welstandszorg, 1928-1995, inv. no. 1.3, annual reports.
- 23 Private Thieme family archive, list of projects, Centrale Plattelandsbibliotheek voor de provincie Groningen: Laan Corpus den Hoorn 1 Groningen, design Thieme - Thieme-Domela Nieuwenhuis architecten, builder Ned. Aannemingsmaatschappij The Hague, designed c. 1963-1964, built 1964-1965.
- 24 'Minister Vrolijk opent centrale bibliotheek', *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 1 July 1965, 11; 'Provinciale Bibliotheek krijgt rijdend magazijn', *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 10 February 1968, 11.
- 25 Minister [Vrolijk] 1965 (note 24), 11.
- 26 H.P. Thieme and B. Thieme-Domela Nieuwenhuis, 'Bibliotheek te Groningen', *Bouw* 19 (1964) 34, 182; GA, 2537, Bouwdossiers dienst RO/EZ (1), 1878-1992, inv. no. 22688.1, Laan Corpus den Hoorn 1, 1962-1987.
- 27 P.L. de Vrieze, *Moderne bouwkunst in Groningen*, Groningen 1969, 8-9; 'Van Corpus den Hoorn naar Atoomweg. Bibliotheekcentrale wacht met smart op nieuw gebouw', *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 9 December 1972, 13; Annual report 1964 Centrale Plattelandsbibliotheek voor de provincie Groningen, Groningen 1964, 5.
- 28 Havenschap Delfzijl Offices: Noordersingel 1, Delfzijl, design Thieme - Thieme-Domela Nieuwenhuis architecten, designed c. 1971-1974, built 1974. Private Thieme family archive, list of projects.
- 29 Van Kessel and Kuperus 1982 (note 4), 157.
- 30 Van Kessel and Kuperus 1982 (note 4), 156.
- 31 W. Havik and A. Blonk, *Architectuur-gids Provincie Groningen (1900-1994)*, Bedum 1994, 43; Van Kessel and Kuperus 1982 (note 4), 156; GA 698 Havenschap Delfzijl 1958-1986, inv. no. 311 'Bouw havenkantoor aan de Noordersingel, notitie Ch.C. van Elderen aan Leden-Dagelijks Bestuur Havenschap', 24 April 1973, and correspondence between Ch.C. van Elderen and H.P. Thieme/J.J.C. Groenewold. The original plan was to use aluminium frames but owing to cost cutbacks, stained timber frames were used instead.
- 32 H. van Dijk (ed.), *Architectuur in Nederland. Jaarboek 1987/1988/Architecture in the Netherlands. Yearbook 1987/1988*, Deventer 1988, 61. Private Thieme family archive, list of projects, Districtsbureau Rijkspolitie Groningen: Schweitzerlaan 1, Groningen, designed by Thieme - Thieme-Domela Nieuwenhuis architecten, for the Rijksgebouwendienst (Government Buildings Agency; Groningen, Friesland, Drenthe division), designed 1980, built 1987, builder BAM, Wijn en Dekker, constructeur adviesbureau voor bouwtechniek bv, J.J.A. Beukema, J.H. Pestman.
- 33 Previous design commissions for the Rijksgebouwendienst included a police station in Grijpskerk and a sports hall plus director's and staff living quarters for the Veenhuizen penitentiary; private Thieme family archive, list of projects.
- 34 C. Ligtenberg, 'Zicht op... Bureau Rijkspolitie', *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 27 July 1992, 7.
- 35 GA 1969 Building permit municipality of Groningen (3) 1965-1987; inv. no. 8404, Schweitzerlaan (municipality of Helpman O 807); granted to the Rijksgebouwendienst for, respectively, a district police office and the enlargement of the building plan, 1985-1986, construction drawings 1985 with placement list. Information kindly supplied by the Thieme children and Hans Groenewold.
- 36 Van Dijk 1988 (note 32), 61.
- 37 Commissie voor de Welstandszorg van de gemeente Groningen, *Voorbeeldplannen voor beeldende welstandszorg*, Groningen 1989, 45.
- 38 'Plan '382 architecten +ingenieurs', *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 29 May 1982.
- 39 M. Barzilay, R. Ferwerda and A. Blom, *Predicaat experimentele woningbouw 1968-1980. Verkenning Post 65*, Amersfoort 2018. Private Thieme family archive, list of projects, Woonzorgcentrum Nij Ylostins: Ylostinslaan 1, IJlst, designed by the architectural and engineering practices Nijenhuis & Ebbing, Timmer, Van Manen & Zwart, Henk Thieme, E.B. Haag, for the Stichting Bejaardenzorg IJlst en omstreken, designed 1969-1972, built 1972.
- 40 'Experimentele bejaardenhuisvesting te IJlst', *Bouw* 26 (1971) 16, 629-631; N. Mens and C. Wagenaar, *Architectuur van de ouderenhuisvesting. Bouwen voor wonen en zorg*, Rotterdam 2009, 110. Nijenhuis & Ebbing had recently built homes for the elderly, Van Manen & Zwart's works included school buildings, Timmer had experience with both housing and school construction, and Thieme had considerable experience in housing, schools and offices.
- 41 Experimentele 1971 (note 40), 629-631; 'Experimentele woningbouw. Adviescommissie kent aan vier projecten predikaat toe', *Bouw* 25 (1970) 36, 137; 'Woonzorgcentrum IJlst', *Bouw* 25 (1970) 35, 1330; M. Barzilay, R. Ferwerda and A. Blom, *Experimentele woningbouw in Nederland 1968-1980*, Rotterdam 2019, 128; Mens and Wagenaar 2009 (note 40), 106-108.
- 42 M. Kruidenier, *Waardstelling Nij Ylostins, 'wooncentrum voor bejaarden'*, Nijmegen 2019, 10; K. Wiekart, 'Woonwijk voor bejaarden te IJlst', *NRC Handelsblad*, 1972. From: Kruidenier 2019.
- 43 'Verkoop-aanbesteding' *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 21 February 1973; Barzilay, Ferwerda and Blom 2019 (note 41), 128. A few years later Nijenhuis & Ebbing did design a 'social services centre' in Smilde based on the same principles, but without the assistance of the other architects involved in the design of Nij Ylostins.
- 44 Private Thieme family archive, list of projects, Gemeentehuis Haren: Raadhuisplein Haren, design Harm Nijenhuis and Henk Thieme, coordinator T.G. Pater, landscape architect J. Vroom from Glimmen, interior architect Metz en Co. from Amsterdam, visual artist B.A. Vels ten Kate from Haren, contractor Lodewijk Geveke from Haren, structural engineers Adviesbureau Grabowsky en Poort from Groningen, designed 1970-1971, built 1973-1975, demolished 2011. H. Nijenhuis and H.P. Thieme, 'Raadhuis te Haren', *Bouw* 31 (1976) 21, 380.
- 45 'Nyenhuis en Thieme nieuwe architecten Harener raadhuis', *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 16 July 1969. A few years earlier the Haren town hall design commission that had been awarded to the Amsterdam architect C.W. Schaling (1912-1972) was withdrawn on the grounds that he did not have the set-up required to be able to complete the commission. 'Ontslag architect van raadhuis in gesloten zitting', *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 26 March 1969.
- 46 H. Nijenhuis and H.P. Thieme, 'Raadhuis te Haren', *Bouw* 31 (1976) 21, 380.
- 47 Havik and Blonk 1994 (note 31) 58; Nijenhuis and Thieme, 1976 (note 44), 380-382; Samenwerkende architecten ingenieursbureau Nijenhuis en

partners, Timmer, ir. Thieme b.v. Team voor bouwkundige- en ruimtelijke vormgeving BNA, *Raadhuis Haren*, Haren s.a.

- 48 H.P. Thieme and H. Nijenhuis, 'Woningen te Steenwijk', *Bouw* 32 (1977) 26, 65-67; J.B.R. Dekker, 'Opinie: Sloopzucht en geldingsdrang in Haren. Noodzaak nieuw raadhuis twijfelachtig', *Dagblad van het Noorden*, 5 October 2005, 10; J. Schlimbach, 'Haren kiest plots voor bouw nieuw

raadhuis. Gemeente laat jaren geplande verbouwing schieten', *Dagblad van het Noorden*, 30 September 2005, 11.

- 49 M. de Vletter, *De kritiese jaren zeventig. Architectuur en stedenbouw in Nederland 1968-1982/The Critical Seventies. Architecture and Urban Planning in the Netherlands 1968-1982*, Rotterdam 2004, 21; S. Vreeling, *Groningen kleurt rood. De rol van de Vereniging tot bevordering der bouwkunst in de*

discussie over de stadsontwikkeling van Groningen, 1883-2012, Groningen 2013, 52-53.

- 50 Private Thieme family archive, list of projects, Woningen Beijum III: Bekemaheerd en Kremersheerd Groningen, designed by Thieme – Thieme-Domela Nieuwenhuis architecten for the City of Groningen and ABP, designed 1976, built 1980.

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DESIGNING SOCIAL INTERACTION

THE ARCHITECTURAL COUPLE HENK THIEME AND BRITA THIEME-DOMELA NIEUWENHUIS

SANNE TILLEMA

The architectural couple Hendrikus Pieter Thieme (1925-2020) and Brita Thieme-Domela Nieuwenhuis Nijegaard (1929-1995) were active from the 1950s up to the end of the twentieth century. From their office in Groningen and their home in the village of Glimmen they collaborated on over two hundred designs for new buildings, renovations and restorations. That legacy is slowly being erased as their buildings are demolished or radically altered, a fate it shares with a lot of architecture from the Post-65 period. This article draws attention to the quality of the output of Thieme-Thieme-Domela Nieuwenhuis architects in the hope of preventing still more of their buildings from being damaged or even vanishing altogether. It is the first time that some of these works have been documented. The study is based on a list of projects, literature and archival research, and conversations with former associates and the couple's children. Much has already been written about Dutch architecture from the period 1965-1990, but the focus of most of those publications is the Randstad urban region and the design practices based there. Still less is known about women architects from the northern Netherlands in the Post-65 period. With the exception of a 1982 thesis *Women in construction, what are you doing now?*, the work of Brita Thieme-

Domela Nieuwenhuis has received little attention to date.

The first part of the article introduces the couple and their practice. The second part examines a number of highlights in the Thieme-Thieme-Domela Nieuwenhuis oeuvre, grouped according to two themes. The first theme is a building type, namely offices. The couple's work reflects a general development in office architecture in the Post-65 period. The second theme is a phenomenon that was growing in importance in those years: cooperation with other designers. In the 1970s and '80s, Henk and Brita worked together in several combinations with colleagues. The article describes the benefits and results.

The oeuvre of the architectural couple Henk Thieme and Brita Thieme-Domela Nieuwenhuis possesses a special quality that only becomes apparent when it is examined closely. Equally special is the way the two architects cooperated with each other. As designers they were equals, a situation that was by no means usual at the time. Owing to their close collaboration it is mostly impossible to distinguish which of them made the decisive design decisions. The individual signatures of these separate designers have merged into one; Henk and Brita were not two architects but one architectural couple.