

The Irritant Principle of Renewal: 100 years of Aldo & Hannie van Eyck

Call for papers

The 2018 edition of the annual conference of the Jaap Bakema Study Centre is dedicated to Aldo and Hannie van Eyck. In honour of their achievements and as a celebration of their work, the conference aims to bring together scholars and practitioners to explore the rich legacy of their ideas and aspirations for a humanist architecture.



Aldo van Eyck. Pastoor van Ars church, The Hague, 1968-69. © TU Delft.

Aldo and Hannie van Eyck were one of the most remarkable and influential architect couples of the second half of the 20th century, not only in the Netherlands but also in the international architecture community. In their inexhaustible quest for a renewal of post-war modern architecture, they placed the human being at the centre of their work and thinking. They found profound inspiration in 'the child, the city and the artist', as the famous title of Aldo van Eyck's manifesto goes. Seminal works include the Municipal Orphanage in Amsterdam, the Arnhem Sonsbeek Sculpture Pavilion, and more than 700 children's playgrounds in Amsterdam. It is in the context of the latter that Aldo van Eyck spoke of the 'irritant principle of renewal': a playground in a city was like a grain of sand in an oyster, triggering a transformation and regeneration of the social fabric.

'The Irritant Principle of Renewal' is both the motto for the conference and its challenge. Next to the demonstration of the internal developments of the body of work and thinking of the Van Eycks, the following topics are suggested for further exploration and debate:

- *The exchange of concepts between the avant-garde and architecture.* In addition to Aldo van Eyck's own reference to what he called the 'great gang' of western avant-garde artists, there is also a highly personal exchange to observe: the Van Eycks moved in the circles of Cobra and were friends with Carel Visser, while Hannie's brother Joost van Roojen was a painter who would contribute to various architectural works. Why was this exchange between art and architecture necessary? Why was it so productive, and could it be productive again?
- *Collaborations and polemics.* Collaborations as well as polemics were a crucial part of the lives of Aldo and Hannie van Eyck, from their exchanges within Team 10 and the Dutch Forum magazine, to their fierce opposition to the rise of Postmodernism in architecture, as exemplified in Aldo's lecture on 'Rats, posts and other pests' of 1981. Both inspiration and contestation can be considered as part and parcel of the agonistics of architectural creativity and knowledge production. Where is the debate today? Can architecture still make a difference?
- *Between Holland and Switzerland.* There are many moments of cross-pollination to be observed in the lives of Aldo and Hannie. Before taking up their life in Amsterdam, the Van Eycks met at the ETH in Zurich where they were both students. Throughout the Modern era, there is an ongoing exchange between the upper and lower Rhine regions, from Berlage to Mart Stam. We want to know more about this.
- *The impact of anthropology on architectural thinking.* This is an already much-investigated field with regard to the travels of the Van Eycks to Africa and the Dogon, but many questions remain unanswered. Can we really move beyond Eurocentric exoticism, in spite of ourselves? In a post-colonial era, and in recognition of aesthetic and cultural appropriation, can we imagine a new universalism once more?
- *Children and pedagogical models.* The much-celebrated playgrounds are often discussed as a welcome refuge, an unspoiled sanctuary within an urban condition dominated by out-of-control technophilia and hypercapitalism. Yet the Van Eycks imagined them as a tool for subversion to open up the possibility of a new social order. How are children disruptive? How to get beyond escapism?
- *Learning from the city.* Together with students from the Amsterdam Academy of Architecture, the Van Eycks proposed a radical and successful alternative for sanitizing the historic city. From their Hubertus House for single mothers to the reconstruction scheme for the Nieuwmarktbuurt area, it was proposed to engage with the historic, material and immaterial fabric of a city. How to view such contextualism today? Does it still matter in light of the global phenomenon of what Rem Koolhaas calls Junkspace? Or is it more valid now than ever before?

- *Interiority*. The most poetic qualities of the work of the Van Eycks probably emerge from the interiors they designed, and from such evocative concepts as 'labyrinthine clarity' and 'the interior of the mind'. Paradoxically, at the smallest scale of the domestic and the self, a vast world opens up (that seems hardly to have been explored), in terms of the ways in which architecture might engage with reality; how, upon reflection, it can create a world of its own.

Practical information

Abstracts of 300-500 words plus a short bio (300 words max) should be sent to Janno Martens: j.martens@hetnieuweinstituut.nl

Dates

Deadline: Monday 3 September 2018
Notification of selection: Monday 17 September 2018
Dates of the conference: 28-30 November 2018

Convenor

Dirk van den Heuvel (Jaap Bakema Study Centre)

Advisory Board

Tom Avermaete (TU Delft)
Hetty Berens (HNI)
Maristella Casciato (Getty Research Institute)
Carola Hein (TU Delft)
Laurent Stalder (ETH Zurich)

Locations

Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment, TU Delft and Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam.

Selection

The selection is in the hands of the convenor and advisory board, together with Guus Beumer, general director of Het Nieuwe Instituut, and Dick van Gameren, chair of the Department of Architecture, TU Delft. Criteria are relevance and focus in relation to the call, state-of-the-art research, an innovative and challenging approach, and an eloquent and evocative articulation of the proposition. Academics and practitioners alike are invited to submit. We are aiming for a diverse group of speakers, in terms of nationality, seniority and academic and institutional background, among other categories, so as to assure a productive and lively exchange of knowledge.

Please note that selected participants are requested to organize their own support for travel costs and hotel accommodation.