Aldo Van Eyck and the rise of an ethnographic paradigm in the 1960s

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Georges Teyssot
Aldo van Eyck
and the Rise of an
Ethnographic Paradigm
in the 1960s
“Make a welcome of each door / and a face of each window.”
Aldo van Eyck

At the end of the 1950s, one of the topics emerging almost obsessively among Team 10 members, in conferences and periodicals, was that of the “doorstep”, the “threshold,” also called the “meeting place,” or the “shape of the in-between.” Aldo van Eyck’s theory of the threshold or the in-between - a discourse on the need for architecture to reconcile spatial polarities such as inside-outside - was first proposed by the Dutch architect in 1959 at the CIAM 11 in Otterlo (the Netherlands). Subsequently, in Forum, the Dutch architectural magazine, photographs of traditional habitation eloquently illustrated keywords and leitmotifs, such as “das Reich des Zwischen” (“the realm of the in-between”), or “la plus grande réalité du seuil” (“the greater reality of the doorstep”), showing dignified children sitting on the one-stepped terrace leading to a mud-constructed abode in some unidentified area. (Figs. 1 and 2) Aldo van Eyck (and of some of his friends) developed a theory of the threshold, borrowing from an array of heterogeneous literature that included popular Western metaphysics. Aldo van Eyck was also one of the first designers to introduce considerations on “primitive” architecture in his discourse, citing, for instance the writings of Franz Boas, one of the first ethno-linguists to focus on the unconscious nature of cultural phenomena, and to situate the locus of such structures within the realm of language, thus becoming an inspiration to the French intellectual movement termed “structuralism.” Van Eyck’s architectural school is often ambiguously defined as one of Strukturalismus, which appears to have been a reference to the doctrine of linguistic structuralism. In order to understand how this term came to be associated with van Eyck’s work one must map the context of various trends leading to an “anthropologization” of architectural discourses in the 1960s. Taking into account the recent scholarship that has thrown new light on the figure of van Eyck, perhaps there is the need to produce a more theoretical reflection, in order to illustrate the cultural background in which the notion of threshold appeared, to expose also for what purpose this “ethnologization” of the discourse was construed, and lastly to show what were already, at that time, the ambiguities that presided over its birth.


The story of how this concept entered the vocabulary of architects begins in theologian Martin Buber’s notion of the “in-between”. Since the bestselling publication of I and Thou in London in 1936, Buber’s existentialist philosophy had been quite a success, while exercising an influence amongst architects and town planners. Moreover, in Buber’s foreword to Community and Environment; a Discourse on Social Ecology [1953], by Erwin Anton Gutkind, a German émigré, the philosopher would state: “The architects must be given the task to build for human contact, to build an environment which invites human meetings and centers which give these meetings meaning and render them productive.” This kind of humanistic plea was immediately absorbed by the organizers of the CIAM, such as Jose Luis Sert, and by Jacqueline Tyrwhitt, a follower and editor of Patrick Geddes, herself a founder of the discipline of urban planning. Furthermore, at a 1954 meeting (while preparing the next CIAM conference in Dubrovnik in 1956), Sigfried Giedion made a plea for a new humanism, invoking Buber’s dialogic theme: “The demand for the re-establishment of the relation between ‘you’ and ‘me’ leads to radical changes in the structure of the city.” Such a summoning will furnish the inspiration for the English title of Giedion’s 1958 publication: Architecture, You and Me. Then, as mentioned before, during the Team 10 meeting of summer 1959 in Otterlo, Aldo van Eyck quoted the Buberian slogan of Das Gestalt Gewordene Zwischen (“the in-between that has taken shape”), and asked architects to be aware of “defined in-between places, which induce simultaneous awareness of what is significant on either side […]”, providing “the common ground where conflicting polarities can again become twin phenomena.” (Figs. 3, 4, 5, 6)

In recent years, Francis Strauven has demonstrated van Eyck’s connection to Buber’s work, based on texts published in van Eyck’s magazine Forum. In various issues of Forum, the theme of the “threshold” was theorized by both van Eyck and Joop Hardy, citing Martin Buber’s definition of the sphere of the in-between as the “bearer of inter-human events.” Similarly, in Buber’s 1951 Urdistanz und Beziehung, a book on “original distance” and relationships, art is defined as the “witness to the relationship between humans and nature.” This relationship would form the basis of van Eyck’s notion of a spatial dialectic, which was to be achieved by incorporating the reality of “dual phenomena.” With things having been arbitrarily divided by the emphasis on efficient production in the technological age, the dual phenomena offered a basic principle that provided for a twin reality in which things would find a reconciled Gestalt: the threshold. Buber, a philosopher of religion, theologian, and foremost 20th-century scholar of Judaism, outlined what has been labeled a philosophy des Zwischen (of the in-between), through readings of Kant, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Bergson, and Heidegger, in various books from Ich und Du (1923); to Between Man and Man (1947), to his anthology, Dialogishes Leben (1947).
The English translation of *Ich und Du*, under the title *I and Thou*, was published over and over again, and in paperback by the Boston-based Beacon Press in 1958, becoming a textbook for architects and planners, including those at the Harvard-MIT Joint Center for Urban Studies, formed in 1959.⁵

Such an ontology of the interval, or the “between,” is a philosophy of intersubjectivity. Buber’s thinking is based on real communication between human beings, hence the emphasis on dialogue as opposed to monologue, which he characterizes as a *Zwiesprache*, a “double speech” of the given and the received. This is a prelude to the double tonality of the soul’s “exhalation” and “inhalation” — or, we might say, its inspiration.⁶ In the now famous 1960 issue of *Forum* on “Door and Window,” van Eyck would develop the concept that the in-between must be conceived “in the image of man,” and that like man himself, the in-between must “breathe both in and out.”⁷ Such a respiratory idea is repeated, conjuring “the breathing image” of architecture, to ask the vital question: “Man still breathes both in and out. When is architecture going to do the same?”⁸ This is an image taken from Buber, inasmuch as the physical act of breathing consists of an inhalation followed by an exhalation. These breathing images refer to the response of the *I* to the *Thou*, a pneumatic system that offers not only the occasion of respiratory metaphors, but also the foundation of a theory of the human spirit, the *pneuma* (in Greek, breath, spirit). Such is the dialogical force of relation.

For Buber, there are two levels of relations between the subject and the world, consisting on the one hand of “I-it,” and on the other of “I-you” or “I-Thou.”⁹ In his ontology, the world of objects, which is defined by the “I-it” relation, appears as a separate entity, a relation that leads to a world of disconnection. The introduction of the “I-thou” dimension, alongside or below that of the “I-it”, creates a mysterious, quasi-mystical, and subjective force: the double fold (*Zwiefalt*) of the *I*. The *Zwiefalt* is a bifurcation of the self, established by the dual structure of a totality (I-Thou) together with the multiplicity of separations (the I-Its). To some, the privileging of the *Ich-Du* duality raised some doubts, which were formulated by Buber’s collaborator, Franz Rosenzweig, who thought that while Buber’s recognition of the role of the “Thou” was groundbreaking, it was at the expense of the “It.”¹⁰ Buber’s “anthropology” is fundamentally the relation between man and man, a meeting or happening, an occurrence that defines the sphere of the between, of the inter-human (*das Zwischenmenschliche*), which unfolds as the “dialogical.”¹¹ Buber calls the interval between *I* and *Thou* the *Zwischen* (in-between), which he sees as the locus where being is realized.¹² Because it is always novel and newly experienced, this meeting takes the form of a constantly renewed occurrence. It is distinguished from the silent dialogue of the mind, and unlike the mind, does not happen in an abstract space.
In Buber’s pure spiritualism of friendship, one might ask if the interval, or the in-between, is not revealed by the consciousness of the relation, which he calls either the Beziehung (relationship) or Umfassung (enclosure, totality). The philosopher apparently doesn’t offer a clear indication of how a state of relation differs from a state of consciousness; moreover, in his work it is difficult to distinguish a relationship from an idealistic, pure conscience. Because man deals with the real world, one must define not only the terms of a spiritual dialogue but also the possibility of a separation between the individual and the whole. As Levinas wrote: “[…Buber] has not taken separation seriously enough.”

Even if Buber’s idea of between-ness functions philosophically as a category of being, “Man” is still its locus. Having distanced himself from the anonymous world of things, Man is put at the center of being. Thus, Buber’s philosophy can be read as an anthropology, and this is probably why it so easily permeates the readings of architects like Giedion and van Eyck during the 1950s and 1960s. As Michel Foucault would later make clear, “anthropology” does not refer to the study of various, exterior world cultures, but to the fact that Western philosophy has the problematic objects of the human condition and its finitude. “Anthropology,” which puts Man at its center, was not an invention of a 16th-century scholar during the Renaissance period, but a biased manipulation of French and German historians during the late 19th-century.

One could ask how this ontology of between-ness could translate into an aesthetic, or an architectural theory. (Fig. 7) To begin to formulate an answer, one has to return to Aldo van Eyck’s famous text in the “Door and Window” issue of the Dutch magazine Forum (1960-61):

“Whatever space and time mean, place and occasion mean more. / For space in the image of man is place and time in the image of man is occasion.”

As Strauven remarks, for van Eyck, “space” is turned into “place” by being construed “in the image of man,” and since man is dual and dialogical, a place should be too. This operation is a “similarity,” which is to be understood in a “structural” way: for van Eyck, a building should present a structural analogue to the human being, and include anthropomorphic pairings, such as breathing in and out, front and back, spirit and body. The source for this is again in Buber’s thinking, who referred to the theory of imitation – mimesis – in the arts. For Buber, as for van Eyck, while man is made in the image of God, space is made in the image of man, and, accordingly, architecture begins to function in a system of imitation, with each level of the similarity, or analogy, “imitating” the next: from the scale of the theological to the anthropological. Since the Greek canon and Vitruvius, an intrinsic aspect of the Western tradition has been to embed human proportions in a building. Buber’s source seems located in the many references to architecture made by the Christian theologian Thomas Aquinas: what
the architect is to the building he erects, God is to the world he creates. Aquinas called the comparison between the realms of the divine and created worlds an “analogy.” An analogy enables an appeal to the community between the divine and the created world, displaying what they have in common, while preserving their incomparable difference. For Aquinas, the analogy of “God / architecture” shows that the architect is actually an analogon of the created world, not so much in terms of harmony and proportions, but inasmuch as architecture bases itself on causes and principles that are imposed and felt throughout the whole of creation.26

Many 20th-century architects, including van Eyck, based their “theory” on a modern version of Aristotle’s mimesis and Aquinas’s analogy. Through Buber’s popularized theology van Eyck appropriated the language of traditional Western metaphysics and its particular theoretical vocabulary and terminology, or conceptual array. An example of this “metaphysics” is van Eyck’s belief that the work of art, whether concrete or abstract, is to be considered through its representative capacity. It consists of an appearance that refers to a reality that serves as a model. Van Eyck’s theory stands by the Buberian aesthetic regime, which in turn is aligned with Aristotle’s “poetical” representation: the oeuvre is both mimēsis praxeōs (imitation of an action) and mimēsis physeōs (imitation of nature), thus caught in the long chain of resemblance and similarity that would be repeatedly taught by the scholastic tradition.27 Parenthetically, one might add that while there were “structural” analyses and critiques of mimēsis in rhetoric, literature and the visual arts in France during the 1960s – by Roland Barthes, Gérard Genette, and Louis Marin, to name only a few – Aldo van Eyck and his contemporary critics seem to have known nothing of them.28

Aldo van Eyck’s metaphors for space are based on such a metaphysical onto-theology. Space, as it were, becomes the receptacle and fundamental meeting place for all humans. Instead of focusing on spatial antipodes, such as the harsh forms of postwar modernist urban developments, architecture ought to develop itself as a dialogical entity - that is, a dual or “twin phenomena” - that brings the dialectic sides into contact, and reconciles their opposing forces. It is an architecture of reconciliation. Space and time, created “in the image of man,” become place and event. There is an affinity between the notion of place and the notion of the in-between, both taking place between the polarities of inside and outside, here and there, small and large, part and whole, house and city, form and structure, and so forth.29 Indeed, the whole oeuvre of van Eyck, from the Municipal Orphanage (Amsterdam, 1955-60) to the Pastor van Ars Roman Catholic Church in Loosduinen (The Hague, 1964-69), is embedded in anthropomorphic references and shaped by a poetry of between-ness.30 It is perhaps possible to view the nave of the Via Sacra, cutting through the two main parts of the van Ars
Church, as a precise illustration of Buberian in-between theory. For van Eyck, space in the image of man signifies that modern architecture must interiorize through its very form(s) the “perceiving, moving and relating subjects.” (Figs. 8, 9) In this way, buildings are “brought to life by their inhabitants.” Such an assertion is an excellent statement, but one is left with a series of questions about the “in-between.” If an interval is opened up within space, creating a place and offering an event, is such a hiatus to be defined by “things” (inside/outside, large-scale/small-scale, house/city, etc.), by “subjects” (humans, divinities), or by both? With van Eyck, as with Buber, one is left with a sense of dissatisfaction about the definition of the Zwischen, as it fluctuates from the physical realm of things to the subjective domain of meeting places for people or inhabitants.

Some answers are offered by early 20th-century ethnology, specifically the work of Arnold van Gennep, whose Rites of Passage (Paris, 1908) describes the different phases of the process of initiation in various societies. In chapter VI, for instance, he focused on natural features that mark a territory, such as a stake, a portal, or an upright rock (in other words, a milestone or a landmark). He describes types of thresholds in a village, a town, a house, or a temple: “The door is a boundary between the foreign and domestic worlds in the case of an ordinary dwelling, between the profane and sacred worlds in the case of a temple.” To cross a threshold, van Gennep adds, means unifying oneself with a new world. It is thus an important act in marriage, adoption, ordination, and funereal ceremonies. More generally he calls the rites of separation from a previous world preliminary rites (from L., prae, before; limen, threshold or limit), those performed during the transitional stage, liminal rites, and the ceremonies of incorporation into the new world, post liminal rites. He cites, for instance, the isolated portal in the city that gives rise to monuments such as the Roman arch of triumph. In another instance, when passing through a door, orthodox Jews must touch the mezuzah with a finger of their right hand. The volume is still of great interest and describes the different phases of the initiation process in various societies through different rites, including exclusion (rites of separation), marginalization (rites of initiation), and the subsequent reintegration of the individual into the group (rites of incorporation). During the 20th century, van Gennep’s Rites was well known, especially after the 1960 English translation. Joseph Rykwert, a Polish-born British scholar, was familiar with van Gennep, and was also an acquaintance of Aldo van Eyck. Rykwert had known van Eyck from Ulm’s Hochschule für Gestaltung, and van Eyck would become the first editor to publish his study on “The Idea of a Town” in an issue of Forum in 1963. (Fig. 10)

In an analysis of foundation rites of antiquity, Rykwert quoted van Gennep in several instances in descriptions of standing stones, the protection of houses and property, and in reference to the
double, apotropaic function of the labyrinth and the templum as both regenerative and protective, excluding and containing all sorts of menaces.\textsuperscript{36} While recounting the history of cities’ foundations during the Etruscan and early Roman period, Rykwert aimed at showing that the original urban design was a reflection of its inhabitants’ cosmic conception, and that the foundation (in Latin, \textit{inauguratio}) was a ritual re-enactment of the world’s creation (or inauguration). Furthermore, the rites that were enacted during the establishment of cities and temples, as well as the division of land in four parts, the ceremonial ploughing, and so forth, were aimed at the reaffirmation of a state of equilibrium, balancing cosmic opposites, the reconciliation of which was to be inscribed on the land and commemorated by rituals of recurrent festivals.

Returning to Rykwert’s “The Idea of a Town,” one realizes that his work also relies on a whole set of dissimilar sources, published between the 1930s and 1940s, that will give a divergent meaning to his essay; namely, the mythologies of Carl-Gustav Jung (with Karl Kerényi); the Indo-European mythography of the French philologist Georges Dumézil; the volume on the mystical symbolism of the cupola by the French academic Louis Hauteceur; and the history of religions by the Romanian Mircea Eliade, a professor at the University of Chicago. Jung, the famous founder of so-called depth psychology, will develop the theory of archetypes, undertaking to study those patterns by the exploration of the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico and Arizona in 1924-25, attempting also to determine their nature in Gnosticism, folklore, and the literature of alchemy.\textsuperscript{37} In 1941, Jung will publish his \textit{Introduction to a Science of Mythology}, together with the Hungarian-educated Karl Kerényi, a professor of classical philology. Interestingly, the young Aldo van Eyck attended the lectures of Jung, who was a professor on the Faculty of Philosophy and Political Sciences at the Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zurich from 1933 until 1942.\textsuperscript{38}

An interest in the theory of archetypes is confirmed by Rykwert in an interview about van Eyck, in which he states that both of them:

“...always agreed...that [architecture] has to do with what you believe about life and death, the way you see society cohere, the way institutions fix certain social notions, the way these notions are represented... to the outside world. This approach finally aims at the reconstitution of the architectural object ..., a connecting with, incorporating, assuming certain archetypical forms.”\textsuperscript{39}

Here Jung’s “collective (or impersonal) unconscious” appears, which was constitutive of the human psyche as a congenital condition of intuition, or archetypes. Today, except in Jungian circles and mystic websites, nobody gives credit to the theory that considers archetypes as belonging to each human being’s hereditary constitution, biologically embedded in the mind and soul, and revealed under the guise of multiple representations that vary widely from epoch to epoch and place to place.
“The Idea of a Town” also mentions Dumézil’s renowned theory of the division of the three functions (sovereignty and religion, warfare, production) that one could supposedly discover in the language, the social hierarchy, and the mythology of every Indo-European population. Dumézil was a close friend of one of the founders of religious studies in academia, the polygraph Mircea Eliade. Rykwert would use Eliade’s volume to propel his underlying thesis that religious experience is a universal and autonomous phenomenon: “I may not have made sufficiently clear that I am touching on one of the great commonplaces of religious experience.” Further on, writing about the foundational rite of ploughing as a hierogamy, a sacred marriage between earth and sky, he insists: “The earth is the great mother whose fertility is increased by tilling and ploughing,” a sentence backed by a reference to Eliade, with a further insistence on the universality of religious phenomenology: “This is true for many cultures, maybe for most.” Nowadays, it is such a belief in the universality of religions facts that would be put into question.

At this point, it is indispensable to recall that a common feature unifies all the aforementioned authors, which is a probable connection to conservative thinking. As is well known, Jung accepted the co-presidency of the German psychoanalytical society from 1933 to 1939, and was hiding his religion of an Aryan-only cult of redemption and rebirth. Hautecœur was a high functionary in the Vichy regime. Today, the extreme-right involvement of Mircea Eliade is well documented. Finally, while the prewar monarchist engagement of Dumézil has been revealed, he has – arguably – been accused of past sympathies for Nazi ideas. Probably, like many, Rykwert came to know of all those unsavory facts only in a later period, and presumably he seemed to have no reason to become tainted with extreme-right politics. However, what hovers in Rykwert’s text, like incense’s persistent odor in a sacristy, is a general “mystical” tone, together with an ahistorical belief in the universality of symbolism, and a pervasive conviction that religion is a sui generis phenomenon, an inclination reinforced by his comparison of Roman foundation rites with the Indian Mandala. Perhaps Rykwert was already perceiving the entrapment that so-called “religious sciences” had created around his thesis, and this would explain why he opens up the last part of his scholarly essay to ethnology, a field introduced in his discussion of African foundation rites described by the German anthropologist Leo Frobenius, and the analysis of the diagram of a Bororo settlement in Amazonia, borrowed from Claude Lévi-Strauss’s best-seller, Tristes Tropiques. This shift certainly would have appealed to Aldo van Eyck, more than any adherence to a wacky Jungian creed.

Rykwert’s study would later be expanded into a volume in 1976. In this late version, the author will add comparisons with the Dogon’s art and rituals in West Africa, the mythic model of the city in archaic China, and so forth. However, in the “analogical” chapters of his book, Rykwert
persists in focusing on the permanence of the “cosmological structure” throughout the history of humanity. He submits the hypothesis of “irreducible elements” as a fundamental pattern of human essence, appearing to be so recurrent in the most varied circumstances that they had to reside in the biological structure of mankind. Quite abruptly, mythography, ethnology, psychology - and now biology - are brought in, as if to uphold and give certainty to the “anthropological” project. As a matter of fact, sciences are introduced to give force to a project which, at least apparently, is not far from what “structuralism” had attempted to accomplish during the 1950s and 60s. However, it must be said that the whole book is organized in a double, or even triple, nature: first, “classical” or Greco-Roman archaeology; second, readings into religious symbolism, the pervasive “sacred sciences” and – extremely reactionary – exoteric knowledge; and, finally, a whole set of sources that, broadly speaking, belongs to the realm of “structuralism.” But was the volume a “structuralist” project? In mixing disparate sources and approaches, Rykwert’s endeavor takes the risk of losing its coherence along the way. Nevertheless, in that last section, one is reassured to find what a scholar of the 1960s and 70s would be expected to have read: pioneers in linguistics such as Ferdinand de Saussure and Roman Jakobson; Émile Benveniste’s volumes on linguistics and on Indo-European institutions; Jean-Pierre Vernant’s “structural” research on Greek mythology; André Leroi-Gourhan’s volumes on the palaeography of technology, and so forth. In addition to extensive considerations on the “sacred” dimension in human cultures, there is a discourse, which - although very discreetly - hooks up to the structuralist paradigm in almost a shy way, and subsequently, but only then, sets this mass of information in motion. However, by the time this volume was published, structuralism was something of the past. Which brings us to a vexing question of terminology, since van Eyck’s school in the Netherlands is often characterized as “Structuralism in architecture,” referring to the work of John Habraken, Herman Hertzberger, Joop van Stigt, or Piet Blom, who formed the so-called “configurative” movement. Arnulf Lüchinger, their spokesman, opens his 1981 volume Strukturalismus with a chapter on “structural” thinking that begins with a reference to the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss. However, the work of the anthropologist is not actually taken up seriously, and structuralism becomes just an easy label, a new brand promoted by these architects. In a comical way, the formula of structuralism is opposed to Existentialism, opposite poles that are translated into the notions of constraint (structure) vs. freedom (existence). To buttress this theoretical gem, the 1959 Otterlo lectures of Aldo van Eyck are cited, including the dual/twin phenomena idea, as a prop that could reconcile the epic struggle of “constraint” versus “freedom.” Already around 1960 and until 1968, structuralism had left the desks of academia and become a media phenomenon, part of the doxa and fodder for fashion and journalism.
As Jean-Claude Milner has argued, the structuralist paradigm's achievement consisted in integrating objects that belong to culture into the realm of "hard," exact, and Galilean sciences, which were originally developed in connection to nature. Starting with linguistics, the "mother" of all human sciences, the paradigm will subsequently be applied to many domains of knowledge, and, in doing so, will displace ancient oppositions but also modern ones, such as nature/history, or nature/culture. It was the Greeks who opposed phusis (that which refers to nature) to the thesis (which broadly denotes all that is human: mores, uses, customs, laws, society, history, and culture). To phusis belonged that which did not depend on the collective human will, but pertained to the regular order of the world. To thesis belonged what was dependent on humanity's collective will. During the 20th century, there seemed to be some difficulty created by the great polarity opened up between the sciences of nature (hard sciences) and the sciences of man (humanities and social sciences). For structuralism, there was no dilemma. Everything that had belonged to the field of thesis (culture) could be made the object of science, without reducing the field of thesis to that of phusis (nature), which would have introduced a naturalization of culture. (Fig. 11)

Inspired by political economy, ethnology, and sociology, the scientific program of Lévi-Strauss was derived in particular from 19th-century comparative grammars of Indo-European languages, and the linguistics of Saussure, Trubetzkoy, Jakobson, and Benveniste. Those disciplines will enable him to assert a theory of différence (as opposed to similarity and analogy), demonstrated through the privileged subject matter of language, kinship and parenthood, marriage, myth, tales, eating manners, costumes, ornaments, tools and instruments, etc. For the "structural" anthropologist, segments of reality, which could be grasped by difference, belonged to realms of exchange and communication. To consider the field of culture as the domain of exchange (and/or communication) will bear significant consequences at the level of later theory. The relatedness between nature and culture will be altered; a theory of knowledge will appear by applying empirical methods to data analysis and processing; and ultimately, a new ontology of being and identity will spread, reshuffling the correlation between the One, the Same, and the Other.

It should be clear that in no way has Aldo van Eyck's thought ever pertained to a "structuralist" methodology; and the reconciled dialectics of the Buberian Ich/Du does not belong to the binary operators that linguistics and structural anthropology were practicing. In his reference to the "other," van Eyck's genial intuition consisted in the introduction of exterior cultures, studied through various volumes of ethnography, including Marcel Griaule's report on the Dogon of Western Africa, published in Le Minotaure (1933, n. 2), the surrealist magazine that van Eyck read during the war, together with Ruth Benedikt's study on the
Pueblos of the Amerindians of New Mexico. During the winter 1961, van Eyck visited Taos' pueblo, subsequently writing an article on “The Pueblos”, published in Forum in August 1962. (Figs. 12, 13)

Thus, like Lévi-Strauss, van Eyck's sources are Griaule and the French school of ethnology, but van Eyck does not go on to interpret them in a structuralist manner. Instead, in a startling way, these readings, and various trips to West Africa in 1960 and to the Pueblos of the Zuñi in 1961, offered for van Eyck a confirmation of Buberian dialogical theory. Van Eyck's discourse and knowledge had nothing to with “structuralism” proper (in other words, Lévi-Strauss's “structural anthropology”); van Eyck was using the studies that the French School of Ethnology had made about the Dogon before the advent of structuralism as a confirmation of Buberian metaphysics, which he in turn interpreted as an anthropological philosophy. This has been the source of much historical confusion about van Eyck and his relationship to anthropology. (Figs. 14, 15)

Together with the architect Herman Haan (1914-1996), van Eyck and his wife traveled to the Dogon, with the knowledge of Montserrat Palau Marti's book, Les Dogon, but presumably without having read the seminal work of the French ethnographer Marcel Griaule, Dieu d'eau (1948). The only copy in van Eyck's library is the 1966 edition. When they reached the land of the Dogon, they made the acquaintance of Paul Parin, his wife Goldy Parin-Matthey, and Fritz Morgenthaler, three psychoanalysts from Zurich who were attempting to psychoanalyze the Dogon in their search for the universal existence of Freud's Oedipus complex. Fully aware of Griaule's studies, the three ethno-psychoanalysts acted as intermediaries for the van Eycks, basically explaining to them what Griaule and his school had discovered, yet presumably without fully revealing their sources. In 1963, they published their book in German with the alluring title, Whites Think Too Much, a volume translated into French in 1966 and read both by specialists and by many eager students of May 1968. (Fig. 16) In 1963, Aldo van Eyck prepared another issue of Forum, which was not published until 1967, for which Parin and Morgenthaler contributed two texts. Subsequently, both of the text were translated and published under a new English heading, “A Miracle of Moderation”, in the periodical Via at the University of Pennsylvania in 1968; and in 1969 in Meaning in Architecture, edited by Charles Jencks and George Baird. The ideas and the sources of Griaule and his school are not mentioned in the last publication. Was omitting the mention of Griaule's school to an English audience a simple blunder by the editors, or was the absence of the footnotes significant? One could probably call for an interpretation of the three psychoanalysts' manqué act. Moreover, one could scrutinize why 40 printed pages were dedicated to questionable attempts of “probing the Dogon personality structure.”
In the case of the Dogon civilization, ethnographers had seen that each village was perceived as “an organ of the landscape body,” and that “each house in turn was thought as an organ of the village.”71 Furthermore, it appeared that, since man was himself an organ of the house, there was a permanent interaction between body and organ. The cosmology of the Dogon seemed to ratify and substantiate the particular analogy of landscape/body/organ, while reasserting an organic continuity between nature and culture. (Fig. 17) For architects like van Eyck, the Dogon’s world image came as an amazing ratification of their own (Western) system of analogies, which, for instance, had been enunciated during the CIAM 1959 in Otterlo with the reiteration of his classical credo:

“A house must be like a small city if it’s to be a real house; a city like a large house if it’s to be a real city.”72

Such an isomorphism at the base of his conception received an unexpected confirmation in ethnography.73 (Fig. 18) The previous analogy of the city/house was further expanded under another form and in a different guise – the analogy of the city with a tree. This was enunciated by Aldo van Eyck at Team 10’s meeting at the Abbaye de Royaumont in September 1962:

“Tree is leaf and leaf is tree – House is city and city is house.”74

The first analogy of city/house is strengthened with a second metaphor (or an “image” to use the architect’s terminology). (Fig. 19) There is a redoubling of the metaphor, which makes it capable of producing a poetic effect. Far from having a purely rhetorical effect, the metaphor here is not illustrative of an idea, but has the power to create a series of new meanings, becoming what Paul Ricoeur has defined as a “living metaphor.”75 Here the metaphor doesn’t proceed only by resemblance or similarity, but also works at a non-rhetorical level, which can be defined by the poetical, or poïesis, meaning production. In this case, the metaphor becomes an image that creates a model via its own dynamics.

Poetic metaphors are probably what architects do best. For both van Eyck and Rykwert, ethnology comes to the rescue of a Western metaphysical discourse. While this discourse was initially met with skepticism by the Team 10 members, it would eventually become one of the dominant theories throughout the 1960s and ’70s.76 Such a new orthodoxy – soon to become part of the doxa – will spread through numerous publications, beginning with the final edition of the Team 10 Primer, edited by Alison Smithson, and its “Doorstep” section.77 (Fig. 20) Afterward, the anthology Meaning in Architecture,78 which includes a text by Rykwert, will become a universal textbook in schools of architecture, leading toward an anthropologization of architectural discourses, and paving the way for postmodernist trends.
As a double coda to this story, Geneviève Calame-Griaule, the daughter of Griaule and herself a specialist of the Dogon, published a critical review in 1969 of Parin and Morgenthaler’s book, reaffirming the principle that one should avoid identifying collective processes with individual ones.\(^7\) Moreover, she observed all sorts of irregularities: that the request for an analysis came from the investigators, not from the subjects; that the “patients” were paid, thus assimilated to regular ethnographic informers; and that the interviews were conducted in French with translators, creating a linguistic gap incompatible with orthodox psychoanalysis. Ultimately – someone will appreciate the irony – in their *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari will use both Parin’s and Griaule’s oeuvres to demonstrate the nonexistence of an African Oedipus.\(^8\)

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4. Martin Buber, foreword to: Erwin Anton Gutkind, *Community and environment: a discourse on social ecology*, (London: Watts, 1953; New York: Philosophical Library, 1954), vii – ix; Erwin Anton Gutkind (1886-1968) was the architect of the housing development „Sonnenhof“ at Weitlingkiez near Berlin (1925-1927); in 1956, he will be nominated Professor at the Graduate School of Fine Arts at the University of Pennsylvania.


11. Ibid.


19. In other words, Buber doesn’t do justice to the “It”, to the things of the world, because he still thinks within the schema bequeathed by western metaphysics, which tends to capture man’s place in terms of object and subject, when ontologically “being” should not be conceived as an object for man, nor beings should not be reduced to the subject-object relation. Ernst Simon, “Martin Buber, the Educator”, in: The Philosophy of Martin Buber, p. 543-576; see p. 576.


21. Emmanuel Levinas, “Martin Buber and the Theory of Knowledge” in: The Philosophy of Martin Buber, 133-150. As Emmanuel Levinas remarked, Buber accords the inter-subjective aspects of the I-Thou (Ich-Du) relation a privileged status, but the meeting is not just construed as a meeting between human beings and things, but also as a relationship with God. The original distance (Urdistanz) that penetrated the between-men sphere also invades the territory “between God and men.”

22. Ibid, p. 149.


24. Aldo van Eyck, “There is a garden in her face”, Forum, 1960-61, n. 3, 121; quoted by Strauven, p. 416; now in: Aldo van Eyck, Collected articles and other writings, ... op. cit., p. 293.

25. Ibid


32. Strauven, p. 418-9
34 Quoting the work of the American Henry Clay Trumbull's *Threshold Covenant: Or the Beginning of Religious Rites* (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1896), a pastor and an army chaplain; Van Gennep, 20.


38 Strauven, 64.

39 Rykwert, 3; Rykwert, note 175, quotes Henri Frankfort's essay about archetypes in the figurative arts.

40 Rykwert, note 196, n. 211, n. 212, n. 276.


42 Rykwert, 117, n. 137.

43 Rykwert, 128, n. 175.


51 = Rykwert, 143: for the author, in "our attempts to give form to human environment", one "must look for it inside ourselves: in the constitution and structure of the human person" in another reference to the Jungian archetype placed at the conclusion.


53 = For a "structuralist" publication that has changed all views about Ancient Greek urbanism and its connection to the birth of democracy, see: Pierre Lévêque and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Cleisthenes the Athenian: an essay on the representation of space and time in Greek political thought from the end of the sixth century to the death of Plato [1964], trans. David Ames Curtis, (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1996).


55 = Arnulf Lüchinger, Structuralism in architecture and urban planning (Stuttgart: Krämer, 1981), 16-17.


58 = Milner, 201-202.


70. “A Miracle of moderation,” 173.
71. Strauven, 386.
72. Strauven, 386; Aldo van Eyck, “Is architecture going to reconcile basic values?”, in: Oscar Newman, CIAM '59 in Otterlo, (Stuttgart: Kramer Verlag, 1961), 26-35; 216-217, quote 28; now in: Aldo van Eyck, Collected articles and other writings, ... op. cit, 202-205, quotation, 205.
73. The identification of house and city can be traced back to Alberti and Palladio, although Francis Strauven believes that Aldo van Eyck wasn’t aware of such precedents. However, it is probable that he had overheard them, since such homologies were a standard part of an architect's education, especially in the 1940s. See: Francis Strauven, “Introduction”, Aldo van Eyck, The Child, the City and the Artist, manuscript of 1962; now: Id., The Child, the City and the Artist: an Essay on Architecture: the In-between Realm, (Amsterdam: SUN, 2008), and footnote 4, page 228.
74. Strauven, 397-398; see: Aldo van Eyck, “Identification of leaf with tree”, original text of 1961, presented at the Team 10 meeting, Abbaye de Royaumont, September 1962; actually, the handwritten diagram was prepared for Domus, May 1965; now in: Aldo van Eyck, Collected articles and other writings, ... op. cit, 443.