

Georges Teyssot Aldo van Eyck and the Rise of an Ethnographic Paradigm in the 1960s



S E C U L A R I T Y C O M M U N I C A T I O N

"Make a welcome of each door / and a face of each window."

Aldo van Eyck¹

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."² 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"),³ 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.



1. "Ich und Du", photograph, issue on: "Drempel en ontmoeting - de gestalte van het tussen" / "Threshold and Meeting - The Shape of the In-between", Joop Hardy and Herman Hertzberger, eds. *Forum*, October 1959, n. 8, pp. 249-284, p. 250.



2. "Das Reich des Zwischen", photograph by Ernst Haas, issue on: "Drempel en ontmoeting - de gestalte van het tussen" / "Threshold and Meeting - The Shape of the In-between", Joop Hardy and Herman Hertzberger, eds. *Forum*, October 1959, n. 8, pp. 249-284, p. 251.