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Jaap Bakema Study Centre

THE OBSERVERS
OBSERVED:

Architectural Uses
of Ethnography

Eighth Annual Conference
November 2021

Dirk van den Heuvel (Head of the Jaap Bakema Study Centre)

Ethnography in Architectural Education and Research

To put together the programme for our annual conference has always been exciting and challenging. Part of the process is to formulate the thematic and call for papers, to review the incoming proposals of colleagues, design the session panels, and invite special guests and keynote speakers. For the eighth edition of the Jaap Bakema Study Centre Conference, the question of ethnography in architecture was quite a natural choice in hindsight. It emerged from educational concerns at our university in Delft, just as it ties in with new archival research projects at Het Nieuwe Instituut in Rotterdam around questions of decolonising our heritage and architectural collection, and socio-ecological concepts in the current architecture and urbanism discourse. The conference also naturally builds on earlier projects realised by the Jaap Bakema Study Centre, TU Delft and Het Nieuwe Instituut, including the exhibitions 'Structuralism' of 2014 and 'Habitat: Expanding Architecture' of 2018.

The ethnographical gaze is firmly inscribed in the traditions of both Delft and Rotterdam through the legacies of Team 10 and the Forum group, it is the obvious thing to state here. The teachings of Aldo van Eyck and Herman Hertzberger, just as those of Bakema and – much lesser-known – Joop Hardy, have had an indelible influence on the formation of generations of students. Hertzberger, for instance, was a professor from 1970 until 1999 and would tirelessly introduce the students to his proposal for a humanist world culture, in which architects would work towards a relational and social idea of the built environment. Such a proposition for a relational understanding of architecture and its inhabitants was already made by Bakema in 1951 in the circles of CIAM, when he talked about the rebuilding of the European cities in the aftermath of the Second World War, and which was inspired by the pre-war ideals of *De Stijl* movement and Dutch Functionalism.

Musée Imaginaire – the term comes from André Malraux – was used as one of the unifying concepts for this new, idealist world culture, to move beyond nationalism and eurocentrism, even when an exoticist interest and orientalist fascination clearly speak from this post-war ideal of multiculturalism. Bakema, Van Eyck, Hardy, and Hertzberger formed the board of Forum in the years 1959–1963 as is well-known, together with Gert Boon, Dick Apon, and Jurriaan Schrofer, and in the pages of the journal, just as in the teachings of its editors, this *Musée Imaginaire* appeared as an almost purely visual language that could only be explained or recounted through poetry, as in the case of the 'Day and Night' issue compiled by Hardy, which presented a sheer visual documentation of the city with a contribution by Lucebert, the Dutch poet-painter, or the issue on 'Door and Window' in which a quote from The Pillow Book connected the vast selection of images.



Door and Window. Compiled by Joop Hardy. Double Spread from the Forum Journal, No. 3 (1960).

Such a *Musée Imaginaire*, almost as a surrealist machine of free visual association, served as a didactic tool. With its vast geographical and cultural references, Hertzberger's lectures served as such an inspirational tool – also for me being a TU Delft alumnus, this is a vivid memory. His lectures would take you from everyday street scenes in Amsterdam neighbourhoods to his visits to the famous, collective tulou housing in Fujian, China. Perhaps they were romanticising harsh socio-political realities, yet at the same time they also opened up a profound understanding of urban space as the outcome of human appropriation and interaction. Hertzberger's private collection of photos, which formed the basis of these lectures, is one of the recent and special acquisitions of Het Nieuwe Instituut, after he had already generously donated his office archive. Other archives with a strong ethnographic aspect and which should be mentioned here, include the one of Herman Haan, who served as a guide to North Africa and the Dogon region for many Dutch architects, including Aldo and Hannie van Eyck. Haan's archive was saved and donated to the institute by Piet Vollaard in 1997. Joop van Stigt, student and assistant to Van Eyck, donated an additional set of slides of Haan's work and travels. Van Stigt's own archive also entered the national collection in 2014, donated by the family, including his work and connections in Mali.

To only focus on the archives of architects of Dutch Structuralism when it comes to ethnography and architecture is probably too limited a perspective. Since modern architecture was born from and within a colonial reality, one could point to many more archives that are kept in the depots of Het Nieuwe Instituut, with Berlage's drawings and photos of his famous trip to Indonesia, then the Dutch East Indies, as one of the more iconic assets, and also perhaps problematic in that sense. The special quality of the archives related to Dutch Structuralism lies in the fact that here a project is formulated for a new social and relational paradigm, in which the encounter with the other and others, and the enabling of such encounters is at the core of a possible reconceptualisation of architecture itself.

The didactic aspect of ethnographic investigation and methods is also a driver behind today's interest in the interdisciplinary traffic between architecture and ethnography. During our preparations for the conference Nelson Mota spoke of 'sensitising' the students to social and relational issues of and in architectural design, while Marie Stender mentioned the need to be able to constantly 'shift' perspective and position as a designer, and also as a researcher. However, more than a photographic, associative visual language of a *Musée Imaginaire*, the focus today is often on drawing tools, to combine analysis and projection. The architectural drawing is not any longer exclusively about the designation of material and spatial structure, but also includes the traces and objects of everyday use and patterns, both real and potential.

Since the interest in ethnography today has become so prevalent, some have started speaking of an 'ethnographic turn' in architecture. From the many publications in the field, I wanted to highlight the ARCH+ issue devoted to *Architektur Ethnografie* of 2020 and compiled by Andreas Kalpakci, Momoyo Kajima and Laurent Stalder, which was based on their

curatorial work for the Japanese pavilion at the Venice biennale of 2018. Next to painting the broad ramifications of ethnographic thinking in architecture, the drawing is celebrated here as a motor for new architectural approaches, not in the least because of Momoyo Kajima's role, who with her office Atelier Bow Wow pioneered the architectural drawing to understand not only the formation of the built environment but in particular the interactive uses and appropriations by its inhabitants.

The conference would not be possible without the help of many people. It was organised by a working committee, which included my colleagues Nelson Mota and Vanessa Grossman who work with me in the Dwelling chair and develop the special Global Housing programme, postdoc researcher Alejandro Campos Uribe, and PhD-candidates Rohan Varma and Fatma Tanis, who is also the coordinator of the Jaap Bakema Study Centre. The Advisory Board and its members Tom Avermaete, Hetty Berens, Maristella Casciato, Carola Hein, and Georg Vrachliotis helped and supported the committee throughout the reviewing and selection process. In conclusion, I would like to thank everyone for their work, just as I want to express my gratitude to the participants, the authors of the papers included in these proceedings, and to the two involved institutions, the Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment of TU Delft, and Het Nieuwe Instituut in Rotterdam, who enable the work of the Jaap Bakema Study Centre.