

**“Bump! - sorry. What’s this? Oh hello!” Do things have stories of their own?**

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# ARCHITECTURE AND ITS STORIES

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*“Bump! - sorry. What’s this? Oh bello!” Do things have stories of their own?*

The imaginary encounter above recalls how Aldo van Eyck (1919-1999) explained his design for the Sonsbeek Pavilion (1965-66), which possessed something of the closeness, density and intricacy of things urban, in the sense that people and things met, converged and clashed there. The idea was synthesised in a famous drawing, where Van Eyck carefully placed each and every art piece creating an animistic network of things or “Thous”, in Martin Buber’s words, that activated space and enabled a situationist *dérive*. Et Voilà, labyrinthian clarity, the sculptures became alive.

However, little is known that the Van Eycks themselves inhabited not a dissimilar place, a concealed house in the Netherlands that is full of African masks, Aboriginal spears, Pre-Columbian bowls, Avant-Garde paintings and sculptures, drawings, models, and modern poetry books (Fig.). Rumour is that Van Eyck had conversations with these things (“good morning, sculpture”), that he arranged and re-arranged them obsessively, in search of a perfect balance, what he called harmony in motion. He hummed in-between them, a mental exercise to assist his design process, as if he was playing, making up imaginary encounters and discussions.

But, what if he was right? What if things have lives of their own? After years of looking at the things, trying to understand why Van Eyck brought them here, I decided to perform a Latourian turn. Objects are as important in creating social situations as humans, and, with narrative techniques, it is possible to tell the story from the objects’ perspectives (Fictocriticism, Frichot-Stead); “Where was I crafted? By who? How did I come here? Who is this man (Van Eyck) who looks at me so deeply? What am I doing for him?” These questions enable a different discourse where objects are not a question of aesthetic inspiration only. They are now actors in a long process of extraction, alterity, exotization, renovation of the unfinished project of modernity... Art dealing enters the scene, together with the travel industry, the discussions around universalism and cultural relativity. As it turned out, the thing’s tales were a key to unpack the ways domesticity, global travels and art collecting can be seen as intersecting fields (intersecting “at home”), and how they sustained Van Eyck’s thinking (and his contemporaries’), from which modern architecture was profoundly re-conceptualised.