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Herman van Bergeijk

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Herman van Bergeijk: A steady presence in my academic journey from student years at the HfbK Hamburg to professorship at Delft University of Technology

I first encountered Herman van Bergeijk by name during my studies at the Hochschule für bildende Künste in Hamburg in the office of Hartmut Frank. Herman and Hartmut shared a common connection to IAUV Venice and first met in the Archives of Schmitthenner in München in the 1980s. They hit it off right away while discussing traditional modernism. At least that was the impression I had, as a beginning architecture student listening to Hartmut. The two were constantly involved in some sort of academic debate, which often became emotional and neither of them would ever give way. Among the themes of debate that emerged from Hartmut's comments were usually ones related to the different approaches of architectural historians trained respectively as architects or art historians: Those with a background in architecture saw architectural history as a way to understand the process of design and ultimately to shape future design. They had been taught to adequately capture the complexity of designing, drawing, and supervising constructions. Meanwhile, the second group was concerned mostly with artistic questions and an interest in the appearance of buildings and their reception. As a student of Hartmut, educated in an architectural faculty, I saw myself as belonging to the architects as an architectural historian and thus as someone interested in connecting the lessons of the past to the present and to the design of the future.

The particularities of the Hamburg educational tradition allowed students to graduate with a diploma thesis on a historical subject in the architectural profession. This was an opportunity that I took advantage of and that started my academic career. My focus on architectural and urban history has included a number of German-Dutch exchanges—some involving Herman in person. Thanks to Koos Bosma, I gave my very first professional talk in the Netherlands in 1991 at

the Academie van Bouwkunst on the question of the capital city Berlin competition of 1957/58, research that included several Dutch contributions. Koos also invited me to attend another conference on capital city planning in 1999, where I crossed paths with Herman in person. Koos also invited me to publish an article on my dissertation in his co-edited book *Mastering the City*.¹ The text published there received positive feedback and questions from two camps: designers, who asked me why I hadn't further developed the final paragraphs concerning the future, and historians, who asked me why I had even written those two paragraphs on future design. At that point, I clearly had entered the discussion between German and Dutch approaches to architectural history. As I started to engage with the Dutch colleagues, I had glimpses of Herman in different venues. He was certainly not someone to be overlooked or unheard.



When I left Europe for Japan in 1995 and then for the United States of America in 1999, Herman remained a steady reference through my German and Dutch friends and colleagues. When I applied in 2012 to the position of Chair History of Architecture and Urban Planning at Delft University of Technology, Herman became a more concrete presence. During my interview, he was the most challenging presence in the room. His questions implied complete disagreement with my proposals on Mother's House by Robert Venturi. At least that is what I thought, and the job offer ultimately came as a surprise. It seemed clear that taking up the job in Delft could mean a challenging working relationship with Herman. But, to my great surprise, Herman was a wonderful support upon my arrival. Who would have thought that he would take my sons, then aged 5 and 9 through BK City, showing them the hidden staircases and the attic while I was signing my contract? Over time, it became a regular pleasure to see Herman enjoy the presence of my children at events, including my inaugural speech dinner.

For the last five years, Herman has been a key partner in the development of the Chair History of Architecture and Urban Planning. Many projects developed out of our conversations. The 2016 conference of the International Planning History Society (IPHS) in Delft gave the impetus for the Inaugural Speech series and the publication of the first volume on *Van Lohuizen & Van Eesteren Partners in Planning and Education at TH Delft* (BK Open, 2015). The series has since grown and come – in this case in a larger format – to accommodate the *Festschrift*. The arrival of new PhD students in the Chair History of Architecture and Urban Planning since 2015 gave Herman new tasks as he shepherded them into and through new and diverse fields of research, including studies as diverse as that of an American magazine, the *Architectural Record* (Phoebus Panigyraakis), settlements along the Trans-Israel highway (Gabriel Schwake), oil regions in China (Penglin Zhu), and Turkish vernacular heritage (Gül Akturk). Whatever the topic, Herman pushed the students to think deeply and to reach their limits. He has intimidated many students and not every student, PhD, or colleague has found Herman easy to deal with. Over the years, we have dealt with some critical moments as people did know how to respond to Herman's intellectual and personal jibes. But through all the ups and downs of our collaboration, Herman has remained an inspirational colleague.

Throughout his career, Herman continued to build his own unique expertise on the Dutch 19th and early 20th century. He has become an inspiration for scholars in the Netherlands, Europe and beyond. The extraordinary response of colleagues when asked to contribute a chapter in this *Festschrift* stands as an example of Herman's widespread influence. Invitations for keynotes and lectures or courses keep reaching him, and he will continue to teach and write. He has an open invitation to teach in China and still bubbles with ideas for yet another new

publication series or journal. Several PhD students continue to rely on his guidance and will keep him engaged at the faculty. Herman thrives on lively discussions, in which he often plays devil's advocate and tries to be as contrary as possible. I am convinced that we will continue to collaborate and battle on diverse topics, notably the role of history in the design of future architecture. Retirement is just another step in Herman's career. We are sure that he will stay active and connected as a scholar, even us we will miss his (noisy) inspirational presence on the History floor.

Carola Hein, Professor and Chair of the History of Architecture and Urban Planning, TU Delft

Notes

- 1 Koos Bosma/Helma Hellings (ed.), *Mastering the City. North-European City Planning 1900-2000*, Rotterdam/The Hague 1997.