*"Making Space – Leaving Space"*
# Herman Hertzberger's ethical understanding of architecture

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Paper presented at the IGAP study days "*Ethics and Architecture. Figures and Renewals in the Ethics of Architecture"*, GERPHAU Institute, ENSA Paris-La Villette, 9-10 November 2022.

## Abstract
To this day, Herman Hertzberger's architectural thinking has been characterized by considering architecture always as a serving instrument: serving the daily life of people, in particular, the individual and collective appropriation and use of build space. Based on the assumption that this serving function is a fundamental ethical aspect of architecture, this paper deals with the question of how this function, or ethical aspect, manifest itself architecturally. With this perspective on the relationship between ethics and architecture, Hertzberger's theses of the 'polyvalent' and the 'inviting' shape are discussed – and what includes the question, to which extend he himself here assigns architecture an ethical meaning. As part of this discussion, his argumentation is placed in the context of Team Ten, referring particularly to Aldo Van Eyck and his thesis of the 'interiorization' of space. Furthermore, it is exemplified, and discussed, based on Hertzberger's architectural work.

## Introduction
In my paper on Herman Hertzberger I will focus on two closely related key concepts of his architectural thinking, and which have also determined his architectural work throughout his career as a practicing architect as well as his work as a teacher: that of the so-called polyvalent and that of the so-called inviting form. To focus on these concepts seems to me very interesting within the scope of our topic: Ethics and Architecture, because both concepts stand for Hertzberger's specific way to regard architecture as a serving art: serving the individual and collective appropriation and use of build space in daily life. And the demand to meet this serving character, I think, we can regard as a fundamental ethical principle of architecture. I will discuss these concepts from a designerly perspective and therefore as a possible answer to the question, of how this serving character, or function, may – one could also say should – manifest itself architecturally, how it may become an integrated part of architectural aesthetics.
Hertzberger's focus on these two concepts started to develop as part of his acquaintance with architects of the Team Ten – that European group of young modern architects that emerged in the course of the 1950 out of CIAM. He continue developed his corresponding approach to architecture in the 1970, 80s and 90s. Even though this led from the 1990s on to a quite different architecture, he stayed true to this approach and both concepts. Moreover, in particular his architectural projects from the 90s gives, in my opinion, a quite satisfying answer to that question of how that serving function, or ethical principle, may become an integrated part of architectural aesthetics.
Hertzberger became acquainted with Team Ten as a beginning professional in 1959 at the age of 27 – having graduated one year prior from the Technical University in Delft and starting his own office with a first commission for a student residence in Amsterdam. And he became acquainted with Team Ten as a member of the editorial team of the Dutch magazine FORUM, which was, at this moment, newly formed as the main organ and platform of discussion of the Dutch Team Ten members – including Jaap Bakema and Aldo van Eyck, who also was the one, who invited Hertzberger to become part of the Forum team.

The first issue they produced under the title: *The story of another idea* was part of the preparation of the 10th and last CIAM Meeting in Otterloo in The Netherlands. Edited by Aldo van Eyck, the main idea of this issue was, as we know, to bring to the fore a different view on architecture and urban planning, different from the still prevailing view within CIAM. If we want to shortly sketch the difference between both views: it was about to generally approach architectural and urban planning from the individual and the collective perspective of people and their social and cultural identity, from their concrete socio-cultural situation of living, and what they, the Team Ten members, identified with the daily appropriation of space as one's private or collectively shared place of living. Accordingly, the social meaning of architectural and urban planning was no longer primarily conceived in socio-economic, but rather socio-cultural terms, less understood in an organizational and planning-oriented but rather in individual and community-related way.

Polyvalent Form

It is as a member of the Forum magazine, that Hertzberger also formulated his concept of the polyvalent form. He presents this concept in an article in 1962 (Hertzberger, 1962) as a contribution to the ongoing discussion among Team Ten members concerning the fundamental problem of uniformity and anonymity in the contemporary mass production of dwellings. As a direct response to Jaap Bakema, who argued in an earlier published article (Bakema, 1962) in favour for the model of a basic building structure that allows for its infill and extension according to the individual needs of the particular occupants, Hertzberger argues that Bakema's solution would focus to much on the moment of flexibility, that is, on that the basic building structure should be as flexible as possible in order to allow the realization of the most individual solutions, including their continue development over time. For Hertzberger, however, flexibility is not the solution because, I quote: 'flexibility is as much as the absolute negation of a clear-cut point of view. The flexible plan starts from the certainty that the right solution does not exist because the problem is in a continuous state of motion, and therefore always temporary' (Hertzberger, 1962: 117).

Diagoonwoningen, Delft (1967-1970)

MFC Perzikhaven, Arnhem (2006-2009)

The polyvalent form instead, he conceives as the building's fundamental, and complete, *spatial* structure of defined interior and exterior spaces in relation to one another and the surroundings – as a structure that just as allows, despite its completeness, the most various forms of different use – thus without the necessity of additional, and changeable supplements. As an example form history he names the traditional Dutch type of dwelling that includes two attached living rooms connected with each other by an in-between zone with a sliding door and built-in cupboards on either side, arguing that the secret of their habitability 'lies in the fact that one can work, live or sleep anywhere; that spaces leave the individual quite free with regard to his interpretation of living' (Hertzberger, 1996). Thus, polyvalency – different to flexibility – for Hertzberger means that the basic spatial structure of a

built form does not take a neutral position with regard to its spatial appropriation and use, but already includes a corresponding variety – in order to correspond to the variety of humans and their individual way of using this structure. A kind of balance between complete and open, one could say: complete with regard the build space itself (including its representation as a specific shape) but, at the same time, open in terms of its appropriation and use. And this is what the expression '*making space - leaving space'*, to my meaning, stands for: the creation of complete and at same time open space.
If we take a closer look on what, for Hertzberger, the polyvalent character of a certain spatial structure is based on, it is the precise configuration of a given number of defined spaces, their specific sizes and how these spaces are related to one another within one spatial entity and in relation to the surrounding (both in a horizontal and vertical direction) as well as how they are additionally subdivided in spatial zones. It is also based on the kind of spatial distance and proximity that is created within the given spatial structure and in relation to the surroundings, and which enables, in turn, a corresponding variety of social distance and proximity and a corresponding separation and connection of use-related activity, again within and in relation to its surroundings. An indicator that shows to what extend such spatial configuration eventually allows a polyvalent appropriation and use is the complexity of how different kinds of use, central as well as decentral, can take place at the same time.

Inviting Form

However, next to manifesting itself at the level of the spatial structure, its configuration, for Hertzberger this quality of polyvalency also gets manifest at a smaller scale and a corresponding more-detailed level of designing. Here he relates the subdivision of defined spaces in separated zones of different socio-spatial quality with the insertion of specific physical elements and their design: a balustrade or pedestal, a door or window as well as an additional staircase or single step. The different quality of these elements – in terms of enabling appropriation and use – and what distinguishes them, also for Hertzberger, from a wall, a floor or ceiling – is to enable an immediate appropriation and use of the built space, or spatial zone. And it is at this smaller scale, that the concept of the polyvalent form finds its complementation in the concept of the inviting form: Inviting in the sense that the form is not only open to a variety of appropriation and use, but that it 'actively' invites, or stimulates, for this variety: the niche that invites to withdraw, the balustrade that invites for leaning against, for sitting behind, the stairs that not only allow for taking a particular route through a space but that also may invite to take a seat, and finally, the door that invites not only to enter the building but to stay in front and talk or look from the inside out, as does the window or oriel. But also the inviting form always has to leave open a certain range of interpretation, in order to avoid – as in the case of a polyvalent space – that 'the user remains subordinate to the form and to the use conceived for it by the designer' (Hertzberger, 1988: 11). In this sense, Hertzberger demands from any architect a certain empathy and imagination, one that is oriented towards 'the margin between the fixed meaning of explicit functions' (Hertzberger, 1988: 25).
In the wide range of possible inviting forms Hertzberger highlights he creation of 'seating', thus of architectural form that invites to pause and settle down, as well as the creation of form that invites for communication. This is because: 'The most basic facility for people to be able to take possession of their immediate environment is perhaps the provision of seating ... A place where you can sit down is an opportunity for temporary occupation and a favourable condition for being able to come into contact with others somewhere' (Hertzberger, 1988: 10). And with regard to the aforementioned necessity of an interpretative character of form he continuous: 'Things, which offer themselves explicitly and exclusively for a certain purpose, e.g. to sit on, are probably not capable of playing any other roles' (Hertzberger, 1988: 11).

Public bath, Budapest

MFC Perzikhaven, Arnhem (2006-2009)

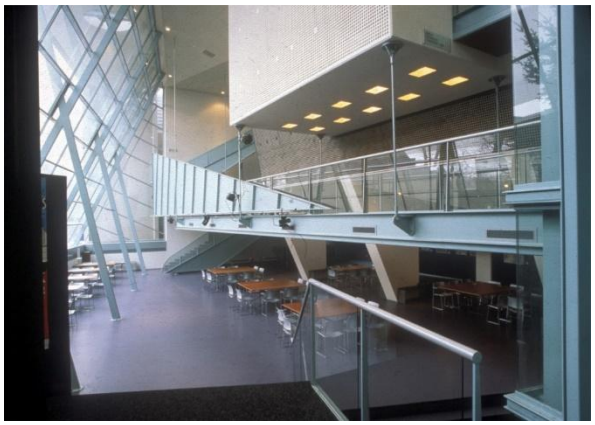
However, polyvalent and inviting form complement each other as the basic structure of defined spaces and spatial relations always forms the spatial frame for the immediate corporeal as well as mental appropriation and use: a frame that set the different places of immediate appropriation and use in relation to one another, that separates and connects them within one defined spatial context. Moreover, polyvalent and inviting form indeed merge: first, they do so, since the separate forms that invite for immediate corporeal appropriation as a balustrade, a set of stairs, as well as a door or window form an integrated part of the physical structure of defined spaces and spatial relations and since the created quality of spatial, and social, distance or proximity is correspondingly created in this way. Second, they merge, as already the spatial structure's configuration just as may *invite* for a certain kind of variety of appropriation and use.

Polyvalent and inviting form in relation to Aldo van Eyck's concept of the 'interiorization' of space

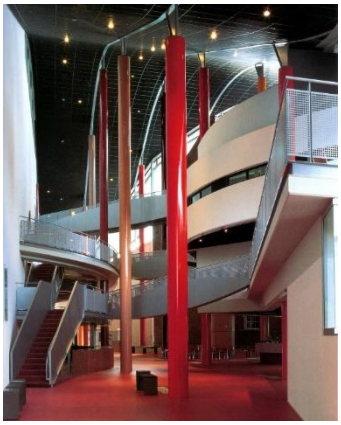
Even though Hertzberger himself has not directly mentioned the connection of both complementing concepts to Aldo van Eyck's architectural theory and approach to architectural design, this connection is clearly to discern – and particularly, the inviting form is related to Van Eyck's notion of the so-called interiorization of space. This notion stands for Van Eyck's specific way to refer to 'space', or rather to space in architecture: namely not in the tradition of the modern movement with its perspective on build space as such, thus in terms of three-dimensional physical extension and particularly oriented to the shaping of spatial openness and interpenetration. This perspective he even rejected explicitly and argued, instead – and in line with Team Ten's general viewpoint to approach architecture and urban planning from the individual and the collective perspective of humans: 'Space is an abstraction. It is only when we see space as a place where it's good to be that we have included man in the concept of space. So you could call space in the image of man 'place'.' (Van Eyck [1961] 2010: 296). And by being, or rather providing, 'place', for Van Eyck space is 'interiorized', meaning that as a pure physical- object-related phenomenon it is broken up, it is made accessible for human experience. Accordingly, for him, also the experience or rather perception of built space as such has no real meaning. It is the experience of oneself and of the relationship with other humans, or other places that counts if we are concerned with the quality of a particular space, and on the basis of which the 'making' of architectural space just receives its actual meaning.

If we return to Hertzberger, we may argue that one difference between his and Van Eyck's approach is that Van Eyck's orientation towards human experience *in* space is made more concrete. It is made more concrete as Hertzberger goes into the routines of daily life, with all its facets and understood as an essential constituent of social life. Even though van Eyck just as deals with the immediate and subjective experience of humans in space, he approaches this experience in a more general, on human identity-oriented way, principally arguing at a more philosophical level. This also becomes clear in the extension of his concept of the 'interiorization' of space (and time) with the demand that architecture

has to coincide with man, that is, with his fundamental existence in space and time. In his famous 'breathing both in and out' aphorism, he demands, in this sense, an architecture that, like humans, also should breathe both in and out.
In this sense, it is Hertzberger's more concrete examination with the actual way of appropriating and using built space, and the implied social and socio-psychological meanings, that also characterizes his ethical understanding of architecture – albeit that he does not explicitly use the term ethical: 'What else architecture can be but concerned with the everyday life of everyone' he argues 'it is something like clothes, which must not only look good but also fit well' and continues that 'it is the fundamental task of the architect, whether he likes it or not, to ensure that everything he designs is suitable for any situation. This is not exclusively about efficiency in the sense of whether it is practical or impractical, but also whether what we design is set up for normal relations between people and whether it obscures or affirms the equality of everyone' (Hertzberger, 1988: 7).
However, a second difference between Hertzberger and Van Eyck lies in Hertzberger's examination with, and appreciation of, architectural space as such and the resulting meaning he assigns to the experience of build space in terms of experiencing spatial extension, spatial separation and relation.
Looking at Hertzberger's architecture, this appreciation seems to have been developed from the end of the 1980s, the beginning of the 1990s on. At least it more clearly determined his architecture from this moment on, for instance his designs for the theatres in Breda and Uden both designed in the early 1990s. In relation to earlier designs, both buildings differ in the realisation of one central space in-between the actual theatre rooms and the surrounding exterior, and in that the manifestation and experience of this space as such remains superordinate to its structuring in various zones, and on the basis of which the intended polyvalency of this space is realized. And it does so, however dynamic this structuring may be.

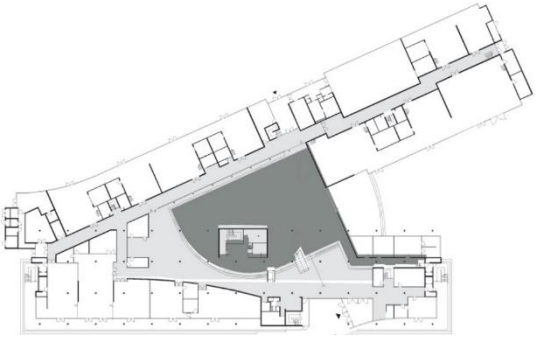
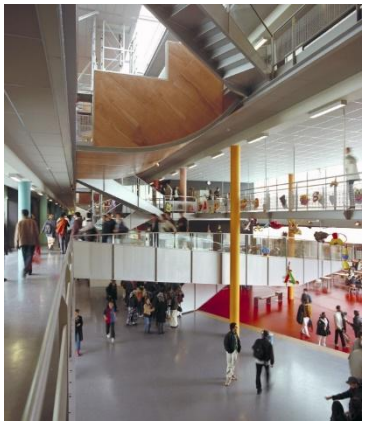


Markant theatre; Uden (1993-96)



Chassé theatre, Breda (1992-95)

Another example for this appreciation of an almost monumental form of spatiality is the Montessori College in Amsterdam East. The fundamental spatial structure of this school building is based on a split-level arrangement in the main part of the building, by which all classrooms are positioned along one huge_central space that starts as an internal square on ground-floor – directly related to the public realm outside the building – and that continuos in a vertical direction to the upper level with another open platform and view to the outside. An additional wing with classroom on ground floor level limits the square on ground floor on the opposite site and leads towards the main entrance that is positioned in-between.
With this spatial configuration the following intended social interaction is indeed transformed into architectural space: 'A school for secondary education is populated by children of an age group that generally prefers to escape the parental home as much as possible in order to seek out peers, and for this you do not seek refuge in school but rather in the streets. To this end, the space is organized in

Montessori College, Amsterdam (1993-2000)

such a way as to evoke an association with the city; with a wide variety of places with different possibilities, where you can hang out, congregate and find each other. [...] This created a large square, spatially connected to the void of the classroom building. The (half) stairs that connect the floors are explicitly made wide, like a grandstand. Here, therefore, teaching can take place outside the classrooms and these are pre-eminently the meeting places for students who are explicitly encouraged to do so. Everywhere stairs, landings, voids and open spaces are situated in relation to each other in such a way that the presence of (the) others is pronounced as strongly as possible and invites contact, deliberation and meeting'.

What I want to point out, however, is that – as in the case of the two theatre buildings – the concepts of polyvalent and inviting form are extended, as it were. They are extended, as all structuring in spatial zones remains completely integrated into the creation of one superordinate interior space, including its relations to the surrounding spaces. As a result, by appropriating and using this building we may not only experience our own actual activity in space in relation to all the other activity, taking place there. We also perceive this space as the superordinate spatial reality that frames and enables all this social interaction. Because due to its open and coherent character, this space remains complete despite its dynamic structuring by the many staircases and bridges experienceable as one spatial surrounding, shaped by means of its physical enclosing and open separation from the surrounding outside.

Coming finally back to the initial question of how the fundamental ethic function of architecture: to serve the individual and collective appropriation and use of build space, may manifest itself architecturally: in the shown examples of Hertzberger's architecture from the 1990s on it does so as an integrated part of the explicit manifestation of space, or spatiality. Due to this integration, the space turns into, and presents itself to its users as, a real stage for social interaction, a stage to take possession of. In this way, the perception of its spatiality, on the one hand, and that of its serving function, on the other hand, completely merge.

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