

The winter of 1990 saw the publication of *OASE* double issue 26-27, bearing the slightly pretentious title: *his job is to bring about an IMAGINED ORDER*, Aldo van Eyck. As this longish title suggests, the entire issue was devoted to the work of Aldo van Eyck. Its editorial dwelled on the fact that a serious architectural critique of Van Eyck's oeuvre would be possible only by avoiding Van Eyck's person and by steering clear of his digressions on the 'human dimension' and 'poetic design'. That very same editorial indicated that the editorial board had set itself the momentous task of 'incorporating [Van Eyck's work] into the science of architecture', which up until that point had clearly not been possible. The issue addressed a range of topics, among them Van Eyck's approach to living, the journal *Forum*, CIAM, Otterlo 1959, his urban development work, Nagele and finally Joost Meuwissen on Van Eyck's private homes.

The inclusion of Joost Meuwissen was something of a surprise. He had been associated with the journal *Plan* and at the time of this publication he worked for the journal *Wiederhall*. Meuwissen had never shown any affinity with Aldo van Eyck's ideas or finished work in either of these two journals. *Wiederhall* had its heyday in the late 1980s. It had stressed its credentials as a platform for the kind of architecture that infuriated and terrified Van Eyck. Nor does it seem likely that *Wiederhall's* editorial board, including the likes of Carel Weeber and Umbeto Barbieri, would have inspired much confidence in Van Eyck. In the late 1980s *Wiederhall* was a remarkably polished journal – seemingly the opposite of *OASE* in everything. It had a large, square layout, deliberately designed to prevent photocopying. In the first *Wiederhall* editorial Meuwissen wrote: 'I love architecture because it is old. In its treatises and manuals it has preserved a dead language up until now.'

Judging by his article Joost Meuwissen appears to have little affinity with Aldo van Eyck's work. The title should have read 'Joost in Aldo's Wonderland' rather than evoking an image of

Aldo wandering around the catacombs of the giant oak, like some bewildered visitor.

Revelling in his own prose, Joost whirls past Aldo's houses without discovering any real virtuosity. The article's title characterises Aldo van Eyck as a master who, in his homes, conjures with scale and ushers the users into a wondrous world of changing dimensions. At the same time, it also explicitly describes him as a giant stumbling blindly through the china cabinet of architecture.

The homes have a unique logic that is quite different from his public works, because here he does not put together façades. Instead the floor plan gives rise to the finished product. The façades have disappeared and the building derives meaning from its surroundings and the floor plan structure.

Meuwissen's article appears to imply that Van Eyck's homes, which up until that point had gone unnoticed and uncensored, show a weakness and ambiguity that may be more interesting than the meticulous and over-composed clarity of his public buildings. In fact, Meuwissen is carried away by them. The paradox of this article is that whereas Meuwissen wants to provide a dry, analytical description of Van Eyck's work, Van Eyck may ultimately have touched a chord in him. He thus concludes with the poetic image of Aldo van Eyck up in the tree like the invisible cat with the mysterious smile.

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from *OASE* 28 to 40

Translated by Laura Vroomen

ALDO IN WONDER- LAND

Remarks on
the Houses of
Aldo van Eyck