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Campos Uribe, A.; Lacomba Montes, P.

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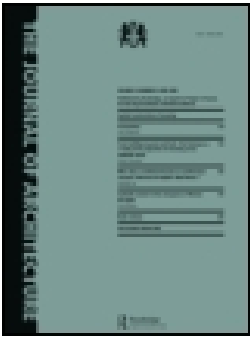
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Alejandro Campos-Uribe & Paula Lacomba-Montes

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# Embodiment takes command: re-enacting Aldo and Hannie van Eyck's homelife

Grounded in an experiential understanding of architecture, this research explores ways in which architectural history can help bring works or ideas more vividly to the present. We propose here an embodied visit to Aldo and Hannie van Eyck's house in Loenen aan de Vecht. In the house, layers of temporality, materiality, everyday living, and lived experience mingle with design solutions and worldviews affecting them. By immersing into the materiality of the Van Eycks' home, the paper offers a lively, intensive, and qualitative understanding of the design and its connections with the architect's contributions to post-war architectural discourses. The experiential account uses a mix of archival, ethnographic, and performative techniques, a proposed method that adds a necessary degree of complexity to architectural history. The method enacts a new form of knowledge where our bodies inform the findings, from materiality to meaning, and connects to new architectural history approaches, namely Architectural Anthropology and Performative Design Research. With all these elements, we are proposing a rich, empirical account of the project by means of three re-enactments of the Van Eycks' homelife: a visit to the attic, table talk under the skylight, and a lively lunch in the garden. The account offers deep insights into how architectural ideas take material form, showing that specific ways of understanding history, time, or space, are indeed embodied within our built environment and that they can only be disentangled, with the help of our bodies, by performing actions within, in and around buildings.

## Introduction

As one of the main contributors to the Western post-war architectural discourses, the European group known as Team 10 — Alison and Peter Smithson, John Volcker, Jaap Bakema, Aldo van Eyck, Georges Candilis, Shadrach Woods, Giancarlo de Carlo — has been extensively documented by Max Risselada and Dirk van den Heuvel, in *Team 10: In Search of a Utopia of the Present* (2005), who have highlighted the group's humanist claims, their focus on

**Alejandro Campos-Urbe** 

*Department of Architecture  
Delft University of Technology  
Netherlands  
a.camposuribe@tudelft.nl*

ORCID [0000-0002-9382-3481](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9382-3481)

**Paula Lacomba-Montes** 

*Department of Architecture  
Polytechnical University Valencia  
Spain  
paulamon@upv.edu.es*

ORCID [0000-0002-1916-2689](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1916-2689)

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contextuality, and their move towards cultural studies. Many decades later, *Team 10 Primer* — first edited in 1962 by Alison Smithson as a special issue for *Architectural Design* — still stands as a compelling journey into the work and ideas of its founders. Further, out of the many short texts in the publication, we have always felt that the excerpts by the Dutch architect Aldo van Eyck stood out for their poetic magnetism. His cultured references to poets, artists and writers, philosophers, and anthropologists, demonstrate the deepness of the changes he felt that were needed to update the field of architecture in response to relativity in physics, cultural relativism in anthropology, phenomenology in philosophy, and the avant-garde in art and literature.

Van Eyck conceived of the architect as an artist who is able to see through practical reality to come to a poetic experience by means of architecture. He articulated a humanist, holistic, historically informed, and contextually sensitive vision of architecture as a constructive critique of what he considered the shortfalls of mid-twentieth-century modern architecture.<sup>1</sup> In short, he proposed a grounding of modern architecture on the accomplishments of early modernism in the arts, a reconsideration of the spatial history of non-Western cultures, as well as a redefinition of the technologically determined modern concepts of 'space and time' into the localised, phenomenological notions of 'place and occasion', which he introduced to the modern architectural discourses. He developed an ethical approach to practice that emphasised the experiential qualities of architecture, a labyrinthine *oeuvre* that has been deeply examined before, with contributions by Francis Strauven, Vincent Ligtelijn, Liane Lefavre and Alexander Tzonis, and many others.<sup>2</sup>

Nonetheless, when one reads historical accounts of architects' lives, there is occasionally the impression that they belong to *the past*, they are *not here* anymore, and their ideas are not pertinent to the present. Conversely, when we read written pieces by Van Eyck himself or listened to recorded lectures, it was as if he came 'back to life' and his reflections standing as relevant even today.<sup>3</sup> This important difference between written works *on* Van Eyck and written works *by* Van Eyck, similarly to other architects, suggests that historical accounts need to be more vividly brought to the present, just as Michel Foucault speculated in an interview with Christian Delacampagne in 1980:

I can't help but dream about a kind of criticism that would try not to judge but to bring an *oeuvre*, a book, a sentence, an idea to life; it would light fires, watch the grass grow, listen to the wind ... It would multiply not judgements but signs of existence, it would summon them, drag them from their sleep. [...] I'd like a criticism of scintillating leaps of the imagination.<sup>4</sup>

Recent developments in our field show that many architecture historians have likewise found something missing from its classical, objectified, and formalist accounts, and advocate for a more holistic view of architecture that influence and is influenced by things, inhabitants, and ways of living, which together shapes different notions of society and culture.<sup>5</sup> New sub-fields such as architectural anthropology, or literary and phenomenological approaches, move beyond the limits of any singular discipline and offer ways of combining



Figure 1.  
Studio in Loenen, photographed by  
the authors, 2018

architecture with philosophy, literature, cultural studies, and experiential accounts in ethnography, which allow for more rich and lively descriptions of the past.

Following these new approaches, our research explores ways in which architectural history can help bring works or ideas more vividly to the present. We propose here a literary visit to a cloistered house in Loenen aan de Vecht. The house, renovated by Aldo and Hannie between 1963 and 1965, and inhabited as their family home until today, serves as a further reminder that we should not reduce Van Eyck to his canonical biography and his buildings; thus, we can move towards a more holistic exploration of his intellectual landscape. Inside the house, we found a big collection of non-Western art, endless bookshelves packed with poetry and anthropology, boxes filled with travel pictures, models, drawings, modern art pieces, everyday objects, and records of people (Fig. 1). As such, the house has given support to our attempt to get Van Eyck *back to life* since he could metaphorically be *found there*, in between their things, with the family taking care of the place and its contents, keeping most of the objects where Aldo and Hannie left them. In other words, we have approached the house as being fossil-like, as the remains of the

indwelt surfaces of living beings and symbolic projections that sheltered the inhabitants' personalities, which in turn reacted on their creators, shaping the selves they were.<sup>6</sup>

This house in Loenen stands today, we think, as an unavoidable project to unwrap Van Eyck's intellectual work, not only a design but a home, a living entity, and a material culture waiting to be explored.<sup>7</sup> In the house, layers of temporality, materiality, everyday living, and lived experience mingle with design solutions and worldviews affecting them, calling for a research method where our bodies informed the reflections and findings. In the following sections, we first outline our method and its connections with existing approaches. Then, we explain how we use it to visit the house in Loenen by means of three performative re-enactments that allowed for a vivid understanding of its spatial qualities, and thus Van Eyck's architectural thinking. Finally, we will address the methodological contribution and its limitations.

## Method

### *New approaches to architectural history*

Canonical history approaches — which, in the case of modern architecture, could be exemplified by the nine seminal works analysed by Panayotis Tournikiotis in *The Historiography of Modern Architecture* (1999) — have traditionally offered linear and distanced accounts of our discipline's past. The historians whose accounts became the basis for the teaching of the history of architecture were preoccupied with finding logical patterns and evolutionary threads weaving a chain of styles and movements, a history project that was aligned with the totalising narratives of modernity. Yet there have always been voices — such as through works of Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer, Martin Heidegger, and Michel Foucault — who widely criticised the strict logoi-oriented world view which led to a widespread scepticism in the conduciveness of subjective experiences to theoretical thought. Over the last decades, in response to phenomenology, postmodern philosophy, and feminist critical theory, architectural historians have developed new approaches that aim at producing more rich and vivid accounts of the past that are non-linear and subjectively informed, conscious of the fact that historians do not simply document but also create history. This rising interest in what Lara Schrijver describes as 'alternative modes of knowing' illustrates a natural desire for a counterweight to the increasing and continuing rationalisation since the rise of industrialisation.<sup>8</sup> Two such approaches, in which our research is grounded, are Architectural Anthropology and Performative Design Research, both connecting to an experiential understanding of architecture — hence to Van Eyck's architectural thinking — where the links between time and materiality play a central role.

Architectural Anthropology, thoroughly presented by Marie Stender in *Architectural Theory Review*, reflects critically on the social relations and meanings materialised in our built environments.<sup>9</sup> This cross-disciplinary field uses a mix of architectural and ethnographical research methods to explore the multiplicity of engagements that architecture enables, which unfold at different

scales, within different temporal frames, and material registers, all accommodated and assembled in the constantly emergent thing that we call built form.<sup>10</sup> Architectural anthropology has received contributions from scholars like Marie Stender,<sup>11</sup> Victor Buchli,<sup>12</sup> Alben Yaneva,<sup>13</sup> Ray Lucas,<sup>14</sup> Sascha Roesler,<sup>15</sup> Momoyo Kaijima,<sup>16</sup> and Mary-Jose Amerlinck,<sup>17</sup> which account for a vibrant sub-field with many interpretations. While Yaneva has been working with the ethnography of architectural practice, Roesler is more interested in the collection of knowledge from non-European building techniques.<sup>18</sup> Particularly important for our research is the work of anthropologist Tim Ingold, who has considerably contributed to the field with publications such as *The Perception of the Environment* (2000), *Being Alive* (2011), as well as the research project 'Knowing from the Inside' based at the University of Aberdeen (2013–2018). Ingold's philosophical framework has deep connections to phenomenology and James Gibson's theory of affordances. His work focuses on the subjective, embodied experience of dwelling — what he coined the 'dwelling perspective' — against an objectified registration and analysis of our environment that neglects the sensations, embodied affects, and perceived qualities which contribute to the sense of a specific place.<sup>19</sup> Houses, as Ingold notes, are living organisms; like trees, they have life-histories, which consist of the unfolding of their relations with both human and non-human components of their environments.

On the other hand, Performative Design Research<sup>20</sup> elaborates upon notions of performativity and embodiment in the form of an examination of *tacit knowledge*, a key term in Michael Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge* (1958). In his work, *The Tacit Dimension* (1966), Polanyi asserted that 'we can know more than we can tell', referring to ideas and experiences that are possessed by people, but are not codified and may not be easily expressed. Recent insights from neuroscience have encouraged increasing attention on the embodiment of knowledge, providing scientific evidence for Polanyi's hypothesis that there is more to knowing than what we can make explicit.<sup>21</sup> Claudia Mareis, who examines tacit knowledge from a cultural research perspective and as a socio-cultural phenomenon, furthers that it has advanced to become a prolific guiding principle in contemporary design research.<sup>22</sup> Performative Design Research uses formats such as re-enactments, animations, and narratives as appropriate methodologies to approach history. There are strong connections with Judith Butler's understanding of the body as 'a manner of doing, dramatizing and reproducing a historical situation',<sup>23</sup> and with Donna Haraway's 'situated knowledges' that argued for 'the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity'.<sup>24</sup> When re-enactment is an ongoing and regular practice, it produces a corporeal inscribing of culture. Cultural values and expectations accumulate on, in, and through the body, in Butler's terms, inflicting an embodied identity.<sup>25</sup> Through performative methods, former passive sources, such as the archive, become active objects of knowing, since the re-enacting body can function, as stated by Katherine Johnson, as a mode of historical inquiry, exploring and extending archival



research through the embodied, experiential nature of performance.<sup>26</sup> The most prevalent form of re-enactment involves the reenactor, or actor-historian, acting the part of a real or imagined historical character, not only to represent but also to research history. For Angelika Schnell, in contemporary 'embodiment' research, re-enactments, with their non-linear products referring to complex interpretation and perception, can generate knowledge that is consistently overlooked by research focused on logos and can help to grasp the inner logic of complex design processes.<sup>27</sup> Re-enactments, animations, and narratives function historiographically to record and relate aspects of the past in, on, and through the body.

Moreover, as we have advanced, both Architectural Anthropology and Performative Design Research are grounded in a phenomenological understanding of space, where the act of dwelling is interpreted as being immersed in an ecology of symbols, signs, images, stories, and daydreaming, an economy of long duration and appreciation.<sup>28</sup> In Architectural Anthropology, scholars draw mainly from Tim Ingold and Juhani Pallasmaa's essays;<sup>29</sup> in Performative Design Research, from Judith Butler,<sup>30</sup> though the primary source in both cases is often Maurice Merleau-Ponty.<sup>31</sup> Phenomenological accounts of architecture highly influenced Van Eyck himself, who quoted Merleau-Ponty and collaborated with Christian Norberg-Schulz and Joseph Rykwert,<sup>32</sup> who were architecture theorists connected with phenomenology. Within a phenomenological framework, a building is encountered, not only viewed: '[I]t is approached, confronted, entered, related to one's body, moved about, and utilised as a context and condition for activities and things.'<sup>33</sup> By attending to Van Eyck's influences and adjusting our methodology to them, we have tried to make our account more vivacious and close to its sources.

### *Expanding the archive*

The main difference, in relation to previous studies on Van Eyck, is that our research tries to uncover the deeper meaning of his architectural thinking, starting from the spaces he inhabited, things he collected, and facets of his everyday life. But, using Stender's words, 'How to interview a house?'.<sup>34</sup> In line with the new approaches described above, we have interpreted the house not only as an architectural design but also as a document that captured its inhabitants' worldviews and a network of human and non-humans in reciprocity, two distinct perspectives that required a mix of archival research, ethnographic techniques, and performative methods.

The first stages of our analysis, close to conventional archival research, involved searching for the original drawings of the houses inhabited by Van Eyck, historical documents (cartographies, newspapers) and photographs, making a dimensional survey of the spaces, and the review of previous scholarly work on Van Eyck's buildings. Nonetheless, we dared to expand the archive and interpret the house and its contents as a 'field', in an ethnographic sense. We proceeded with numerous interviews and conversations with the everyday dwellers of the spaces, our hosts Tess van Eyck and Julian Wickham. With these interviews, we gathered both oral histories of the



house and its contents, as well as empirical evidence on how the space is experienced and inhabited. These were complemented by long periods of time spent inside the building, dwelling as guests for an accumulated period of around five months between 2015 and 2022 to develop new interpretative drawings — *architectural ethnography*, in Kaijima's terms — photographs, extensive fieldnotes, and a complete catalogue of the Van Eycks' library and art collection.<sup>35</sup> During these visits to the field, following Ingold's work, we took notice not only of the spatial arrangements but also how these aspects affected our perceptions and associations. However, as Klaske Havik has pointed out, 'the affective relationships that people establish with places are simultaneously conscious and embodied, material and conceptual, spatial and temporal'.<sup>36</sup> That's why, on top of the set of archival and ethnographic methods described above, we used Performative Research as a way of accessing the house's embodied knowledge.

As re-enactors — or actors-historians — we recreated some of the repeated, stylised acts of the Van Eycks' life, somatically remembering the customs, values, and practices which instituted their ways of living.<sup>37</sup> These re-enactments of ordinary activities further expanded the field and allowed us to combine all previously collected experiences and materials, tracing the relations between the objects, the space, Van Eyck's lectures, buildings, and writings, to rebuild his intellectual landscape. The process was like 'that of following trails through a landscape: each discovery will take you so far, until you come across another that will take you further', what Ingold calls *wayfaring*.<sup>38</sup> We continuously performed and re-performed activities within the spaces, and these re-enactments, unconscious at first, became an essential source to understand the material and experiential reality of the house, for it is in the very process of dwelling that we think, and make-with.

What follows is a speculative re-visit of the house through three re-enactments: an ordinary visit to the attic; a table conversation; and a lunch in the garden. In each of these three instances, we conceptualise the house as *strata*, *domus*, and *threshold*, respectively, suggesting links between our embodied experience and concepts of time that are central both to the paper's argument and to Van Eyck's understanding of architecture: the presence of the past, cyclical change, and *in-betweening*. These should be read as examples from a myriad of possible re-enacted experiences.

## **A re-enactment of the Van Eycks' homelife**

### *The presence of the past: a visit to the attic: house as strata*

It seems to me that if the past, the present and the future are embraced in every real imaginative process as a continuum, this continuum cannot be absent from the created artefacts which ensue. [...] The full scope of humanity's enormous environmental experience cannot be contained in the present unless we telescope the past, i.e. the entire human effort, into it.<sup>39</sup>



Figure 2.  
Visit to the attic, photographed by  
the authors, 2016

Months into our research, an art piece from the Van Eyck Collection had been damaged and had to be stored in the house's attic, in between the bare rafters of the strong framework, a space that normally goes unnoticed. As a simple act of housekeeping, inasmuch as a house must be maintained, repaired, and taken care of, a visit to the attic appears as a very ordinary event, and it surely was ordinary for our hosts. Still, the visit was very fruitful for our research, as it led us to conceptualise the house as a superposition of temporal strata, a *gathering body of experiences*, in Van Eyck's terms.

The attic could only be reached by climbing a metallic ladder that hangs between two of the wooden beams. There was no door, no handle, one had to know that the secluded space was there, accessed by pushing one of the wooden planks of the central skylight, a secret passage only known to the house owners (Fig. 2). The contrast between the house's interior and the attic is immediately apparent: one well-tempered and well-maintained, nicely illuminated, while the other dark both at day and night, cold, dusty, full of boxes, *full* of broken things. We had to push the plank, fix it with a metallic hook, and light the portable lamp; it was obvious that this space was something apart from the home below. When standing in the dark, our feet felt like on top of the house's roof, at an exterior place, out of bounds, in-between the Van Eycks' home and a rooftop that had been built centuries before, humid and cold.

This initial experience of the attic, where our bodies played such a big role — temperature, humidity, light, smell, and reverberation — suggested indeed that the house was made of several spatial devices, two houses fitted into one another, like stacking dolls, thus prompting an investigation of its transformations over time. Until its auction in 1963, when the Van Eycks acquired the property, the building had undergone several reforms and had several



Figure 3.  
Dorpstraat 44, 1979,  
photographed by State Archives  
Utrecht, courtesy of Het Utrechts  
Archief

owners. In 1819, Dorpstraat 44 belonged to the carpenter and mill-builder G. J. Kroon, and from 1830 to L. Krook. The façade was transformed between 1830 and 1900, when numbers 44 and 46 were joined (Fig. 3). The current 600 sqm plot consists of a terraced construction facing the street — the house — a large garden down to the river, and an old brewery used for years as a workshop by the Dutch painter Jaap Hillenius (Fig. 4). The house was to be radically modified by Van Eyck in 1964 (Fig. 5), but the transformations are not so apparent at first sight. The Van Eycks respected the existing façades, the structure of wooden beams and brick walls, and the position of

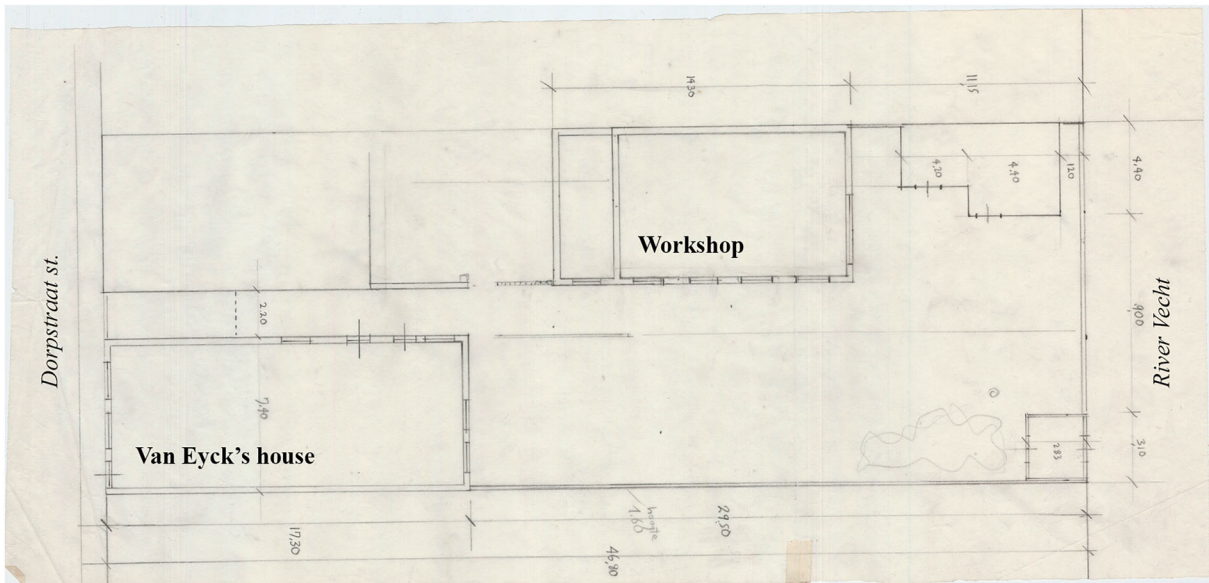


Figure 4.  
Site plan, 1964, courtesy of The  
Aldo and Hannie van Eyck  
Foundation

the fireplace. In their material presence, with their smell, textures, and creaks, these elements feel like memories from previous interiors, as traces of different ways of living. Evidently, the architect had designed a new house from within the original building, something that grew and filled the spaces, a new sheath that kept the historical carapace intact, no erasure, no *tabula-rasa*. The attic was left in-between the two, both still simultaneously present, what the architect might have called a *twinphenomenon*.<sup>40</sup>

Therefore, the house had to be interpreted as the result of this strata of interventions, with the involvement of several generations, a superposition of temporal layers, of, at least, three houses: the Kroon family house, with its gabled silhouette, the Krook family house, with its room on top of the alley, and the Van Eyck family house. These three, however, are houses that have existed in the same place. But 'how many dwelling places would there be, fitted one into the other, if we were to realize all the images by means of which' the Van Eycks lived their 'day-dreams of intimacy?'.<sup>41</sup> There was, indeed, a second discovery that came with our re-enacted act of housekeeping, which led us to believe there were many more than three houses contained in Loenen, that the atmosphere only 'made sense' when looked together with the other spaces inhabited by the family in Zurich (1943), Amsterdam (1948) and Baambrugge (1958).

Before their move to Dorpstraat 44, the Van Eycks lived in a rented apartment in Binnenkant, Amsterdam. The first thing one notices in the photographs of Binnenkant is a carefully selected set of objects, such as a steel ring around the stove, a stool, modernist paintings, and a self-standing wardrobe.<sup>42</sup> As written by Van Eyck, these elements were 'tangible point of focus from



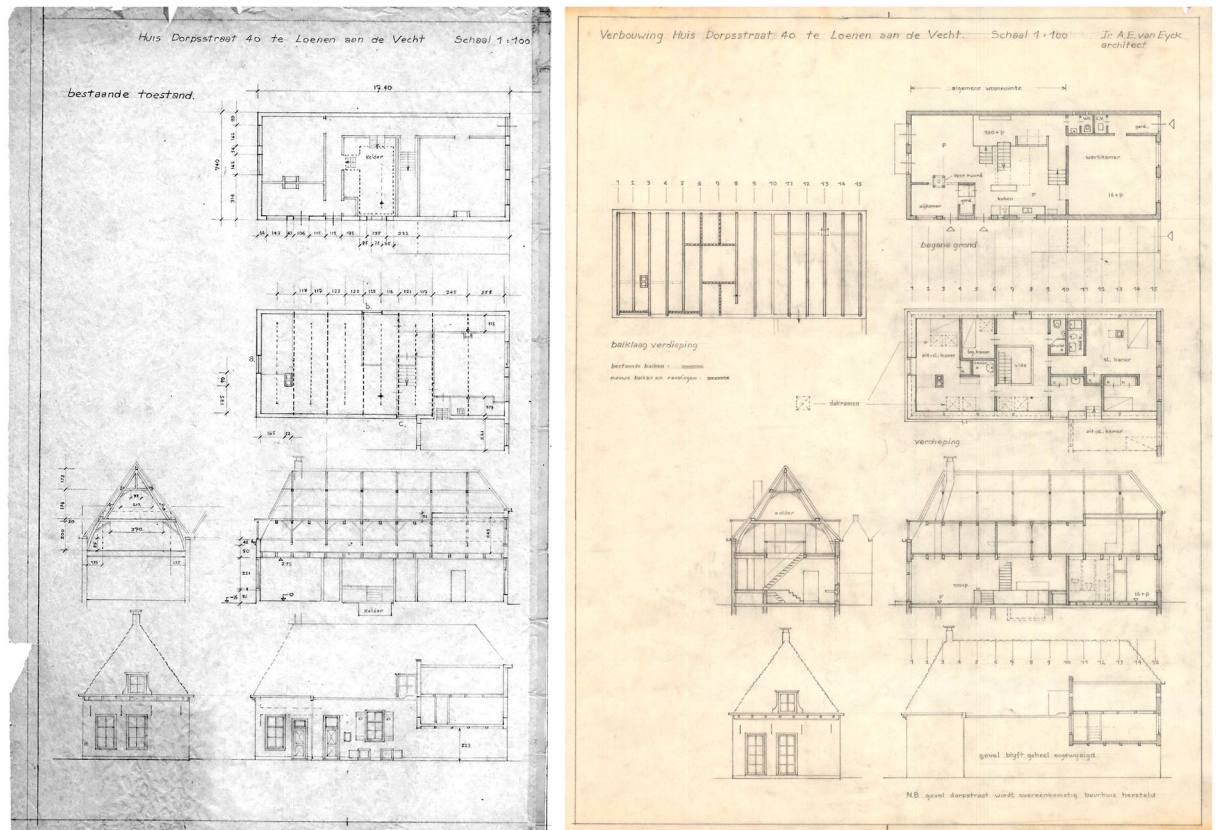


Figure 5.  
Original state and proposal, 1964,  
courtesy of The Aldo and Hannie  
van Eyck Foundation

which the space is appreciated, [...] with an experience value that belongs to the body of space, [and which] impart a feeling of belonging, of being somewhere specifically'.<sup>43</sup> After a few visits to Loenen, we had casually found some of these objects from Binnenkant exhibited on the walls, logically moved from the previous house to the next one, nothing that required special attention. However, in the attic we discovered, dusty albeit safely stored, a few elements from Binnenkant that had no real utility nor fitted the new house (Fig. 6), particularly the famous steel ring where Frans van Meurs sat to hire Aldo for the design of the orphanage in Amsterdam (1955–1960).<sup>44</sup> This unearthing, personally experienced as a sudden and unsuspected discovery, made us reflect on whether the family had lived in four different houses, or had actually dwelled in one and the same house, extended over several places.

When personally and physically experienced with our own bodies, the objects immediately and very vividly brought distant places and memories to the dark, cold room where we had found them. This rich juxtaposition of old and new elements from different times that characterises the house, of previous and later houses by several and the same owners, created the perfect climate for



Figure 6.  
Objects from Binnenkant,  
photographed by the authors,  
2018

imagination. Indeed, we could say that the house and its contents triggered our imagination and created a network of relations that extended its meanings and created temporal and spatial depth. Van Eyck has described a similar process in his writings: 'Architecture must reach beyond visibility; places at a great distance should be conceived in terms of each other since memory, anticipation, emotional and intellectual association transcend the limitations of temporal and spatial distance.'<sup>45</sup> For Van Eyck, inspired by Merleau-Ponty, vision permeates matter, and this house, as we discovered in the attic, was made and inhabited with this experiential idea of vision in mind (Fig. 7). Van Eyck has extensively discussed the implications of memory, anticipation, and emotional and intellectual association in the concepts of time, space, and particularly history. He advocated for an approach to the past not in terms of history, but of 'gathering human experience'.<sup>46</sup> In his view, the past imparts temporal profundity to the present as the body of human experience increases, and our 'interior of vision' — experiential vision — renders us aware of the past's tangible reality, of its 'presence'.<sup>47</sup>

As performers of the Van Eycks' everyday life, we had visited the attic, and old memories suddenly acquired a living possibility of being. We realised that we had to approach this house together with the memories of the family's old dwellings because they were all inhabited simultaneously, through an embodied, real, and concrete experience. The visit, to put it simply, made us physically aware of the presence of the past and the resonant memories in our bodies.<sup>48</sup> Each return to the house further expands our 'body of experiences' — and our research insights on the Van Eycks' work — with the stories we are told. Every time, the house looks bigger than before, more extensive, heavier, and charged with new meanings.



### *The natural cycles: table talk: house as domus*

The time has come to take rain as rain, wind as wind, snow as snow, night as night, and make something of them for the benefit of the citizen, who today is still only peripherally and negatively aware of their existence. Not just geometry and the pretty shadows sunlight casts — not just abstract space theory — nor just concrete, steel, glass, bricks and whatever the catalogue suggests [...] but rain, storm, snow, spring, stars, winter, sun, clouds, ice, moon, child and the aged: these and the greater rest are the ‘materials of architecture’ — come to terms with them, take hold of them.<sup>49</sup>

The most frequent activity we carried out during our field stays was table talk (Fig. 8) because, if there is a ritual in Loenen, that is to sit around the table, under the skylight, and tell stories. From our research on Van Eyck’s buildings, we already knew that light coming from above was a common feature in the architect’s designs: in the Damme House in 1951, ‘ample sunshine enters from above through the double floor-height staircase’;<sup>50</sup> in the Protestant church in Driebergen in 1963, ‘light passes through the wheels into the space below and falls on the people, as it always should’;<sup>51</sup> and in the catholic church in The Hague, 1964, ‘light falls onto the altar and people alike’.<sup>52</sup> As light falls onto the things below, it traverses space to reach the centre of the buildings. Sunbeams hit objects, stairs, people, and railings, and cast their shadows down.

That’s why, back to Dorpstraat 44, it was no surprise that the main intervention to the existing building was the opening of a big skylight in the roof and a hole in the first-floor wooden slab (Fig. 9). The intention could have been to give the house a new vertical dimension that counter-balanced the Dutch-traditional horizontal views towards the river. The vertical expansion of the space via this new three-story ‘gap’, containing the staircase and the distribution hall, illuminated by the sun, completely transformed the interior

Figure 7.  
(Left) Pieter de Hooch, *Young Woman with a Letter and a Messenger in an Interior*, 1670, courtesy of Rijksmuseum Amsterdam; (right) main space of the house, photographed by the authors, 2018

Film 1. The expansion of our ‘body of experiences’ is captured in the film made across our visits; see *Aldo van Eyck. Le Musée Imaginaire*, dir. by Alejandro Campos-Urbe (2018) <<https://vimeo.com/292307012>>





Figure 8.  
Dining space; (left) authors' photo, 2017; (middle and right) family photos, n.d., courtesy of The Aldo and Hannie van Eyck Foundation

movement. That might well be the key to the design: a big hole in the old construction to radically transform the house's layout and its interior atmosphere. The window of about  $3.50 \times 1.50$  m on the sloped roof (Fig. 10), together with the hole in the first-floor slab, creates a tall and empty interior volume which is imperceptible from the outside, from which all rooms are accessed. The corridors are replaced by a public hall illuminated by the sun, a multi-storey gallery looking down to the ground floor (Fig. 11): a covered atrium, we might say. As in the other projects by Van Eyck, through the skylight, the light falls onto things and inhabitants alike, onto the stairs, the tables, lamps, paintings, and the African masks, onto the wooden shields, the ceramic bowls, the books, and the hands of those that sit around the table, telling stories.

This is indeed what a first impression of the house, or a virtual visit to its drawings and photographs, might be able to tell us. But embodied experience of the interior exposed something that is usually forgotten when architects design or speak about buildings: there was not always light coming from above. Contrary to a 'distant' virtual visit, the repeated re-enactment of the Van Eycks' homelife, particularly the act of sitting around the table to enjoy a meal, showed that there was much more to weather than just blue skies and sunny days — especially in the Netherlands. Consecutive meals proved that the interior atmosphere strongly reacted to outside conditions: the house was noisy under the rain; it was dark when the sky was overcast; dynamic when the clouds passed by the skylight, pushed by the wind; and it was silent and motionless in a calm summer day, at early morning, when the sun is still low on the horizon. Birdsongs, bees, butterflies, spiderwebs, and a

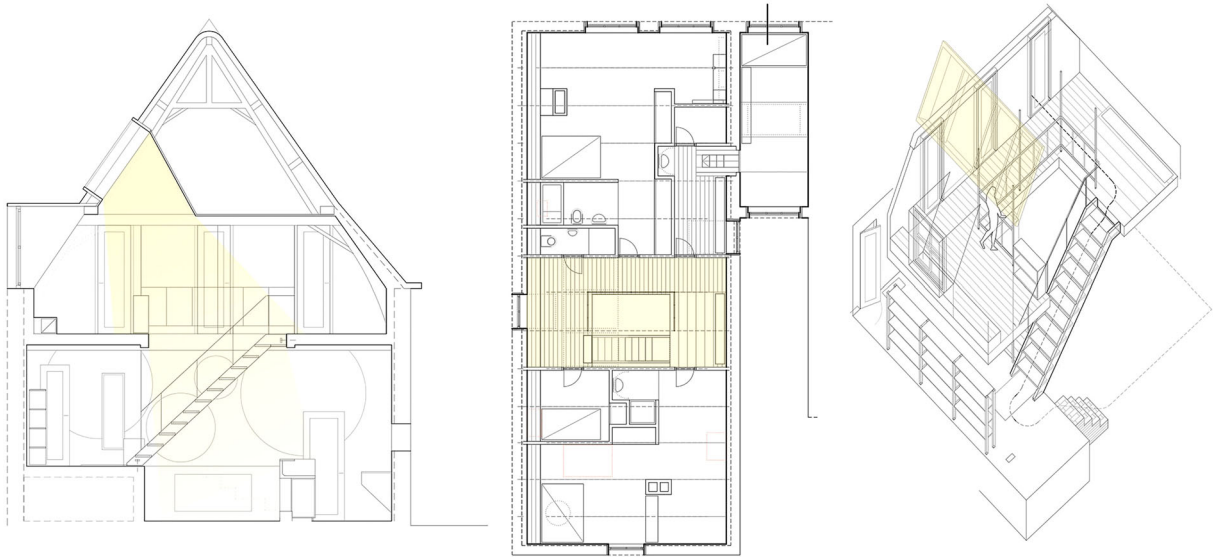


Figure 9.  
The covered atrium, drawn by the  
authors, 2017



Figure 10.  
Main skylight, photographed by  
the authors, 2018

chilli plant growing on the wall are further varying elements, different for each of our meals, whether on consecutive days or subsequent visits at different times of the year.

In a way, the house was like a Roman *domus* revolving around a covered atrium, where any change in the outside had an immediate effect inside, despite our expectation of being isolated and disconnected from the exterior — after all, we were at the place furthest from the street. Due to the interven-

Figure 11.  
Upper floor hall, photographed by  
the authors, 2018



tions, the perception of the interior is continuously and radically changed by the natural elements, variable humidity, and even birdsongs, so that there is a different house for each time of the day. When we entered the house's core for the first time, we expected to arrive at a dark interior but, against all odds, the outside was still inside, both outside and inside reconciled, an interior that simultaneously contains the outside. However, it was a different *outside*, an *outside-world* inside that was now mediated by walls, wooden stairs, steel handrails, and glass sheets.

This seasonal or cyclical quality that we discovered via our re-enacted experiences had a corresponding explanation in architectural terms. The





Figure 12.  
Alleyway, photographed and the  
plan drawn by the authors, 2017

making of the new interior *outside-world* required a strong perceptual contrast between the *atrium* and the street. To achieve this, Van Eyck modified the main access to the building (Fig. 12) and emphasised the separation between the central space and the ground floor office. Previously, the house was directly entered from the main door to the street, but now it is accessed via the exterior alley between numbers 44 and 46, transformed into the main entrance, a true intermediate space between the city and the house. This exterior passage allows for another common feature in Van Eyck's projects: the building is entered in its centre, and from there, the inhabitants move in a spatial spiralling motion towards the perimeter, where the private rooms are located. Different levels, heights, and sensations are gathered within the same vertical line, a space full of detours and *in-between* places that prevents rapid circulation employing obstacles on the way up, down, and around. The staircase's landings become platforms where books and objects from the non-Western art collection, Bach's vinyl, and modern paintings are stored and exhibited (Fig. 13). Hence, the glance is no longer directed to the outside, they are the outside things (trees, bees, stars, clouds, and the sun) which come inside.

As we realised after our visits, it was no coincidence that Van Eyck set aside a full chapter of *The Child, the City and the Artist* for the natural cycles and various meteorological phenomena.<sup>53</sup> In his writings, he beautifully embraced light and dark, sun and rain, wind, snow, mist and clouds, rainbow, the four



Figure 13.  
Podium, photographed by the  
authors, 2018

seasons and their deep semantic potential. In the first re-enactment, we pointed out the distinct perception of time within the house, the cohabitation of old and new, which is the meaning of history in Van Eyck's terms. There is here a second dimension of time, that of cyclical change, a circular mutation of things in 24 h or 365 days cycles. When we combine both — history and natural cycles — we arrive at the spiral, to the 'cyclocosm', concepts found once and again in the architect's essays: 'Damn, there's nothing beyond the spiral, since it's always expanding, reaching outward and inward.'<sup>54</sup>

And again, it was the everyday activity of talking around a table, when extensively performed with our bodies, that enabled a deeper, experiential understanding of Van Eyck's long-lasting fascination with the natural cycles and the ways in which he effectively attained the kaleidoscopic interior's atmosphere. When architects design buildings, we tend to think of functions as constantly repeated activities, as if they always happened in the same ways and in the same places. On the contrary, when we performed and re-performed the mundane activity of talking around the table, we never encountered the same spatial experience twice: different conversations, distinct meals, varying moods, and changing atmospheric conditions that were architecturally brought to the core of the house and made the space look and feel unique.

### *The in-between: lunch in the garden: house as a threshold*

Well, perhaps the greater reality of a door is the localized setting for a wonderful human gesture: conscious entry and departure. That's what a door is, something that frames your coming and going, for it's a vital experience not only for those that do so, but also for those encountered or left behind.<sup>55</sup>

Early visits to the field showed that the house's relationship with the exterior was quite different from that of its neighbours. While one can normally see the interior space of Dutch houses right from the street, the rooms of the Van Eycks' house were completely hidden from the outside behind shutters, curtains, and walls. The architects preserved the old shutters and placed tracing paper on the windows, they kept the brick wall between the office and the dining space, and painted it grey-blue, granting it more materiality. In other words, the limits were stressed to protect the homely interior and, as we explained in the previous section, existing spaces such as the alleyway were used to create buffer zones between the village and the house. In Van Eyck's terms, we should call these limits and buffer elements *in-between spaces*.

Nevertheless, our close look into the house's buffer zones came with the unplanned re-enactment of a historical event — Team 10's famous meeting in the Van Eycks' garden at Loenen, this time with Tess van Eyck, Brita Bakema, Julyan Wickham, and Izak Salomons (Fig. 14). This re-enactment and our subsequent reflection clarified Van Eyck's work with the *in-between* and the limits of spaces, particularly, his plea for both *enclosure* (in response to early modernists' *continuous space*) and *transparency* (in response to post-modernists' massive volumes). The lively meal on Friday, 11 May 2018, demanded a continuous crossing of boundaries, from the kitchen to the garden and back. With this repeated movement, a minor element, a step between the living room and the garden, became apparent as a nuisance. Why Van Eyck did not open a floor-to-ceiling window to connect the house to the garden? In fact, the only important transformation of the existing historical façade took place in the garden front, where Van Eyck did change these windows, but kept the width of the original openings and the *inconvenient* step between. On the other hand, the experience of the meal (and subsequent meals in the garden) also proved that the transformation of these windows changed the character of the garden, from a residual space to an external family room that is continually used when the weather allows for it. With the step, though, the windows became a place in which to momentarily tarry (to go carefully over the step while carrying glasses and plates to the garden or back), *in-between* two places (Fig. 15), the house somehow transformed into a succession of rooms (with or without roof) for the family to inhabit, neither continuous nor occlusive. The step effectively divides the ground flow into a set of different spaces that are distinctly experienced by the dweller: the garden, constant and constantly changing throughout the day; the door, with a step in-between inside and outside; and the living room. The step carefully emphasised the transition from one place to another by calling on our whole bodies, by requesting a specific and non-automated movement. In





Figure 14.  
(Left) Team 10 meeting in the garden, 1974, photographed by Peter Smithson, courtesy of Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut, TTEN f14; (Right) lunch in the garden, photographed by the authors, 2018

other words, the step created a threshold with an experiential role that is clarified by Van Eyck in his writings:

It is human to tarry. Architecture should, I think, take more account of this. Yes, that's it — we must indeed 'frame' our desire to tarry, make the places where we can do so.<sup>56</sup>

After the meal, this halted movement through the garden doors, due to the step between, prompted a careful look into the materiality of the windows and doors themselves. The care with which the architect modified the existing openings, conserving the wooden lattice, and adding a stone threshold that responded to the existing carpentry, serves as a token of the architect's respect for the historic building. Moreover, when we reviewed the historical photographs of the building, we noticed that the window's carpentry originally followed the traditional colour scheme in the Netherlands: white frames with green sash and muntins. However, when we looked at the house after the intervention, we observed that Van Eyck performed a colour inversion. The sashes were now painted white (both inside and outside) while the frames were painted green and now blended in with the walls (Fig. 16). The original contrast between the exterior (green) and the interior (white) surfaces of the windows sashes transformed the glass into a





Figure 15.  
(Top) Garden in Loenen, n.d.,  
courtesy of The Aldo and Hannie  
van Eyck Foundation; (Bottom)  
lunch in the garden, photographed  
by the authors, 2018

'guillotine', a very thin plane between outside and inside; but now, both in white, the spaces on either side feel like parts of the same house.<sup>57</sup> Again, an expansion of the limit to transform it into a place, just as Van Eyck has repeatedly called for: 'Make of each window and each door a place where it is good to be and, here it comes: make a bunch of places of each house and each city.'<sup>58</sup> In fact, the colours of the windows to Dorpsstraat remained unchanged. Out in the street, the glass still acts as a hard limit between the city and the house.

The careful design of the house's limits as places themselves shows the attitude with which Van Eyck approached the design of their house. The resulting atmosphere is that of a closed interior, clearly defined, but still open as part of a set of places that includes the garden or the passage. The exterior spaces are



Figure 16.  
(Left) Elevation and site plan,  
courtesy of The Aldo and Hannie  
van Eyck Foundation; (Right)  
garden façade before and after  
transformation, photographed by  
Aldo van Eyck, courtesy of The Aldo  
and Hannie van Eyck Foundation

thus transformed into roofless rooms, into 'a bunch of places', or *in-between* elements, for each place is not a location in space, but a position in a path of movement. Besides, the architect did not only keep the limits between spaces intact but also designed holes in the rooms' boundaries: a noisy wooden staircase, a window looking at the alleyway (Fig. 17), and a glass cabinet. These elements should also be considered *in-between* devices,





Figure 17.  
Studio in Loenen, photographed by  
the authors, 2018

places where the artworks dwell, as it did not take long for us, actor-historians, to start feeling the gaze (half proud, half guilty) of the hundreds of anthropomorphic artworks from the Van Eyck Collection.

For Van Eyck, the *in-between* is the place where a simultaneous experience of apparently opposite dimensions is possible, where these are reconciled. It facilitates the linking of one place with others and allows for a narrative experience of architecture and reality. But, if we travel from the house to his writings, the *in-between* is much more, as it captures Van Eyck's understanding of perception, mediated by physical things, in a perpetual state of being *in-between* one and the following moment, this and the following place. For him, living is a synonym of *in-betweening*, not like being in a present interval that is cut off from the past and the future, but as an extended present, phenomenologically experienced: 'The present should never be understood as an a-dimensional instant between past and future, but as a temporal span experience, shifting in the continuum of consciousness where past and future coexist.'<sup>59</sup> We mentioned that our two previous re-enactments allowed for an understanding of the different dimensions of time in the architect's work: firstly, the history of the house, the gathering of old and new in the same place; secondly, the natural cycles, that which repeats in different timeframes; now point out to a third dimension of time in Van Eyck's work, that of being *in-between*, in a never-ending process of *in-betweening*, of *being-in-the-world*, what Ingold called the 'dwelling perspective'. For Van Eyck, the immersion

of the organism-person in an environment or lifeworld is a condition of existence, and hence the main question for architects is how to design places that support this embodied presence.

## Conclusion

By using one's body in the same way as others in the same environment one finds oneself informed by an understanding which may then be interpreted according to one's own custom or bent, yet which remains grounded in a field of practical activity and thereby remains consonant with the experience of those among whom one has lived.<sup>60</sup>

As advanced in the introduction and the methodology, these three re-enactments allowed for an understanding of some elements of Van Eyck's architectural thinking, starting from the space he designed and inhabited for decades: history in Van Eyck's terms, as a gathering of human experience, natural elements, and cycles as materials for architecture, and *in-betweening* as a condition of existence. By immersing our bodies into the materiality of Van Eyck's home, we are surely offering a lively, intensive, qualitative understanding of the design and its connections with some of his most important contributions to post-war architectural discourses. Such embodied experiences allowed us to dwell not only in Aldo van Eyck's texts and drawings but also the place he inhabited with Hannie for forty years, building an experiential account that uses archival, ethnographic, and performative techniques, and the written works of the architect himself. This holistic approach is, we think, the main contribution of this paper to the field of architectural history.

The method, phenomenologically charged, adds a necessary degree of complexity and liveliness to architectural history, and enacts a new form of knowledge where our bodies, through the embodied experience of the house, constantly informed the research and findings, from materiality to meaning. We have conducted archival research and ethnographic fieldwork using techniques drawn from architectural anthropology, analysed the architect's writings and lectures, studied previous scholarly research on Van Eyck and his contemporaries, and, additionally, proposed a performative approach to architectural space in which our bodies and experiences were conceived as an essential source of empirical evidence. This has been possible because, throughout the paper, meaning has been interpreted as immanent in the relational contexts of people's practical engagement with their lived-in environments.

Although we usually think about ideas and discourses as predominantly disembodied entities, ideas are in fact shaped by our continuous embodied interaction with our environments and life-worlds; furthermore, they get incorporated into the places in which we dwell, especially our own homes. In his writings, for instance, Van Eyck reflected upon the notion of the present as a gathering *body of experiences*. Our particular mode of research has led us to encounter that *body* in the space he inhabited, where one can come face to face with a particular Dogon mask or a copy of James Joyce's *Ulysses*



Figure 18.  
Central space, house in Loenen,  
photographed by the authors,  
2018

that shaped the architect he was. Through this paper we have proven with three examples that Van Eyck's architectural ideas can be encountered by reenacting their homelife, as these ideas were materialised in the house and remain somehow corporally present (Fig. 18). Nonetheless, if our method is indeed similar to *wayfaring*, as we suggested above, then we must admit that it cannot offer a definite, closed, nor finished understanding of spaces, people, and ideas. What a house represents, its embodied experiential knowledge, cannot ever be exhausted.

With all these elements, we are proposing a rich empirical account that offers deep insights into the ways spatial qualities affect the dwellers' patterns of inhabitation and, more importantly in this case, into the ways in which architectural ideas take material form. In fact, the main body of the paper shows that

architectural ideas, specific ways of understanding history, time, and space, are indeed embodied within our built environment and that they can only be disentangled with the help of our bodies, by performing actions within, in and around buildings.

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