

ENTREVISTA COM HERMAN HERTZBERGER*

INTERVIEW WITH HERMAN HERTZBERGER

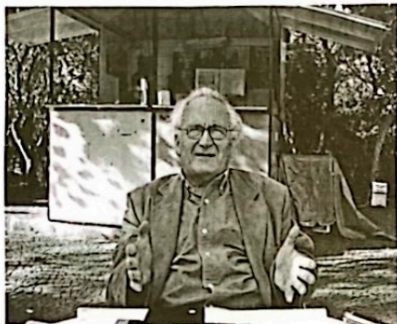
OPENING REMARKS

Herman Hertzberger was born in Amsterdam, 1932. Having graduated in 1958, in Delft, started working in Amsterdam. From 1959 to 1963 he co-edited the magazine *Forum* with Jacob Bakema and Aldo Van Eyck, which marks the beginning of the so-called Dutch Structuralism. His major buildings include the Montessori School in Delft (1971), the insurance company *Centraal Beheer* in Apeldoorn (1972) and the *Musical Center Vredenburg*, in Utrecht (1978). More recently he designed the *Willemspark Montessori School* in Amsterdam (1983) and the *Chassé Theater* in Breda (1995). Hertzberger is the author of the widely known volumes *Architecture Lessons*.

APRESENTAÇÃO

Herman Hertzberger nasceu em Amsterdam em 1932 e se graduou em 1958, em Delft. Entre 1958 e 1963 foi co-editor da revista *Forum* juntamente com Jacob Bakema e Aldo Van Eyck, que marcou o início do chamado Estruturalismo Holandês. Suas obras mais importantes incluem a Escola Montessori em Delft (1971), o edifício da companhia de seguros *Centraal Beheer* em Apeldoorn (1972) e o *Musical Center Vredenburg* em Utrecht (1978). Mais recentemente projetou também a Escola Montessori de *Willemspark* em Amsterdam (1983) e o Teatro *Chassé* em Breda (1995). Hertzberger é o autor de *Lições de Arquitetura* cujo primeiro volume traduzido para o português é amplamente conhecido no Brasil.

* Entrevista realizada quando da visita do Prof. Hertzberger à 6ª Semana de Arquitetura da PUC Minas. Hertzberger foi entrevistado por Fernando Lara e Vanessa Borges Brasileiro no Parque das Mangabeiras, em 29 de agosto de 2002.



Herman Hertzberger
– VI Semana de
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Fernando Lara: *Prof. Hertzberger, you graduated in the late 1950s in Holland, how was the climate of architecture at that time? You told me before it was "another profession".*

Herman Hertzberger: In Holland at that time there was a very strong and clear split between what we used to call right wing and left wing architecture. And the right wing architecture was trying to do a kind of regionalism, and it was all a little bit in the atmosphere of rebuilding after world war II and the left (or the so called left wing architects) tried to do the modernism of CIAM.¹ Just when I stepped in, there was a sort of criticism of CIAM because CIAM became too much administrative, bureaucratic. I saw in that CIAM group, Team X,² they tried to split up from CIAM to go back to real design issues. That was when I came in.

FL: *So Bakema³ and Van Eyck⁴ from the left wing group, were trying to improve CIAM and the real design issues without leaving the social concerns behind, responding to some of the criticism that the right wing groups were articulating?*

HH: Absolutely. Because there was some confusion, the idea that the right wing

¹ CIAM: Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne, grupo fundado em 1928 por iniciativa de Hélène de Mandrot, sob a orientação de Le Corbusier e Siegfried Giedion. As primeiras reuniões (1928-1933) foram fundamentais para a consolidação do Movimento Moderno. As reuniões do pós-guerra (1947-1956) já traziam uma tendência de revisão da arquitetura moderna que culminou com o grupo chamado Team X (ver nota seguinte).

² Team X: Grupo de jovens arquitetos Europeus (Jacob Bakema, George Candilis, Alysso Smithson, Peter Smithson, e Aldo Van Eyck, que no final dos anos 50 adotam uma postura crítica frente à ortodoxia dos CIAM. O nome Team X vem do fato de que este grupo estava encarregado de organizar o décimo CIAM.

³ Jacob Bakema (1914-1981) arquiteto holandês que foi muito influente na segunda metade do séc. XX, membro do CIAM de 1947 e do Team X. Co-editor da revista *Fórum*. Autor de inúmeros projetos em sociedade com Johannes Van den Broek.

⁴ Aldo Van Eyck (1918-1999) talvez o mais influente arquiteto holandês do séc XX, Van Eyck es-

was somehow referring to more humanistic concerns (but in fact that was the privilege of CIAM), CIAM was too much into big projects and not realistic points of view on how to transform the world, and Team X found itself into this environment. Van Eyck expressed it criticizing the fake regionalist designs of the right wing catholic architects in Holland that built large concrete structures and covered it in brick to convey a regional feeling that was fake. That was completely disgusting in the eyes of the modernist. Those claims that CIAM was an offspring of socialism and therefore could not be humanistic made for a very confusing atmosphere. And although I was very close to Team X was never a member. I was invited several times to their congresses and admired their positions but never became a member.

FL: *Have you been a student of Van Eyck?*

HH: Oh no, I was never a formal student of Van Eyck but I was a student without being a student because I studied his works and his proposals and followed him. In 1959 he invited me to be a member of that magazine *Forum*. *Forum* was the leading magazine in Holland and it belonged to the right wing but gave us two issues a year for the Team X group to publish its ideas and color the magazine a little bit. Finally, we were offered to take over, Van Eyck, Bakema and me.

FL: *How was that similar to what was happening in Italy with Gio Ponti⁵ and Bruno Zevi having little space for their ideas – so much that Lina Bo Bardi decided to stay in Brazil since there was little space for the left wing ideas also in Italy after the war.*

HH: Well, Gio Ponti after all had the *Domus* and he was more of an industrial designer. We had *Forum* and we did this *Forum* a couple of years. It was not a normal magazine, it took us a lot of energy to make another issue and it was not regularly coming out.

FL: *And how does that led to structuralism? Were you influenced by Levi Strauss?*

HH: That was later. I was very much into the whole school of Van Eyck and at a certain moment I found my own way although Aldo Van Eyck had really some structuralist ideas, he made some fantastic structures like the orphanage, but he didn't want only the structure but he wanted also to led the infill. To make the infill until the last drip. He was very annoyed when, before the building was completed they changed the system of orphanages and he said: no, we cannot change it, the building was designed to another configuration! They changed from

tudou na ETH de Zurich e foi membro do Team X desde sua fundação em 1953. Co-editor da revista *Forum*. Projetou em 1957 o orfanato municipal de Amsterdam, edifício paradigmático da arquitetura estruturalista holandesa.

⁵ Gio Ponti (1891-1979) arquiteto italiano, editor da revista *Domus*, autor da torre Pirelli em Milão em parceria com P. L. Nervi.

family groups into age groups and the whole building was based in family groups. And I said: "Aldo I don't know what you are talking about because the structure, as a structure is so fantastic that... who cares?". Maybe from the negative it formed my opinion about the orphanage as a perfect structure and who cares about the age groups or the family groups or the whatever groups because the structure remains the same. I was asked about in 1995, when I became Dean of the Berlage Institute and we got the orphanage as our home, then I could demonstrate myself that the structure was absolutely perfect to receive our school. I could tell you some anecdotes of Aldo, we had students build a structure in the court as part of their assignments, and they built a temporary structure and Aldo Van Eyck came in and he was furious: "Out with this thing!". He couldn't stand it.

FL: *He was very much a performer right? There is the famous scene of throwing a bottle on the wall at CIAM.*

HH: So this is to demonstrate that Van Eyck was a semi-structuralist, for me he was always a structuralist although he didn't know it himself. Anyway, I was very much educated by the structuralism. Also was Bakema. Bakema is now a little bit at the background, he was a little bit megalomaniac but he made fantastic structures. He was a little bit the Rem Koolhaas of that time. He makes me think of Koolhaas very much sometimes. A sort of a way to cut himself and do what he want to do. Of course Van Eyck was the intellectual and had a much deeper basis but Bakema was the designer and had a large office with over 100 people in the American way that could design complete buildings in 14 days, I mean, very much the way Koolhaas can do it know. Aldo Van Eyck was always absolutely opposed to that but to the outside world they were friends. By the way, I describe a little bit of that in my new book that is coming out in September that is a little bit autobiographical.

I must say that Bakema also was inspired by structuralism when he talked about a Roman Palace that was abandoned and taken over by the local people that re-adapted the structure and split it all, inhabiting the palace like a city. And Bakema also put me on the track that every building should be like a city.

FL: *The whole idea of the leaf-tree diagram of the city/house relationship.*

HH: Yes, but that is Van Eyck and he makes a symmetry but making the city as a building and the building as a city but I don't agree with that symmetry. For me they are asymmetrical, in the sense that everything should be a city but not everything should be a house, because a house has a certain enclosure. If a house is so open as to become a city it loses its familiarity. And a city is not a house. Maybe a medieval city can be like a house with its walls but a modern city is part of a network.

FL: *And during that period, how was the influence of the CoBrA⁶ group and the Situationists?*

HH: It is very interesting that you ask that because everybody is asking that those days. To talk about the situationists and Constant, who by the way was also a member of the CoBrA, it was a utopian thing, and we were, I can say that full hearted, we were in no way influenced by those utopian ideas. After so many years one could say, you are right, that there is something structuralistic in the ideas of Constant. He was thinking in terms of the living of big groups and not in terms of houses. It was art, it was abstract and slightly naïve. Constant is now again in the pictures. As for the CoBrA, they were painters and Van Eyck was more like a part of it, they were of more influence on us in the sense that they were thinking somehow anthropologically. By going back to the main sources of human energy. They helped, also for me, to find what I might call now structuralism although structuralism is often misunderstood. What it really means is that you should build for basic conditions and not for specific programs because specific programs are a temporary derivation of those basic needs. As long as there are people, people dance but according to their specific cultures they dance in different ways. So what I want to state with my idea of structuralism is that you should distinguish a long time cycle and a short time cycle. It is like the chess playing. You take the chess rules and you can play your individualized game with those same rules.

FL: *If we go to younger generation, to Koolhaas for instance, they do the same but they think in a shorter time cycle. When they do this mix-programing or this overlapping of program: Koolhaas, Bernard Tschumi, MVRDV. Your generation had the ability to think in a longer time cycle.*

HH: They don't want to use structuralism. But when Koolhaas talk about the generic, in fact he found a very good word, it is the same thing. What you could and what you might do is then say that there is this generic structure and this temporary program.

FL: *That's interesting because Koolhaas, correct me if I'm wrong, he was a journalist in Holland and went to school of architecture in England at the AA (Architectural Association), then he came back to be one of the most famous Dutch architects. So this direct learning of Dutch architecture he does not have.*

HH: Yes, he is clever enough to have adapted. He tries to keep at a distance like

⁶ CoBrA Group: Grupo de artistas do norte da Europa (o nome vem das cidades COnpenhagen, BRuxelas e Amsterdã, cujas idéias sobre antropologia e a busca de formas básicas e significativas para toda a raça humana influenciou a arquitetura holandesa no final dos anos 60.

⁷ Situationists: Internacional Situacionista – Grupo de artistas reunidos na França sob a liderança de Constant e Guy Debord que criticava a ortodoxia do Movimento Moderno e chamava atenção para a apropriação cotidiana dos espaços.

the son keeps the father on a distance. To guarantee his being new. He wants to be new. By the way, the first and decisive issue of *Forum* was called "the story of another idea". And I remember very well the discussion we had at that time, some people at the editorial board thought it should be the "story of a new idea". And Van Eyck said no, there can never be a new idea, because the essence of our way of thinking is that nothing is new, it is just a different way of doing the same. This is the anthropological thing, implying that there is the human species and we have some sort of thing that are common to all of us and have not changed over 10.000 years but yet interpreted in different ways.

FL: *But how do you see this other way of doing things in this younger generation of Dutch architects? MVRDV, NL, Mecanoo.*

HH: NL are too young to know, they haven't built anything, you have to wait. MVRDV, well, in my second book I give as a case study this building that MVRDV built for this and publishing company VPRO, and in fact it is a different interpretation of a existing idea. After 30 years that nothing happened, now there is a group of people that have a new interpretation of that idea. To go in there would take too long.

FL: *Well, Vanessa has some questions to you about teaching.*

VB: *You talked about that yesterday, about getting the student hungry for knowledge. Can you tell us about it? How can we achieve that?*

HH: It is no time to tell the students how they should learn because we don't know it ourselves. School education so far has always meant to teach students things you know and the students don't know but at this moment it is very difficult to teach design because there are too many possibilities. You could learn things like how to make a building stable on an absolute knowledge, but design and also history is very difficult to educate because who knows what is important at this moment? So every education where design is involved should to a certain degree come from the students themselves. We have to find methods so that the students can educate themselves. We should not educate them but teach them how to educate themselves. Not only teach them how to handle the internet and how to get information, but in someway or another be able to teach students what they think are interest for them. You cannot ask a baby "what do you want to eat" but you can find methods to let the students formulate what they think are interesting for them. I know it is very difficult.

FL: *The whole process of formulating is already educational.*

HH: Yes and it is difficult because you have to start to get the students conscious of where they stand in the world. You might be obliged to be political. To say: "Listen, do you think that the distribution of means and knowledge over all peo-

ple is fair or anything better could be realized?" When I have first year groups I give the assignment of designing a city for 100.000 people. Normal educator would say this is nonsense because how could they know how to design a city? And my answer would be: "How do you know?" First of all you should learn how to work together. What is the basic idea of a city? Why do we have cities? Let them think what is a city. I did this assignment with first year students with fantastic results. There was one group that came with a circular city, another group came with a linear city, another even with a city without cars. And then you are going to ask questions. "How should people live, how do you want to live?" You must be a complete citizen to be educated today. What you should do is really talk to people about basic things. Try to limit to how should people live. Let them show how is this organized today. And no limits in the sense of: this is not possible because of legislation and etc. that comes later. Start from people the way they are and always will be, and then go down to how it can be better.

You were saying yesterday, Vanessa, that the students are not interested in history. Of course they are not interested in history, it is lousy stuff. It is up to you as a teacher to show them that they need history to solve their problems. When I was at school in the 50s for some reason or another I was excited seeing Brunelleschi, I made notes when I went to Italy to see all this. I was absolutely amazed. But you must try to transform history into nowadays things. If you read Vasari on the cupola of Santa Maria del Fiori you will see that they had a competition although they new they had the best architect at arms distance, right next door. When he got the commission they said – no you are not going to do the *lanterna* – this is exactly the way it works today. There was the competition of the extension of the municipal museum in Amsterdam, my backyard, where I came as a little boy, that is my museum. And they ask Siza to design the museum and Siza made a lousy building, just absolutely not good. Exactly the same sort of thing in Firenze 500 years ago.

Another exercise could be to make a house without windows. It is forbidden to have windows. You must, in your assignments, do things that put them on the wrong track and that means they have to think for themselves. Or a cube of 10 by 10 by 10 and ask them how many houses can you make in there?

FL: Just to wrap up, what is interesting you those days?

HH: Oh my goodness, too much! To say about a very interesting thing we have in Europe but I am not pessimistic about your place also, we have so much good architecture and what interests me most is in what ways – or let me put it in another way – when we see magazines today we see the most fantastic buildings of which people have worked with their hearts. They are consumed like pieces of chocolate and you chew it and the next and the next... This cannot go on. This is a cultural waste. I think that there must be a moment when we are going to ask

ourselves what are we doing? And why? We are up to that moment. And I think already a lot of people are thinking that way. The fact that I am still there and not completely forgotten – I should be forgotten – is already something. I think every generation has to redefine what is the role of architecture in his or her time. We should take the time to define what we are doing and why. Are we just going on making beautiful objects and being sort of sculptures that are symbols of the rich and the establishment? Or are we more embattled than that? That is what is my concern.



Herman Hertzberger em entrevista com Daniele Caetano, Fernando Lara e Vanessa Borges – VI Semana de Arquitetura e Urbanismo – PUC Minas, 2002

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