

**Diagonal Poems of the Right Angle
/
Parallels in Practice in the Works of
Richard Paul Lohse and Aldo van Eyck**

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From its beginning, modernism was understood by its leading practitioners to integrate and engage all the arts. Yet this modern tradition was abandoned in the great majority of architecture built in the latter half of the 20th century, and today is almost entirely forgotten, edited out of both the canonical histories and daily practice of architecture and art. What were originally understood by their practitioners to be integrated, experientially based disciplines of making have now been segregated by professional specialization, educational hermeticism and critical isolation, leading to the all-too-common definition of architecture and art as entirely autonomous practices. Yet, despite being almost entirely overlooked in critical discourse and academic scholarship, this other modern tradition has continued to evolve in practice through the 20th century to today.

This essay is a part of a larger study by the author that examines this other modern tradition—a tradition wherein spatial concepts, ordering principles, experiential precepts and design methods are shared in the work and teaching of both modern painters and modern architects; a tradition originating in the beginnings of modernism and continuing unabated, if largely unrecognized, to this day.¹ The study documents the ways a number of leading modern architects initially established the tradition of actively engaging the implications of the spatial speculations to be found in modern paintings; the manner in which later modern architects built upon the tradition; and how contemporary architects continue to engage the tradition as an integral part of their modern inheritance.

The core of this study are examples of three types of pairings of painters and architects: *parallels in practice*, an actual relationship where contemporaries were influenced by each other; *parallels across time*, an actual relationship where a contemporary architect draws upon the work of an earlier painter; and *parallels in principle*, a purely speculative ‘relationship’ where contemporary painters and architects on spatially distant, non-crossing paths, unaware of each other’s work, are nevertheless found to employ similar ordering principles. The three types of artist-architect pairings serve as the most effective demonstration of this modern tradition being put into practice within the studio disciplines, exemplifying the ongoing, active, and productive nature of this tradition today.

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Lohse's complete works are at the time of this writing being published by the Richard Paul Lohse Foundation, Zurich, in four volumes; to date, Volume 1, *Richard Paul Lohse: Graphic Design 1928-1988* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 1999), and Volume 2, *Richard Paul Lohse: Prints* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009), have been published.

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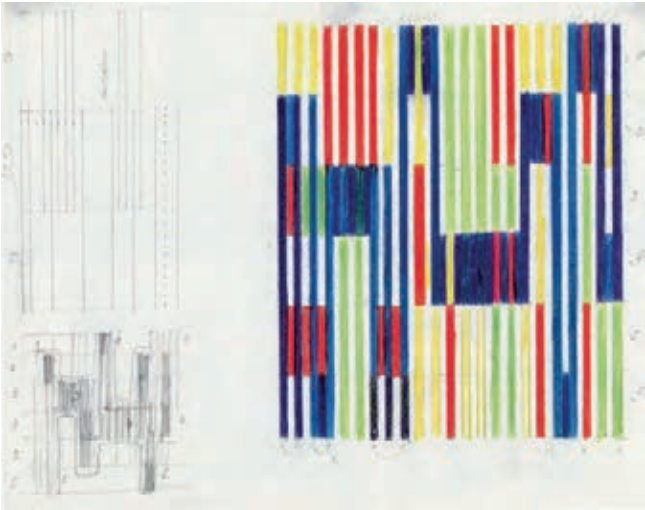
Hans-Peter Riese and Friedrich Heckmanns, *Richard Paul Lohse: Drawings 1935-1985* (New York: Rizzoli, 1986), 138.

In the present essay, this other modern tradition of shared principles of space, order, perception and design between art and architecture will be explored by pairing the Swiss painter Richard Paul Lohse and the Dutch architect Aldo van Eyck—this pairing is an example of a *parallel in practice*, an actual relationship of contemporaries.

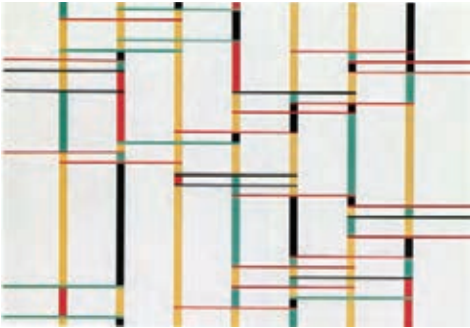
Richard Paul Lohse (1902-1988) was a versatile designer, and today he is equally recognized for his graphics, advertising, and exhibition design as for his paintings and prints.² He was born in 1902 in Zurich, Switzerland, and began painting at age 15. From 1918-22 he apprenticed to an advertising and graphic designer while studying at the Kunstgewerbeschule in Zurich under Ernst Keller. From 1922-30 he worked in the advertising designer Max Dalang's studio, and painted still lifes, landscapes and "experimental" paintings. In 1930 he established his own advertising and graphic design studio with Hans Trommer, and he would continue this work for the rest of his life. In 1933 Lohse joined the "friends of New Architecture," a group of Swiss artists who supported modernism, and in 1937 he co-founded Allianz, the Association of Modern Swiss Artists. Active in anti-fascist movements in Germany, Italy, and France from 1935-44, Lohse was also involved in art exhibitions, as well as editing and designing the leading Swiss architectural publication *Bauen und Wohnen* from 1947-55, where in 1948 he published the architect Aldo van Eyck's first built work, the 1946 tower room renovation for the Loeffler family in Zurich. Also indicative of Lohse's interdisciplinary interests was the fact that in 1947 he was commissioned to develop an educational program entitled "Interrelationships Between Art and Architecture" for the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule (ETH) in Zurich.³

Starting in 1933, Lohse met a number of artists and architects who passed through Zurich, largely due to the rise of Nazi-ism: the artists Paul Klee, Lazlo Moholy-Nagy, Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Hans Arp, Georges Vantongerloo, and the architects Serge Chermayeff, Charles Eames, Gerrit Rietveld, Cornelius van Eesteren, Le Corbusier, Konrad Wachsmann, and Georgy Kepes. Zurich would remain Lohse's home, and there he would meet Aldo van Eyck when the latter lived in Zurich from 1938-46.

In 1943, shortly after he had met Van Eyck, Lohse became aware of Piet Mondrian's recently completed "Broadway Boogie-Woogie" of 1942, and as a result Lohse decided to give up all figural elements in his painting, and to pursue what he later called a "constructive system," beginning with the ordering of the entire surface of the canvas as a vertical structure, which he later called "serial systems." The regularly ordered, equal-width vertical bands were joined around 1945 by the "rhythmical progression" or "fugue" series, where the bands varied in width, but usually in a repeating pattern, which he came to call "themes."



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1 Richard Paul Lohse, *Serial elements in rhythmical groups*, 1945; colored pencil study

2 Richard Paul Lohse, *Konkretion III*, 1947

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Willy Rotzler, *Constructive Concepts: A History of Constructive Art from Cubism to the Present* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989), 150.

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Margit Staber, "Concrete Painting and Structural Painting," in Gyorgy Kepes, ed., *Structure in Art and in Science* (New York: Braziller, 1965), 165.

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Hans Arp, *On My Way—Poetry and Essays* (New York: Wittenborn, 1948), 72.

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"Concrete Art" is documented by Willy Rotzler, who characterizes it as a largely Swiss movement, in *Constructive Concepts: A History of Constructive Art from Cubism to the Present* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989); first published by ABC Edition, Zurich, 1977. Post-war "Concrete Art" is also documented in *Concrete Art in Europe after 1945*, The Peter C. Ruppert Collection (Hatje Cantz: Ostfildern, 2002).

Lohse's use of musical terminology is hardly accidental, and reflects the powerful impact on Lohse of Mondrian's final paintings, including the "Victory Boogie-Woogie" of 1942-44. After this time, Lohse dedicated himself exclusively to engaging the vertical and horizontal, the right-angle grid as an ordering device, and the use of color and rhythm to construct diagonal spatial tensions and rotational volumes within a strictly orthogonal geometry. Lohse stated; "I try to conceive a picture with the simplest possible basic elements: square, line, ribbon elements that are in structural relationship with the bounding lines of the composition. Since 1943 I have used rectangular forms only."⁴ [1-2]

In 1944 the exhibition "Concrete Art" was held at the Kunsthalle Basel, and included works by Wassily Kandinsky, Klee, Theo van Doesburg, Piet Mondrian, Arp, Vantongerloo, and the Swiss artists Walter Bodner, Leo Leuppi, Max Bill, and Lohse. The term "Concrete Art" had been coined in 1930 by Van Doesburg, who, in Margit Staber's paraphrase, defined concrete art as "art in which all gradations of abstraction had been overcome and in which previously unknown pictorial possibilities were discovered and realized solely through the use of color and form, light and movement, all sorts of different materials and methods, and by means of constructive 'structural' laws." The core ideas shared by concrete art, in all its variations, was that of the viewer's direct experience of the materiality and structure of "a creative idea that has been transmuted into the reality and sensuousness of the work of art."⁵ In 1948, Arp wrote: "Concrete art aims to transform the world. It aims to render existence more bearable. It aims to save man from his most dangerous folly: vanity. It aims to simplify human life. It aims to identify with nature. Reason uproots man and makes him lead a tragic existence. Concrete art is an elementary art, natural and healthy, which makes the head and heart sparkle with the stars of peace, love and poetry. Where concrete art enters, melancholy departs, lugging its grim suitcases full of black sighs."⁶

Over the next few years, Lohse would work out his own definition of the largely Swiss evolution of constructive art known as "Concrete Art."⁷ Lohse held that concrete art was derived from modern art, saying that, since Cézanne, painting has conceived of itself as two-dimensional, so that content and process have merged. Lohse's paintings are rigorously ordered on a right-angle grid, with colors and volumes objectified, the paradoxical result of which is the variability, extendibility, and legibility of both the individual elements and collective orders; both the primary colors and polychromatism; and both the rectangular structure and diagonal movement. In 1944, Lohse articulated the concept of the principle of equilibrium in the quantity of color, so that, while remaining identifiable and individual, no color would read



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3 Aldo van Eyck, gateway for "Rotterdam Ahoy" exhibit, 1950

4 Aldo van Eyck, interior, Roman Catholic Church, The Hague, 1963-69

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Richard Paul Lohse, quoted in Hella Nocke-Schrepper, "‘Child Without a Name?’ On the Development and Terminology of Concrete Art in Switzerland," *Concrete Art in Europe After 1945* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2002), 97, 99.

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Richard Paul Lohse, in *Richard Paul Lohse: 1902-1988* (Budapest: International Colour and Light Foundation, 1992), 22, 83.

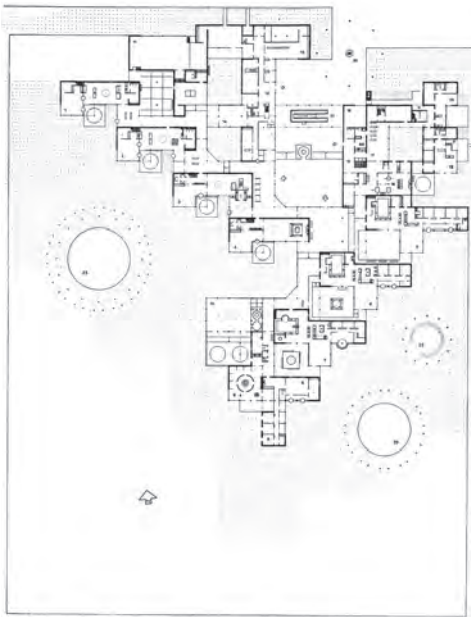
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Rotzler, op. cit., 151.

more strongly than any other. That this equilibrium, normally a static concept, could coexist in paintings of such apparent dynamism and disequilibrium would prove to be the special genius of Lohse's work. Lohse's paintings consistently involved rigorous right-angle grid orders, into which were woven, through the use of color and rhythm, various diagonal tensions, often including dynamic pinwheel compositions, but Lohse achieved this without ever employing any literal diagonal forms.

From the very beginning, Lohse regards the primary goal of painting to be the preservation of the surface—in order to accomplish this, the typification of the pictorial elements is a prerequisite. The unity of form, surface, and space emerges through the internal structure, which corresponds to the boundaries of the canvas, a process Lohse calls “constructive concretion.” The starting point for all of Lohse's paintings is his concept that “the picture itself is and remains structure.”⁸ Willi Rotzler has noted that in Lohse's paintings there are no primary or secondary elements, no foreground or background, no figure or ground, no positive or negative, and thus there is no hierarchy. Lohse's paintings are the product of a rigorously resolved ordering system, which begins with the setting of bounds within which the work can be developed. “The picture field is a structural field,” which, as Lohse noted, yields, “A paradox: the integration of boundaries leads to the unlimited.” This is complemented by Lohse's idea that the more rigorous the structure of the painting, and the more precisely bounded the field of action, the more likely is the result of “variability and extensibility.”⁹ Lohse also believed his paintings and their ordering system held a deeper social meaning, as Rotzler noted; “[Lohse] calls his structures ‘democratic:’ the elements enjoy equality in their system, and they are dependent on each other for the formation of the whole,” leading to Lohse's parallel interest in new forms of democracy, “the environment, the humanism of our living space, and the implementation of social justice.”¹⁰ [3-4]

Aldo van Eyck (1918-1999) was an architect, urbanist and critic, and one of the founders of Team 10, a group of younger architects who broke away from the Congr s Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) in the late 1950s, and in his work and writings, he articulated a humane, holistic, historically informed, and contextually sensitive vision of modern architecture and urbanism. Van Eyck was born in 1918 in Driebergen, the Netherlands, and his father was a leading Dutch poet and cultural reporter for a leading Dutch newspaper. A year after his birth the family moved to London, and Van Eyck was educated at the King Alfred School, an experimental arts school, and at Sidcot School, which was run by the Quakers. Initially interested in literature, Van Eyck attended the Senior Secondary Technical School in the Hague from 1935-8, where he



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- 5 Aldo van Eyck, ground floor plan, Amsterdam Municipal Orphanage, 1955-60
- 6 Richard Paul Lohse, *Rhythmical system vertically divided*, 1949-50

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Aldo van Eyck, "Ex Turico aliquid novum" (1981), Vincent Ligtelijn and Francis Strauven, *Aldo van Eyck: Writings Volume 1* (Amsterdam: SUN, 2008), 18.

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C. Giedion-Welcker, "Arp," *Horizon* (1946, No. 82); and H. Arp, *On My Way* (New York, 1948); cited in Francis Strauven, *Aldo van Eyck: The Shape of Relativity* (Amsterdam: Architectura & Natura, 1998), 87.

studied architecture and art. Van Eyck then studied architecture at the ETH Zurich from 1938-42, where he was able to attend lectures by Carl Jung, the leading exponent of significant form in human psychology. After graduating in 1942, in the midst of WWII, Van Eyck was unable to return to the Nazi-occupied Netherlands and remained in Zurich until the end of the war. There he worked for a number of leading modern architects including Ernst F. Burckhardt, Alfred Roth, Hans Fischli, and the firm composed of Max Ernst Haefli, Werner Moser and Rudolf Steiger.

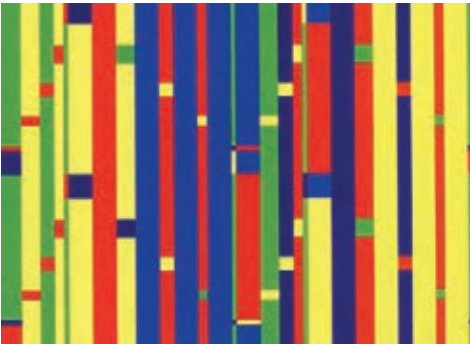
During this period, Zurich was a refuge for all the forms of modern art that the Nazi's had labeled "decadent," and here Van Eyck met Carola Giedion-Welcker, the first important art historian to engage modernism, and the wife of architectural historian and CIAM co-founder Sigfried Giedion. Giedion-Welcker would become one of the most important influences on Van Eyck's thinking, and, in describing her affect on him, Van Eyck wrote: "She opened my windows—and I haven't closed them since; she tuned my strings—nor did they ever require retuning... Carola Giedion provided nourishment for a lifetime."¹¹ Through Giedion-Welcker, Van Eyck came to know the work of artists Hans Arp, Max Ernst, Piet Mondrian, Theo van Doesburg, Alberto Giacometti, Karl Schwitters, Constantin Brancusi, Paul Klee, Pablo Picasso, Joan Miro, Robert Delaunay, Antoine Pevsner, Georges Vantongerloo, Georges Braque, and Ferdinand Leger, the writers Andre Breton, Tristan Tzara, James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound, the composer Arnold Schonberg, the philosopher Henri Bergson, and especially the Swiss painter Richard Paul Lohse. [5-6]

Van Eyck was deeply influenced by the belief, shared by Giedion-Welcker and these artists, that the primary aim of modern art and architecture is to rediscover the essential, particularly the essential nature of humankind, and that this required the engagement and resolution of paradoxical concepts; what Van Eyck later called the "twin phenomena." In 1946, Van Eyck made a very free "translation" of a Giedion-Welcker essay on Arp, transforming her ideas and even inserting new ones of his own devising, including the statement that Arp's work spans the ages, "reflecting what is constant and constantly changing"—a phrase suggesting the fusing the timeless and the contemporary that was not to be found in her original manuscript, but a phrase that would repeatedly appear in Van Eyck's own later writings.¹²

Van Eyck would remain a close friend to many artists, and he was instrumental in first publishing the work, and setting up the first exhibitions of many, particularly the international group called COBRA. The painter, Constant Nieuwenhuys (co-founder of COBRA and author of the visionary urban design, "New Babylon"), came to Van Eyck's



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Strauven, op. cit., 125.

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Aldo van Eyck, "Ex Turico aliquid novum," in Ligtelijn and Strauven, op. cit., 19.

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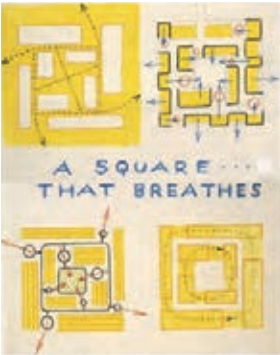
Richard Paul Lohse, in a 1981 interview with Strauven; Strauven, op. cit., 96.

- 7 Aldo van Eyck, ground floor plan, Primary School at Nagele, 1954-56
- 8 Richard Paul Lohse, *Four themes of equal form*, 1949-50

Amsterdam apartment in 1947 to see his collection of art, which at that time already included Mondrian, Van Doesburg, Arp, Miro, Giacometti, and Klee, among others. After COBRA was formed in 1948, Van Eyck's apartment became a meeting place for the artists, and while he was not a member, Van Eyck approved of their collective efforts, actively taking part in their discussions, even though they criticized De Stijl and Surrealism—and even when Constant threatened to fill in what he called the “blank spaces” of Van Eyck's Mondrian painting. Yet when Van Eyck designed two installations of the works of the COBRA group, in Amsterdam in 1949 and in Liege in 1951, Francis Strauven has noted how he incorporated the impulsive and instinctive works of his friends into layouts based on the pure De Stijl geometries of Mondrian.¹³ [7-8]

It was during the Zurich period of 1938-46 that Van Eyck first met Lohse and came to know his work. Van Eyck was strongly moved by the psychological insights to be found in the works of the Surrealists, Miro, Ernst and Arp, as well as being inspired by the strong sense of space and order in the work of the DeStijl, Mondrian, Vantongerloo and Van Doesburg. Recalling his earliest discussions with Lohse, Van Eyck remembered Lohse “forgiving my simultaneous (and lasting) infatuation with both Mondrian and Miro.”¹⁴ In fact, Lohse was astonished that Van Eyck could engage such a wide range in art; “But Aldo, you are a split person! You consist of Miro and Mondrian and these two wage a continuous fight in your inner self!”¹⁵

This engagement of a broad range of art would continue throughout Van Eyck's career, perhaps peaking at the 1959 Otterloo CIAM conference. Van Eyck's talk at this conference was a sustained attack on what he felt was the aesthetically and ethically bankrupt state of mid-century modern architecture, dominated as it was by large corporate practices and formalistic urbanism. He singled out modern architecture's failure to meet the challenge of engaging the ideas of the earliest modernists in all the arts, and the way mid-century modern architecture had turned its back on this, its own legacy. Van Eyck called attention to the liberative concepts discovered by Picasso, Klee, Mondrian, Joyce, Schoenberg, and Bergson; “Surely we cannot permit modern architects to continue selling the diluted essence of what others spent a lifetime finding. They have betrayed society in betraying the essence of contemporary thought... Far from expanding reality [as the modern artists and poets have done], architects have contracted reality.” Van Eyck went on to argue; “Modern architects have been harping so continually on what is different in our time to such an extent that even they have lost touch with what is not different, what is always essentially the same. This grave mistake was not made by the poets, painters, and sculptors. On the contrary, they never



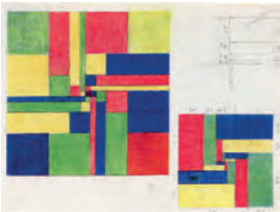
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- 9 Aldo van Eyck, diagram for Congress Building, Jerusalem, 1958
- 10 Richard Paul Lohse, *Movement of groups of colors away from their centers*, 1953
- 11 Aldo van Eyck and Jaap Bakema, Urban design for Buikslotermeer, 1962
- 12 Richard Paul Lohse, *Interpenetrating axes*, 1954; colored pencil study

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Three versions of Van Eyck's first talk at Otterlo exist; the first is an incomplete transcription taken from a recording made by Herman Haan at the Congress (NAi, Rotterdam), transcribed in Ligtelijn and Strauven, op. cit.; the second is the edited and slightly different version that appears in *Team 10 Primer*, Alison Smithson, ed. (Cambridge: MIT, 1968); and the third is published in Oscar Newman, *CIAM 59 in Otterlo* (Stuttgart: Karl Kramer, 1961). All texts included in Newman were edited by their authors.

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Van Eyck, "What Is and Isn't Architecture: Apropos of Rats, Posts and other Pests," *Lotus International* 28, 1980 (Milan), 15-19. For Van Eyck, the "Rationalists" (Rats) and the "Post-Modernists" (Posts) were exemplified by Aldo Rossi and Leon Krier, who rejected modern architecture and embraced classicism in its traditional and modern forms, and the "Other Pests" were exemplified by Peter Eisenman and Rem Koolhaas, who embraced "De-Constructivism" and its emphasis on fragments and chaos.

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Richard Paul Lohse, "Lines of Development, 1943-84," in Hans-Joachim Albrecht et. al., *Richard Paul Lohse* (Zurich: Waser Verlag, 1984), 143.

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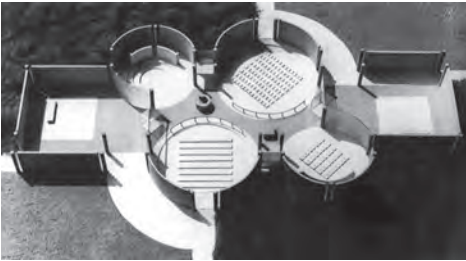
Aldo van Eyck, "Ex Turico aliquid novum," in Ligtelijn and Strauven, op. cit., 19.

narrowed down experience, they enlarged and intensified it.”¹⁶ [9-10]

That this reference to art would remain a lifelong habit of Van Eyck’s is indicated by the following passage from his 1980 *Lotus* essay, “What Is and Isn’t Architecture: Apropos of Rats, Posts, and Other Pests,” an attack on the various forms of so-called Post-Modernism. Van Eyck labeled this work “treason,” saying that contemporary architects had forgotten the work of the early modern artists, architects, and poets, saying that “to willfully—and spitefully—neutralize, counteract, or deprecate the message this century’s pioneer period carried...is, intellectually, the most short-sighted thing imaginable—also the vilest and most irresponsible.”¹⁷

From the very beginning of their friendship, Van Eyck believed that Lohse’s work was characterized by principles relevant to architecture and urban design, for Lohse’s paintings showed how the spaces and relations between things were more important than the things alone. In a statement full of implications for architecture and urban design, Lohse said; “It is clear that to overcome the division between programmed theme and undefined area, norm and action must be controlled by a rhythmic principle.”¹⁸ Van Eyck found this same type of spatial pattern in the African weavings and prints he collected during his many trips to Africa starting in 1947, and he held that such patterns allowed the small and the large numbers, the individual and the collective, to be correlated within the same order. From these sources, Van Eyck evolved his concept of “the aesthetics of numbers,” and he saw that Lohse’s patterns, when developed as urban plans, would allow both the identity of the individual and the larger community to be expressed—and in fact to depend on each other—as what Van Eyck called the “twin-phenomena” of many-few, large-small, whole-part, and collective-individual, which could be simultaneously engaged in a design, rather than emphasizing one over the other. [11-12]

In recalling his time in Zurich, Van Eyck stated; “Two of [Lohse’s] paintings in particular have been in my mind as though engraved there, almost since they were made around 1946... Boundless space (in which breathing goes freely) yet firmly contained within the finite surface of two small rectangles—but what bracing rhythm—what rippling multiplication and continuity. Harmony in motion, I called it. Surely the future lies in these beautiful paintings?”¹⁹ The two early paintings, which Van Eyck often showed in lectures on his own work, deserve our close attention. “Konkretion I” of 1946 is composed of a series of eighteen equal-length thin single-color vertical lines, arranged in three different positions across the square board. The vertical lines are joined by small squares aligned in six different positions from bottom to top, constructing both horizontal patterns and a series of interlinked figures that seem to rise and fall as they move from left to right, forming



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Aldo van Eyck, "Aesthetics of Number," in
Ligtelijn and Strauven, op. cit., 56.

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Richard Paul Lohse, from an interview with
Francis Strauven in Zurich, 19 August 1981.

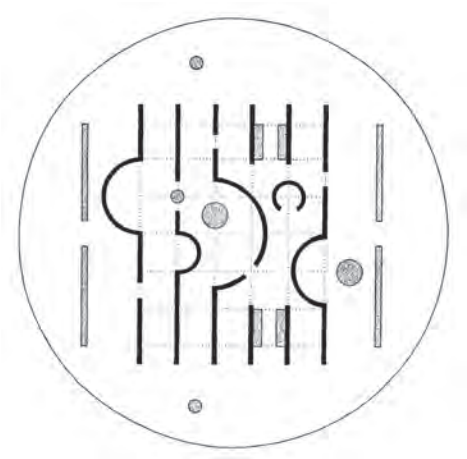
13 Aldo van Eyck, model with roof removed,
"Wheels of Heaven" Church, Driebergen, 1963-64

14 Richard Paul Lohse, *Two rotations around a
center*, 1952-69

strong diagonal tensions on the surface of the painting. “Konkretion III” of 1947 is composed of seven vertical bars spaced equally across the rectangular board and linked by a series of thin horizontal lines, each of which runs across two of the “bays” formed by the vertical bars. Where the thin horizontal lines, in red or green, meet the thicker vertical bars, a color change occurs in the segments of the vertical bars, which are red, green, black and yellow. In this way, despite the predominance of the vertical bar forms, their colored segments, linked to the thin horizontal lines, constructs a surprisingly strong horizontal counterpoint, bringing the painting into a dynamic diagonal balance.

In his statement made at the CIAM 9 conference at Aix-en-Provence in 1953, Van Eyck defined his idea of “the aesthetics of number,” and its relation to urban design: “In order to that we may overcome the menace of quantity now that we are faced with *l’habitat pour le plus grand nombre*, the aesthetics of number, the laws of which I should like to call “Harmony in Motion” must be discovered.” He went on to define this as “theme and its mutation and variation.”²⁰ Yet it was Lohse’s reaction to a design by the architect Jaap Bakema, Van Eyck’s fellow Dutch Team 10 member, which first provoked Van Eyck to formally address the manner in which Lohse evoked diagonal movements within a completely orthogonal geometry. After Bakema presented his first urban design for Pendrecht of 1949 at the CIAM conference on Bergamo, Italy the same year, Lohse told Bakema that he recognized in the plan much of what he was trying to achieve in his own paintings, including the repetition of elements and their composition into themes and variations whose structural patterns “make it possible to expand or contract in every dimension.” Lohse’s characterized his paintings as an attempt to develop a method for future use in architecture and town planning “when land is no longer the property of individuals.”²¹ Bakema published the second, revised 1952 urban design for Pendrecht, which was influenced by Lohse’s paintings, with mention of Lohse’s endorsement, in the Dutch magazine *Forum*. [13-14]

In the same issue of *Forum*, the journal’s editor, Van Eyck, published a photograph of Lohse’s *Konkretion III* of 1947, along with a text by Lohse and a statement of his own, in which Van Eyck indicated precisely what he believed were the important implications of Lohse’s work for urban design: “In search of the further principles of a new form language, the Swiss painter Lohse discovered the aesthetic meaning of number. Imparting rhythm to repetitive similar and dissimilar form, he has managed to disclose the conditions that may lead to the equilibrium of the plural, and thus overcome the menace of monotony. The formal vocabulary with which man has hitherto imparted harmony to singular and particular cannot help him to equilibrate the plural



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Aldo van Eyck, "Lohse and the aesthetic meaning of number," in *Ligtelijn and Strauven*, op. cit., 56.



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Richard Paul Lohse, *New Design in Exhibitions* (Zurich: Erlenbach Verlag für Architektur, 1953), 259.

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Aldo van Eyck, "The City, the Child, and the Artist," *Aldo van Eyck: The Writings*, Volume 2 (Amsterdam: SUN, 2008), 168; this is a rephrasing of Van Eyck's description of Lohse's paintings in the 1952 issue of *Forum*.

15 Aldo van Eyck, floor plan, Sonsbeek Pavilion, Arnhem, 1965-66

16 Richard Paul Lohse, *Ten equal themes in five colors*, 1946/1958

and the general. Man shudders because he believes that he must forfeit the one in favor of the other: the particular for the general, the individual for the collective, the singular for the plural, rest for movement. But rest can mean fixation—stagnation—and movement, as Lohse shows, does not necessarily imply chaos. The individual (the singular) less circumscribed within itself will reappear in another dimension as soon as the general, the repetitive is subordinated to the law of dynamic equilibrium, i.e. harmony in motion. Fearful of the monotony of number, repetitive elements in town planning are often needlessly combined into themes, as though the meaningful rhythmification of a repeating theme were not an even more demanding task—for the time being. The significance of Lohse's work in this process is evident."²²

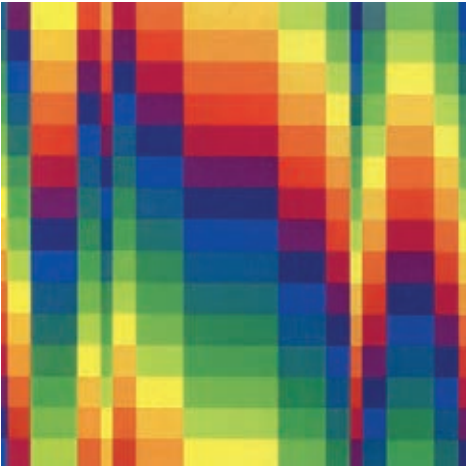
Van Eyck's 1952 article in the Dutch journal *Forum* was one of the first international publications of Lohse's paintings, and in doing so Van Eyck might be said to have "returned the favor" for Lohse's publication of Van Eyck's first project in *Bauen und Wohnen* in 1948. In 1953, Lohse again published Van Eyck's work in his book *New Design in Exhibitions*, a remarkably comprehensive presentation of 75 examples of modern exhibitions from around the world from 1930-51, including four exhibitions of Lohse's own design. In the caption for Van Eyck's entry gateway in the "Rotterdam Ahoy" exhibit, Lohse described the 15-meter by 15-meter, vermillion-colored I-beam structure as "an excellent organization of an area with its methodological plastic realization. Form, construction, and material have become a perfect unit."²³ [15-16]

The ordering principles that Van Eyck developed in his architecture, inspired by Lohse's paintings, included the importance of elements as boundaries defining space, rather than objects in space; the delimitation of space by elementary forms; the search for dynamic space within the orthogonal grid; the creation of a shifting center by use of centrifugal pattern; the establishment of non-hierarchical cohesion between various centers—polycentric orders; variation of themes; point and counterpoint; syncopated rhythm; and the methods by which one could "impart rhythm to repetitive similar and dissimilar form, thereby disclosing the conditions that would lead to the equilibration of the plural, and thus overcome the menace of monotony."²⁴

Lohse argued that concrete art, while non-representational in the traditional sense, was not isolated from society; rather he held that the two-dimensional designs in concrete art were indicative of fundamental structural changes in contemporary society, and he conceived of his pictorial orders as the visualization of radical models of democracy. Lohse came to regard his systematic configurations as an opportunity to allow human insight into the relationship between order and



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- 17 Aldo van Eyck, playground, Zaanhof, Amsterdam, 1948
- 18 Richard Paul Lohse, *Fifteen systematic sequences of colors*, 1956

- 25 Friedrich Heckmanns, "The drawings and character of the artist and his times," Riese and Heckmanns, op. cit., 27-28.
- 26 Richard Paul Lohse, in *Richard Paul Lohse: 1902-1988*, op. cit., 72.
- 27 Heckmanns, *Richard Paul Lohse: Drawings, 1935-1985* (New York: Rizzoli, 1986), 28.

- 28 Richard Paul Lohse, *Serial Systems*, exhibition catalog, Kunstvereine e. V., Braunschweig, 1985; Series 3, 12, 17. Translated by Heckmanns, op. cit.
- 29 Aldo van Eyck, "The fake client and the great word 'no'" in Ligtelijn and Strauven, op. cit., 325.

- 30 Richard Paul Lohse, quoted in Vincent Ligtelijn, *Aldo van Eyck: Works* (Basel: Birkhauser, 1999), 296; original interview published in Dutch in *Niet on het even... wel evenwaardig, van en over Aldo van Eyck* (Amsterdam: Van Gennep, no date), 18.

freedom,²⁵ as well as simultaneously engaging the individual and mass society; “The crowd contains the possibility of the individual.”²⁶ As Friedrich Heckmanns has noted, rather than representing, Lohse’s works were experienced concretely, “not as rationally conceived projection of human behavior, but as means of sensory communication.”²⁷ [17-18]

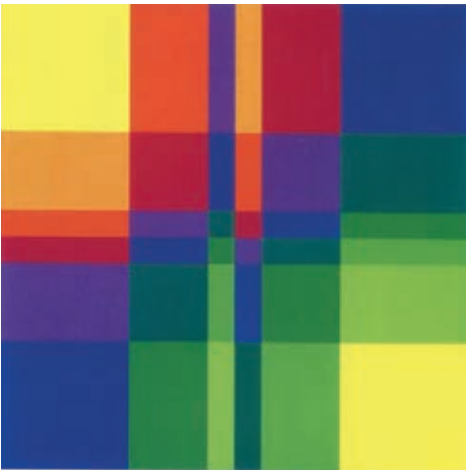
Lohse’s ideas regarding the reciprocal relationship between the arts and society were among the subjects of the “countless discussions” Van Eyck recalled having with Lohse during the forty-six years they knew each other. Articulating their shared commitment to constructive and critical artistic practice, Lohse stated: “In no other forms of art do the means and the methods of a global technological strategy find their legitimate expression in the way they do in constructive, logical, systematic configurations that are a subliminal and critical echo to the structure of civilization... Constructive art exists both rooted in the form of contemporary society and contrary to it. An aesthetic creation is the result of sublimating and criticizing reality.”²⁸ Van Eyck and Lohse shared a deep commitment to a democratic, liberative social structure—yet they also shared the criticisms that contemporary society rarely achieved this ideal; that contemporary life often served to distract people from the search for a better world; and that contemporary society no longer provided a clear pattern for daily life. As Van Eyck asked, “If society has no form, how can architects build the counterform?”²⁹

In an interview late in life, Lohse recalls; “Aldo and I were always talking about the possible relations between art and architecture, about the question whether both involved analogous structures, and to what extent these structures can be identical. It is not possible to transpose Lohse or Mondrian directly into architecture. There is always the danger that this sort of transposition is limited to only the outer, visible picture. Nevertheless, the methods and systems a painter develops may contain possibilities for structural transference. This was the case in, among other places, Holland in the 1920s, when there was a correspondence between the plastic principles of DeStijl painting and tendencies in architecture. There was an identity in the expression of painting and architecture, without Rietveld or Duiker having directly followed Mondrian... Van Eyck always pursued a logical dynamic. In the same way this dynamic arises out of a cohesion of verticality and diagonality in my work. Diagonality was the determining force for Cézanne too, though he did not depict it as such. One can also recognize this sort of dynamic in the work of Van Eyck.”³⁰ [19-20]

Lohse and Van Eyck shared the belief that spatial and formal structure in both art and architecture had the capacity to change the world for the better. As Lohse said in 1982; “Every form of cultural conception is a



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Richard Paul Lohse, "Art in the age of technology," (80th birthday address at Kunsthaus Zurich, 1982), *Richard Paul Lohse: 1902-1988*, op. cit., 75-77.

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Van Eyck, "The radiant and the grim," *Documenta X*, 1997; in Ligtelijn and Strauven, op. cit., 648-49.

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Kenneth Frampton, "Team 10, Plus 20: The Vicissitudes of Ideology" (1975), *Labor, Work and Architecture: Collected Essays on Architecture and Design* (New York: Phaidon, 2002), 144.

- 19 Aldo van Eyck, play terrace, Amsterdam Orphanage, 1955-60
- 20 Richard Paul Lohse, *Six systematic color series with horizontal and vertical concentration*, 1955-69

function of its social basis, each aesthetic form belongs to a conception of life,” and that even though progressive thought “is confronted today with irrationalism and individualism in art and architecture claiming to be simultaneously in opposition to and an expression of the spirit of our times... constructive art is destined in its philosophy and working methods to further our quest of changing society and the environment.”³¹ In one of Van Eyck’s last writings, titled “The radiant and the grim,” he spoke of the avant-garde in the arts of the first half of the 20th century as “the radiant,” with “the grim” being the failure of mainstream modernism of the second half of the 20th century, and the “post-modernist” and “deconstructivist” movements that came in its wake, to come “to terms with vast multiplicity and the menace of uniformity, monotony, and oversize” and to engage both the spiritual legacy of early modernism and the “gathering human experience” of history.³² Due to his anthropologically-grounded attacks on both “the alienating abstraction of modern architecture”³³ and the superficial cynicism of the movements that followed it, as well as his insistence on conceiving architecture as “built homecoming”—with all the ethical responsibilities that implied—Van Eyck may be said to have acted as the conscience of the international architectural profession during the second half of the 20th century. The constructive relationship between Lohse and Van Eyck, which lasted some forty-six years, is exemplary of the other tradition of modern art and architecture, where ordering principles, perceptual insights, and spatial conceptions are shared by those believing in art and architecture’s capacity both to enrich the experiences of everyday life and to make the world a better place.