Cultivated landscapes as new cathedrals

‘I have the same idea with all my books: an attempt to come close to the core of reality, the structure of reality, as opposed to the merely superficial. The realistic novel is remote from art. A novel should heighten life, should give one an illuminating experience; it shouldn’t set out what you know already. I just muddle away at it. One gets flashes here and there, which help. I am not a philosopher or an intellectual. Practically anything I have done of any worth I feel I have done through my intuition, not my mind - which the intellectuals disapprove of.’ (Patrick White)
Cor van Eesteren in a Sikorsky helicopter
during his visit to Brazil in 1958
Cornelis van Eesteren plays an instrumental role in the history of urbanism education in the Netherlands. He is regarded as a modernist, as a counterpart to the more traditional M.J. Granpré Molière. His expansion plans for Amsterdam earned him a reputation even before World War II, but as well as focusing on the IJsselmeer polders, his post-war work also involved modernising urbanism education in Delft. Van Eesteren was the pioneer of a new approach.

After World War II, education on architecture and the built environment at what was then the Technical College of Delft (Technische Hogeschool Delft) needed a radical overhaul. Many new staff were appointed. Although this included several new professors, the power of the old guard, whose most influential exponent was Granpré Molière, Professor of Architecture since 1924, remained undiminished. However, three professors by special appointment were brought in to teach architecture and urban design. These were J.H. van den Broek, Van Eesteren and G.H. Holt. In the weekly magazine De Groene Amsterdammer of 17 January 1948, the famous architect J.J.P. Oud presented his views on this important change. He wrote: ‘Het nieuwe bouwen [the modernist movement in Dutch architecture and construction] eschews pre-existing forms. Rather, it bases itself on the needs and possibilities that arise from the practicalities of everyday life and enables these, as it were, to burst out to create a new form. It develops in an evolutionary way, continually recreating itself. The resulting form takes shape not at the start, but at the end of the design process. This very concept has
hitherto been almost totally alien to the Delft programme and the art Delft has presented to us previously has been visual in nature rather than functional. Giving students freedom is worthless when a view like that at Delft prevails. Just as in the old-style architecture programme, so with the new art of construction the students must be guided according to principle and expertise. This new art of construction cannot be left for the students to solve of their own accord. This will lead to chaos or ... to the Delft School!' As an advocate of a new art of construction, Oud saw the appointment of Van den Broek and Van Eesteren as a positive step towards improving the education on offer. He had his reservations about the appointment of Holt. It is both striking and remarkable that Oud makes no reference to the appointment of Th.K. van Lohuizen at the same institute, despite being well acquainted with his work. Some eight years previously, he had offered his apologies to Van Lohuizen for being unable to attend his public appointment in Amsterdam. ‘I am delighted that you have the opportunity to put your knowledge of and dedication to this field to good use in educating a new generation of urban designers’.

On 11 February 1948, Van Lohuizen gave his inaugural address in Delft where he had been made professor by special appointment in urbanism research at the Technische Hogeschool. Around two months later, on 28 April, C. van Eesteren gave his speech to mark his acceptance of the post of professor by special appointment in urbanism at the same institute. As was customary, both of these
speeches were published. In addition to this Van Lohuizen published his speech as an article in the journal *Tijdschrift voor economische geografie*. Here, in 1940, he had also published his public lesson on the subject of research in urban design, ‘Het wetenschappelijk onderzoek in den stedebouw’, given to mark his appointment as private lecturer at Amsterdam University. He had also sent a copy to the architect Willem van Tijen, who communicated in a letter how much he had enjoyed reading it: ‘It is characteristic of the way in which Urban Design is developing’.

For both professors, giving these speeches not only offered an opportunity to present their thoughts to their future students, but also to bring their ideas to the attention of colleagues within and beyond the institute. It was not only a local but also a national event. However, this impact went no further. Since the addresses were given in the Dutch language, their effect was limited to the Dutch-speaking area, and even there, few reactions were forthcoming. Van Eesteren in particular saw this as a great disadvantage. He had an international reputation and was often approached to act as a consultant or speaker abroad. His archive includes an English translation of both his own speech and that of Van Lohuizen. Van Eesteren’s speech was translated in 1981 by Anneliese Nassuth-Broschmann. As is known, G.S. (Siegfried) Nassuth (1922-2005) and Götz A. Nassuth had been students of Van Eesteren in Delft. On the death of the master, Götz Nassuth published some of his memories in *Archis*. Almost every Dutch post-war urban designer was influenced greatly by
the lessons of Van Eesteren, and this was not confined to urbanists: many architects also felt his influence. As Auke van der Woud rightly points out, Van Eesteren represented an ‘artistic type of urban design’, an attitude that may not place him at the heart of post-war dynamism in the field of urbanism, but that did ensure he was able to open the eyes of many students to the changes that had come about in the fine arts. Van Eesteren was greatly influenced by the pre-war art movements and had friendships with many of the artists.

Although a lot has been written about the life and work of Van Eesteren and a monograph was published about Van Lohuizen, there has been little focus on their teaching. This is strange, because they had a significant influence on the way teaching took place and the archives of both professors include a wealth of information about their work at the Technische Hogeschool. The most remarkable aspect of it is probably the inherent conflict in Van Eesteren’s teaching. He peppered his lectures with references to works of art and the like, but above all he expected his students to do thorough-going research into the origin and development of the towns and cities that he discussed. Photographs, maps, cross-sections, historic maps and other illustrations were used to present a specific subject and the students were also expected to conduct fieldwork. For this purpose, study groups were established that not only included students from his own department, but also students from other disciplines and from other universities. The freedom of the art was bound by the thoroughness of the research. Urban design and planning were
the two poles within the study groups initiated by Van Eesteren and Van Lohuizen. Thanks to their contacts, close collaboration between the different disciplines, the study groups and the municipalities used as case studies was guaranteed. Many municipalities were extremely happy with the students’ work and facilitated it in various ways. When a final report was issued, it would often be presented in the municipality concerned, accompanied by some festivities. Many small towns and villages were closely examined and formed the basis for the compilation of extensive reports and expansion or development plans, complete with comments. It is interesting to note that the major cities were not handled in this way. These were more likely to be the subject of lectures and were a popular destination for excursions. As well as visits to major cities in the Netherlands, foreign cities with international appeal were also included. Van Eesteren’s address reveals that he was not only interested in urban settlements, but also in cultural and other landscapes. In this, he focused primarily on the relationship between villages and small towns and the landscape created by humans. Town and country were inextricably linked. This seems to tie into a pre-war development in Germany that had focused more on natural landscapes and their charm, yet Van Eesteren was primarily interested in cultural landscape shaped by humans.

In his inaugural address, Van Lohuizen did not quote anyone. He did not explore the history of his subject or the work of, for example, Robert E. Park or Ernest W. Burgess, who both highlighted the
value of surveying for urbanists. Van Lohuizen merely touched on problem areas and tried to elucidate on the objectives of his work. His approach was not directly scientific: it was intended to make the subject understandable to his listeners. Van Eesteren adopted a different approach. He referred to modern artists and art movements. He had little fascination for traditional art. Most of his listeners were probably familiar with the names he mentioned. Arp, Mondrian and Van Gogh were all respected artists, especially among the post-war generation. Georges Vantongerloo and Herman Kruyder may have been slightly less well-known, yet Van Eesteren deliberately uses these figures to demonstrate that knowledge of art is of great importance in students’ development. He referred to the work of urbanists to a lesser extent. The exceptions were Fritz Schumacher, Ludwig Hilberseimer and Eliel Saarinen. Van Eesteren had been a great admirer of the first of these since the early 1920s. He was very keen to work with Schumacher and asked the Hamburg-based architect and urban designer for advice on several occasions, as the correspondence in his archive reveals. Schumacher, whose plans for Cologne had earned him great acclaim in the Netherlands, explicitly advised him to focus above all on the organisational aspects of the profession. It is not known whether Van Eesteren was also familiar with Schumacher’s theoretical writings. He had certainly read his memoirs. According to Van Eesteren, the new districts that Schumacher had designed for Hamburg were similar to those that had been established in Amsterdam. ‘They both had broadly the same virtues and shortcomings’.
Van Eesteren also paid attention to Ludwig Hilberseimer. The reasons for this can be found in the latter’s book *Leaves of Grass*, that starts with an excerpt from Walt Whitman’s poem of the same name. This is followed by an introduction by Mies van der Rohe. It includes the following: ‘He [Hilberseimer] knows that cities must serve life, that their validity is to be measured in terms of life, and that they must be planned for living. He understands that the forms of cities are the expression of existing modes of living, that they are inextricably bound up with these, and that they, with these, are subject to change. He realizes that the material and spiritual conditions of the problem are given, that he can exercise no influence on these factors in themselves, that they are rooted in the past and will be determined by objective tendencies for the future’. These words could almost have been written by Van Eesteren. He attempted to make the very same point in his speech. Just like Hilberseimer, Van Eesteren believed that urban designers of the early 20th century had become aware of their responsibility for society. In the words of van Hilberseimer: ‘Then the growing recognition of the forces shaping intellectual, social and economic and technical changes was definitely brought into the field of city planning to effect there significant and lasting concepts. City planning became a science. Man came to realize that, like any other science, it is rational and must be mastered in all its phases’. At times you could almost hear Hilbersheimer’s words echoed within the speech by Van Eesteren. The fact that Hilbersheimer’s book ends with an allusion to the relationship to landscape by citing the examples of Versailles, Karlsruhe and
Bath would certainly have appealed to Van Eesteren, partly because it was one of the themes that he had raised in his letters to Schumacher. Schumacher had recommended that he visit some parks in England. Hilbersheimer also had an interest in an artistic approach to urban design and asserted: ‘Only by mastering the technical means can the city planner realize his aims with artistic freedom. This freedom must be always linked with the useful and the necessary’.

By contrast to Hilberseimer, for Van Eesteren modern art was an important factor in reaching a kind of freedom. This was something he was particularly eager to impress on his students. For him, it was about perpetuating the artistic influences to enable them to serve as symbols of a new reality. They sharpen our sensory perceptions. He left the more scientific approach to the surveyor and others. In this, he bears great similarities with another urban designer who interested him: Eliel Saarinen. Saarinen wanted to draw a distinction between town planning and town design, favouring the latter. ‘Town-planning’ – he wrote – ‘has gradually become surrounded by an aureola of insipidity due to the degrading effect of superficial practice. In our analysis, therefore, at least as far as the three-dimensional conception of the physical city is concerned, the word “planning” has been avoided in all cases where misunderstanding could have arisen. It is a word which implies a vapid dryness, just the same as does a stereotyped street map laid out on paper as a mere utilitarian pattern of intercommunication. Therefore, to avoid misunderstanding, the word “design” was preferred. It implies that civic organization must spring from wells deeper than
the utilitarian purpose only’. It is impossible to underestimate the importance to Van Eesteren of Saarinen’s sparsely-illustrated book. Many of the ideas and concepts that Saarinen raised recur in Van Eesteren’s speech. Saarinen ignored the connection with the other arts but highlighted what Van Eesteren saw as the problems of the modern city and the lack of leadership, or what Saarinen referred to as ‘proper counsel’. Van Eesteren would certainly have agreed with his view that ‘it is most important to understand more than has been so far understood, that past methods of town-building are not valid anymore, and that present and future methods must be based on entirely new premises. And these new premises can and must be found only in and through the existing difficulties’.14

It is not surprising that Van Eesteren mentioned Sigfried Giedion in his speech. The two had been acquainted for many years and their work within the C.I.A.M. (Congrès internationaux d’architecture moderne) often coincided. Giedion was the secretary and Van Eesteren the president. During his stay in the United States, Giedion had written Space, Time and Architecture, a standard work in many architecture schools. He was seen as ‘a milestone in modern thought’.15 Giedion saw history not as a collection of facts but as insight into the dynamic and ever-changing process of life. He sought a new tradition that would also take account of urban design. ‘The virtues and defects of various types of cities – governmental centres, sea ports, factory towns – cannot be compared, simply because there has been no steady and unified research’.16 Giedion had a
strong belief in progress, although the Second World War would put a dampener on that to some extent. Van Eesteren was probably also eager to see this book being used in Delft as an introduction for students to the history of architecture. Giedion actually supported the very same developments as Van Eesteren and also drew connections between architecture, urban design and the fine arts. Giedion would even devote a chapter to ‘Van Eesteren’s idea of the town planner’.17

From the speeches it can be ascertained that Van Lohuizen and Van Eesteren worked successfully together. They had already laid the foundations for this when working on the Amsterdam General Expansion Plan (Algemeen Uitbreidingsplan van Amsterdam).18 The fact that both were appointed at Delft proved to be a lucky choice, despite Van Eesteren’s initial dissatisfaction with his appointment and its duration. Following some disagreement with the director of the department, M.J. Granpré Molière, Van Eesteren announced his willingness to accept the appointment on 18 July 1947, although not yet all of his objections had been met. After the professors H. Rosse, L.O. Wenckebach and H.T. Zwiers, none of whom were representatives of the most progressive movement in their discipline, visited Van Eesteren, he wrote a letter to the department arguing that the ‘movement expressed in Nieuwe Bouwen (...) must have such representation, that the potential that lies within Nieuwe Bouwen can effectively be brought out. Only then will it be possible to achieve a genuine interplay of insights and growth of ideas’. His main issue
was that the department initially intended to offer him a temporary appointment for five academic years only. For Van Lohuizen, that was not the case. As well as working at other universities, he had contributed to an urbanism course in 1942, for which he taught research methods. (J.H. Froger was responsible for urban design at that time). The particularly complementary collaboration between Van Lohuizen and Van Eesteren meant that their joint arrival in Delft laid the foundations for a new way of teaching, in which, alongside lectures, students worked primarily in study groups supervised by various professors.

Van Eesteren began to give lectures in the autumn of 1948. On 5 November, he spoke of the ‘use of moderation and scale in connection with the street plan’ and a week later raised the issue of ‘De Stedebouwkundige Ruimte’ (Urban design space). The subject of villages came in the spring. For this, he made use of the report issued by urbanism consultancy ‘Instituut Stad en Landschap van Zuid Holland’ on the subject of Alblasserdam, Hardinxveld and Lekkerkerk. He also explored the villages in the north-eastern polder, including Nagele and Nieuwe Tonge. An excursion to Schiphol was also included in the programme. The choice of subjects was anything but random. Van Eesteren knew very well which areas to tackle and where future problems lay. The relationship between the village and landscape was a particularly frequent subject, not only in his lectures but also in his study groups. His arguments were often coloured by personal experience. After taking a study trip to Copenhagen
with Van Lohuizen, he immediately incorporated his impressions in a lecture. For most of his lectures, he drew up a rough structure that he fleshed out with an argument.

The establishment of the multidisciplinary study groups mentioned previously was a particularly important innovation. These involved various professors from within and beyond Delft together with students of various disciplines. In the academic year 1949/1950, Gorkum was the subject. Van Eesteren argued that he had good experiences with this course and wished to address Leerdam or Breda in the following year. He intended the work not only to result in reports that could be collected, but also in exhibitions, ‘possibly to mark institute anniversaries’. Breda became the chosen subject. This was followed by Apenberg, Goor/Rijssen, Markeloo, Bergen op Zoom, Weesp, Steenwijk, Purmerend, Kuilenberg, Hattem, Doesburg and Hardewijk. Many students attended these courses, including both Nassuth brothers, who participated in the Bergen op Zoom study group in 1952. This group was led by the professors H.G. van Beusekom, J.H. Froger, P.P. Jansen, Van Lohuizen and Van Eesteren. Siegfried Nassuth served as Van Eesteren’s assistant. Van Eesteren’s lectures had a great impression on Götz Nassuth. Van Eesteren had a penchant for using visual illustrations. ‘The images and associated text each formed an independent information link within a chain, whose cohesion was to be gleaned from the context of the lecture. An important factor that contributed to this approach was his express desire not to be a theoretician. This meant that, during
the lectures, one needed to have the theory that formed the basis of the narrative to hand in order to be able to contextualise the flow of verbal and visual impressions and fully understand the result. All of this led to the fact that no lecture notes were ever published of Van Eesteren’s work.\textsuperscript{20} Despite this, a transcript of a lecture does appear in Van Eesteren’s archive, dating from February 1952, when Nassuth was a student of Van Eesteren. In this lecture on the subject of ‘Design and recreation sites’ he had hung up maps and photographs. ‘Objects of recreation are examples of living matter. Everything is in motion (...) We need to experience it to the full.’\textsuperscript{21}

For the fieldwork, the students could fall back on the teaching of Van Lohuizen. He covered such themes as residential district, population, traffic, income sources, etc. Research methods were also explained. Statistics were an important tool for him. Although Van Lohuizen was no lover of statistics, he accepted them as an invaluable resource, since ‘figures are the symbols of life itself. Statistics are not only an analysis of what exists, projection into the future is also possible.’\textsuperscript{22} Van Lohuizens’ teaching
came to an end on 9 December 1956, when he died following a brief illness. Van Eesteren gave a speech at his funeral, very much appreciated by the family because it depicted such a vibrant portrait of the deceased. ‘At home, withdrawn, gentle and friendly and quietly thinking and working – here, the strong contours of creative work and human attachments’, his wife confirmed. The warm words were a testament to a close friendship. ‘You, the apparently exclusive and – as precise as possible – deliberative researcher, embodied for us the understanding of the rich wealth and plenitude of life in the city and in the countryside. Your probing mediation brought us an awareness of the nature, being, function etc. - characteristic and visible expressions of this life’. His research did not have a ‘cooling influence’. Quite the contrary, it was of enormous value. ‘In the study groups that embodied your passion and came about above all at your initiative, interdisciplinary collaboration is spontaneously and continuously put into practice’. According to Van Eesteren, they approached their teaching ‘like two brothers sharing the same trade’.
After the death of Van Lohuizen, Van Eesteren continued to supervise the study groups to the same extent, but had lost a fellow traveller and the atmosphere at the institute gradually began to change. Contact with students mainly took the form of his consultation hours, where he took time to discuss their papers. He carefully updated his diary and assistance and assessment timetables. In December 1959, he gave lectures on the ‘history and background of the C.I.A.M.’. Although he often referred back to comments from his inaugural speech, the C.I.A.M. had never been the subject of a separate lecture. He did this now in response to the recently-published issue of the journal *Forum*, in which Aldo van Eyck had published his ‘story of another idea’. He wanted to illustrate his own origins and emphasise the benefits of the C.I.A.M. since he believed that the views of Van Eyck and others failed to do justice to reality. Van Eesteren argued: ‘The FORUM issue again addresses the matter intuitively. Now it is time for the reality. A city is something very real’. In February, he was invited by Van den Broek to a ‘commentary lecture’ to discuss and clarify his ideas. He faced quite a battle. Nic. Tummers, Jean Leering and Pjotr Gonggrijp turned against the views of Van Eesteren, whom they saw as stubborn and outdated. He defended himself by pointing out that ‘analysis does not cause analytical settlements. The problem is not analysis itself, but becoming bogged down in it’. However, in the subsequent commentary lectures, the fierceness of the attacks intensified. Herman Hertzberger and Jelle Jelles also joined in the debate. The former argued: ‘The madness starts when the individual and the collective are
Community cannot exist unless they come together. The meaning of the individual is lost in the new districts. FORUM has highlighted that there is something wrong here. The kasbah is cited as a possibility.’ Van den Broek joined in and retorted: ‘Our residential construction is like an off-the-peg industry. Individual people create their environments through paintings, furniture, colour. The kasbah is something invented’. Van Eesteren introduced the next session and spoke about the pre-parcelling of land. He concluded: ‘Architecture reaches up to the door knob: everything according to its nature and place in the community’, but ‘as an architect, one must not even begin building in a plan if one cannot engage with the vision of the urban designer.’ Hertzberger, who had just graduated, felt the need to explain his views to Van Eesteren and wrote a long letter to do so. In it, he alludes to a ‘grandiose misunderstanding’. ‘It is (or has become) clear to me from the various reactions to what appears to have been dubbed the “Forum idea” that, to use your own words, through the door that we have only placed on the latch, all kinds of unsavoury individuals are attempting to enter; even trying to get a foot in the door; people who have never seen or felt anything, and are now claiming that they had always predicted this “story”, despite the fact they have no idea what they are talking about because they have hardly anything to say’. He admits that he knew very little about the C.I.A.M.: ‘But it is a pity that you are only now openly talking about this subject in Delft, when the ship is in peril or has even sunk’. Opinions became increasingly divided. The advocates of an autonomous architecture and the proponents of the
Van Eyck ‘story ’became opposite poles. Hertzberger wrote bitterly: ‘It is not only extremely difficult to shape and formulate your thoughts, but even harder to present things in such a way that they are not seized upon like prey by the wrong groups, making it almost impossible to discuss these things, because they cannot even talk, never mind engage in a discussion.’ The letter from the young Hertzberger foreshadowed the changing climate in the department. The accord among the students – if it ever existed – had vanished and conflicts began to emerge. Students who wanted to develop grand projects – such as Henri Hulsbosch at the Weena in Rotterdam, or Frans van der Werf with his corridor city between Arnhem and Nijmegen, could turn to Van Eesteren. He also continued to invest a lot of energy into the study groups, but this way of graduating was slowly phased out and replaced by a less individual approach and by the so-called ‘vertical workshops’, in which students from various years had to work together.

Although they had initially appeared to be successful, the study groups came under pressure in the 1960s. Democratisation began to take its toll and there were demands for greater consultation. In 1960, Van Eesteren supervised a study group that included D.H. Frieling, J. Kristinsson, M.F.Th. Bax, G. Smienk, A. Cahen and several others. The object of their study was Papendrecht. Within the study groups, Van Eesteren was able to keep the peace. As long as he could continue his work in urbanism education, there were no problems. However, issues did arise when he began to move outside
his specialist field and become involved in architecture. This does not mean that he had no interest in the work of the architecture students, but he sensed a lack of understanding on their part. He did not avoid confrontation and often reflected on the problems he had with students. This comes across most strongly in the frank letter that he wrote in January 1968 to Pjotr Gonggrijp. Gonggrijp had been part of the study group on the subject of Baarn and was about to graduate. Van Eesteren was already retired, but continued to supervise students’ graduation. He wrote: ‘My dear Gonggrijp. I am captivated by your efforts and your work and repeatedly wonder what causes the anti-climax in our conversations. I think I can put this into words. You are looking for the form and structure of an occupation environment. Actually part of the western Netherlands. For that, you find frames of reference in the landscape: geological, historical or otherwise. You raise important psychological considerations. All of these are of a primary nature and significance. I am enthusiastic about the result with regard to these frames of reference. You then present your design sketches and – the enthusiasm disappears. (…) I wonder what could be causing this. Your method and working style? No, they are fine. So what could it be? In my opinion, the cause lies in the fact that you do not yet know about several co-determinant environmental factors, but still attempt to evoke a complete picture. You also need to explore and know about those factors, as you have about what I just mentioned. Things like traffic and transport, the way people live, production and services, physical cultures and relaxation. Urbanism enables all environmental
factors to be integrated in order to achieve a maximum quality, both in terms of function and with regard to expression, atmosphere and so on, in other words as a work of art. Assuming that this is of interest to you, I would like to share ideas about it with you. As stated, I would like to find a not too challenging task in the western Netherlands where these as yet untreated factors will be easy to identify. I would like to do this partly in order to achieve your aim and also enable you to graduate in the near future. Letters of this kind pay testament to the humanity and openness with which the professor engaged with others. He did not hide behind intellectualism but was approachable to all. This same attitude is expressed in a letter that he wrote in 1974 to the secretary Veraart when she was leaving. Van Eesteren praises her energy and looks back on his own position within the department. ‘I remember it as if it was yesterday – how you solved a furniture-purchasing problem simply by ordering factory furniture (...) I think it was because one or more professors who wanted to design their own had failed to deliver. (...) You simply believed that members of the department ultimately – it was around 1949 – should simply be able to sit like normal people. I was one of the few professors who went along to the Gorkumse – Stylos – Hugo de Groot – Loevestein event; standing on a horse-drawn cart – packed together and holding onto each other to avoid falling off – we rode through crowds towards the town hall’. To attend, he had had to let down his friend Giedion who was giving a lecture to mark the anniversary of the study association. He also explains how he ended up in Delft. ‘My appointment was (...) not a straightforward
matter in the department. Although when I entered, Molière said: Van Eesteren, I oppose your appointment, but now you have been placed in our circle and accepted, you are “zeen”\(^{24}\) to me – a comment that I of course appreciated and saw as positive. At the start, efforts were made to keep me confined to my remit, as a professor by special appointment. Van Lohuizen refused to play that game. He saw in me a partner who could realise his ideas and desires. Just think of his inaugural address on the loneliness of working in urbanism (“De eenheid van het stedebouwkundig werk”). Our very first study group proved to be a success. With hindsight, this heralded a new phase of education. In fact, my significance for education and for the students was purely that of a normal professor; even in terms of scope. Van Eesteren always had issues with the fact that he had been brought in ‘by special appointment’ and remained so. However: ‘All in all, my experience in the department was very positive, especially when I think of the teaching, the students, the staff and some colleagues, including, as I said, Van Lohuizen, but also Zwiers, Kist, Wegener Sleeswijk, Hammacher and later some of the younger ones’. It had already been seven years since he had left the department. He gave his valedictory lecture on 9 June 1967. De Telegraaf newspaper reported that ‘the man who gave Amsterdam its face’ had taken his leave.\(^{25}\) There was no mention of his significance for Delft. His valedictory lecture had a more sombre tone than that of his inaugural address. He believed that there needed to be a dramatic increase in student numbers in order to be able to tackle the problems. Van Eesteren had educated countless students
and often helped them find employment by writing testimonials.26 His valedictory lecture made hardly any reference to art or artists, but he quoted Lewis Mumford: ‘The first step in a proper plan is to initiate an impartial investigation into what would be ideal. Once this is known, it needs to be realised within the structure of a large framework such as the urban district’. Van Eesteren added that this essential structure of landscapes and settlements had largely been destroyed. The task for the future was to enable a resurgence of these structures.27 He had moved from an approach with a strong focus on art and art history to Mumford’s more sociologically and philosophically shaped perspective.28 A year later, Van Eesteren was awarded the David Roëll prize by the Prince Bernhard Fund for his services to urban design.29

Herman van Bergeijk

Van Lohuizen was on the payroll of the municipal housing service (Gemeentelijke Woningdienst), then run by Oud, where he worked on surveys for the expansion plans.

See letter from J.J.P. Oud to Van Lohuizen, dated 24 January 1940, in HNI, Archief Van Lohuizen.


See letter, dated 13 February 1940 in Archief Van Lohuizen. Van Tijen adds: I was very impressed by the quality of the articles on the subject in the journal V. & S. I was also particularly taken by the Slotermeer plan. If it succeeds, it will be a real achievement. Something like this engenders confidence, even in impatient and sceptical people like me’.

Nevertheless, Van Eesteren received some stern criticism from writer and friend Til Brugman. In a long letter, she wrote: “You take things as your basis and go from there to people. Whereas I go from people to things. (…) Ultimately all work starts for the sake of people. That point cannot be made clearly enough, especially to students. Perhaps you will find it strange that I place the emphasis in this way, because you will say: all construction – it cannot be clearer, because without people it itself does not exist – is based on people. But it also needs to be SAID’. She believed that he should take the human connection as his starting point.

In a letter to Van Eesteren, dated 16 March 1981, she refers to the translation. We have used this translation and amended it only if there were obvious errors in it. These mainly related to the translation of the quotations.


Ibidem, p. 143.


Ibidem, pp. 816-817.


G.A. Nassuth, ‘Herinneringen aan Van Eesteren’, in: Archis, 1988, no. 4, p. 5. In the Van Eesteren archive, there are however various sets of lecture notes transcribed by other people.


23 For these letters, see: HNI, Archief Van Eesteren, EEST VI 136.

24 Zeen = a fibre, a sinew.

25 'De man die Amsterdam zijn aangezicht gaf. Prof. Van Eesteren neemt afscheid van de T.H. Delft', in: De Telegraaf, 10 June 1967, p. 9. On the same day, the Nieuwsblad van het Noorden newspaper made reference to his departure in a brief article entitled 'Prof. C. van Eesteren: Stad is caricatuur van de menselijke nederzettingen'.

26 He not only wrote testimonials for students, but also for others. These occasionally included his own characteristic views. In a testimonial letter about Zwaantinus Naber, urban designer in Emmen who was applying in 1951 to an engineering consultancy in Bandung, he wrote that Naber was highly competent, but also "niggling" and difficult to get along with. He obviously wanted Naber to remain in Emmen.


29 See also: N. Tummers, 'Cornelis van Eesteren. Bescheiden figuur met veel kwaliteiten', in: Cobouw, 22 November 1968; R. Blijstra, 'Van Eesteren ijverde a vroeg voor “leefbare” stadswi- jken', in Dordrechts Nieuwsblad, 15 November 1968. The same article was also published on the same day in the Haagse Courant. Blijstra had been a member of the judging panel.