



The architect has never been very human. Throughout history he has occupied himself with pyramids, temples, cathedrals, palaces, and office buildings. He has existed more to honor and celebrate the established order of the few, than to stimulate better conditions for the many: more servant of the oppressors than of the oppressed.

Whenever the architect effectively determines the environment of people on a large scale and gives it form in word and deed, he in fact contributes, as is continually being demonstrated, to the perpetuation and extension of a world where everything is too cold and too large: a grim underworld of gravestone skyscrapers, of empty squares and smooth, rejecting, untouchable walls between the asphalt that is spewed out as a choking crust over steadily enlarging areas of our towns. This whole misformed world is little more than a gigantic storage system where nobody really feels at home and everybody is an outsider. This is a no man's land from which none of us can extricate himself. It is a world of alienation.

The starting point for the design of housing is a collective interpretation by a few of the individual wishes of many, a conception formed by authorities, investors, sociologists, and architects about what people want. This conception can never be more than a stereotype to which perhaps everyone seems by and large to conform and no one person really does.

Every society is for the individual a basic given pattern to which he is subsidiary. Everyone is doomed to be the person he wants the others to see. That is the price that the individual pays to society in order to remain an insider. And so he is simultaneously possessor of and possessed by a collective pattern of behavior. Everything that is organized for people and fixed up for them will, even with the best of intentions, be experienced as imposed from above and cannot therefore be adapted and annexed by them. The boundless fear that whatever is left to itself will lead to chaos continues to gain priority, while it is in fact the conflicts and the resolving of them that are the essential function of society.

The idea of ever being able to start off with a clean slate is absurd, and moreover, disastrous when, under the pretext of its being necessary to start completely from the beginning, what already exists is destroyed so that the naked space can be filled up with impractical and sterile constructions.

Several years ago I was asked to design a new library building on the site of a well-preserved 19th-century neo-Gothic church. Rather than demolish this perfectly usable and rather unique given, we decided to design the new building as

an extension of the old. My insistence on preserving the church cost us the job. When we do away with what has gone before us, pay no attention to what we still possess, and thus make no use of the accumulation of images at our disposal, we nip the possibility of renewal in the bud.

We could assume, as many do, that all of what architects do is unnecessary, since people left to themselves could provide for their own needs better than we can if only we give them the room. One need only consider the conditions under which people live (or subsist) all over the world; everywhere it has been the people themselves who, without even a minimum of outside help, have gone on making of the given conditions what could be made of them. But would this not be to abuse the inventions and apparently limitless adaptability with which people, however confined their circumstances, make do with the impossible, making the unusable useful and the uninhabitable habitable?

Changing the world is a step-by-step process. A revolution is nothing more than the sum total of infinitely many small pieces which must be fitted together, one by one like a gigantic jigsaw puzzle. Any of these steps can only occur as a change of attitude, a self-generating process enveloping the whole of society. Like everybody else, architects can contribute and maybe add a few pieces which fit into the great puzzle. Architects must not just



show what is possible; they must show what should be possible for everyone. Everything that we make has to offer a helping hand to the people to let them become more intimate with their surroundings, with each other, and with themselves. It has to do with making shoes that fit instead of pinch.

The more somebody is personally able to influence his surroundings, the more involved and attentive he becomes, and also the more likely he will be to give them his love and care. However devotedly we may carry out our work, we can never match objects with people as exactly as

when they do it by themselves and for each other by way of the love and care which can arise between them.

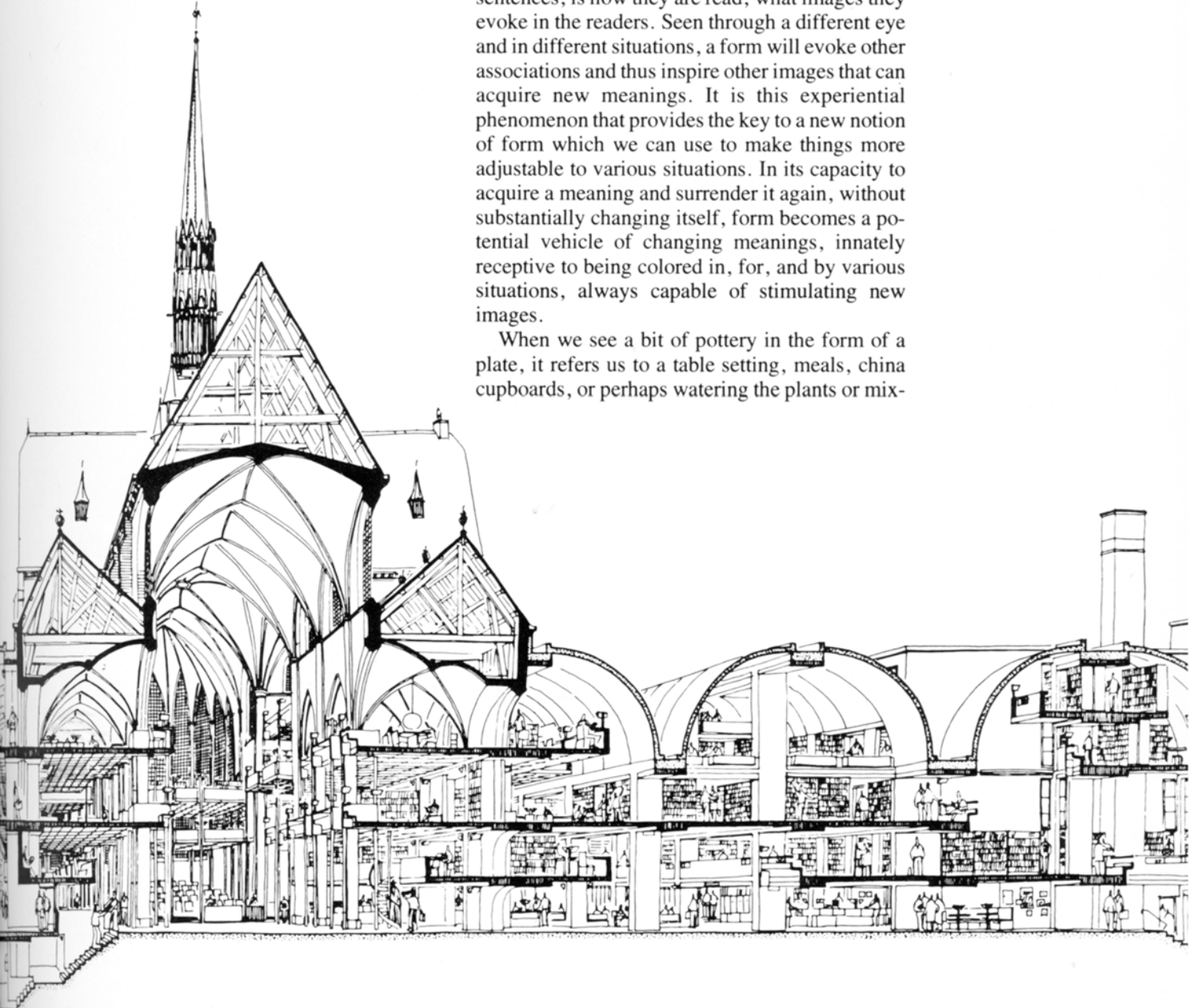
The task of the architect is to free in the users themselves whatever they think they need by evoking images in them which can lead to their own personally valid solutions.

We proposed to convert the neo-Gothic church in Groningen, Holland, into a university library by weaving the older structure into the newer one.

Form: The Vehicle of Changing Meanings

What matters with forms, just as with words and sentences, is how they are read, what images they evoke in the readers. Seen through a different eye and in different situations, a form will evoke other associations and thus inspire other images that can acquire new meanings. It is this experiential phenomenon that provides the key to a new notion of form which we can use to make things more adjustable to various situations. In its capacity to acquire a meaning and surrender it again, without substantially changing itself, form becomes a potential vehicle of changing meanings, innately receptive to being colored in, for, and by various situations, always capable of stimulating new images.

When we see a bit of pottery in the form of a plate, it refers us to a table setting, meals, china cupboards, or perhaps watering the plants or mix-



The cracked dinner plates Gaudi used to face the Parc Guell terrace walls are no longer just china but have also become building material.



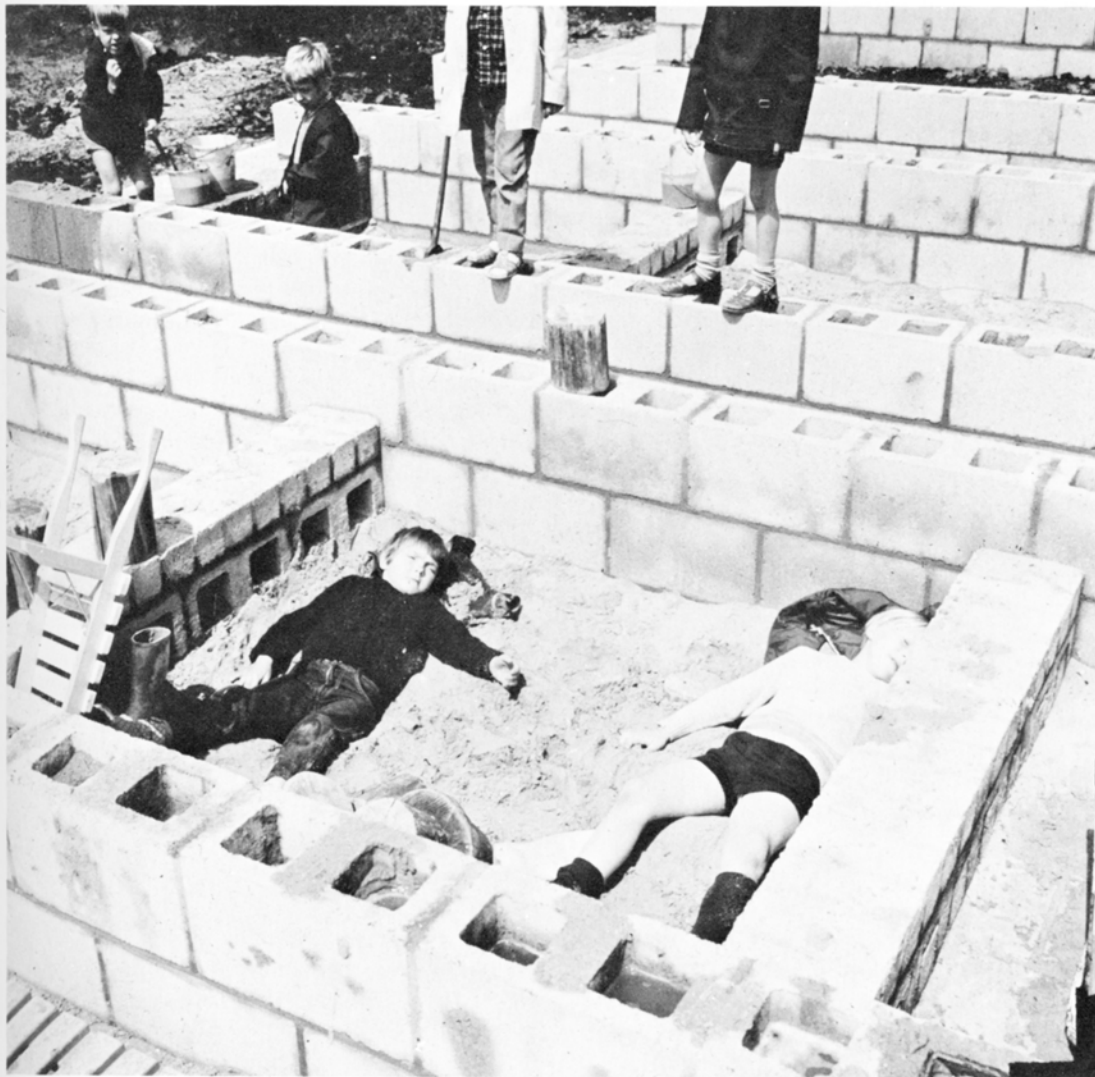
ing watercolors, depending on our aims and intentions. The fragmented plates which Gaudi has used to tile the curved terrace walls in the Parc Guell in Barcelona break through the accepted pottery images and become building material. A plate in fragments is no longer a unit on its own. Each distinct fragment, like its neighbors, becomes an accessory to the wall as a building stone. The old image is strong enough to survive even when broken. But it mingles with the other image, that of the wall, permitting the form to be read in different ways. The result is both ambiguity and plurality in the elementary sense, the beginning of another understanding of form. These plates are the once and for all expression of an artist's imagination. The process is irreversible; we can never again eat from them, we cannot sell them to an antiques dealer, and there is no need to anyway.

Forms with a too strongly defined purpose are too strongly committed. What is expected of the user and what is or is not permitted has already

been too clearly worked out, leaving the user subsidiary to the form and to the implicit assignment it suggests.

Designing ought to mean a better disciplining of the material with an eye to getting more in return for your money. Everything that is given a deliberate form should be appropriate for the job that's expected of it by different people, in different situations, at different moments, and in endless retake.

One might assume that we only have to make unemphatic empty cartridges, as neutral as possible, so as to allow the occupants optimal freedom to fulfill their specific wants. However paradoxical it may seem, it is highly questionable whether such a degree of freedom might not have a paralyzing effect. It is like the sort of menu that offers such an endless array of dishes that, instead of making you hungry, dulls your appetite. When too many possibilities are offered, the choice you would make gets lost in the melee of all the other



Instead of the usual big sandpit in this Montessori School, the walls have been used to divide up the space into a large number of very small rooms in which the children can play.

possible choices; we could then speak of "freedom noise."

Unlimited freedom may hold great potential, but there is no spark to start the motor. The central point here is that people, in their dependence on themselves and on each other, and the fundamental limitation that this means, cannot free themselves from the systems of significations and the underlying systems of values and valuation by which they are confined without being given a helping hand. Everyone needs an incitement, a helping hand, to motivate and stimulate him to fit his environment to himself and make it his own. These instigators must be so designed that they summon up images in everyone which, through being significantly projected, lead to associations which stimulate an individual use, that is, precisely the use he had need of in his particular situation. The more associations something evokes, the more people and the more of their personal situations will be able to resonate with it.

The Architect's Musée Imaginaire of Forms

The main difficulty in architecture is that in order to present raw material containing intentions which will accommodate the users, you have to know as the architect what will or will not be evocative for them. For each thing you want to make, you have to summon up by yourself all images of all the users and integrate these as intentions in what you present. And what other way is there to achieve this than by putting yourself in the other's place. What holds for everyone in general holds for the architect also in the professional sense, namely, he must look well and listen well. For the tools which matter to him are not his ruler and set of compasses, but above all his eyes and ears.

At Centraal Beheer all entrances are main entrances. This is one of them.

When we are designing, we have to explore our memory continuously for all the experiences that can be brought to bear on what we are making. What we create can be different from, but never more than, what has become part of ourselves as experience. By referring each one back to its fundamentally unchangeable ingredients, we then try to discover what our images have in common and find thus the cross section of the collection, the unchangeable, underlying element of all the examples which in its plurality can be the form-generating point.

Many people believe that the dilemma implicit in the subjectivity of our imaginative faculty can be resolved by shifting the emphasis to scientific research, that this is the source of more objective information on human needs. But since such research methodologically starts from a hypothesis, the audacity—or lack of it—of the hypothesis will dictate the limits of the result. We cannot get around the difficulty or escape our dependence on subjective experience in this way.

The only available escape from the fundamental limitations of our imaginative faculty lies in directing our attention more to the experiences we all have in common, the collective memory, some of it innate, some of it transmitted and acquired, which in one way or another must be at the base of our common experiential world. It can be likened to the relationship between language and speech. We each use language in our own way; as long as we keep more or less within the framework of recognized declensions and rules and use recognizable words, the message comes across. Indeed we can assume an underlying objective structure of forms which we will call “arch-forms,” a derivative of which is what we get to see in a given situation. The whole *musée imaginaire* of forms can then be conceived of as an infinite variety out of which people help themselves, in constantly changing variation, to forms which in the end refer back to the fundamentally unchangeable and underlying reservoir of arch-forms.

Making something new each time would not only be useless, but impossible anyway. What is possible is to present the same in such a way that something else can be read into it.

A Question of Finding the Right Size

The world which is regulated by a person himself, and not for him, will be smaller. It will be built from small dimensions of workable units no larger than a person or group needs and can devotedly

care for on his or their own. Each unit will be more intensively used and therefore shown to the best advantage. Articulation thus leads to “increased capacity,” which means a greater return on the available material, or getting by with less material by using it more intensively. Everything has to have its right size, and this is the measure necessary to its being employed as completely as possible. And if we are to make things no bigger than necessary and no bigger than is handy and usable, this will amount to having to make almost everything much smaller.

It is a question of the right dimensions, placing, beat, interval—the right articulation—that things and people offer each other. Irregularities such as differences in level and unevenness of the building line occur frequently. Instead of trying hard to iron them out, we should direct ourselves to forming them consciously in such a way that they can be exploited. Walls, posts, bars, and gutters are also devices of articulation and can all form an increased capacity for adhesion. They can be used as primitive elements of what we could call the basic grammar of the architect. In their diverse outward forms they are constant incentives for use in daily life.

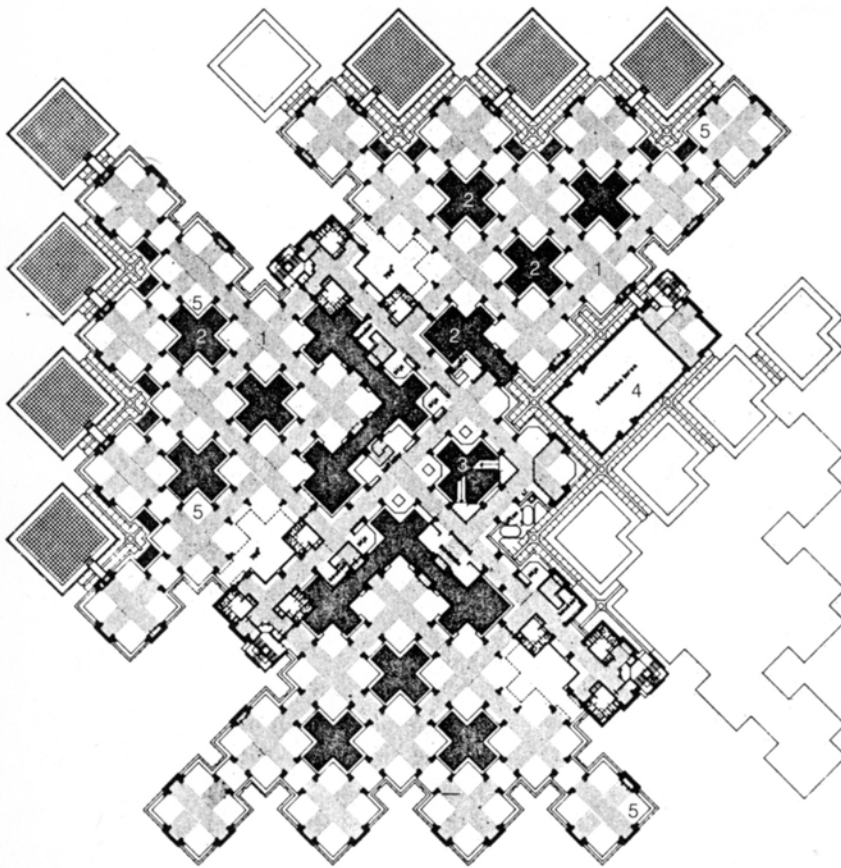
However far the designer goes, it is the occupants who go on to put the finishing touches to a building once they have taken it over, constantly changing and renewing it and constantly taking more complete possession of it. They interpret the building in their own way. The more diverse the ways in which the building allows for completion, the more people there will be who can feel at home in it. For the office building of Centraal Beheer the question was to make a working place where everybody would feel at home—in fact, a house for 1,000 people.

Centraal Beheer

Centraal Beheer is a cooperative insurance company headquarters designed in 1973. The bulk of its activity is the routine clerical work necessary for processing claims, receiving payments, and so on. Formerly housed in ordinary speculative offices in Amsterdam, it was plagued by high rents and a high staff turnover which were alleviated by the move to the new building with its high proportion of social amenities in Apeldoorn.

The building can be divided geographically into four quadrants, three of which contain the office spaces, with a “wingspread” of central area in between. The working spaces are large rooms, continuous yet articulated in such a way that a group or individual can appropriate a com-





Above: Typical floor plan of
Centraal Beheer.

1. Circulation
2. Voids
3. Central wingspread
4. Mechanical services
5. Typical workstations

Opposite page, left: Four
possible office furniture ar-
rangements.

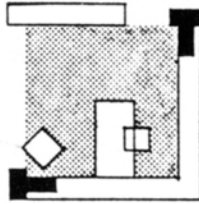
Opposite page, right: The es-
sential incompleteness of the
building, the grayness, and
the bare concrete are colored
in by the inhabitants.

prehensive place for himself. The open relationship with floors below as well as above gives a certain feeling of belonging. The voids are breathing space, the built-in margin that prevents overcrowding. The basic 3 by 3 meter (10 by 10 feet) space forming the corner of each main element, or "island," can accommodate from one to four workstations. It is defined by a pair of substantial T-columns, by a low block wall on the edge of a void, and by deep downturned beams lining the "corridor" walls (and enclosing the mechanical ducts). The offices are both higher and brighter than the adjacent circulation areas, serving to further heighten the sense of place. This arrangement forms the frame of reference and starting point for the initiative of the users; precisely because the organization of the whole has been done for them, the users can devote themselves entirely to the things which especially matter to them. As far as the individual workstation is concerned, the simple facts of choosing one's own lighting and desk type and having the possibility to dress it up however one likes in an ad-hoc fashion with flowers, plants, posters, and what-have-you allow one to take possession of the space. It is the fundamental unfinishedness of the building, the grayness, the naked concrete, and the many other imposed (but also concealed) free-choice possibilities that are meant to stimulate the occupants to add their own color, so that everyone's choice and therefore his standpoint is brought to the surface. This building is an example of my thesis that what architects should be making is "the wall" on which everyone can write down, in his own way, whatever he wants to communicate to others. The information which remains under discussion will be legible for a long time; that which is no longer germane will be submerged by other accounts, the distinctive marks of other and altered inhabitants. This is tangibility in its most literal sense, and it is the antithesis of the neat, orderly, alienated world from which we want to wrest ourselves.

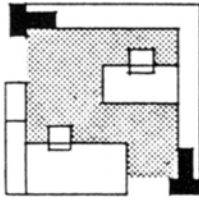
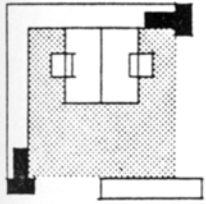
We have deliberately not indicated a boundary between offices. For if the design started from the idea of division of the whole into private premises, no doubt everyone would have done his best to make something of it for himself. A strict, built-in division between what is private and what is public would have been established a priori. But now an in-between area has been created, the intermingling zone of the strictly private areas, the workstations, and the public domain, the "street." Specifically, the building has been designed as a structure with a basic inalterable structural zone that manifests itself throughout the building; it includes the main mechanical ducts

SOCIAL

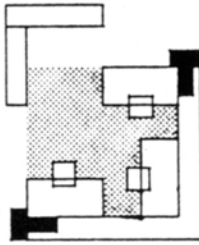
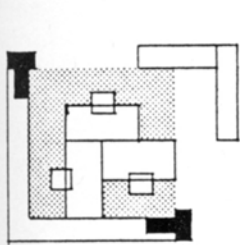
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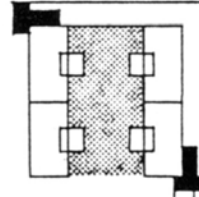
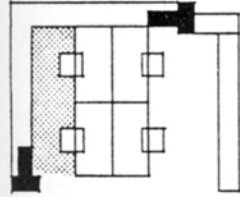
1 PERSON



2 PEOPLE



3 PEOPLE



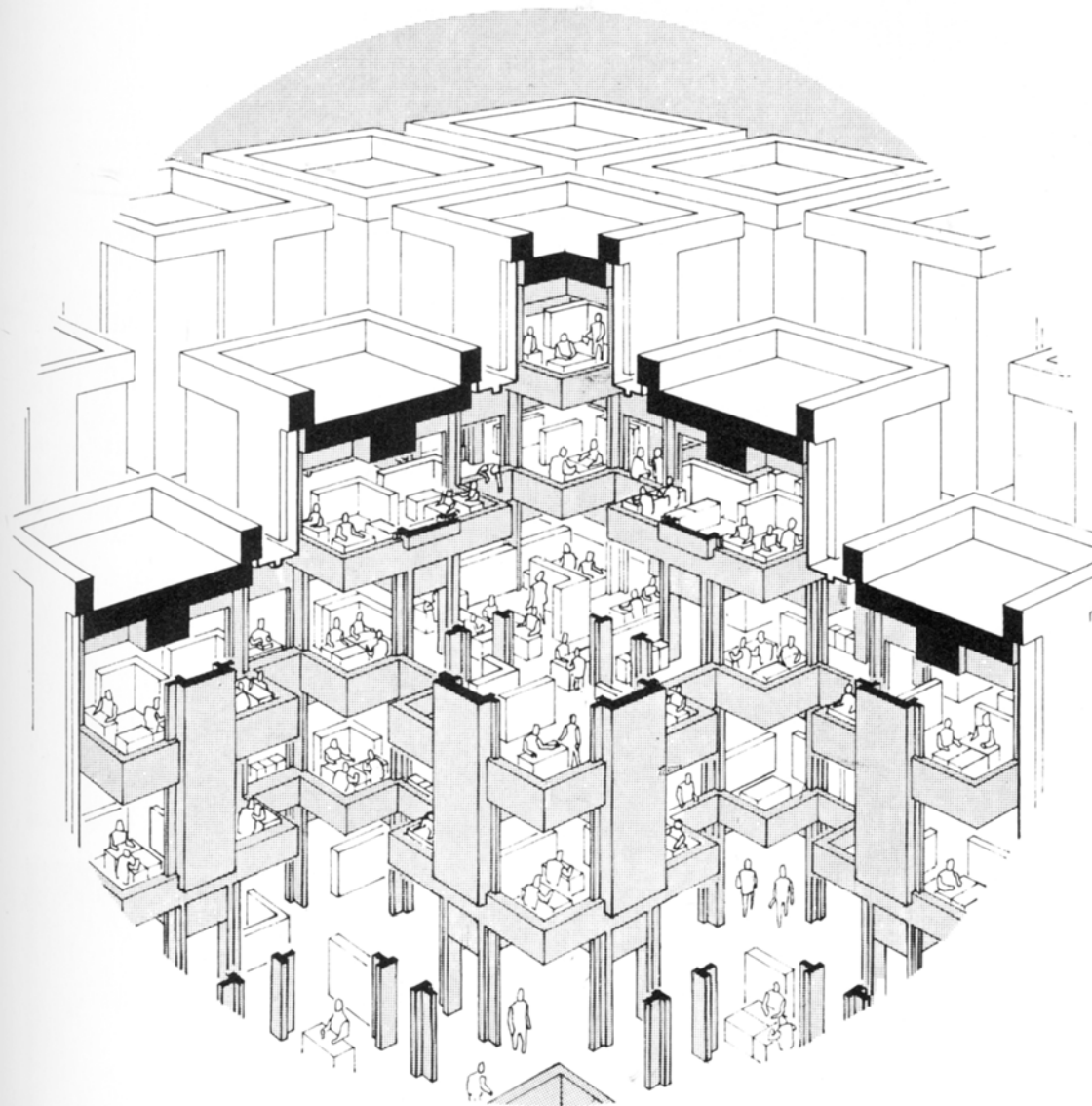
4 PEOPLE



Like a little village, there are many cafes or coffeebars in Centraal Beheer where one can go to sit, talk, and watch other people whenever one wants.



The system of numerous heavy columns defines small space units in such a way as to promote their articulation. In spite of what one might expect, this enlarges rather than diminishes the option of adjustment by the inhabitants.



and coincides with the main circulation pattern as expected. There is also a secondary structure of small concrete block partitions that are interpretable and variable: forms are only designed to a coarse grain, leaving allocation of workstations and furnishing arrangements to the discretion of the users, so the space can be constantly changed. Wherever resolving conflicts might lead to people reaching more agreement with each other, we ought to build them in rather than try to avoid them.

In a larger sense this happens with the public streets that cross the center of the building. Central Beheer is accessible at many points; no particular entrance claims to be the main entrance, or rather, all entrances are main entrances. This openness is intended to contribute to the reconciliation of building and street, of public and private. Mother and children may have a walk in the

building to see where father is working and what he is doing. They may have a drink together in one of the coffeebars in the central area. Coffee in fact is no longer brought into the working spaces at fixed hours; instead one goes to a coffeebar whenever and as often as one wishes. The family may even lunch together in the restaurant, as many do. Here an attempt has been made to produce an environment which will allow a great variety of social contacts. Contrary to the normal canteen with its repetition of uniform tables for six or eight people for a uniform social stencil plate, there is room for a varied and consequently richer social pattern.

This building is a hypothesis. Whether it can withstand the consequences of what it brings into being depends on the way in which it conforms to the behavior of its occupants with the passing of time.

Below: Plan of the De Drie Hoven village green.

Key:

1. Shop
2. Storeroom for chairs
3. Storeroom for instruments
4. Podium
5. Laundry
6. Public terrace
7. Billiard hall
8. Smoking corner
9. Occupational therapy
10. Bar
11. Buffet
12. Library
13. Social work
14. Hairdresser
15. Gyro branches
16. Post office
17. Bank

Opposite page, top: Houses should allow the occupiers to convert them to their own needs not only inside, but also outside. This woman has made a front porch in the corridor in front of her apartment at De Drie Hoven.

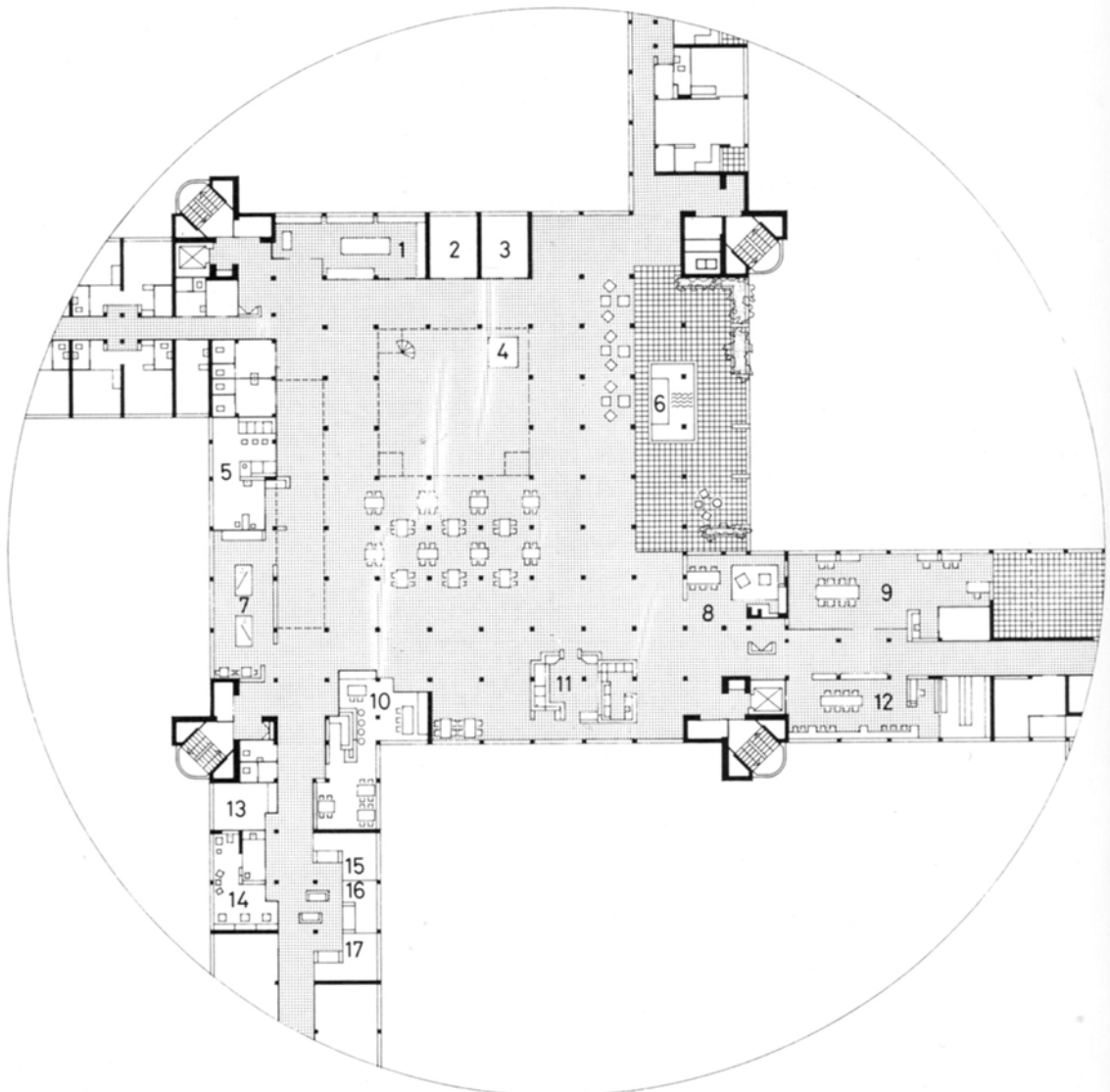
Opposite page, bottom: One of the most popular seating areas is around the billiard room.

De Drie Hoven

The other, rather extensive building, designed in the same period although constructed later, is the residential complex De Drie Hoven intended for physically or mentally handicapped people, most of whom have reached an advanced age. All of them need care and especially attention. Like Centraal Beheer, this building is an attempt to invite the inhabitants into as active a role as possible in their environment and consequently offer a helping hand to establishing relationships with the other inhabitants. Everything possible has been done to avoid a hospital atmosphere, which tends to imply an emphasis on treatment. Just because the nursing and sanitary facilities control the 'patient's' life to such a large extent, they must not

be allowed to dominate the living quarters, while always being available.

This building is also essentially unfinished, enabling the occupants to alter it in accord with their changing needs. This in fact was a questionable experiment since the inhabitants on the whole are in such bad condition that one might not expect them to exhibit a great deal of concern. Still, the common opinion is that everything is supposed to be done for them instead of by them, and their environment as it is usually made adds to their passiveness rather than stimulating them to use any degree of vitality they still possess. The residents' limited mental and physical capacities make it impossible for them to go out into the town, so as much as possible of what the town has to offer has been brought to them. The intent was to create an environment in which each person,

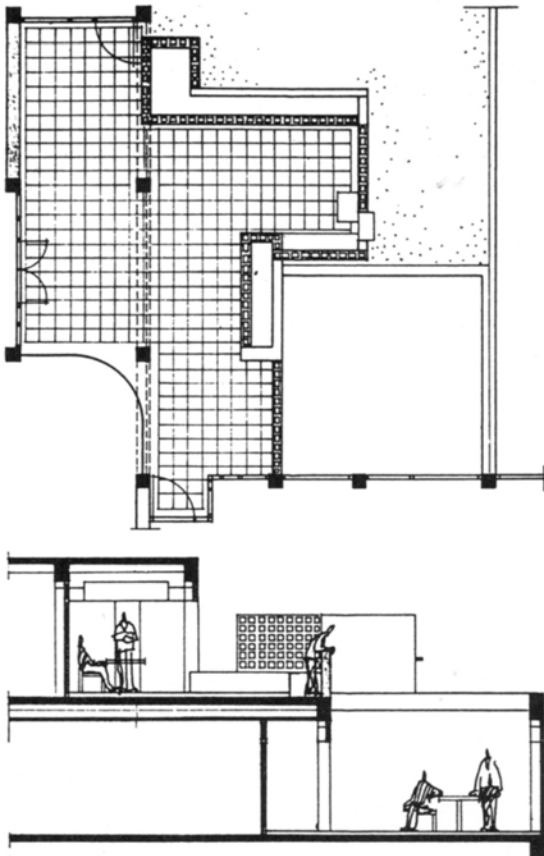




Right: This man has made his own garden on a terrace at De Drie Hoven.

Below, left: Plan and section of his terrace garden.

Below right: One of the many roof terraces at De Drie Hoven.



according to his limitations, would have the greatest choice of communication on the basis of a varied social pattern within the singular world of a small town forced into an isolation greater than desirable.

The requirements for the different sections of the buildings are incorporated into a common building order: a system of columns, beams, and floors whereby, in a fixed and consistently applied module, a large amount of freedom in the utilization of space arose within the limits set by the system. From the very beginning the plan was programmed to enable it to fulfill the large variety of requirements and regulations which had to be met, and blocks of different dimensions can be added to it as desired. In this way a structure was created which was then filled in according to the needs of that moment. The structural language is assumed to be great enough to enable it to incorporate subsequent additions, however chaotic, without its unity being disturbed. So a structure comes into being in which many things can be altered while it is in use and where the occupants, improvising if need be, can find answers to needs which could not be anticipated during its construction.

All the living units are situated along passageways which may be regarded as streets. They also have their own front doors, porches, and where possible, windows with a view over the street. The front doors are made so that the top half can be opened separately from the bottom. This enables those who are feeling lonely to open their homes informally to others and makes relationships between neighbors easier.

Where finish, lighting, and space are concerned, the indoor streets have been designed so that there are many places offering the chance to make contacts even on a short walk. On the many different floors adjoining the indoor streets are many small roof terraces. These are adjacent to the communal living rooms which each serve eighteen units. One could say that the communal living rooms lend themselves to neighborly contacts. The squares near the central staircase allude to the districts of the town, inducing contacts of a less binding nature. The central meeting space, nicknamed "the village green," is comparable to a town center, a sort of communal living room suitable for a variety of uses ranging from fashion shows to concerts to religious services. There is also provision for those who wish to indulge in the cosier activities of drinking coffee and playing cards.

In addition the complex also boasts such amenities as shops, laundry, bar, library, billiard

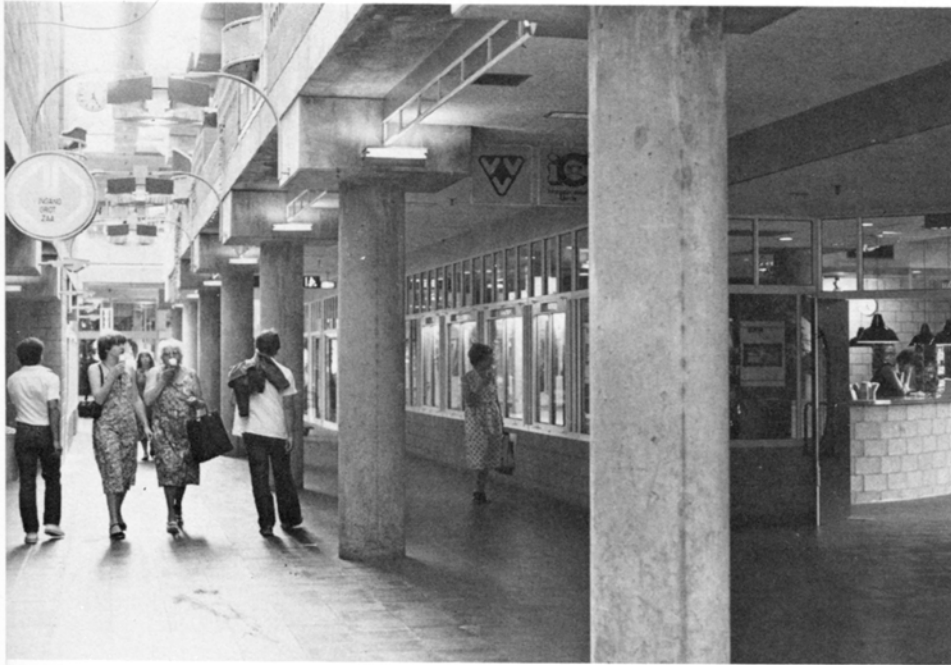
hall, hairdresser, bank, giro branch, and hobby room. Every remote corner is entirely accessible inside and by elevator.

While the land surrounding the buildings is officially owned by the complex, it is permanently open to everyone. Much of it is divided into small victory gardens for the use of both the residents and the neighborhood people. Eventually the greenhouse facilities could be instrumental in setting up a system enabling the residents themselves to supply the complex with plants and flowers. And the building proper becomes a public area through its many entries. If the administration decides that De Drie Hoven has something to offer outsiders as well, a more intensive, mutually beneficial interchange could occur. For example, elderly and disabled people from the area might like to use the facilities available here: cafe, restaurant, laundry, and sun terrace, while others might be willing to work, perhaps on a part-time basis, in the building. It is then essentially unfinished, much as a town center is constantly being revised within its basic street system according to changing requirements.

Musiek Centrum Vredenburg

Both Centraal Beheer and De Drie Hoven are, each in a different way, permanently occupied by people whose intense relationship with their building makes them inhabitants. The Musiek Centrum Vredenburg in Utrecht is more of a visitors' building, in the sense that, except for the relatively small number of staff members, there are no permanent occupants to be expected whatsoever and consequently no attempts to invest any personal love and care. If the central area of Centraal Beheer and the pattern of interior streets and the village green in De Drie Hoven were to be considered as public, Musiek Centrum Vredenburg is a public realm all over. It is made of a conglomerate and variety of qualities that may accommodate a rich pattern of relationships.

It also picks up the notion of the building as a microcosm of the town. Here the shops, offices, lounges, and cafes in the internal streets are at once part of the building and part of the street pattern of the town. But mostly this project is an effort to demystify the ritual elements of a concert and replace them by another kind of celebration. With the advent of the long-playing record, the motives of concert-goers have changed. This auditorium is designed for the audience to see and surround the musical performance as well as to hear it. With a concert it is not the most perfect



Top: The facade fabric of Utrecht's Musik Centrum Vredenburg is woven from many human size parts; the same few elements are used throughout, yet each is recombined differently. Balconies and roof terraces can be reached from the galleries inside.

Above: An interior street is a microcosm of the town with its street signs and shop windows.

Right: Musik Centrum Vredenburg is highly articulated in an effort to capture the fine grain of the town. Wrapped around the concert hall are shops, restaurants, and an exhibition area.





balance of sound that counts; people rather like to be aware of just those irregularities of an orchestral performance that the multitrack sound mixing of the recording studio tries so hard to eliminate. This auditorium has to be used for all sorts of performances. The architect must involve himself in the organizing of the events that will stretch the building to the limits of its flexible potential.

The building, rather than being an apparatus, becomes an instrument that should be played. The instrument has capacities which the performer knows how to extract, and the way in which this happens defines the freedom which it can generate for each of its performers.

The pretension inherent in making buildings which have distinct form, distinct spatial effect, distinctly different lighting, and different building materials must justify itself by improving the situation of the people who inhabit them, or rather by offering them a helping hand to improve their conditions by themselves. A new building is the prepared ground on which the people who will inhabit it can reappraise relationships, involvements, and responsibilities. The architect will then have a lot more to do than translate a given program into form. He is in a position to demonstrate that the personal interest of all those involved can be realized by organizing space. Through his proposals he can further animate people into thinking up other new possibilities. Such a reappraisal leads unavoidably to changes which have to be undergone and absorbed by those involved.

Form makes itself, and that is less a question of invention than of listening well to what a person and thing want to be.

Unlike many concert halls, Musik Centrum Vredenburg is arranged so that the audience surrounds the performers. While the acoustics may not be perfect, performances are much more intimate than in a more traditional hall.