

31 DESIGNING A CITY HALL

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31.1 INTRODUCTION

This is the report of a design process of Carel Weeber for a new City Hall in the town of Berkel en Rodenrijs. Each illustration indicates an important step in the design process.

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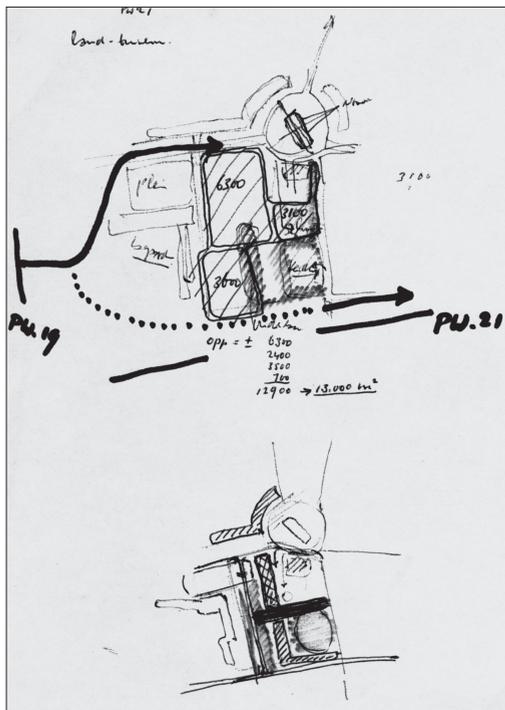
In my design process, the working out of associations and design ideas is taking place in my head, in my memory. This may be done everywhere, at any time. I investigate an idea like that in small sketches. As I grow older, I need fewer sketches. Now that I am working exclusively on the computer, these sketches are at the same time the start of a process of elaboration. Previously, I started with a drawing in ink in the top-left corner; a few days later I would finish in the corner right-below. If that did not come off very well, I started anew. I was taught to do so at Delft University of Technology and, basically, this is still the way I work.

The commission described consisted in a Prize Competition on the basis of invitation for a new city hall in Berkel en Rodenrijs. My design process started with an extensive study of the location and the programme of requirements. Next I tend to ponder the possible and required spatial relations between functions, while trying to develop a total concept. I am studying scale relations, placing the whole in the context in terms of urban architecture, starting with floor plans, cross-sections and the front. I am making spatial sketches while studying new design ideas. In the end I make the final design drawings. Visually the deployment of my design process looks as follows.

31.2 DESIGN PROCESS

297 Study of context

As the first study the context in terms of urban architecture



298 Summary programme of requirements

Along with the situation I study the programme of requirements extensively. I always make a summary of it; I am already learning it by heart.

PROGRAMMA VAN EISEN

Bibliothek

- 19.200 boeken
 - vloeropp. 13.000 b. 2 55 boeken/m² → 260 m²
 - rijen 6.200 b. 2 4.600 boeken/m² → 155 m²
 - 415 m²

overzichtelijke optreden van de bibliotheek

deels openbaar

- 11 24pt. 2 3m → 33 m²
- 50 m²
- 85 m²
- 80 m²

Overige ruimte

- 40 m² eventueel te combineren met Raadhuis.

andere

- 40 m² eventueel te combineren met Raadhuis.

Beste partijen die niet nodig, zamen in overlap met andere partijen

Centrale ontvangstell.

- ontvangstfunctie leestafel
- Koudwater/elektr. behuizing ruimte
- multifunctionele ruimte
- mogelijk bij rijen plan en lot op "openheid"

Minste afdekking omvangrijke programma's

- combinatie met publieke ruimte aan noordzijde in één lot → open algemeen ruimte
- "afdekking"
- "verduimend"
- "voorzichtig"

afdekking in "open" ruimte

Speelruimte - als alternatief van speelruimte?

alle openbare - bijzijde aan "noordzijde"

Open bakken - alle kamers (of: financieel)

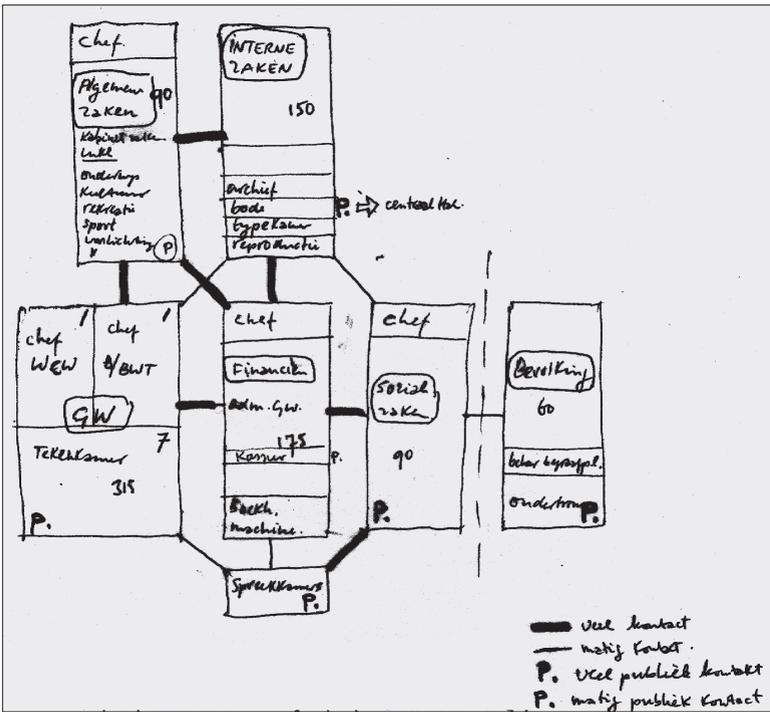
de bestaande ruimten (bth 0-11)

- Receptie**
 - multifunctioneel (restie met centrale hal) daarom minstens 110 m² of meer
- Financiering**
 - combinatie met raadzaal + centrale hal mogelijk
 - "open" bijzijde (open bijzijde, zie felicitatiekamer)
 - multifunctioneel
- Overname van kamer**
 - overname met ontwerp mogelijkheden
- Administratieve kamers**
 - part-kamers → beschikken openruimte
 - afdekking bij conferentie-kamer 2 aan linkerzijde

de administratieve + technische-administratieve ruimten (bth 0-12 Vb)

Daarbij

- Kamer voor de medewerkers op stouwen open mogelijk optreden a een 100 m² groot
- representatieve "interne" hal 40 m²
- kantoorruimte 40 m²
- kleine financieel 6-10 m²
- open multifunctioneel part-kamer
- kamer voor de raadzaal
- alle conferentieruimte

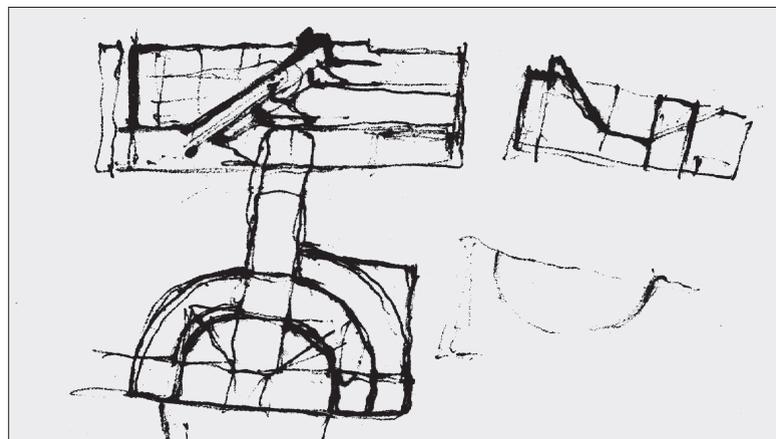
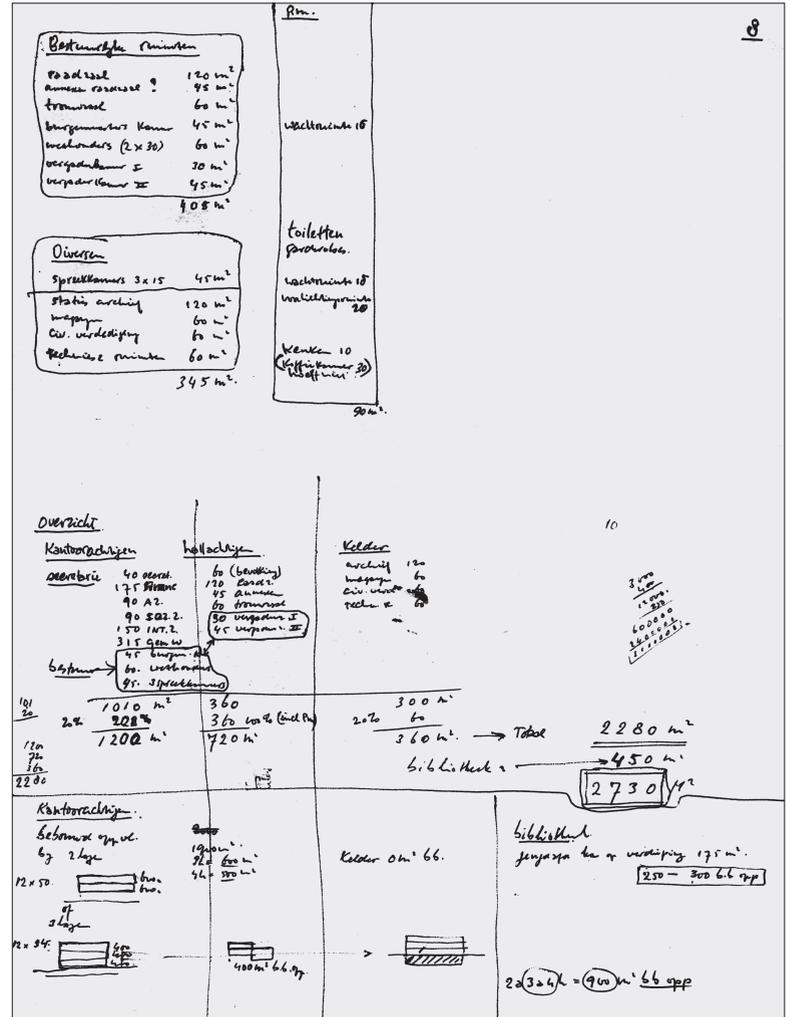


299 Relation schema + valuation

A next step consists in determining the relations between parts and characterising them.

300 Typing

Guided by the programme of requirements and the relational schema I determine the total concept. I am looking first to what I have got in hand. How much office surface is required? Is it an office with additional functions or a hall with offices?

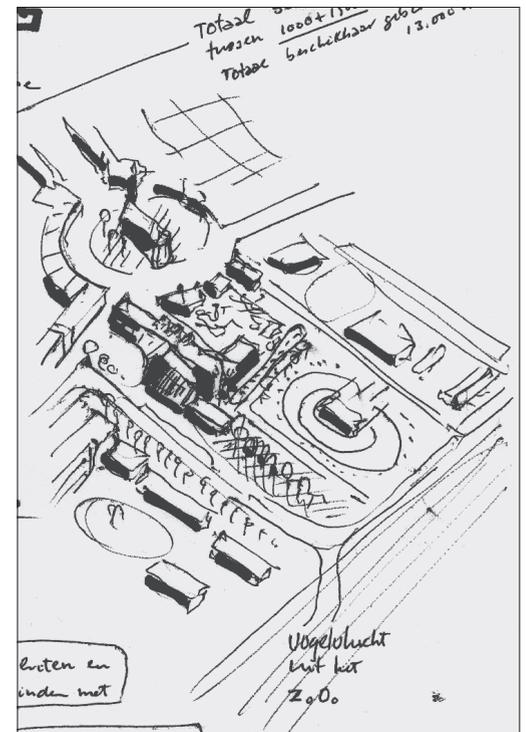


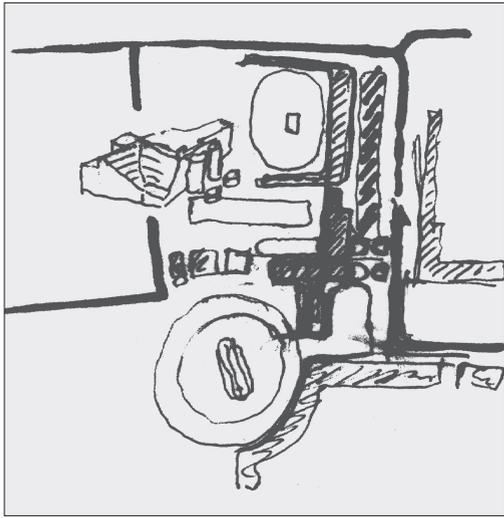
301 Scale relation study

I study possible organisations for the building and proportions of the parts of the building.

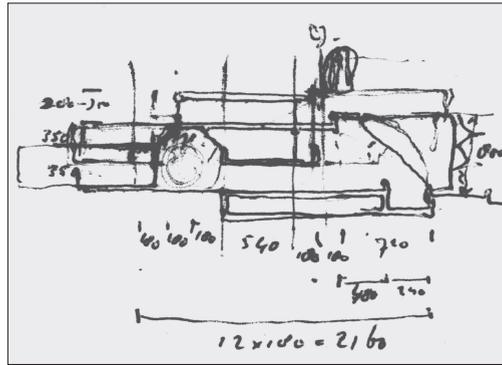
302 Urban context

What the study of the programme of requirements has yielded as a whole is placed in context in terms of urban architecture. This will result in morphological requirements for the surroundings. In a small sketch in perspective I look at whether something can be made of this.



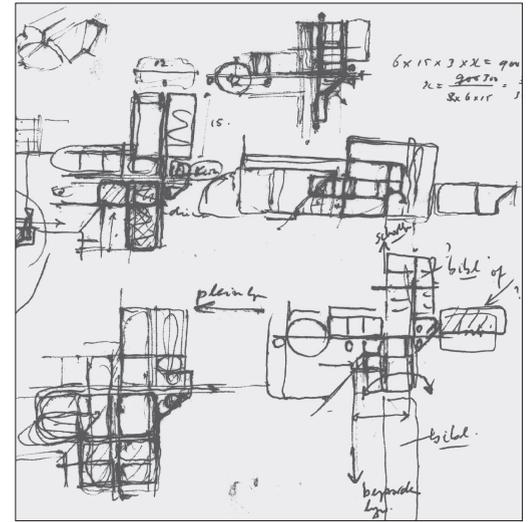


303 Test of form

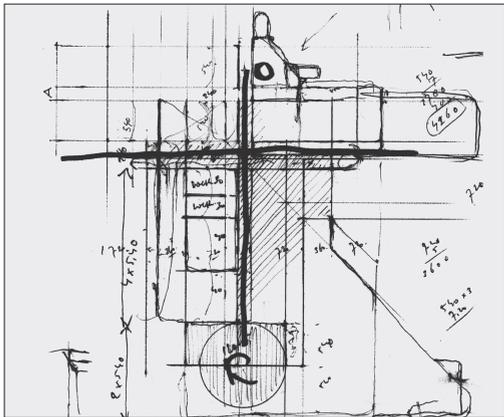


304 Cross-section

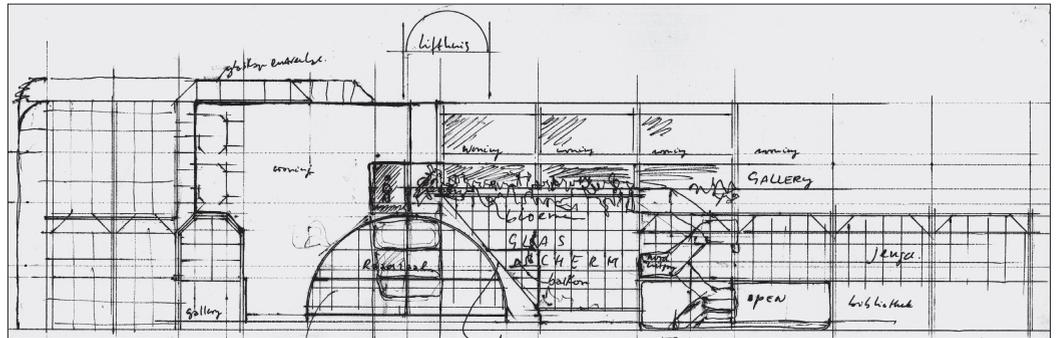
Following this, the elaboration in floor plans and cross-sections starts. I consider it to be very important, that this is done directly in the right proportion and scaling. These small sketches are acting as further elaboration of the design ideas in my head.



305 Loose sketch

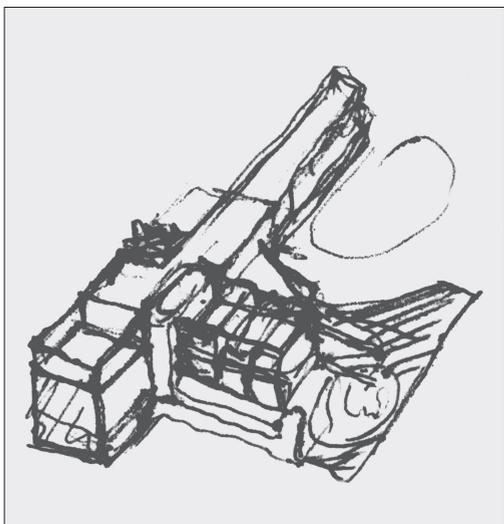


306 Sketch with a ruler



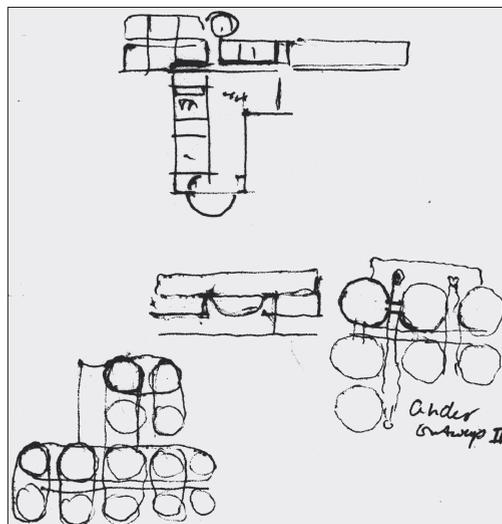
307 Study of the front

Next, I study colour and texture of the front. Any number of these modest studies is being made. If I run into something of importance, I just make a note.



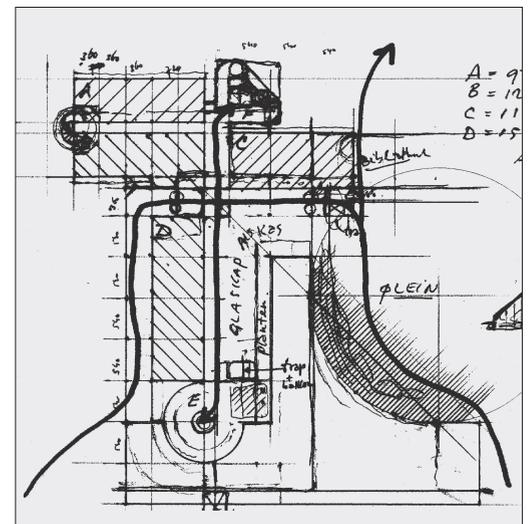
308 Spatial sketch

A spatial sketch, to look again whether it is any good.



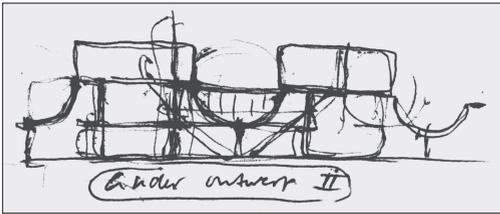
309 Different design ideas

While studying a detail of the building, a different design idea emerged: some upturned halved spheres forming corridors through the space they are leaving open. A nice idea, a kind of fascination: something for a following design.



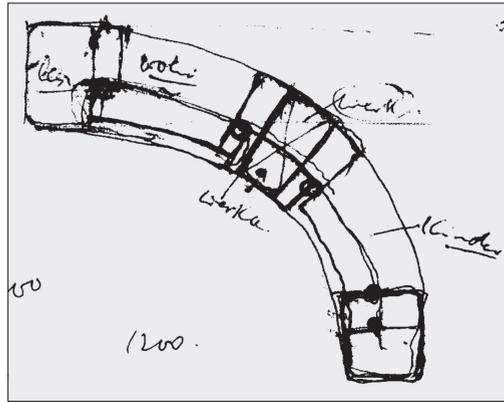
310 Context

Then, study of the adaptation in the urban context, as far as entrance and accessibility are concerned.



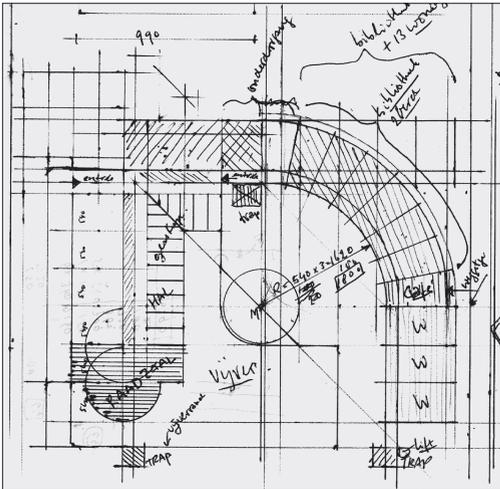
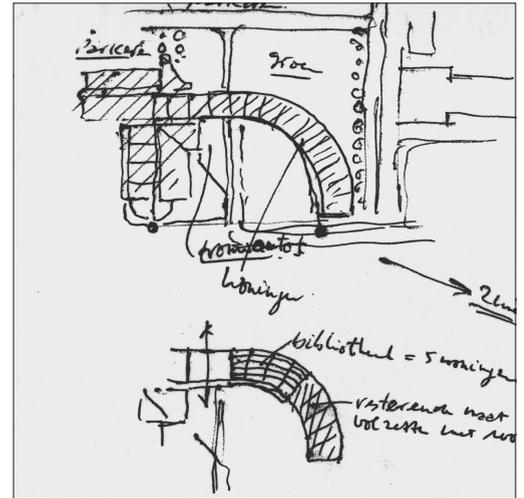
311 Come-back of an idea

On the corner of the page the other design theme is returning. Maybe I also saw in this a solution; or maybe I was uncertain about the solution on which I was working; or maybe I just had fallen in love with this idea.



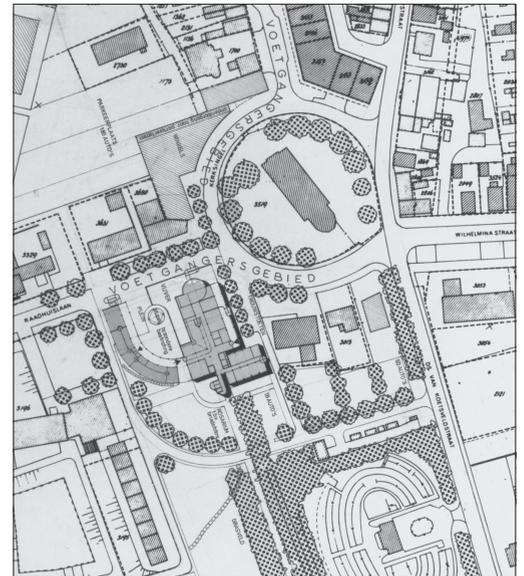
312 Adding functions

It was permitted to add a few programmatic components. I added some homes and a library. Obviously, no further study of a programme of requirements for the homes was necessary: a house is a house.



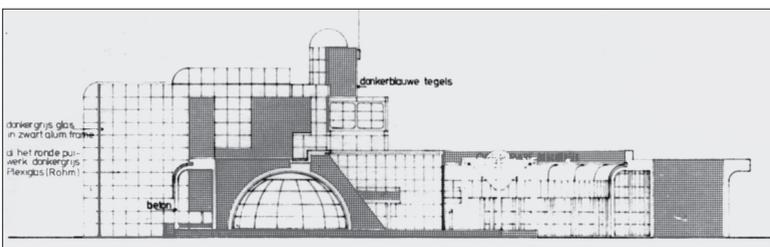
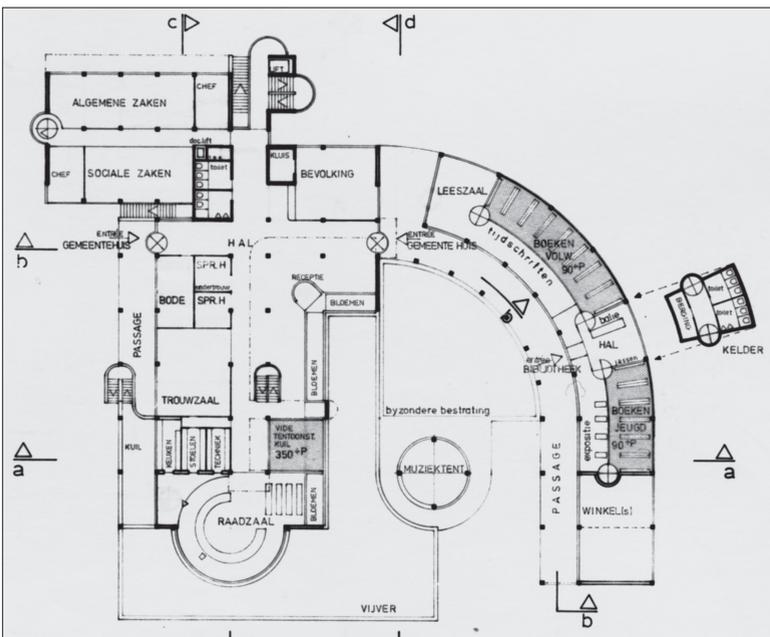
313 Library study

A simple design study for the library. The envelope for it hailed back to the design of the City Hall. For the rest, it was matter of connecting with the programme here. I have partitioned it in segments preceding fitting it in with the programme.



314 Final drawings

During the production of the presentation drawings, I work with a pencil and a pen in hand. In the way I work, I calculate before I draw; so there is not much going wrong. In addition you already see, before you start with ink, and while drawing the auxiliary lines, whether something is going right or wrong. My sketches are illegible and introverted. Designing this way is individual.



31.3 LOOKING BACK

Is this report of sketching happening in your head?

This is not a report of sketching but an elaborate programme of requirements study; I am doing this for each design.

You are unleashing your design idea on the urban context. Is this a characteristic approach?

Yes, the programme of requirements is providing a box of building blocks reacting to the location.

What is making for the initial inspiration?

My most important source of inspiration lies in a deadline. The approaching moment of presentation co-erces the making of choices. A deadline is forcing the idea; for that I do not need flowers or things like that. It is just hard work. While your designing experience is growing, you are putting greater confidence in your intuition. I panicked only once in relation to the enduring absence of a design idea in my time as a student. That also proved to be the last time. I have learned to trust the circumstance that design inspirations are coming by themselves. In addition, I have learned that designing is just hard work.

What are you doing with a dead end?

I am experiencing them regularly. But, this is compensated by my systematic way of working. If I have arrived at a dead end, I can just turn the pages back to the moment when it still went alright. It is important to me that my study is written down and dated rigorously.

At the moment I do not need this any more. For the residential project for students 'De Struyck' in The Hague a study of one A4 page was sufficient. Everything that happens, is happening directly on the computer. With a lot of designing experience, you are not in need of sketches any more; you can add the measuring mentally. Students can not do that as yet; they are lacking a sense of scale: what is 1.8 metre, what is a toilet?

What was a decisive constraint?

In practice, the programme of requirements, the budget and the method of building are decisive. And the image you have. What are you after? The shift from the programme of requirements to the image is a matter of feeling: it does not yield an image. In India I was fascinated by a red building. I made the decision my next building should become a red one. That was 'De Struyck' in The Hague.

After all, initial inspiration?

Of course one is influenced by the environment. Are not all young architects doing the same thing? One is afraid to step out of convention; it is a kind of fashion. Form convention is a more powerful constraint than the programme of requirements.

The residential project for students in The Hague had to be an unconventional building, it had to be disturbing. It is also for students. The municipality went along with this.

Are you not this way part of that convention yourself?

Of course, but with the addition, that I am conscious of that myself. An architect cannot function without convention. Peutz, for instance, designed in one year in all domestic Dutch styles. One did not take that gladly. In the Faculty of Architecture form is associated too tightly with ideology. There should emerge an exercise in convention, so that students would become conscious of these conventions. As a commission, for instance: "Design in the style of the thirties, or the style of Gehry". When you are asking students during the beginning of their study what they consider to be beautiful they tend to suggest 'farmerettes' and their ilk;

when you ask the same question after six months you get as an answer the Van Nelle factory or something like that.

Is your design process methodical?

Certainly; the study of the programme of requirements and the measuring can be ascertained and may be followed up. The form is not developed systematically, the form is a found object, like the colour in India. Sometimes there is a form fascination, like in the design of the city hall. The form arrives suddenly; like in the design for the prison in Schiedam. During the study of the programme of requirements, in one fell sweep, a form idea occurred; and ultimately it was realised. It is a intuitive process surrounding the question: under which form may the programme be housed?

In our profession there is a lot of flexibility in allocating functions; the relation form-function is very relative in architecture.

Can study in architecture be compared to that in industrial design?

In architecture the relation between the programme of requirements (the properties of the product) and the form are not fixed. Man is a flexible animal. Usage of architecture is determined by behaviour, not by ergonomics like in industrial designing. Behaviour is less readily predictable and open to study. Guidelines for a ramp for a normal human being are, for example, impossible to give. The relationship between form and function can only be given in a reduced form, for humans only in convention. From The Netherlands I can not design a house for an Indian in South-America, although I can design a rifle or a needle; then he even knows its purpose. That is the reason why architectonic study is so difficult; it does allow verification. The failure of a building can always be compensated. And if it collapses, it is not a building anymore.

The programme of requirements is playing an important rôle in architecture, but in spite of that it is only of secondary importance.

Why then so much attention for the programme of requirements?

I am a functionalist; buildings are also being judged according to functionality. The (spatial) form of function is the convention. A lord mayor can also function in an office of 10 m², instead of one of 40 m². Form convention is important; without it we could not design. The description of sleeping is not leading to the form of a bedroom, nor even to the form of a bed.