SCANT HOPE OF AN UNTROUBLED OLD AGE

THE FATE OF POST-1965 BUILDINGS

BERNARD COLENBRANDER

The post-war British 'new towns' are a familiar reference point in Dutch architectural courses. Intended to relieve some of the pressure on the London metropolis, their realization became a testing ground for the viability of many of the principles in the modernist repertoire – not just in relation to the quality of the housing, but also to the spatial planning of the entire estate. In addition to garden-city comfort, the new towns were required to provide a good amenity infrastructure and efficient access for the various traffic flows. Most of the new towns sprang up in an outer ring around London, but there were a few northern outliers. It was to one of these, Runcorn New Town near Liverpool, that a group of Delft architecture students headed in the early 1990s.[1] They were keen to see what had become of the Southgate housing estate designed in 1967 by Sir James Stirling (1926-1992). Stirling had managed to create an eloquent architecture, made up of raw, precast concrete modules cleverly arranged into a totality. The ground level was reserved for green space and vehicular traffic, while pedestrians had their own dedicated 'street in the sky'.

The Southgate Estate, completed in 1976, was not just the epitome of a modern living environment. For those in the know, Stirling's architecture contained ample references to English architectural history: the dimensions of the courtyards, for example, referred to the Georgian squares of Bath and Edinburgh. Reasons aplenty, therefore, for the Delft teachers and students to head to Runcorn. But they were in for a rude awakening. The Southgate Estate was no more, unexpectedly demolished so it seemed, despite its young age. 'It was

◄ 1. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment building appropriated for informal use, 2023 (photo Herman H. van Doorn GKf)

clear,' wrote François Claessens after having recovered somewhat from his initial dismay, 'that the privatisation that had prevailed in Britain under the Thatcher regime had limited to less than twenty years the lifespan of this collective housing project that had been achieved with great ideals, effort and investment, even before it had been written off financially.'[2] The same thing could easily happen in the Netherlands, too, Claessens added, alluding to the fate of the Bijlmermeer and, even more drastic, that of the Zwarte Madonna. Much praised upon its completion in the 1980s, this contribution to Dutch housing had scarcely reached puberty before it was torn from life. Not long after this, a stone's throw away in The Hague, the death knell sounded for another piece of Dutch architectural history when the Nederlands Danstheater, a sublime early work by Rem Koolhaas, was also prematurely euthanized. It involuntarily made way for the banal facadism of the Amare complex that is indisputably much less likely to qualify for any kind of heritage status.

UNSTOPPABLE DEMOLITION FRENZY

These are not exceptions. The prospect of surviving to a ripe old age is depressingly low for recent buildings, and that is equally true of buildings born of architectural pretensions. Structural robustness does not necessarily increase the chances of survival, as I experienced first-hand almost twenty years ago when I embarked on a monograph of a contemporary architect I had come to admire greatly: Frans van Gool (1922-2015). The excursion programme I had put together for a day out in the company of Van Gool included a building that had seemed to me to be indestructible: the solidly constructed brick and concrete Phoenix office building in Amersfoort (1972-1980). But Van Gool swiftly disabused me; I could scratch that item from our programme because I was too late. That building, too, was no more.

It seems as if nowadays *every* building is regarded as ripe for demolition, regardless of age, structural condition or architectural quality. As soon as the idea that it is 'in the way' has taken hold, its chances of being razed are considerable. As unreasonable as this demolition frenzy is, it is consistent with a line of reasoning rooted in the functionalist fixation with a presumed fitness for purpose that was very much in the ascendant last century. 'In a perfectly functioning state, according to the precepts of functionalism, buildings would either fulfil their purpose or be demolished, except perhaps for a few exceptions,' wrote Fred Scott in his admirable book, *On Altering Architecture*. He then followed this reasoning to its predictable conclusion: 'Alterations would be unknown. Through forethought and prescience, buildings would remain unchanged from the moment of their inception to their eventual demise.'[3]

That is lucidly expressed, yet the everyday world does not always behave according to this simple outline. There are exceptions to the rule; sometimes there is also scope for alterations and there turn out to be more options for a building than to stay exactly as it was built or to be knocked down. Contrary to functionalist doctrine, a building is not by definition a perfectly homogeneous answer to a perfectly homogeneous question, which can never afterwards be altered. The use can change, the aesthetic mood can undergo a sea change and the building may opt to adjust to that.

THE PERMANENCES OF THE CITY

To get closer to the various possibilities resulting from such a willingness to change, a building's resilience needs to be subjected to a more nuanced investigation than that prescribed by functionalist dogma. One well-known diagram that attempts to do justice to a broader tolerance of alteration was devised by Stewart Brand. It distinguishes the various layers of a building according to their alleged capacity for change.[4] All the loose fittings in the interior of a building (*stuff*) are by definition interchangeable; the interior layout (*space plan*) is less accommodating and that also applies to the *services* and even to the cladding (*skin*) of a building, while the plot of land (*site*) is pretty well eternal. The underlying idea is that potentially, each layer has a different lifespan.

This diagram is considerably subtler than the previous functionalist all-or-nothing plan, but even this assumes the reasonableness of doing whatever one wants with a building as long as the functional issue is meticulously analysed, layer by layer. But it is no longer always easy to predict how that reasonableness will turn out. There are plenty of examples of buildings that have perished in the wake of a capricious decision-making process devoid of any semblance of logic. Human nature is inconstant and that carries over into how buildings are treated.

This is why cultural explorations of the same issue sometimes get closer to reality than the supposed 'rocket science' of deterministic functionalists. Culture encapsulates not just logical reasonableness, but the entirety of affective tendencies, including ostensibly less productive variants. Aldo Rossi is a fitting reference in this context, if only because of his definition of the city as the *fabbrica della città* (the buildings that make up the city) referring both to the material manifestation of the city form and to the cultural project that sustains interaction with that form. Rossi regards the city – and thus the building – as an 'interrupted work': 'With time, the city grows upon itself, it acquires a consciousness and memory. In the course of its con-

struction, its original themes persist, but at the same time it modifies and renders these themes of its own development more specific.'[5] It is precisely through the activity of the phenomena of consciousness and memory of which Rossi speaks that the city can behave and be understood as a cultural project.

Anyone who finds this somewhat vague and undefined should dip a little further into Rossi's legendary book about the city. The cultural project is not some airy-fairy notion for Rossi; it is supported by permanences, also referred to as 'primary elements', by which he means the sustaining, essential buildings of the city. Rossi's primary elements initially correspond with the historical institutional and religious buildings that through their size and status alone once dominated the structure of the city and to some extent continue to do so today. More generally, with the late-modern era in mind, primary elements can be explained as permanences in the city that can serve as monumental reference points for the urban organism, provided they are viewed and cherished as such by the community and civic authorities. Viewed in this way, the memory of the city is both mental and material.

UNPREDICTABLE SURVIVAL PROSPECTS

It is with the possible guise of these mental and material permanences in mind that thinking about heritage actually starts, including heritage from the last fifty years. Deciding which buildings merit permanence has traditionally been the core task of institutional heritage preservation. The gradual dominance of a lower echelon of functions than that of the classic institutions and churches is an inevitable side effect of contemporary architecture. Selection is a direct consequence of searching for permanences, less in terms of functional performance or functionalist merit, than of appreciation, if need be in the most subjective sense. However, the inexorable transience of even the most permanent permanence demands a credible estimate of a building's capacity for adaptation over time. Only then is it possible to assess just how robust the line of defence needs to be, ranging from impregnable to elastic, when the continued existence of selected buildings hangs in the balance. Stewart Brand's diagram is a good first step for such an evaluation, but no more than that because it focuses solely on the material layers.

A more detailed approach to the same issue recently became available with the publication of Ruurd Roorda and Bas Kegge's *Vital architecture*.[6] In this study the future prospects of buildings are assessed in a comprehensive system of considerations, divided into three chapters: economy, architecture, culture. Whatever its heritage status, every building appears in some form of financial accounting, making economics an inescapable factor in the life span of a building. It represents a certain land value that, together with graduated depreciation, can push a decision about a building's future in a particular direction, be that adaptation, conservation or demolition. Following on from that, architectural considerations can help to determine whether the building in question lends itself to a different use and whether it can if necessary be extended. The cultural aspect, finally, includes assessing the ramifications of the building's official or non-official heritage status.

Roorda and Kegge's research has yielded a useful checklist for evaluating a building's chances of survival. Sadly, that does not mean that much predictive value can be ascribed to it. A high land value *may* make it more likely that a notable historical building will be replaced by another, but it is no hard and fast rule. The fact that a building can be extended *may* prove an advantage in the case of adaptive reuse, but that too offers no guarantee of survival, any more than a robust materialization. Many readily extendable buildings have vanished without ever being extended, just as many durable buildings never had the chance to wear out. The only more or less reliable criterion for survival is to be heritage listed. Anyone who conceives a plan to demolish an official heritage building can be assured that the relevant authorities are not going to wave it through uncontested. In practice this carries more weight than the fact that the building is very robust or is otherwise architecturally meritorious, but without official protected status. *Any* building can bite the dust.

NEUTRALITY CRITERION

In reality, an object that is deemed a cultural permanence, cannot take that status for granted. Architecture is a social applied art, not an art that in benign isolation can, if necessary, fall into oblivion without perishing. The unremarked magnification of one aspect of this applied function of architecture during the late-modern era has served to accentuate its transience. In the past a building was a durable, materially solidified function, whereas today it is more of a neutral service, in other words a 'commodity'. This is related to the waning significance of the classic typological system that distinguishes between houses, palaces, offices and factories. In today's service economy the clear-cut definition of these categories is eroding: for the most part, work no longer takes place on farms or in factories, each with its specific function-dictated spatial arrangement, but in settings that adhere to more or less the same comfort and safety requirements as a dwelling.

The homogenizing trend extends to interiors, where spatial efficiency requirements and a diminished

sense of staff hierarchy signalled the end of the traditional office layout. Today's office floor has very few space dividers and consists mainly of furniture. In dwellings, the time-honoured distinction between kitchen and rooms is less frequently defined by a wall, hallway or serving hatch. Spatial interiors are in principal neutral and 'multifunctional', in the contemporary, homogenizing sense of that term. It is with good reason that 'flexibility' has become a keyword and a fixture of real estate speak and the jargon used by architects and builders: it is often the essence of a building and there is nothing else to be said about it than that it is suitable for all manner of uses.

THE HERTZBERGER CASE

The expectations that attach to a building nowadays make themselves felt not only in new-build programmes, but also in the approach to existing buildings. To the extent that those existing buildings bear the hallmarks of classic typology, their resilience will be sorely tested, because a purpose-designed building cannot turn into a flexible-use 'commodity' just like that. Nevertheless, many historical churches and industrial artefacts have in fact been relatively easily converted to accommodate a wholly alien programme from the leisure economy. Such conversions are socially acclaimed as a demonstration of successful heritage preservation, even though the credibility of the contrived tableau is by no means always convincing.

With buildings of more recent date, not least those of the Post 65 generation, where the shift to a programme of maximum flexibility was often already evident, the adaptive capacity should be greater. The reality is complicated, however, even for Post 65 buildings that were intrinsically programmed for change – and to illustrate that most acutely, we must now mention Herman Hertzberger (b. 1932). Of all Dutch architects Hertzberger, who acquired an international reputation in the 1960s by ostentatiously devoting himself to a functionally flexible architecture, has suffered the most as he and his buildings approached old age. This was not yet the case with his Muziekcentrum Vredenburg in Utrecht because that building had been designed specifically as a concert hall and consequently represented a traditional typology. The original Vredenburg was completed in 1979. Forty years later, after a drastic renovation directed by none other than Herman Hertzberger himself, it was embedded in the Tivoli-Vredenburg music complex. While the large, octagonal Vredenburg hall was once the climax of an approach from the centre of Utrecht spun out with many architectural details, in the revised version this same hall became a large, albeit still brilliantly designed piece of furniture in an arbitrary spatial arrangement of halls with an indifferent exterior. The fact that the concert hall itself, in rudimentary form, was able to be preserved, nevertheless illustrates what permanence may ultimately mean for a building: it is impossible for architecture to be more decisively compromised.

CENTRAAL BEHEER

Another major Hertzberger work is the slightly older office building for Centraal Beheer in Apeldoorn (1968-1972). What this building has endured over the years encapsulates everything revealed above. The history of use is a drama with plot twists no functionalist doctrine is proof against. Centraal Beheer came about thanks to a client who was not daunted by a highly unconventional office setting, structured by clusters of square office islands, separated by top-lit voids and connected by a circulation route consisting of bridges. At one stroke the classic office acquired a coherent successor whose main features started to find their way into the buildings of admirers near and far, helped by the fact that the building received copious press coverage. Together with the slightly older Burgerweeshuis in Amsterdam by Aldo van Eyck, Centraal Beheer became an icon of what came to be known as structuralism. However, because the concept of structuralism derived from outside architecture and had its origins in philosophy, there continues to be confusion as to what Van Eyck and Hertzberger actually meant by it. That irritates Hertzberger, all the more since an accurate explanation of structuralism is helpful in understanding why he put up a fight when the building's survival was threatened. '[W]hen it comes to structuralism, let's stop concentrating on the formal aspect of a distinctive structure. Structuralism is a concept that originated in linguistic philosophy where it stands for the relationship of language as a collective instrument that offers language users the freedom of personal interpretation,' Hertzberger wrote recently. 'Structuralism in architecture relates to a spatial framework where not everything is programmatically laid down in terms of functions, but where freedom is allowed for the filling-in of additional uses, so that a building can adapt from place to place to what is needed from time to time and thus to new requirements.'[7]

This explanation not only clarifies why Hertzberger allowed the renovation of his Utrecht concert hall to reach such a painful conclusion but is also typical of his mindset during the erratic history of Centraal Beheer after it had become clear that the office islands, after thirty years of use, could not remain as they were. The trajectory has been graphically chronicled by Stephan Petermann in *Back to the Office*, a recent book co-edited with Ruth Baumeister.[8] The future of Centraal Beheer has hung in the balance for over fifteen

years during which time it has been subject to the disparate whims of a succession of owners and developers, with now and then a supporting role for the architect and the civic authorities.

ON THE ROAD TO RUIN

In 2007 Achmea, Centraal Beheer's mother company, sold the building to SNS bank and developer TCN, only to immediately lease it back: in real estate speak this is called sale and leaseback. Coincidentally, a year later the building was granted municipal listed status but that did nothing to alter the dramatic sequel. Achmea ended its lease as of the beginning of 2013 and moved into new premises elsewhere. The building remained largely empty. A year earlier one of the two owners, TCN, had succumbed to the credit crisis. Things were no better at SNS, which also went bankrupt, after which the property accrued to the State. Under the neo-liberal policies of the day that offered only temporary relief since that same State was busy selling off its properties wherever possible. Centraal Beheer, at that moment valued at 38 million euros, fell into the 'wrong basket'. In 2015 it was put up for sale, finding a new owner in development company Certitudo, which was able to acquire it for the trifling sum of 2.5 million euros. During the period when TCN was still in the picture, there had been talk of adapting the building to accommodate the Saxion University of Applied Sciences, but it came to nothing. As soon as Certitudo took over, any such prospect disappeared. It is hardly news anymore that 'location' is regarded as crucial to the success of a development project: a large, empty, high-maintenance building in Apeldoorn is not exactly an asset. That also explains the glaring disparity between 38 and 2.5 million. Certitudo had previous experience with the Strijp-S site in Eindhoven where it had discovered that there was still a lot of money to be made by adapting old buildings for start-ups. That was more complicated in Apeldoorn. While a lack of tenants and vandalism were slowly turning Centraal Beheer into a ruin, Certitudo consulted with Hertzberger on viable solutions. The cluster plan did not lend itself readily to housing since there was too much interior for too little external facade. Variations were devised in which the plan evolved into four entities separated by a passageway, at least one of which could be converted for office functions. Efforts to produce marketable and lettable dwellings continued, but this entailed major alterations to the plan and the materialization. It was also self-evident that numerous thermal bridges would have to be eliminated.

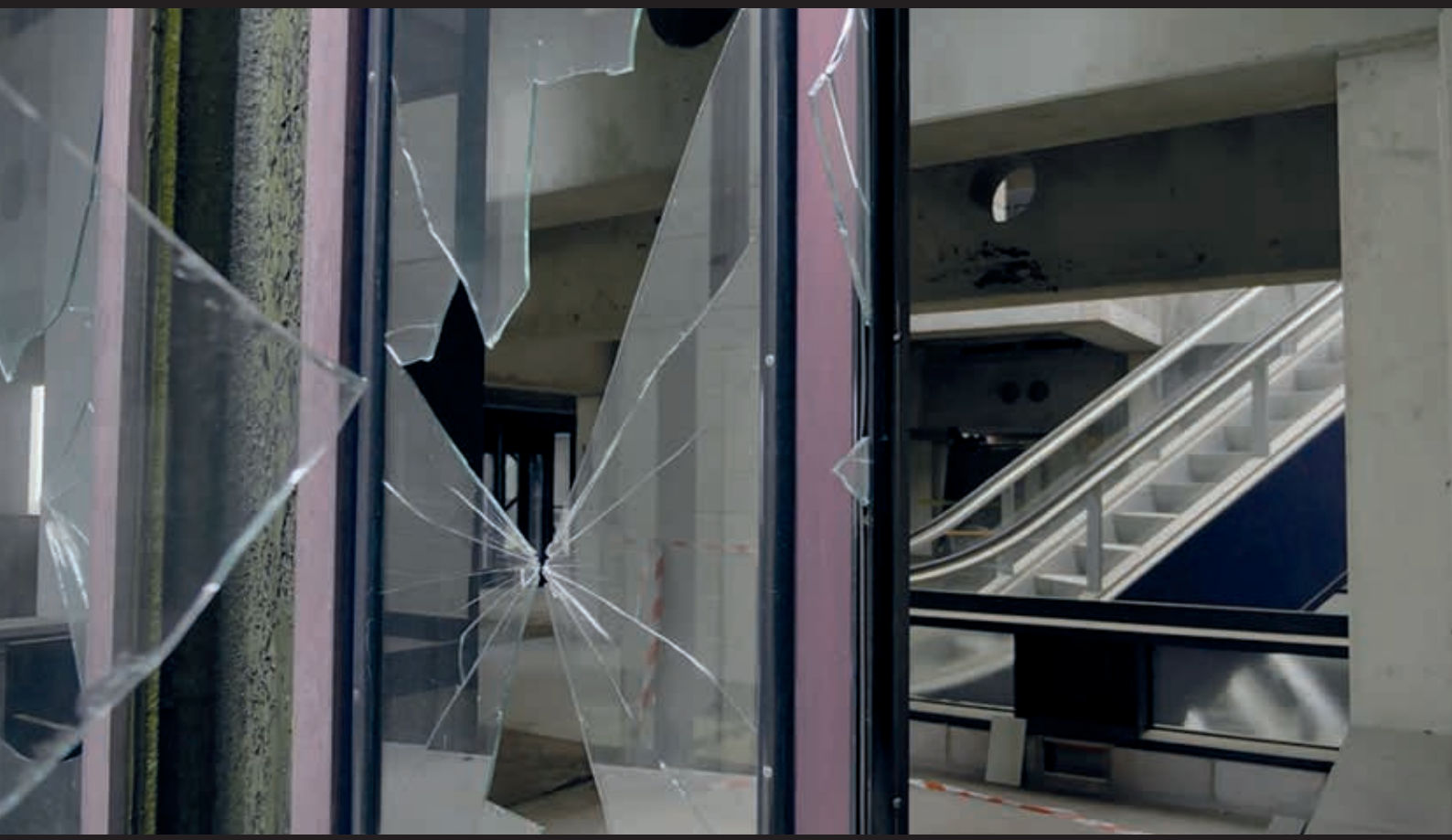
An outcome remains out of reach, the more so since Certitudo, too, was subject to commercial setbacks and has since been declared bankrupt: stalemate. For the time being a stalemate is better than implementing a plan that is neither architecturally nor commercially fully worked out. It is an indication of the degree of complexity of this challenge. National listed status might help: it was an important factor in the preservation of Van Eyck's Burgerweeshuis, although that permanence occupies a prime site, and the surface area is five times smaller.

A MINISTRY IN THE HAGUE

The truly remarkable aspect of the long Centraal Beheer redevelopment saga following the sale and leaseback, is Herman Hertzberger's apparently infinite forbearance, never deviating from the ideological line that a building is a generic framework without any definitive programmatic specification. He stuck to that, even when it was abundantly clear that the material integrity of the original was suffering as a result. While the fate of Centraal Beheer remains chronically unresolved, the future of another major work by Hertzberger, the twenty years' younger Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment in The Hague (1979-1990), is looking shaky. In the dying days of the last century and without paying any heed to the fundamentally decentralized composition of The Hague's street plan, the State decided to bring all government ministries to the would-be city centre around Het Spui. The ministerial buildings outside this area, including the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science in Zoetermeer, were abandoned, and so too Hertzberger's still youthful building for Social Affairs, located close to the Laan van Nieuw Oost-Indië railway station on the outskirts of The Hague.

In line with the prevailing neo-liberal ideology, the building was put up for sale and acquired by the developer Vorm acting together with MeyerBergman Erfgoed Groep, successor of the development company previously known as MAB. In the 1990s MAB had been the developer who initiated De Resident, the key project in a plan to provide The Hague with a credible centre. The new owner, who paid 23 million euros for the 56,000 square metre ministry building, was doubtful that this expenditure would pay off if the existing building had to be retained, however young and robust it might be. Assuming that the net-to-gross ratio of the volume of the Social Affairs building did not readily lend itself to conversion to housing – comparable to Centraal Beheer – demolition was definitely on the cards. A succession of plans for replacement new-build were presented by UNstudio, Rijnboutt and Barcode

► 2. Centraal Beheer in dilapidated state and Herman Hertzberger draws the transformation of Centraal Beheer, 2023 (still from the documentary *The Proof of the Pudding* van Herman Hertzberger by Patrick Minks, Jaap Veldhoen and Wouter Snip)



while a fuming Hertzberger watched from the wings.

In light of the recent sharp rise in building costs, the business case for housing on this site is far from compelling, at least so long as The Hague sticks to its mandatory benchmark of forty per cent social housing for housing developments. In this case that would result in dwellings with a surface area of around thirty square metres. Meanwhile, in the reality of everyday practice, Hertzberger's claim that a building like this is a spatial framework that lends itself to more uses than just the original has shown to be plausible. The Social Affairs building has been successfully appropriated by new groups of users: start-up businesses, students and residence permit holders, all gathered around the large atrium. A short-term outcome is uncertain here, too, but Hertzberger tirelessly continues to insist that components of the building, in particular the structural members, still have decades of life left in them.[9]

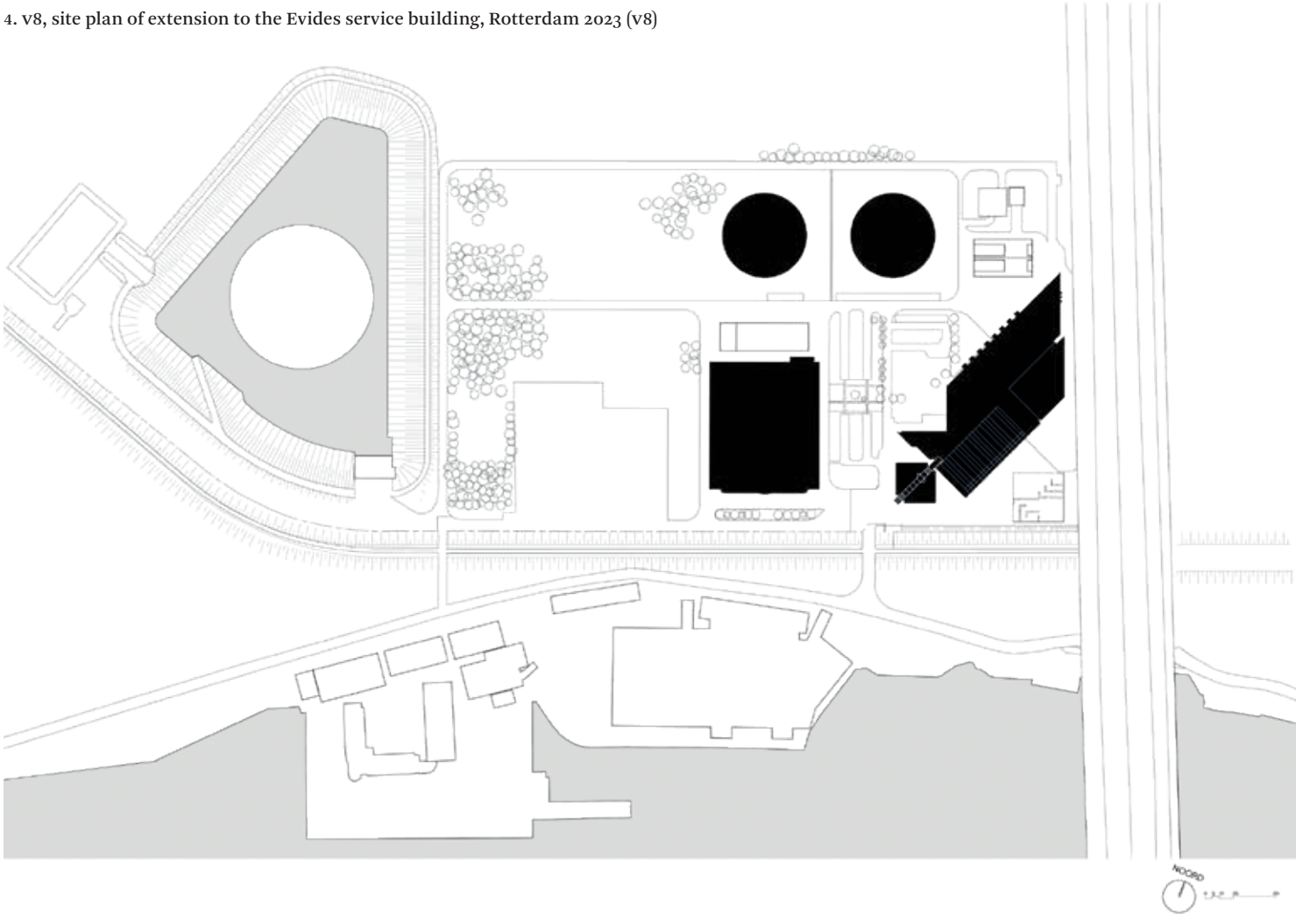
◄ 3. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment building appropriated for informal use, 2023 (photo Herman H. van Doorn GKf)

THE QUIST CASE

Centraal Beheer and the Social Affairs ministry have each in their own way become a major headache for all those involved in their fate. The architect might have acknowledged the theoretical alterability of his buildings, but that does not mean that they really *are* alterable. On top of that there is the extreme capriciousness of the social process, with the possibility of listed status as the only remedy against an unpleasant end. It is, as previously observed, typical of an architectural culture in which buildings have become commodities. But there are exceptions to that culture, including for post-1965 buildings with clear heritage status potential.

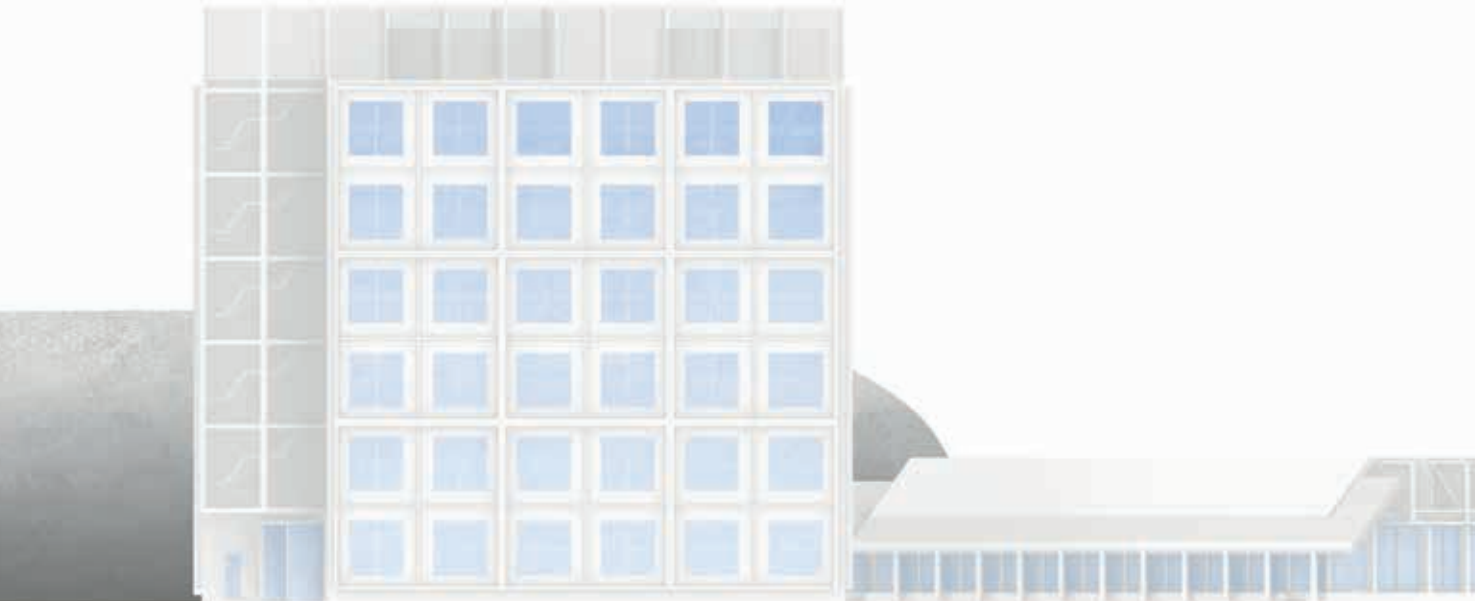
The oeuvre of Wim Quist (1930-2022) was forged under a different ideological star from that of Herman Hertzberger and this had a direct effect on what happened to his buildings as they aged and became susceptible to the pressure to adapt. Quist most emphatically did not see his buildings as a spatial framework that could be varied at will later on, depending on new functional demands. Change might not have been excluded in advance, but the idea underpinning his designs was that the buildings were complete in them-

4. V8, site plan of extension to the Evides service building, Rotterdam 2023 (V8)



5. V8, entrance of extension to the Evides service building, Rotterdam 2023 (V8)

6. V8, south elevation of extension to the Evides service building, Rotterdam 2023 (V8)



selves and consequently not amenable to tinkering. Anyone who tried that on without consulting Quist could be sure of provoking his ire. This is what happened to the Evides water company when it wanted to add a new office building to the waterworks complex Quist had designed at the foot of the Brienenoord bridge in Rotterdam for the Kralingen water company (1973-1977).

The famous tear-shaped water reservoirs and filter plant would be unaffected by the envisaged extension, but in the instructions provided in advance a modest triangle diagonal to the end of the existing service building had been allocated for a possible extension. A European tender organized by the company was won by the Rotterdam architects, v8. Quist was not informed until mid-2020, after the tender had wound up and the winner had produced a preliminary design. He was livid. He was affronted not to have been consulted, but also infuriated by what he saw as the spatially misconceived choice of a triangular volume, by the architectural effect of that choice, and by the connection between the new volume and the existing building. In autumn 2021 Quist applied for an interim injunction against Evides, which was successful insofar as it eventually resulted in a conversation between Quist, Evides and architect Michiel Raaphorst of v8.[10] At Quist's request Floris Alkemade, who had just stepped down as Government Architect, acted pro bono 'to search for a possible solution from an independent position'.[11] Under Alkemade's mediatory guidance the initially frosty relations started to thaw. The parties gradually reached agreement on the idea of connecting the extension, in the form of a diagonally positioned cube, to the existing building via a narrow intermediary section.[12] A rapprochement was achieved, with everyone's autonomy remaining intact. Quist died in the summer of 2022; Alkemade carried on with his mediation activities until mid-2023 by which time the design had attained an almost Quist-like serenity and could be prepared for presentation to the Rotterdam Design Review and Heritage Committee.

Quist's own design exercises, applied to recognized heritage buildings, reveal that it was impossible for him to capture the essence of the original. This was true, for example, of the extension of the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo (1970-1977) and the renovation of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam (1981-1990). Given his own character, there was only one option open to him: apply his own distinctive style down to the last detail. Cultivating mutual respect is an approach that yields results in circumstances where neither the survival nor the related function of the relevant primary element is in question. This befell Quist and he behaved accordingly. The v8 architects and their client gradually assimilated what they had experienced here. As for the 'commodities', which are expected to respond anew to every corporate impulse by adapting to a changing reality, the problem is more serious and more urgent. Mutual respect cannot be taken for granted here and the existing building is quite simply expected to acquiesce or, in the last instance, make way. This was what befell Hertzberger and what determined his agenda for many years. That agenda could well symbolize the effort that is also required of others on behalf of post-1965 heritage.

NOTEN

1 F. Claessens, 'In memoriam Runcorn', *Oase* 57 (2001), 104-117.
2 Claessens 2001 (note 1), 104.
3 F. Scott, *On Altering Architecture*, Abingdon 2008, 1.
4 S. Brand, *How Buildings Learn*, London 1994.
5 A. Rossi, *The architecture of the city*, Cambridge 1982 (1966), 21.
6 R. Roorda and B. Kegge, *Vital architecture. Tools for durability/Vitale architectuur. Gereedschap voor levensduur*, Rotterdam 2016.
7 H. Hertzberger, unpublished text 'Van "werkplaats voor 1.000" naar overdekte ministad', 2 December 2021. Made available to the author by AHH office.
8 R. Baumeister and S. Petermann, *Back to the office. 50 revolutionary office buildings and how they sustained*, Rotterdam 2022, 388-399. Information gleaned during an interview with Herman Hertzberger and Laurens-Jan ten Kate, Amsterdam 1 June 2023.
9 AHH, *SoZaWe. De toekomst van het voormalige gebouw Ministerie van Sociale Zaken. Poort naar de stad*, Amsterdam 2021.
10 Injunction judgement 5 November 2021, Court of Rotterdam case number C/10/621627 / KG ZA 21-584.
11 Conversation notes of Floris Alkemade, d.d. 22 December 2021, shown to the author. Interview with Floris Alkemade, Sint-Oedenrode, 30 May 2023.
12 Interview with Michiel Raaphorst and Frank Huibers (v8 Architects), Rotterdam 22 June 2023.

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THE FATE OF POST-1965 BUILDINGS

BERNARD COLENBRANDER

Buildings completed after about 1964 cannot count on surviving into old age, however robust some of them may still be. Any building can perish, irrespective of age, structural condition or architectural quality. Once the idea that a building is in the way has taken hold, its chances of being torn down are considerable. All the more the building has lost its original function. This essay takes the position that the functionalist fixation on fitness for purpose has fed through into the way existing buildings are treated and the intellectual reflection on that. Take Stewart Brand's famous diagram. It distinguishes the various material layers of a building according to their different lifespans, yet that is no guarantee that those lifespans will be respected in practice: a building is by no means always treated justly, let alone the material lifespan of the different layers of a building. Nevertheless, for anyone devoted to the city as cultural project, there is still Aldo Rossi's renowned theory regarding a city's 'permanences' of cultural value. The lifespan problem of more recent architecture is amplified by the fact that buildings are increasingly categorized as a neutral amenity, in other words, a commodity. As such, they can be manipulated at will and without taking account of any architectural merits they may possess. Two highly regarded buildings by the architect Herman Hertzberger have struggled to survive in recent years: the Centraal Beheer offices in Apeldoorn (1968-1972) and the Ministry of Social Affairs in The Hague (1979-1990). Although both buildings were designed to be functionally flexible, that has not rendered them proof against the whims of the real estate market: the survival of both buildings is still on the line in 2023.

Paradoxically, the second case study presented in this article is more hopeful, even though it concerns a building that was most certainly not designed to be adaptable. It is the office of the Kralingen water company in Rotterdam (1973-1979) by Wim Quist. While the initial idea for the extension of this building gave rise to conflict, mediation eventually produced an architecturally convincing solution acceptable to all the parties involved, including the original architect.