



THREE DUTCH ARCHITECTS: HERMAN HERTZBERGER / KOEN VAN VELSEN / REM KOOLHAAS

Author(s): Peter Buchanan

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THREE DUTCH ARCHITECTS

Introduction by Peter Buchanan

Throughout this century The Netherlands has made an extraordinary contribution to modern architecture, having produced many of the greats of modernism as well as a variety of approaches to building. This vitality continues, and it was the subject of an AA evening lecture series which I organized last autumn, 'The Netherlands Now'. Most of the lectures were by architects explaining their ideas and work, each one chosen not only for the innate quality of his work but to represent one of the various strands to be found on the Dutch scene today. Three of these architects, each very different in his ideas and ideals, and each representing a different generation, are Herman Hertzberger, Rem Koolhaas and Koen Van Velsen.

Hertzberger and Koolhaas, with his Office of Metropolitan Architecture, practise in the two main centres of Holland, Amsterdam and Rotterdam, respectively. Theorists, polemicists and writers as well as architects, both are immensely influential in the Netherlands and abroad. Van Velsen, the youngest of the three, works in the small town of Hilversum. He is largely instinctual rather than theoretical in his approach, and his influence is mainly in the standards he sets for emulation.

Hertzberger's approach to architecture was shaped under the influence of the group which gathered around Aldo Van Eyck in those heady years when the latter edited the magazine Forum. With the work of Van Eyck, and despite the steady evolution of the work of both, Hertzberger's architecture is still characterized as representing the Forum Group, the Dutch arm of Team 10, whose influence still pervades the Netherlands, too often in its deliberate rejection. Their buildings are intensely Functionalist, not in the narrow sense of being tailored to explicitly defined function, but rather in implying — even provoking — a wide range of functional responses and interpretations. They are also intensely committed to engaging social issues, particularly alienation, to the extent that some stigmatize the work as suited only to disadvantaged minorities: architecture as paternalist therapist.

Forum Group architecture is also characterized as Structuralist, as being built up ('structured') with systematically repeated and modulated elements. These (to paraphrase structural linguistics) define a potential repertoire of functional elaborations, to which each user's response is a personal performance. Actually, of Van Eyck's work only the Amsterdam orphanage of 1957–60 is truly Structuralist, but Hertzberger remains committed to this approach, though few of his designs deploy their repetitive elements in quite such an unrelenting manner as his competition design for an extension to the museum complex on the Kulturforum in Berlin. An almost pure and uncontaminated diagram, a chequer-board of possible moves, it is a system or machine for displaying works and circulating viewers. As such it runs counter to the recent trend in Hertzberger's work, which is becoming more fluid in composition and less insistently accretive.

Koolhaas and OMA's approach is often presented as the antithesis of

that of the Forum Group, and was enthusiastically embraced as such. It is an attempt to return to a pre-Forum modernism and to meld, amongst other things, the rationalism of Hilbersheimer with the provocative social programmes of the Constructivists and of 'Manhattanism' — all clothed in the optimistically trashy style of the fifties. It was to this latter, of course, that Forum advocated an antithesis offering authenticity in a mix of experiential richness and profundity with aesthetic sobriety.

In contrast to Structuralism's discipline and close attention to function and detail, Koolhaas offers the broad sweep of scenarios and scenography. With the Netherlands Dance Theatre the approach precisely matches the problem, and even elements carried over from very contrived early versions — particularly structural solutions — convince in the completed one. Those who dismiss the building for its tacky detail, or lack of detail, are missing the point, for the building is a mix of shed and scenography. Even in the feeling of flimsiness and ephemerality such an approach is exactly suited to modern dance — though it is quite unsuited to, say, opera. That it is not conventionally architectural is the Dance Theatre's most radical and in this case triumphant proposition.

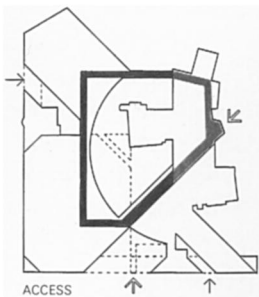
Hemmed in by two ghastly vulgar buildings, the Dance Theatre has little opportunity or need to exert an architectural presence. Instead, it gesticulates its presence through a few apt devices recalling the currently popular spirit of the fifties: the mural of dancers on the fly tower, the gold ice-cream-cone box-office and cafeteria, and the wavy auditorium roof. Close to and inside the building there is little sense of architectural mass or detail, and absolutely no poché. Instead, the shed-like volumes are rendered usable by discrete elements which are inserted, like the temporary flats and fitting-out found in fringe theatre and dance venues. Highlighting this scenographic quality is the dependence on artificial light for much of the drama and spatial mystery.

Though Van Velsen is considerably younger than Koolhaas, and his taste for dynamic compositions of Constructivist elements might suggest his influence, he is much the more experienced architect, having opened his own practice several years before even graduating. He is already a master of form and construction, selecting for each job a limited range of materials which are deployed and detailed with an explicit rigour. His designs celebrate movement, with a promenade architecturale punctuated by a series of free-floating geometric elements. Entering Van Velsen's own house and studio, the visitor is drawn onwards and upwards by a series of circular openings, in a progression from darkness to light, to reach the upper living areas brightly lit through saw-tooth roof and translucent walls. With the house and photographer's studio in Bussum, designed for his brother, a long sloping bridge skewers the three main volumes, in which a number of smaller elements are slewed to dynamic effect. And in the house beside a lake in Vinkeveen, the two main volumes collide in a gyratory of shared family activity.

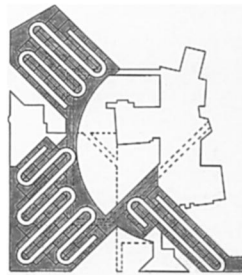
Herman Hertzberger

ART GALLERY, BERLIN

Competition project for an extension to the museum complex on the Kulturforum in Berlin, 1986.

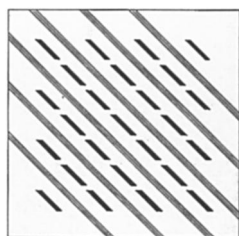


Access: An avenue along the perimeter of a semicircular garden provides access to the new picture gallery. Its starting and finishing points are both situated in the existing entrance hall, creating a continuous route which can be used in both directions and which essentially takes in all the rooms of the museum. Although the building is centred on the entrance hall, there is a second entrance which also opens on to the main route, providing access to the museum from Sigismundstraße.

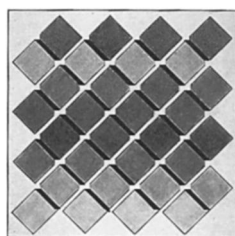


MUSEUM LANDSCAPE

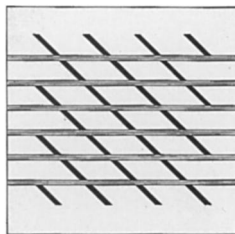
Museum Landscape: The painting galleries take the form of a 'landscape' of extensive avenue-like spaces with parallel walls which act as a tectonic structure, and the main route through the museum constitutes a section through the landscape, as it were, providing an overall impression of the collection at a glance. The successive 'avenues', connected by stairs and ramps, are situated on an incline, so that each is fifty cm. higher than the preceding one. They offer views at both ends in the longitudinal direction, at one end through a glazed screen into the landscaped courtyard, and at the other, through a glass-brick wall, on to the street.



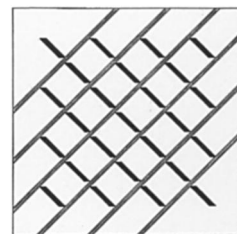
LONGITUDINAL VIEWS



TERRACING

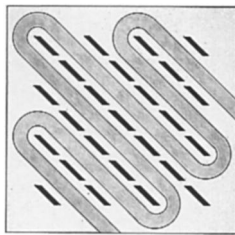


SIDEWAYS OPENINGS



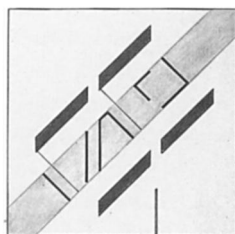
VERTICAL OPENINGS

Diagonal to the avenues, and visible through the openings between the walls, there is always a continuous route on each level. The sideways openings connect platforms on the same level diagonally, whereas vertically they reveal a series of drops in level.

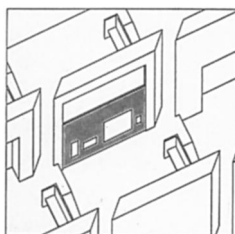


CHRONOLOGICAL ROUTE

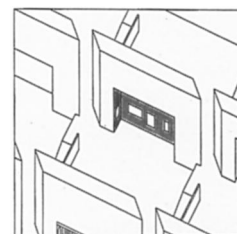
The Route: The parallel walls which form the avenues of 'rooms' are interrupted at regular intervals by vertical, rather high openings giving access to the adjacent avenues. By walking up and down every avenue from beginning to end, it is possible to view the collection in a chronological sequence. However, each avenue offers views of other rooms, tempting visitors to leave the main route. Those who choose the vertical openings as a route can glimpse successive periods, cutting through the fabric of time, as it were.



PARTITIONS



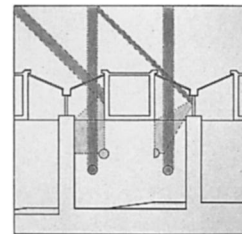
ADAPTABLE PANELS



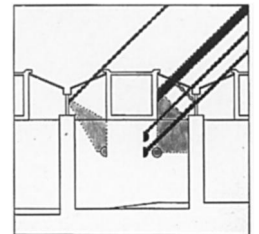
RECESS SHOWCASES

Recesses/Showcases: The long main walls, in light-grey masonry, can be adapted to suit particular spaces or paintings. The depth of 120 cm. allows enough space for deep recesses for paintings which require an environment of a more intimate

character, and the recesses can also accommodate showcases or become a particularly wide gate leading to the next avenue.

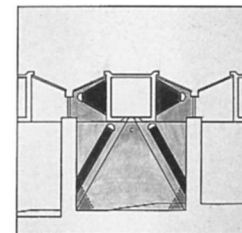


NATURAL LIGHTING



SUNLIGHT

Lighting: All the rooms have skylights designed so that sunlight never enters directly and is always combined with neutral light to create an effect which is as homogeneous as possible. The large vertical surfaces of the technical service ducts act as reflective surfaces, while above the walls there are half translucent and half reflective panels which also affect the quality of light. The artificial lighting system includes halogen spotlights producing light

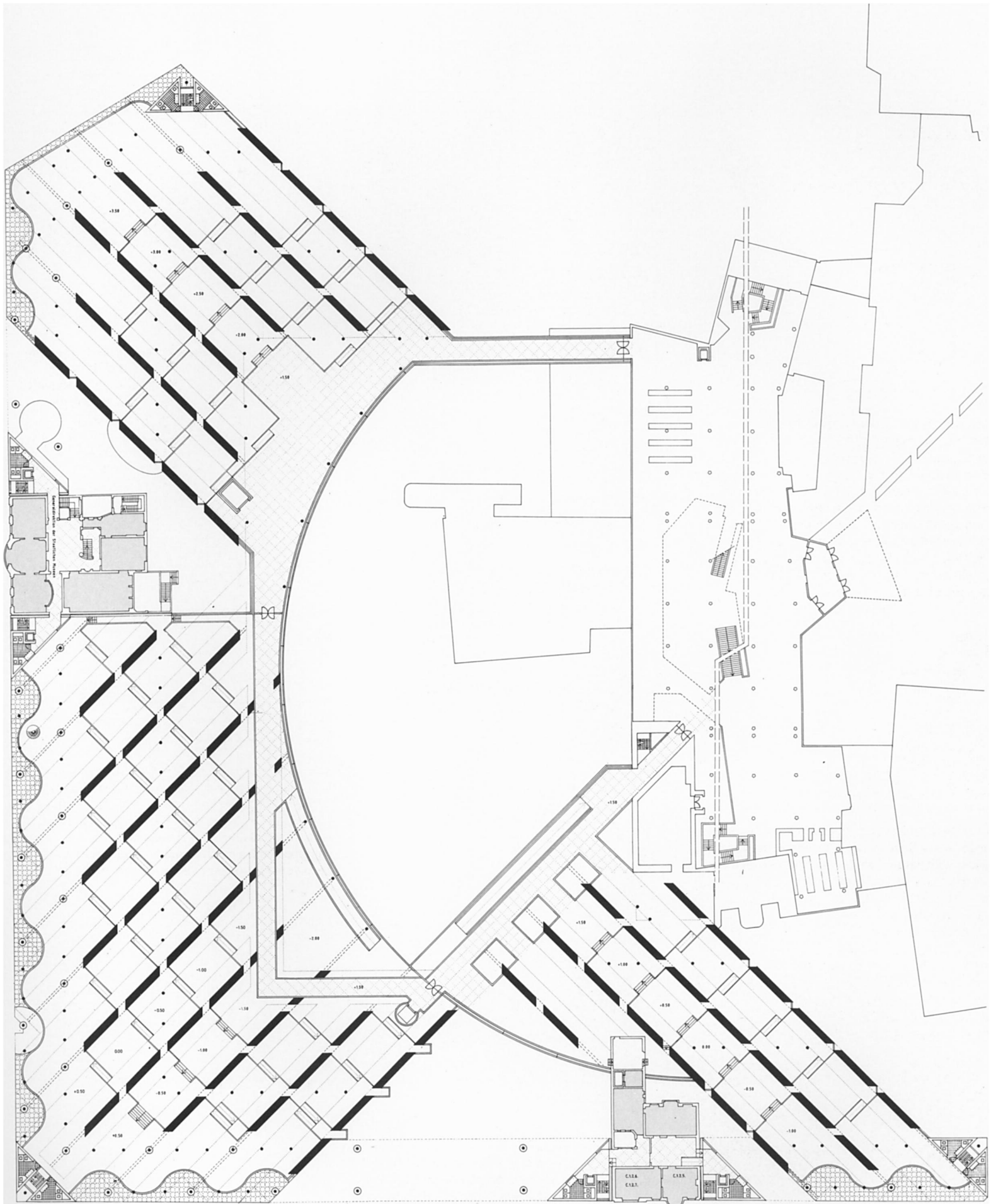


ARTIFICIAL LIGHTING

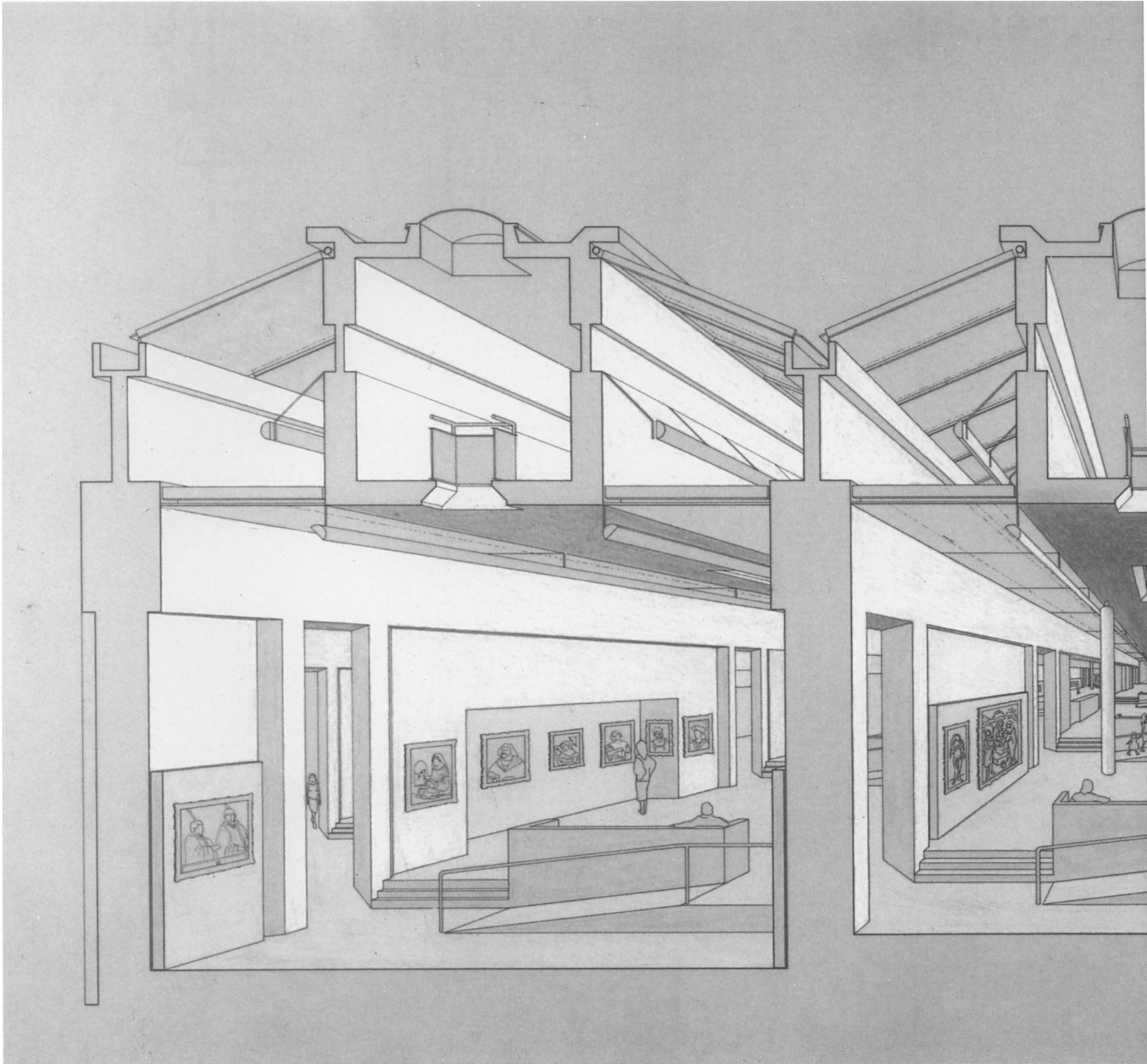
which is diffused over the reflecting walls and mixed with daylight, track-lighting for individual paintings, and fluorescent tubes, or possibly lightbulbs, for general lighting.

Services: Service ducts above the avenues are all connected to a central supply duct which is in turn connected with the supply system of the existing building. The new storage depository for paintings is also located along this route, and each room is equipped with a hatch through which paintings can be lowered by means of an overhead crane.

Café and Restaurant: Our view is that, rather than being a separate building on the piazza, the café-restaurant should be accommodated in the new extension, where it would act as a threshold between the entrance hall and the new galleries — with the advantage of a central location where visitors sitting on the terrace could enjoy a view of the courtyard and pond — while also helping to integrate the existing museum with the new galleries.



First-floor (gallery level) plan.

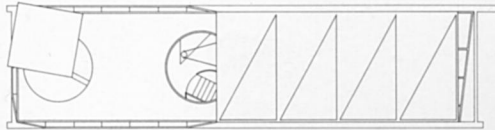


Interior perspective.

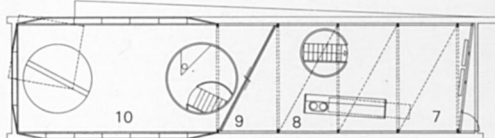


Koen van Velsen

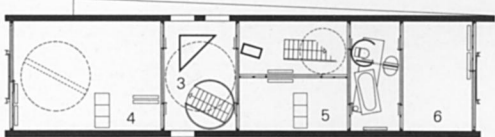
HOUSE AND HAIRDRESSER'S SHOP, HILVERSUM



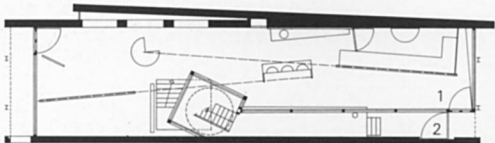
Roof



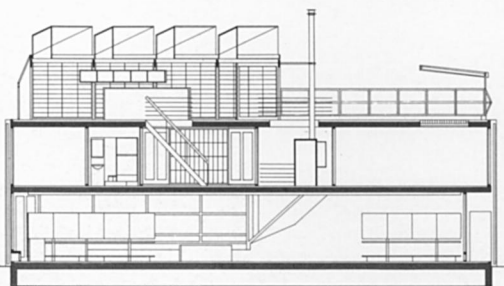
Second floor



First floor

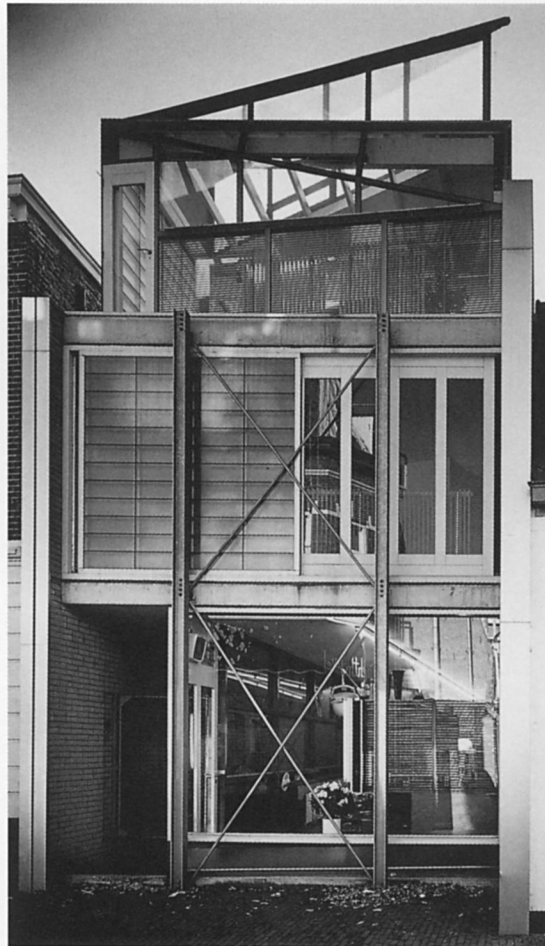


Ground floor



KEY

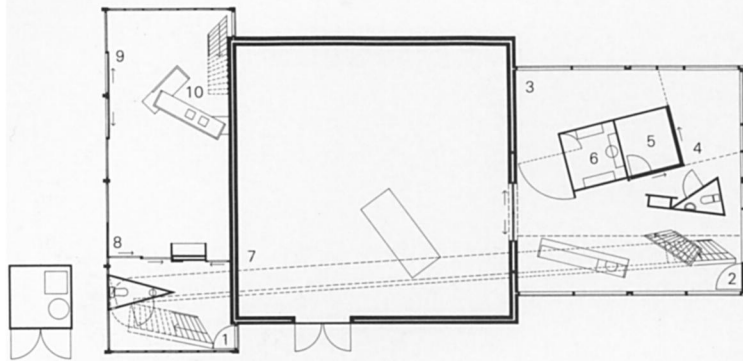
1. hairdresser's salon
2. entrance
3. inner court
4. studio
5. guestroom
6. bedroom
7. living-room
8. kitchen
9. dining area
10. roof terrace



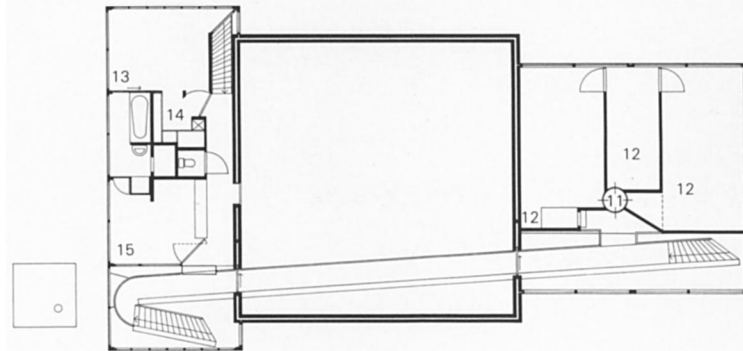
Photographs by Martin Charles.



PHOTOGRAPHER'S HOUSE AND STUDIO, BUSSUM

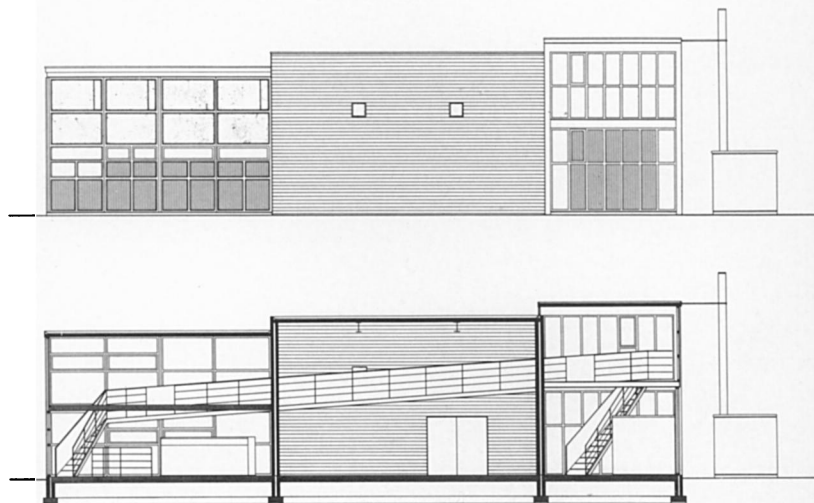


Ground floor



First floor

- KEY
- | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. entrance to living area | 9. dining-area |
| 2. entrance to office area | 10. kitchen |
| 3. prop storage | 11. entrance to darkrooms |
| 4. work area/office | 12. darkrooms |
| 5. storage | 13. bedroom |
| 6. dressing-room | 14. dressing-room |
| 7. photography studio | 15. study |
| 8. living-room | |



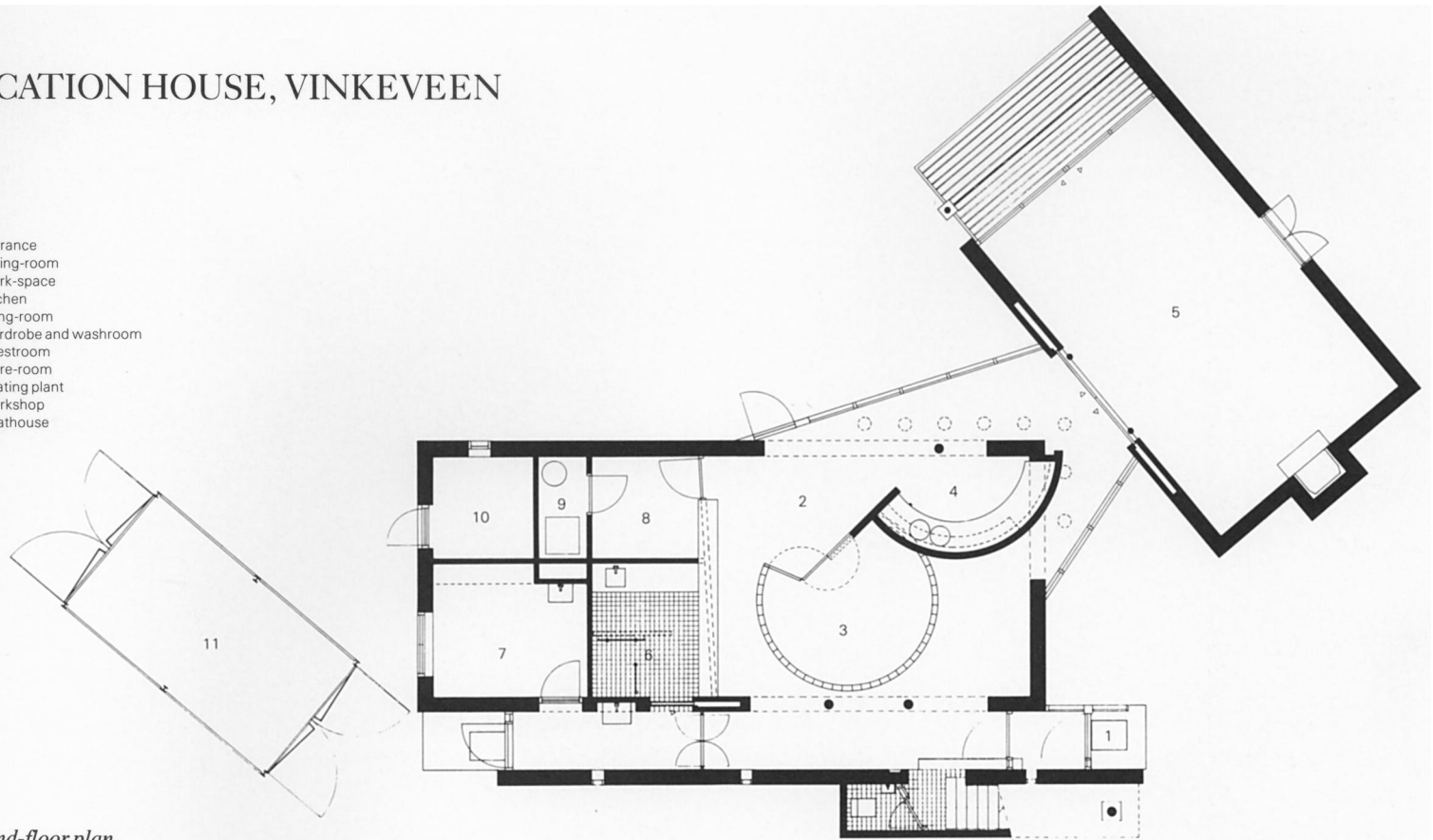
Photographs by Martin Charles.



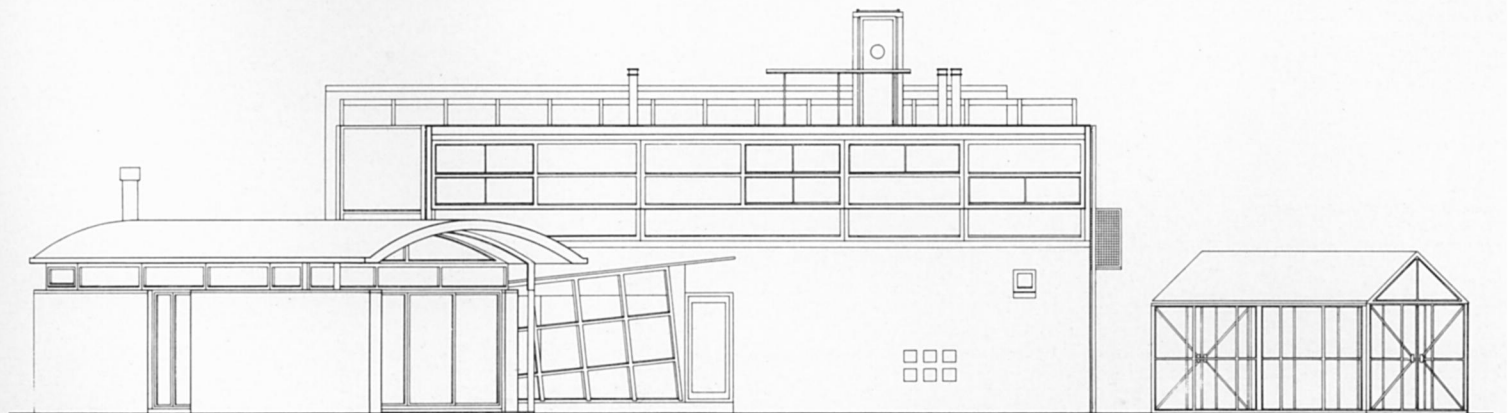
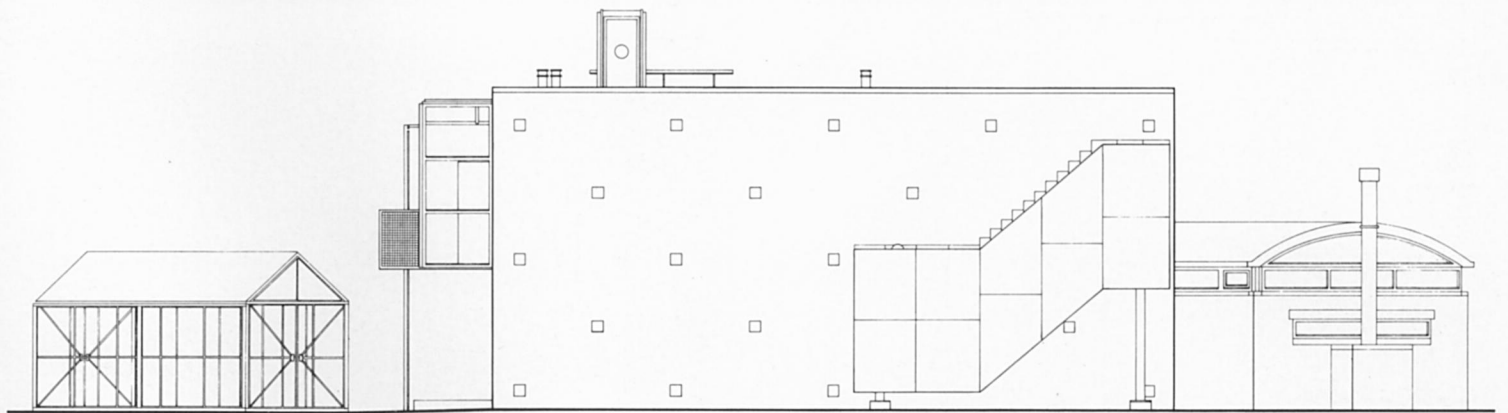
VACATION HOUSE, VINKEVEEN

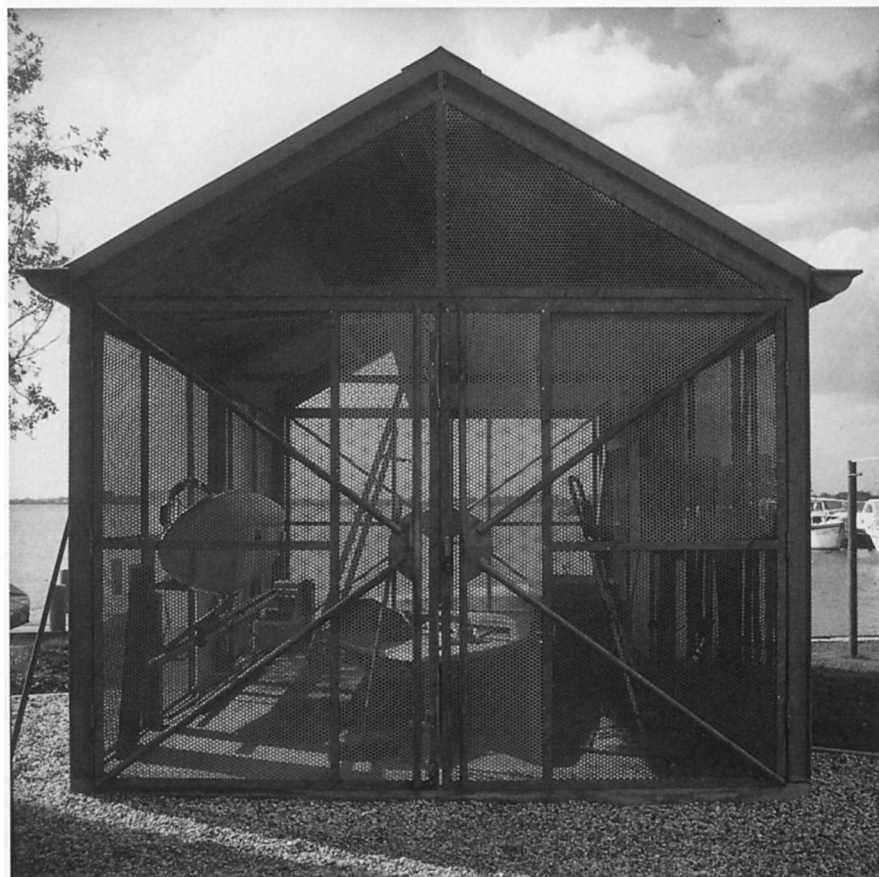
KEY

- 1. entrance
- 2. dining-room
- 3. work-space
- 4. kitchen
- 5. living-room
- 6. wardrobe and washroom
- 7. guestroom
- 8. store-room
- 9. heating plant
- 10. workshop
- 11. boathouse



Ground-floor plan.





Rem Koolhaas with OMA

NATIONAL DANCE THEATRE, THE HAGUE

The first two projects for The Netherlands Dance Theatre combined an 800-seat theatre (equipped for opera as well as dance) with rehearsal studios, offices and lodgings for dancers. These were to have been built as an extension to the existing Circus Theatre at the seaside resort of Scheveningen, a few miles from The Hague. The first project was designed as a rehearsal facility with an open-air theatre, eventually to be covered by a tent, while in the second project the tent was replaced by a steel roof, its curves reflecting those of the tent.

The third and final project, completed and formally opened in September 1987, is located in an entirely different setting, the civic centre of The Hague. Dominated by two slabs of government offices, the site includes a seventeenth-century church, sole survivor of the now vanished historic centre; the slope of an abandoned project for an

inner-city motorway; and the future location of a new city hall. The Dance Theatre shares a plaza, built on top of a parking garage, with a concert hall (architect Van Mourik) and a hotel (architect Carel Weeber, also area planner). What was conceived for Scheveningen as a functional box decorated with flamboyant exterior elements, in harmony with the vernacular of a bathing resort, became in the city centre a formal façade revealing almost nothing of its interior spaces, which were carved out of the envelope.

The exterior is composed of shades of black, white, and grey — except for the bright-blue artificial turf which covers the auditorium roof, whereas inside there is an emphasis on the use of colour. The seven-metre-wide foyer is situated between the concert hall and the 1,001-seat auditorium of the dance theatre, extending beneath the sloping floor of the latter. A balcony in the shape of a half moon extends into the foyer, and on a still higher level is a floating oval 'sky bar' suspended on cables. Between the auditorium and a three-storey

slab containing offices, studios and lodgings are three rehearsal studios. Next to the auditorium is a service stack containing sauna, swimming pool, massage studio, and showers. Facing the public space is a circular restaurant.

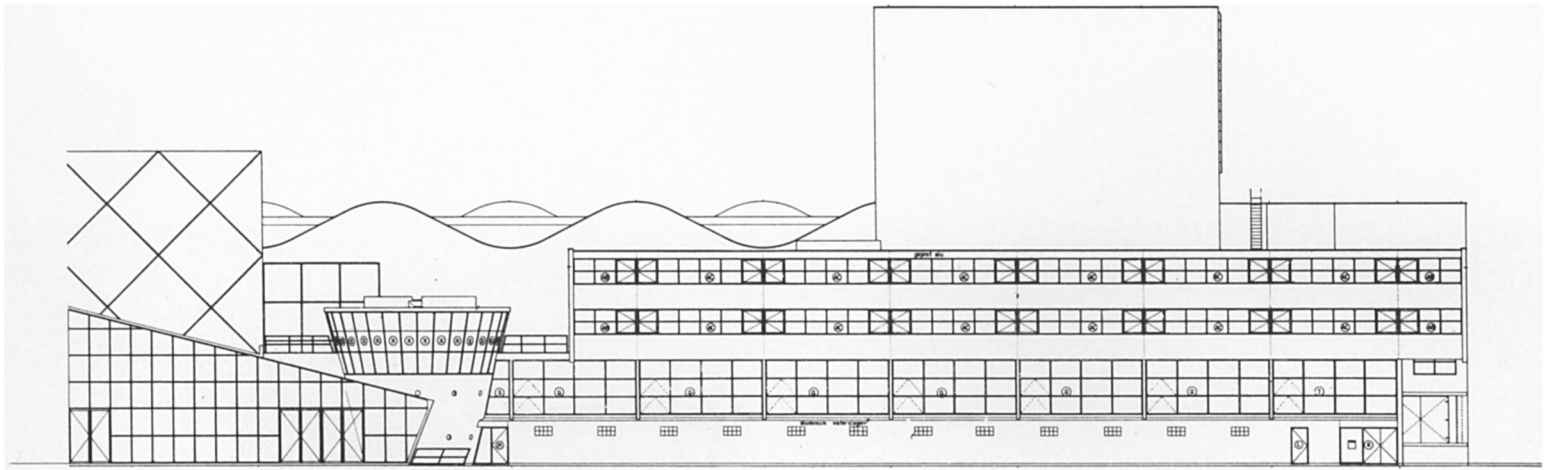
The theatre was constructed of steel beams and girders clad with aluminium and plasterboard covered in stucco, marble and gold foil. The roof is a self-supporting structure composed of a double layer of trapezoidal folded sheet-steel — an enlarged version of the roof of the second project, now reinforced by a beam.

Projects 1 and 2, 1980–84: Rem Koolhaas, Jan Voorberg, Stefano de Martino, Willem-Jan Neutelings, Arjan Karssenbergh.

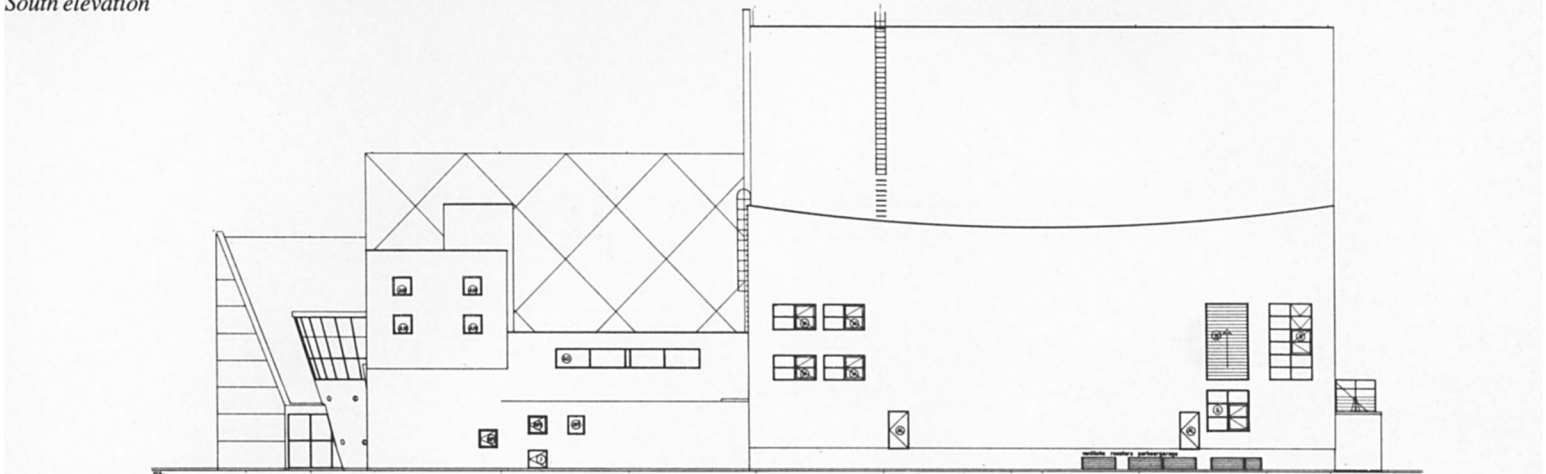
Project 3: Rem Koolhaas, Jeroen Thomas, Willem-Jan Neutelings, Frank Roodbeen, Jaap van Heest, Ron Steiner, Dirk Hendriks, Frans Vogelaar, Wim Kloosterboer, Hans Werlemann, B. O. A., Petra Blaisse. Structural Engineer: Stefan Polonyi (FGR).



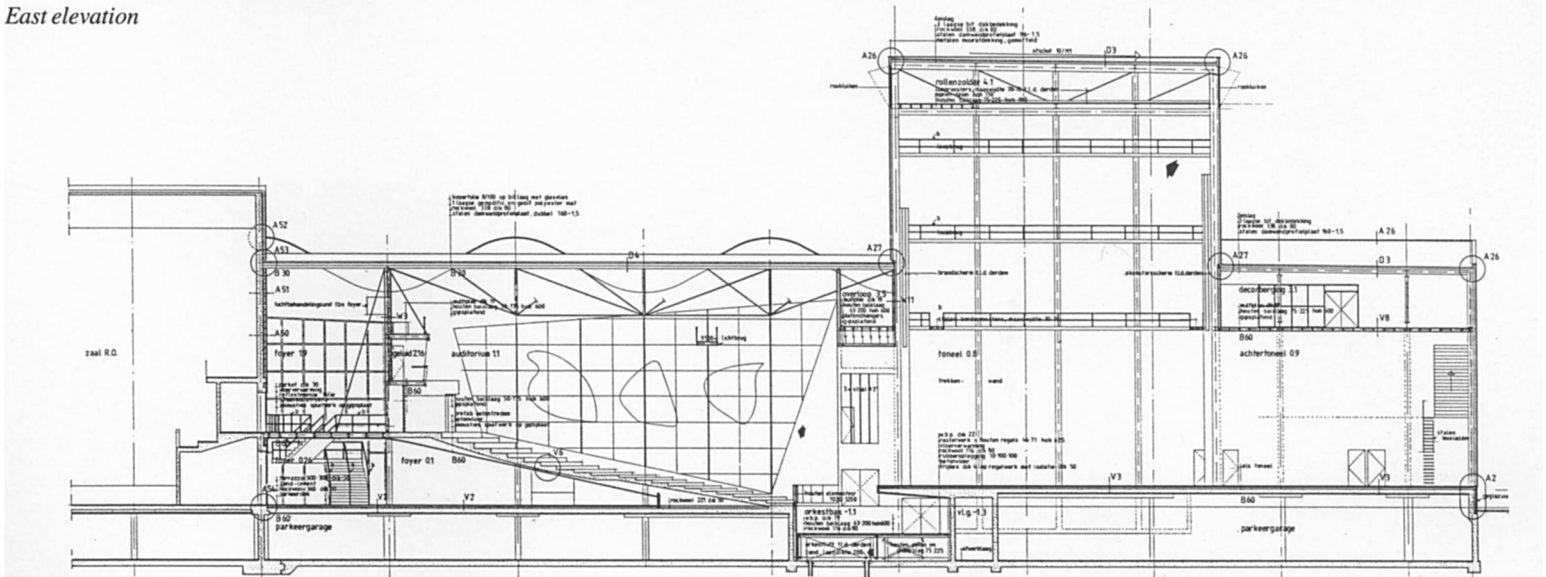




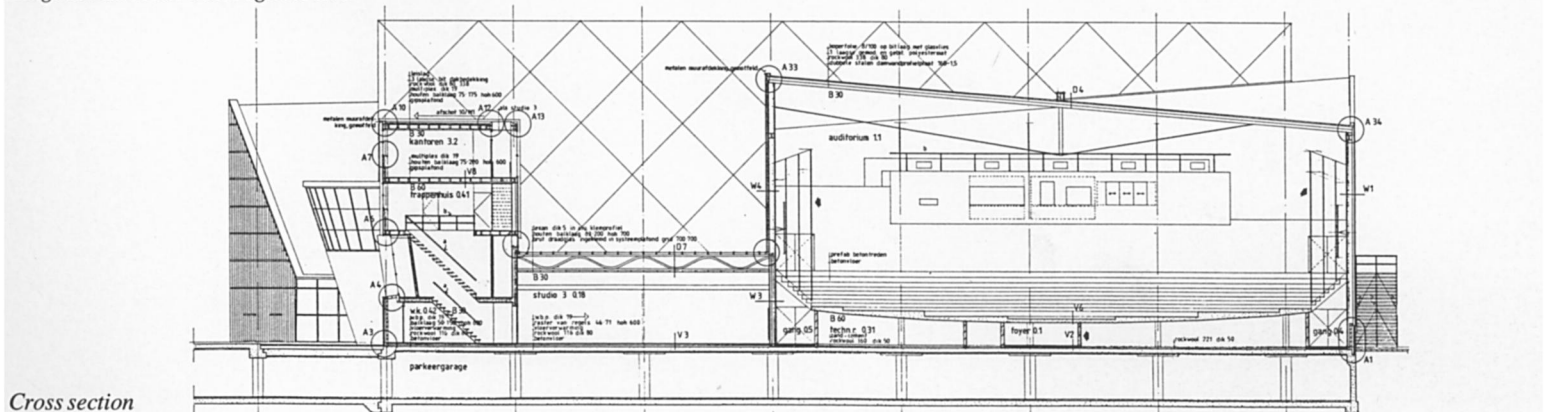
South elevation



East elevation



Longitudinal section through theatre



Cross section





