



**THE FUTURE  
OF THE BUILDING**

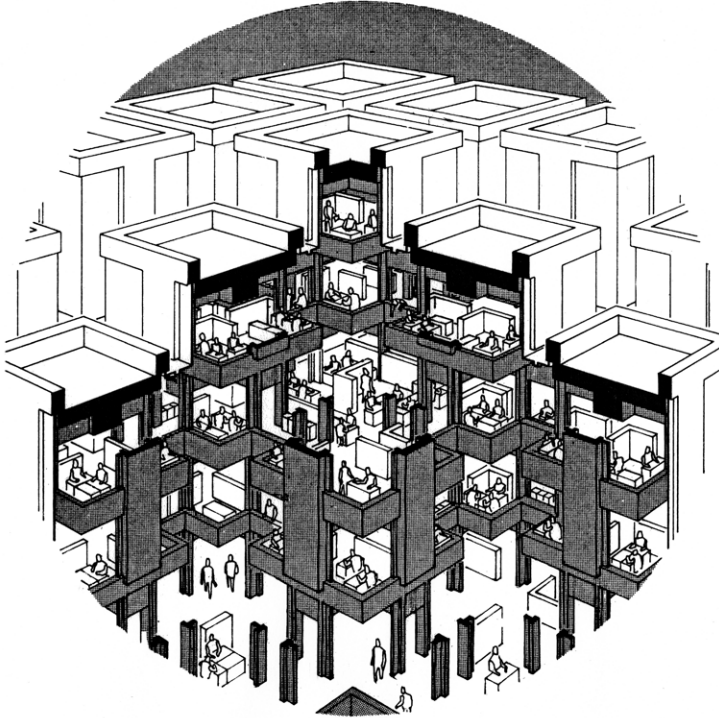
# **“CENTRAAL BEHEER”**

**HERMAN HERTZBERGER  
JULY 2016**







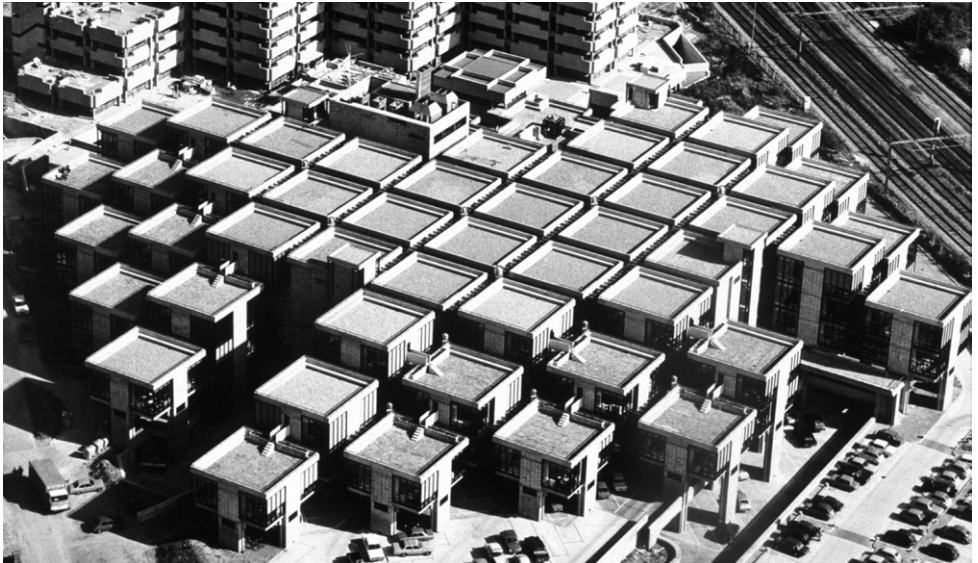
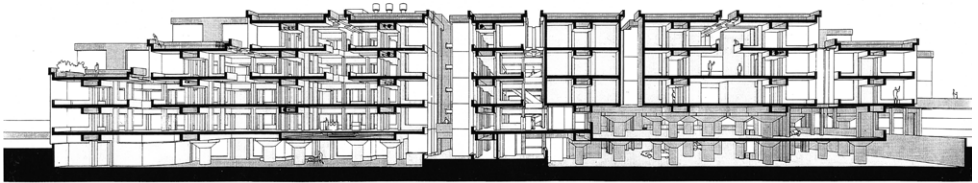


The Future of the Building

# “Centraal Beheer”

Herman Hertzberger

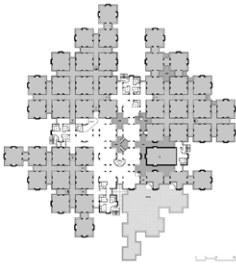
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## The original concept

The concept for the Centraal Beheer building involves the consistent application of a single repeated spatial unit of 9 x 9 metres as a basic building block. The dimensions were chosen so as to be able to accommodate all components of the programme. These spatial units have a pronounced form yet are independent of specific duties and therefore interpretable and polyvalent. With the floors articulated as so many 'islands' interlinked by elements acting as bridges and surrounded by open space (voids), the whole was an open-work system with its different levels linked spatially.

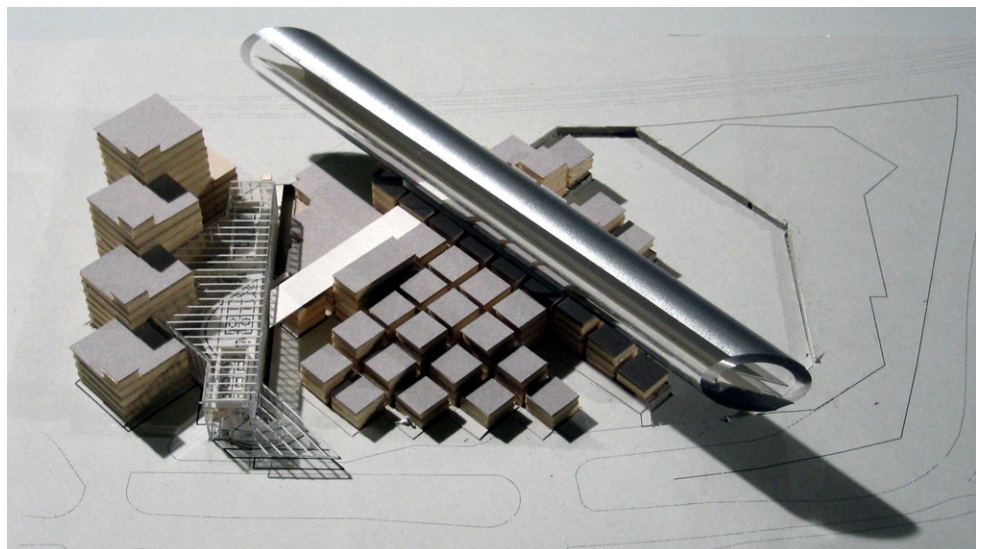
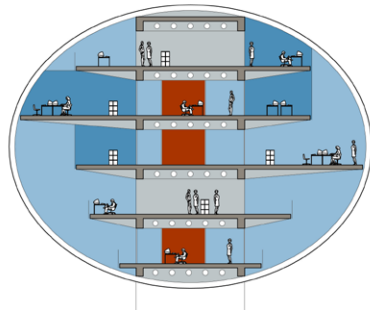
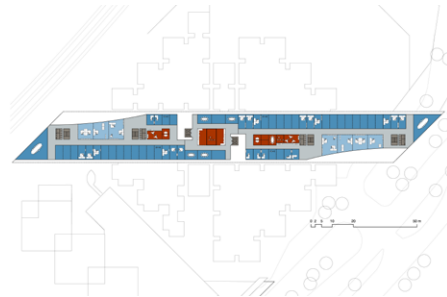


Centraal Beheer was designed from the inside out with the equal-sized spatial units grouped in accordance with the gridiron principle. Depending on what is needed at a particular place, the spatial units can be allotted another duty and in that sense are interpretable. In addition these spatial units, though interlinked by bridges, are washed by a sea of space, so to speak. The large articulated communal space this creates has the ambience of a community workplace.

Constant changes occur within the organization, thereby requiring frequent adjustments to the size of the different departments. The building must be capable of accommodating these internal forces, while the building as a whole must continue to function in every respect and at all times. This means that permanent adaptability is a precondition of the design. In each new situation, to ensure the equilibrium of the system as a whole, i.e. that it continues to function, the components must be able to serve different purposes. The building has been designed as an ordered expanse, consisting of a basic structure which manifests itself as an essentially fixed and permanent



Proposal for educational space, 2003



Proposal for an extension of office space, 2003



zone throughout the building, and a complementary variable and interpretable zone. The basic structure is the bearer of the entire complex, as it were.

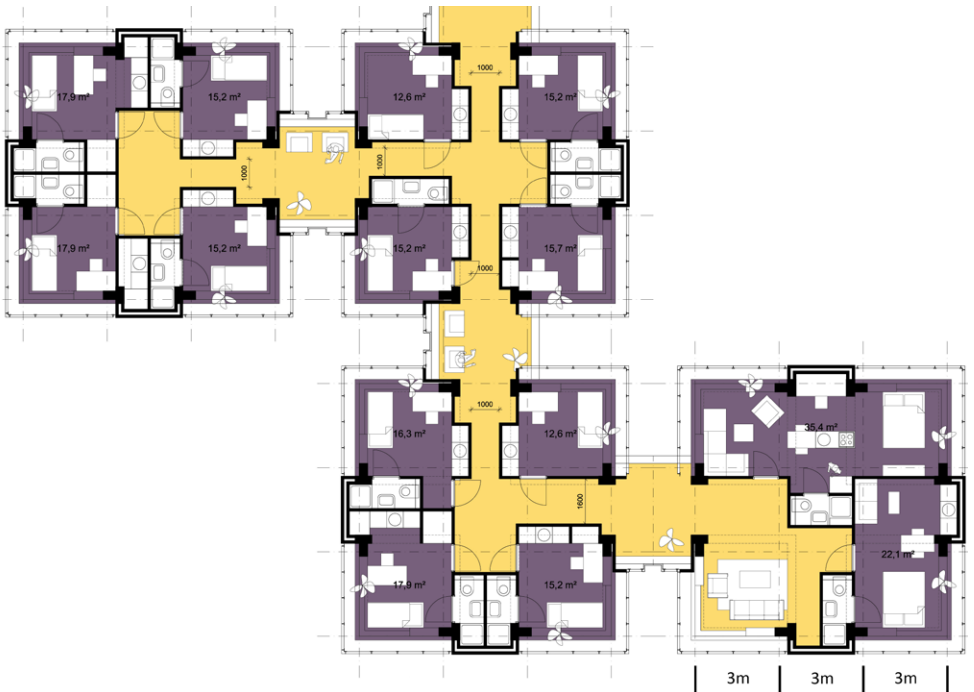
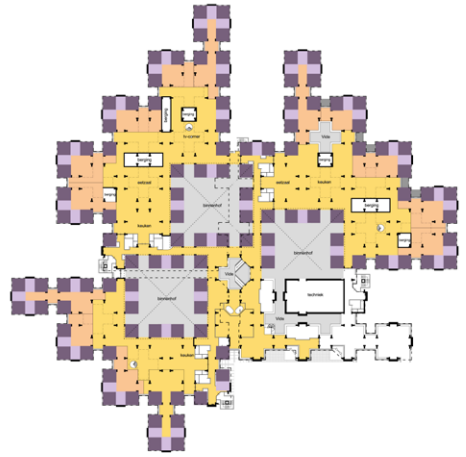
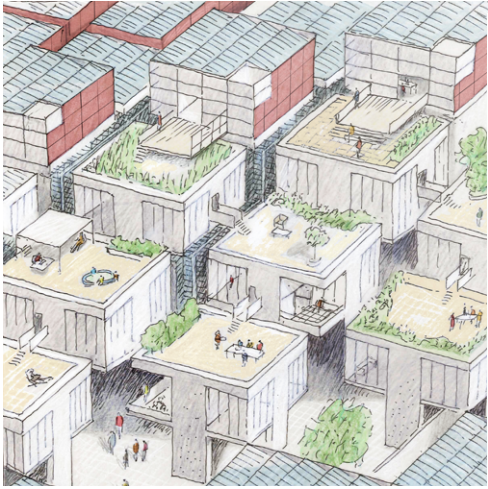
### **About the future of the building: ‘Centraal Beheer’**

Since the insurance company Achmea left the building abandoned in 2013 it was taken over by a developer: Certitudo Capital. They have the ambition to give it a multifunctional content with an emphasis on housing, and they also want to put a special emphasis on sustainability. The intention is to involve us as architects in this operation.

Since there seemed to be a demand for educational space as well as housing, particularly for students, and also for the elderly, we sought to determine the extent to which this would fit in the existing construction. It was obvious at first sight that the space might be appropriate for educational purposes but would face more difficulties in the case of housing. For housing you need a large area of facade, thus an extended periphery, whereas this building has a lot of internal space.

However, creating inner courts by eliminating and thus sacrificing some ‘towers’ from the centre, could be a considerable improvement. In this way we managed to find the right balance between peripheral and internal space. The remaining open space in the centre would fit to house communal spaces for social activities.

In the original design of the building, the leading idea was to make room for limited space-units, undetermined in the functional sense and open for a variety of uses, thus transformation had been anticipated. The building has never been intended to be an untouchable artwork but meant to be a structure to bear different contents as long as the structure itself



Proposal for student housing, 2015



would vindicate. (This attitude was seriously criticized at the time for instance by Alison and Peter Smithson, who read this as a lip service to the market.)

In the light of this openness for transformation, the recent developments are by no means misfitting.

**Transformation is a given as far as buildings are concerned and we do not believe in literal preservation such as might be possible for art objects.** As long as the basic structure remains, it might be finished according to new demands. Although with the sacrifice of the three towers a limit may be passed.

The problem we face today is that bureaucratic hinder, such as a stop on the housing production in the city of Apeldoorn for the time being, interfere with the good intentions and grand plans of the developer Certitudo Capital.

Despite the extensive international acclaim of the building, the Dutch local and national authorities or any other cultural institutions involved, so far have not supported any plans to save and refurbish the building, which seems to be too heavy a duty for a private developer. **The present situation of the building shows a serious threat of falling apart when it stays empty any longer.**

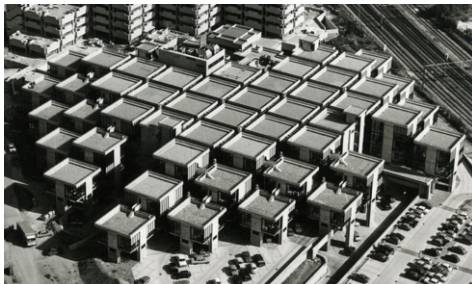
In addition to the possibility to create roofgardens, the large roof surface is very suitable for additional light weight units and a serious quantity of solar panels. However, the developer's relevant ambition to turn the building into a model of sustainability might require undesirable adaptations to the original structure, a dilemma that will play a serious role in redeveloping all buildings dated from before 1980.









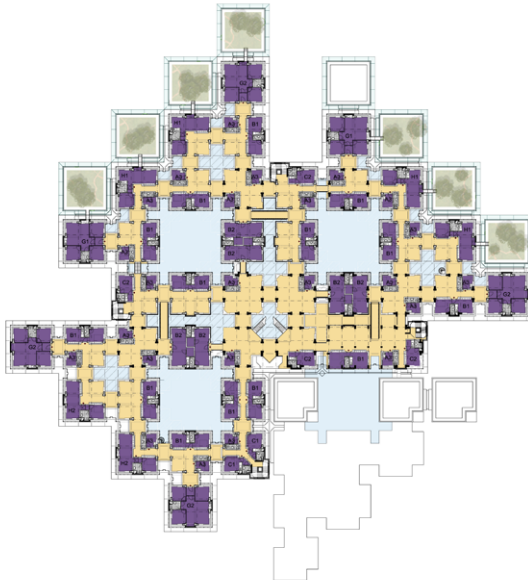


Proposal for housing, 2016

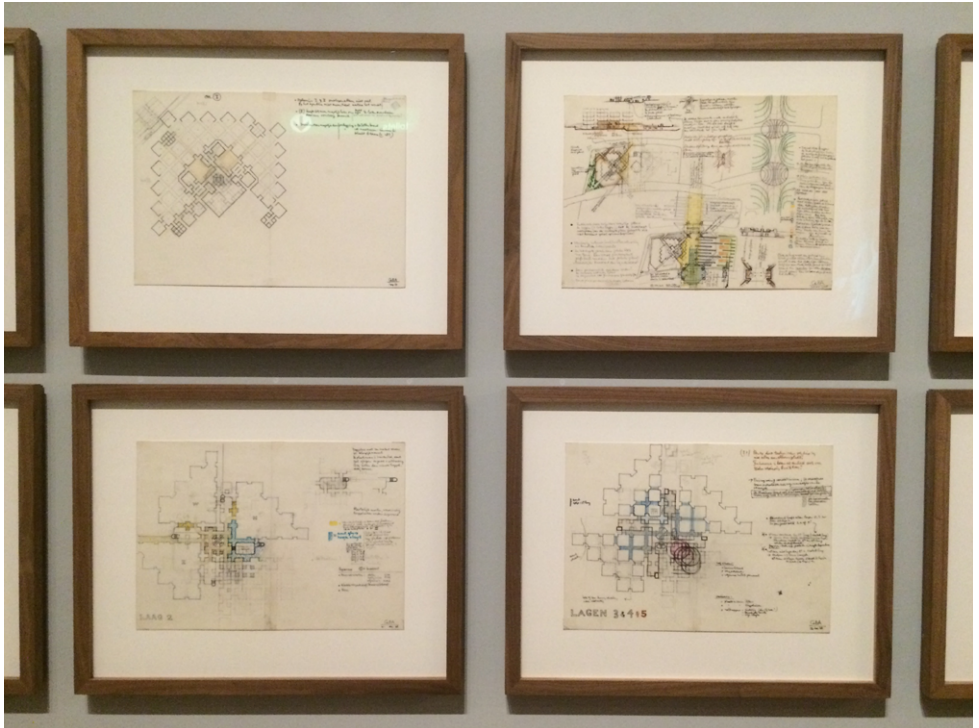
Recent design sketches show the building enveloped by a greenhouse-like second glass skin. Also, a greener environment may be beneficial for housing, to be realized with gardens on terraces and the option of vegetable cultivation nearby.

Next to the housing units, open space for communal services as well as small offices, sports, educational units and maybe a restaurant, is left open. This ambitious program could turn the building into a micro-city, which in fact would be the fulfillment of what in the early design stage was envisaged as prospect. It would be the ultimate proof of the idea of interpretable space units offering conditions instead of fulfilling functions and thus open to transformation and different use in time.

**However, the challenge will be to find a financial basis for this ambitious project to consolidate the future of the building “Centraal Beheer”.**







**Ontwerpschetsen voor Centraal Beheergebouw te Apeldoorn**  
**Herman Hertzberger (1932)**  
 potlood, inkt, 1968-1969

Met het ontwerp voor een nieuw kantoorgebouw van verzekeringsmaatschappij Centraal Beheer ontwikkelde Herman Hertzberger een totaal nieuwe benadering van de werkomgeving. Zowel horizontaal als verticaal had het een open structuur. Ieder mocht z'n werkplek naar eigen inzicht inrichten. Menselijk contact tussen de medewerkers moest belangrijker zijn dan gezagsverhoudingen. Deze schetsen met aantekeningen tonen enkele stappen in het ontwerpproces.

**Design Sketches for the Centraal Beheer Building in Apeldoorn**  
**Herman Hertzberger (1932)**  
 pencil, ink, 1968-1969

With his design for the new corporate office complex of the insurance company Centraal Beheer, Herman Hertzberger developed a totally novel approach to the workspace. It had an open structure, both horizontally and vertically. Everyone could occupy their own station freely and arrange it as they saw fit. They could meet and work openly as equals. These annotated sketches show some of the steps in the design process.

Bruiken van Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam  
 Drukken van Herman Hertzberger, 2006

Temporary exhibition of designsketches (1968-1969) and photographs (ca. 1975) of "Centraal Beheer" in Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, May-July 2016

## Criteria for Transformation and Reuse

- Keeping interventions reversible.
- Keeping characteristics of the spatial idea intact and visible.
- Also retaining a part of the building in its own right, unchanged and visible, with its original materials and joints.
- Always keeping visible what used to be and what parts are new additions. So a new harmony of distinct and distinguishable worlds should come into being.
- New functions should not suffer from constraint caused by the old structure. However, some compromises may be inevitable and hopefully compensated by unexpected qualities such as a surplus of height, light, view or maybe a nice bowwindow.
- The building basically should gain, instead of suffer, from new interventions.

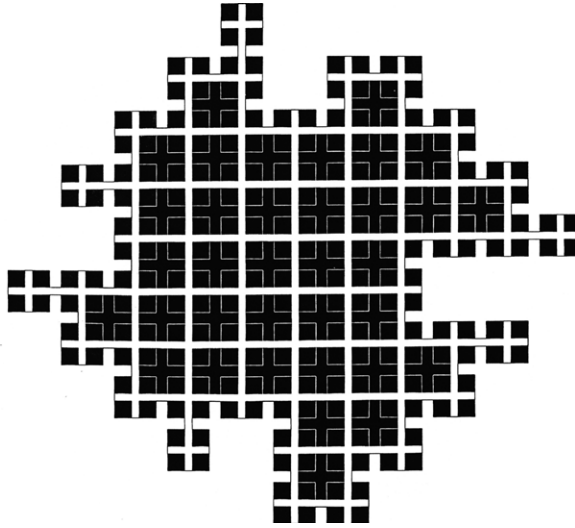
A building cannot be left abandoned without any function or population and without being properly used. Once abandoned, it will irrevocably degrade and disintegrate.



Present state of the building







**Photographs:** KLM Aerocarto, Johan van der Keuken, Willem Diepraam, Martinus Schuurman







