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Discussing two highlights of Dutch residential houses and their changes through time

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Ambitions of Residential Houses in Dutch cities – The interface of the building as a research object –

Discussing two highlights of Dutch residential houses and their changes through time

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Abstract

The architecture of residential buildings has always been related to social conditions and political tendencies, to new techniques, new materials and contemporary popular taste.

Dwelling in the urban context makes it very necessary to deal with the aspect of privacy next to the public domain. Dwelling is an activity that takes place in both, the private and the public, the interior and the exterior spaces. The interface of the dwelling is the place where the transition from interior to exterior (and vice versa) takes place.

The Netherlands has a long history of collective residential houses - especially social houses. The last century has brought several highlights in residential housing projects which pretended to show a new, a better way of design. Different architectural tendencies can be found at the residential interface, telling more about the inner life of the house or hiding it behind a mask that tells us a different story. Some design attitudes pretend to create a fluent transition from inner life to the public, some pretend to protect the home from it. All these tendencies and ideas show a discussion about how to design residential buildings in the urban context, how to give identity to a building which hosts several families in one building and at the same time how to communicate with the city.

In this paper first the highlights of residential housing design in the last century will be shown very briefly. Then a method to analyse the interface with its function as a mediator and a protector between public and private will be elaborated and discussed. The design of the interface will be analysed on two case studies of residential houses from the inspiring idea behind it up to their condition today.

Keywords: façade; intermediary spaces; transitions; public; private

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1. Introduction:

One of the collective proud of the Dutch architecture is the very rich history on housing developments. The Netherlands was one of the first countries that developed laws to control the design, the quality and realization of residential buildings in the 20th century with the so called Housing Act in 1901. The 19th century brought the growth of the cities, not only in the Netherlands, with disastrous effects for the people who had to live in the cities. Since the introduction of the Housing Act residential housing were built with support of the government, new types were invented and for the first time housing got a priority item of the government. Lots of experiments can be traced and changes can be seen especially in the century of the Housing Act.

The 20th century was the birth of a big amount of collective houses, houses stacked onto each other, a type which caused new kinds of facades, giving the often quiet big collective residential houses a new identity, and a new kind of access. The staking of houses in the city was one of the most striking points of the change of the dwelling typology. Even now we are looking back to this century with its interesting changes and developments, searching for the highlights in the development of the residential houses. Research concerning these highlights is divers, starting at the new typologies and ending up with sociological discussions about the collective dwelling and its public versus private areas. The aspect of privacy in these collective housing types, next to the public domain and next to the city, is one often discussed item. Dwelling is an activity that takes place in both, the private and the public. As the Dutch dweller had a history of dwelling types which were totally different, the collective housing forced the question how to deal with the border between both, public and private. In this paper the focus is laid on the façade in its complexity as an interface between the public and the private. I will show some historical examples, explain a method to look at this interface and show to case studies.

2. Between Public and Private: The interface of the Façade

The interface of the façade is the place where public and private meets each other and where the identity of the house is shown to the spectator. The façade of the house has always been the place to represent: the function of the building, the richness of the owner as well as the background, culturally and professionally, all these are representational items. At the same time the interface of the façade always has been the place to select who or what was allowed to enter the house, it was and it is the place of transition and threshold. With the changes of the residential houses in the last century, resulting in a development of collective houses, the representation got unclear, as there were more inhabitants and families in one house, and the transitions and thresholds got more complicated as there were more front doors. Different attitudes developed during the decades and showed a change concerning these items according to the time. It ends up today with the question of how to design the façade. Is the façade still a representational element, and if so – what does it represent? Is it at the same time a border between public and private, a filter between outside and inside?

3. Highlights of the residential houses in the 20th century

(For the pictures see appendix at the end of this chapter)

To understand the developments and experiments in the 20th century we have to look at history in a broader sense. The Netherlands has a history of housing which is formed by individuality. Even the poorest men had their own, small house. With the revival of the city in the 10th century, the typical Dutch channel cities developed (10th - 14th centuries) along with the hall house, a rectangular floor plan with a street façade of 4,50 meters and a depth of 9,00 meters. The façade of the hall-house was altered by the outdoor arrangement of tables, shutters and baldachins used for conducting business ([picture 1](#)). This served as a transition area for the people who lived there. It created distance from the public and introduced a space in-between. The border between public and private, outside and inside was smooth. The Dutch urban house with its front hall, working place or shop underwent changes during the next centuries (1500–1750) in materiality – from wood to stone - and in use, shutters and baldachins were forbidden to create a stronger streetscape, but the transition zone was somehow always kept (for example a small pavement with steps and

another materialization in front of the house). The facades of these houses were designed individually, each house for another owner, but in harmony with the streetscape. Today the “channel house,” as they are called, are known by almost everyone. The façade had its meaning in a social and aesthetic context (picture 2).

With the ongoing growth of the cities, starting especially in the 18th and 19th century, the movement of people to the cities and the agglomeration of different social classes, the tradition of living in individual houses changed definitively. In the 18th century half of the population of Amsterdam lived in hired rooms or dwellings. In that time the Dutch city house developed into a collective dwelling without changing its appearance. Cellars, annexes in the backyard of the house, upper houses, and sometimes even one room were hired out to families. The houses were increasingly occupied by more than one family, but still the appearance of the house remained unique, each one slightly different from the other.

Probably nothing had more influence on the type of dwelling and its appearance than the industrialization, the growth of population in cities, the separation of living and working and the lack of dwelling in the city. The 19th century saw the construction of the first apartment houses in the Netherlands, which were narrow with communal staircases, usually straight, with landings on each floor. Zanstra (1946) notes that the new ground plans were completely unlike those of the single-family houses that had hitherto developed in Amsterdam and other cities. Each family had its own dwelling, however small, with its own front door abutting on the communal staircase. An example of an apartment house is the first one built with a “*portiek*” (= enclosed communal staircase) by the architect Hana in Amsterdam in 1852-53 (picture 3). The old-style pavement was not necessary any more, and contact with the street was lost. The appearance of the house was also different. The façade got the result of the interior, the rooms behind it. There was no attention for the individual dwelling and its identity any more.

The Housing Act (1901) was not only created to control the hygienic aspects of the dwelling, but also the aesthetic ones. Before the Housing Act, at the end of the 19th century, residences often built without any ‘metropolitan dignity.’ With this piece of legislation, the collective dwelling and its design attracted serious attention. This was considered a ‘turning point in the history of Dutch architecture.’ (De Jonge van Ellemeet 1938) The housing act brought new aesthetical inspirations. Now, more than hundred years later we notice a red thread of highlights in the development of the residential housing in the Netherlands which deals with the aesthetically theme as well as with the old tradition of the pavement access and the transitions from public to private.

It was in 1901 in The Hague that an apartment building appeared which had a total different type of access. Each apartment was given a separate access and a front door onto the open air. The apartments on the first and second floor had a frontal area on the first floor outside their front doors, it reminded the dweller on the old outside space in front of the pavement, it created a transition between indoors and outdoor, but here the entrances of four apartments were on the first floor and an outside stair gave way to them (picture 4). This type was called *The ‘Hague portiek’* (Hague staircase). The group of six apartments had a clear identity together, mainly formed by the dominant stairs in the central line of the house (see case 1).

Evidently the Dutch still felt the need for a pavement, even in stacked housing blocks, as is as well clear from the *Justus van Effen project*, a working class housing development built in 1919. These were small homes with a fairly high density, but the architect, Brinkman, referred back to the old tradition, living in front of the house using the pavement. As the dwellings had to be stacked he designed a wide access balcony. This made it more than just a functional feature: it became the new pavement, where the milkman drove along in his float (picture 5). The whole complex was built like a fortress as one strong identity to all dwellers.

The architect “*Berlage was one of the first to emphasize the social significance of architecture and the responsibility architects bore in housing design, one that they had completely alienated themselves from, considering it beneath their dignity*” (Zanstra 1946; p.196). His apartment blocks were innovatory for their time, in terms of representation, forming an ensemble. He confined the accentuation to a few eye-catching features such as the entrance to the *portiek* (picture 6). The same happened with the designs of the *Amsterdam School*, a group that built for the working class. They formed architectonic ensembles (picture 7) but they did not refer to the pavement tradition any longer.

There were at most ten housing developments in the social rented sector based on functionalism (Noud de Vreeze 1993). The functionalistic houses Bergpolder (by Van Tijen and Brinkman, 1932-34) are based on the functionalist principle: they are small but have a balcony facing west along the whole width of each flat (picture 8) and a very functional access gallery on eastside. The functional flats changed the way people entered a residential building. Reaching your home was a much longer process, via the entrance hall and a lift or staircase, along a long access balcony to your front door and not just a transition from the pavement to the house. After WW II, however, the functionalistic architects were faced with the task of a high demand for dwellings. The closed staircase as an access type became very normal. It became not only an area between the street and the dwelling; it became also a clearly visible element in the façade. In the first few decades after the war the main aim was quantity, not always quality. Output was stepped up even further in the 1960s. Home designs were based on a catalogue of ground plans and façades. Nobody thought about the old street tradition of the Dutch any more. No experiments occurred. Monotonous residential buildings, anonymous entrances, staircases and galleries as a result let some architects, like Aldo van Eyck and Herman Hertzberger, feel doubts. Together with others he published his criticism (Forum 3 1959).

In 1968 the Housing Ministry introduced a grant scheme for *experimental housing*, designed to result in a more variegated residential environment. Transitions, encounters, models for humane dwelling – these aspects cropped up more and more in the housing debate. ‘The 1970s saw countless attempts to stage the encounter, attaching a great deal of value to façade design. Architects must have felt this as an era of liberation from strict modernist dogma and an opportunity to search for new paths with the aid of government money. One of the best-known schemes is the *Kasbah* of Piet Blom (1967-74) (picture 9). The access is innovatory, via a system of walkways on the first floor. Another highlight was Frans van der Werf’s *Molenvliet project* (picture 10). Orientation and the need for identification were taken up as themes in this project. Residents were given the opportunity to have a say in the design of the ground plan and façade. Herman Hertzberger proclaimed that architects should offer space for the resident to annex inside and outside of his house. This would be a contribution for creativity and collectivity. The dwellers would create their own in-between zones. Several projects show what he means. The *Haarlemmer Houttuinen* (picture 11 and case 2) is one of the famous early projects 1978-82 in which he created street life by offering lots of in-between spaces to the dwellers. From the seventies till the nineties were a time of more attention to transitions and aesthetics. The large gesture with a whole range of dwelling types – and the wide variation in access types – showed that the Netherlands had a long tradition of building large estates and had learned a lot. Housing in the Netherlands was written about abroad and, just as after the Housing Act, the Netherlands was seen as setting an example of how to tackle housing.

The past fifteen years show that the ground plan is played out: there are many good, ingenious ground plans for dwellings and there is not much freedom left when it comes to designing them. Architects now seek creativity in their choice of materials. *The identity of the house* has become a focus of the design. Architects use new materials to create a new identity. This trend, moreover, is meeting a need on the part of residents. The authorities stopped being involved in housing in the 1990s, with the result that developers are responding far more to the demand for personal, unique homes, doing everything in their power to build homes with unique characters, for example by building dwellings in the appearance of a castle, like Haverleij, built by Sjoerd Soeters (picture 12). It seems that the Dutch is searching for a new identity while looking back to the old tradition of his beautiful channel houses where individuality of the house and the pavement life with its sequences were very important aspects. The individual identity of the house and the transition from public to private are the main points which I focus on in my research about the façade as an interface. In the following chapter I will discuss a research method for an in depth analyse of several projects to study the façade as an interface between outside and inside.

Illustrations to chapter 3: Highlights of the residential houses in the 20th century



1. Painting of the street life in the Dutch city of the 15th century
Source (Rottier p.123)



2. Amsterdam 17th century, Bantammerstraat
Source: Meischke Amsterdam p.48



3: 1855 The first apartment building with a *portiek*, in Amsterdam, architect Hana;
Source: Prak (1991) p.70



4. Street elevation of the *Hague portiek* Architect Stefanus Steens
Source Prak (1991) p.146



5. 1919, Spangen, architect Brinkman
Source: Arch. Guide Nederland p.232



6. The rationalistic houses of Berlage
Source: Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek 1974 deel 25 p.157



7. Spaarndammer Buurt, architect De Klerk

[http:// www.iisg.nl/volkshuisvesting/index.html](http://www.iisg.nl/volkshuisvesting/index.html)



8. 1932-34,
Rotterdam, Bergpolder block of flats, Van Tijen
Source: <http://www.iisg.nl/volkshuisvesting/p5f112.html>



9. Kasbah, Piet Blom
Source: Vletter de M. ; p.107



10.1978 Frans van der Werf's Molenvliet housing scheme
Source: <http://www.iisg.nl/volkshuisvesting/p28f225.html>



11. Hermann Hertzberger:
The *Haarlemmer Houttuinen* in Amsterdam
Source: Lüchinger p.246



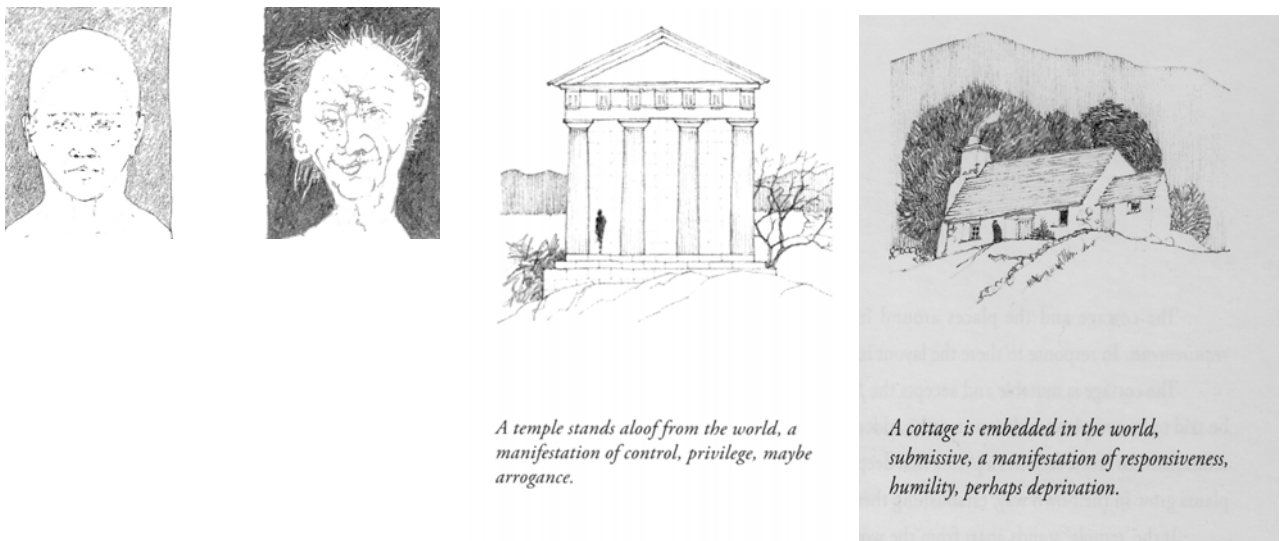
12. The "castle" Haverleij, built by Sjoerd Soeters
Photo: B. Jürgehake

4. A method to research the interface of the façade

In my research I am interested in the facade as a *face* to the public – the representational element and the façade as a *social filter* – as a transition from public to private. Understanding the design approach of the façade during the last century and possible shifts in the approach calls for investigation of built precedents, the position of the architects and the user in those times. I elaborated upon an applicable research method that clarifies my search for the meaning of the façade in its total complexity as an interface.

Researching the aspect of representation: face, impression and character

To analyse architecture architects often have used the human body as a reference, while searching for methods to order and compose the building. The link from the human face to the façade of a building is obvious. Simon Unwin (2009 p.122) looks at aspects like regularity and symmetry and compares them with the human face.



Picture: Unwin S. (2009) 3rd. edition; Analyzing Architecture p.122, 118, 119

Each face has a main form which can be traced with a drawing of the front and the profile. The striking elements of the face are not only the form, but also the eyes, the nose, the mouth, the forehead, the chin and the cheeks. You could make a close-up as close as useful. In the research about the representation of a building I use the analogy with the human face to study the facade. I refer to the parts and elements of the face and look for analogical parts in the architecture and to compare them through the last century.

<u>The face and its accents</u>	versus	<u>The building and the dwelling</u>
Main form and profile	=	main form of the building and profile
Forehead	=	gable
Eyes, eyelashes and eyelid	=	the window and other openings
Eyebrows	=	accents above the openings, i.e. protruding parts
Mouth	=	Entrance
Chin	=	stairs or steps to the entrance
Cheeks	=	monolithically parts
Ears	=	finishing elements to the right and left
Skin	=	Material, colour, decoration

More difficult to catch is the first impression of a building. This is intuition. Much research has been done on the outer appearance of the human being and what it reveals about the human being as a whole. The aim almost always is to understand the inner condition of a person by looking at his outer appearance. The face is the main informant of nonverbal communication. It is also where emotions are expressed. The most important emotions like happiness, surprise, fear, anger, disgust and curiosity can be seen without further

communication. Different models have been developed to distil character out of the expression of the face. These models categorize features of persons in groups or types (the reformer, the helper, the achiever, the individualist, the investigator, the loyalist, the enthusiast, the challenger, the peacemaker...). Categorizing architecture into *character groups* could be a means of capturing the first impression of a building and comparing it to others. The character discussion in architecture of the 18th and 19th centuries reached the Dutch architects as Auke van der Woud describes in his book 'Waarheid en karakter' (Truth and character), concerning the 19th century debate in architecture in the Netherlands. The residential building had a special position in this discussion. Housing as an architectural point of interest started with the introduction of mass housing which was more relevant at the beginning of the 20th century. The notion of character in residential buildings is a relatively recent topic whose categories remain more or less unclear. De Vreeze named three categories which occurred between 1900 and 1940 (Noud de Vreeze 1993 p.68-75): The *traditional grant family house*, this was the garden city ideology, *residential housing as an art product* - these projects can be distinguished by their monumentality, originality, expression of power, exuberance, a richness which was known in architectural history for centuries, but not in the context of residential housing projects. The third category was *the dwelling as a product of the ordinary*, the simple and functional house. In my opinion the three categories are a starting point that should be elaborated in a more profound way.

The face and the first impression are main items of the analysis of the façade. Next to this the composition is a basic instrument of classical architecture. Elementary geometric forms, proportion, symmetry, axis and hierarchy are seen in new applications even today. Composition nowadays is not as fixed as the basic instruments of classical architecture were. A play with axes, arrangements in zones, a free composition of the façade, contrasts, a collage, and also rhythm and repetition are all possible. There is, therefore, no law for composition and neither is there for the design of the façade. Architects who are analysing the composition of buildings realize this. In an analysis Peter Eisenman did on two buildings designed by the architect Terragni, typical features he found were: *Overlap*: parts of the façade run to the next façade, lines run from the one façade to the other; *Contradiction*: change between monolithically designed parts and open structure, between smooth and rough, between light and dark; *Accent or central point* in the façade that differs from the rest; *position of the entrance* as a special element in the façade. One question which strikes my interest while researching facades of residential buildings would be : Do you recognize the individual dwelling or is it hidden behind an identity that covers the whole building? The short history already gave some answer because this is dependant to the time.

Researching the aspect of the social filter – the transitions from public to private:

From the public space to the protected place of the home, there are various and culturally dependent transitions, boundaries and borders. Transition is meant as an alteration (of a physical system from one state, or condition, to another) of material, space or measures (height, breadth, level) and even spheres – for example, lighting effects. Transitions are oriented towards the mechanism man has developed to create and regulate privacy in a conscious and unconscious way. Richard Sennett explains the difference between border and boundary: "A border is a zone of interaction where things meet and intersect. A boundary is much more like a national frontier, a place where something ends (...)." (Richard Sennett 2004).

Research about privacy and the tools to create it can be described from very different points of view and approaches. Examined from the point of view of man and his behaviour, the approach would be more social or anthropological. Examined from the point of view of an architect, the approach is oriented toward: functions and spaces within a house or the immediate surroundings; flexibility and changeability of spaces; generic spaces and elements that could be interpreted by the user, etc..

Researchers and architects focussing on the transition and hierarchies between outside and inside, between one condition and another, describe the concept of public versus private. They examine architectural means, zones and spaces to order these different conditions. Some researchers categorise the various transitions and try to define terms. Like *Urban public; urban half public, areas for private groups, familiar private* (Christopher Alexander and Serge Chermayeff 1960). Herman Hertzberger always searched for space that offers choices to the dweller. He is not defining categories of space (public, collective and private). What matters to him is the generic. A 50cm-high wall, if wide enough, can evoke the association with a bench and can be interpreted as a bench.

Hertzberger searches for those generic elements inside the building, as well as transitions from the outside to the inside. “A gradual succession of indications in architectural means allows us to enter and leave in the same way. Thereby, the whole complex of experiences participates as is evoked by architecture: change of height, breadth, fall of the light, illumination, material, floor level” (Hertzberger H. 1996 p.86).

When and how do you know you are inside a boundary? This was exactly the question that was posed by the sociologist Bourdieu in researching about the Berber House (1973). In a very empirical way he described with incomparable care the interior of the Kabyle House to find out how this division of the house into two parts has been achieved, where the borders are and which part is used by the women and which by the men. (In: Setha M.Low 2003 p. 131-141) To be able to answer his question Bourdieu worked carefully with observation, photography, notes of everything and drawings. He realizes that the movement from outside to inside and the attributes passing while moving are very important. In my point of view, he confirms the use of photography as a valid tool within research.

Unwin summarizes the essence of transition as follows: “*Transition is an essential element in our dramatic experience of the World. Transitional places are important in the ways static places relate to each other. They play a part in the relationship between a place and its context. Often there is a sequence of hierarchy of stages between one static place and another. When entering dwellings, for example, one usually has to pass through a number of different zones of increasing privacy. Sometimes this hierarchy or serial experience of places culminates in a place that is conceptually at the core of the work of architecture – its heart.*” (Unwin 2009 p.210) The drawing is essential to understand these transitions. A section that shows a marking point as a portal and a floor plan is necessary. The author here gives direction on how to investigate and illustrate the filter of a building.

Transition zones and borders are not always very clear. Space can be used simultaneously for two different systems. For example a veranda can be part of the room and by changing some wall or window elements as well part of the outside space. Such a space belongs to two systems, flows from one system to the other without clear boundaries. Within the concept of transparency developed by Colin Rowe and Norbert Slutzky, spaces are studied in order to determine whether they simultaneously belong to different systems (Rowe 1997 p.61).

Explanation:[In 1955 the authors Colin Rowe (architect) and Robert Slutzky (painter), wrote an essay about “transparency”. This essay seemed to be of a special importance because of its totally different way of treating the concept of transparency. Colin Rowe and Norbert Slutzky both use the concept of transparency to illustrate transparency in painting and in architecture. Within their essay they quote Gyorgy Kepes: “If one sees two or more figures overlapping one another, and each of them claims for itself the common overlapped part, then one is confronted with a contradiction of spatial dimensions. To resolve this contradiction one must assume the presence of a new optical quality. The figures are endowed with transparency; that is they are able to interpenetrate without an optical destruction of each other. Transparency however implies more than an optical characteristic; it implies a broader spatial order. Transparency means a simultaneous perception of different spatial locations. Space not only recedes but fluctuates in a continuous activity. The position of the transparent figures has equivocal meaning as one sees this figure now as the closer now as the further one.” Kepes, G., The language of vision, P. Theobald, Chicago 1944, p.77]

The different approaches show how the transition from one condition (outside) and the other (inside) can be researched. In some case studies the different steps of transition will be noted and photographed to answer the question: When and how do you know you are inside a boundary? I will take into account the possibility of simultaneous working of the two different systems.

An applicable research tool for built precedents:

Analysing built precedents, cases, is an often-used research method within architecture. In total 11 cases represent a broad spectrum of residential buildings of the last century, especially residential buildings that were considered to be innovative. I explained that the methods to research the façade as a face are ambiguous. One aspect is the analogy with the human face and its parts, the first impression and the notion of character; the other is a careful analysis of the composition. Within the research of the façade as a filter and its transitions authors use different terms while describing the transitional zones from public to private. The case studies have to clarify and help to develop a classification of transition zones for the residential houses. The notion of transparency is interesting for research of transitions, borders and boundaries, because a zone could belong simultaneously to two conditions. The question: when and how do you know you are inside a boundary? is the essence of this part of the research.

For all case studies I will adopt the following structure:

- A: Facts and information
 - B: Approach, appearance and character of the building
 - C: Relations and composition
 - D: The filter, transitions and transparency
 - E: Observation of transition zones and usage
 - F: Evaluation of the analysis
-

5. Case 1 – The Hague Portiek project

See appendix document Case 1 - Jürgenhake

6. Case 2 – The Haarlemmer Houttuinen project

See appendix document case 2 - Jürgenhake

7. Conclusion

In this paper I elaborated a short overview of the Dutch history of residential houses of the last century and I explained the historically important relation between pavement and the dwelling. Then I elaborated a method to look at the interface of residential houses, the façade in its complexity of being a face and a social filter. The two cases which I had chosen to present in this paper both have a strong connection with this former relationship of the dwelling and the pavement, but both solved this relationship in a different way.

In the first case, the Den Hague staircase, an open stair to four entrances, the ambition was very high – to give every dweller a front door next to the public realm, even on the first floor. In the second case, the Haarlemmer Houttuinen, the ambition is the same, but the conditions are not the same. The entrances are lying on a quiet and protected small street, almost a path, where no cars can drive. In the first project this is not the case. There is a street in front of the houses. The first case, more than hundred years old, has totally changed. The former ambition seems to be forgotten. The renovation is not done with respect on this architectural idea behind it. In case two Herman Hertzberger uses a full amount of architectural elements to create sequences and transitions, but as well to create a recognizable face. As he uses the same language at both facades, you can easily recognize these houses. The places that can be filled in and changed by the dweller offer the possibility to identify with the building. The question: When do you know you are inside the house, can very easily be answered by case 1 because of the very clear threshold: the door. In case 2 there is much more tension in the routing to the house and the last border, the hedges - organized by the dweller himself, tell that now – you are really entering something private, even when you are still outside.

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Case 1: The Hague “portiek” – Delftselaan 1-23

A: Facts and information

The project of the Hague “portiek” in the Delftselaan appeared parallel with the Housing Act which was initiated in 1901. The main goal of the architect Stephanus Steens was to stack apartments without disappearance of the own front door onto the street, an almost archetypical element in the Dutch dwelling history (see chapter 3). The term “ Haagse portiek” which means Hague staircase got a new access type in the Netherlands. The house was built in a group of three houses with in total 18 apartments. Today the three houses are still used, but they are totally changed. The roof vault disappeared and the open stair, which was the central design object of the project, disappeared as well. There are doors that close up the whole entrance. The central part of the façade has changed totally. Two rooms had been added in the middle of the building with two windows to the street. The street façade has been changes totally by this intervention and one can hardly imagine how the three buildings looked like hundred years ago.



Source photo: Niels Prak p.146



Source photo: Bakker Schut p.90



Source photo: left and right : Maarten Jan Hoekstra p.168 en 169

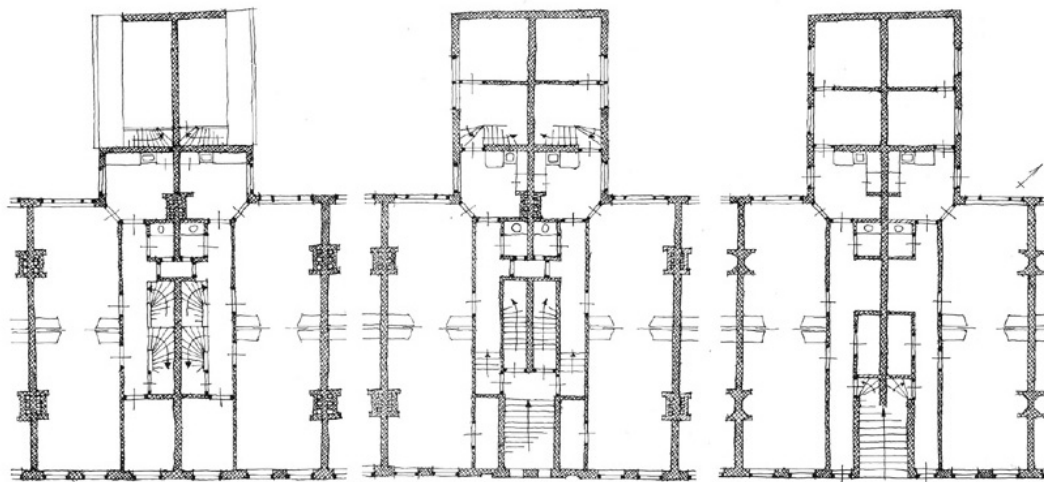
The nineteenth century was the time for a big change in the collective housing design. But in the city of Den Hague this happened to change very slowly. Between 1850 and 1900 the government started to stack two apartments onto each other. Both had an entrance at the ground floor. Inside a long and small stair led to the upper apartment. Sometimes even three apartments were stacked onto each other in the same way. Starting with 6, 0 meter broad houses, which were very small, an extension was built into the courtyard at the backside. When these extensions got forbidden (1906), the apartments got wider which caused better floor plans. The Hague staircases got prominent in the first two decennia of the twenties century.

The architectural magazines followed the new steps in the design of residential houses very closely. In 1915 an extensive article was published about the new type, the Hague staircase. There was criticism about this type as men were afraid that these entrances would be difficult to clean up and to control by police. But nevertheless, as was written in the text, it was handy that every apartment has its own front door directly to the open air and what had happened before, that all dwellers of one house were put into quarantine because of the one front door, even if only one dweller got a contagious sickness,

would hopefully not happen again. (Bouwkundig Weekblad 1915, No 4, 22 Mei p.15, written by A. Salm architect)

Most of the Hague staircase types were built in the twenties. Up to the WWI it was built with a small floor plan, then with a bigger floor plan. From 1930 onwards the apartment building developed with a closed staircase and more luxury apartments. The floor plan is always almost the same: The main room is a front-and backside living room, next to it a small corridor with a zone for the internal stair, the toilet and the kitchen to the backside. Later two rooms were added, one to the front and one to the backside. The apartments had one balcony at the backside, next to the kitchen, never to the front side, where a bay window or a window at the corner of the room gave the chance to look into the street and to the open stair.

Plandocumentation: Original state 1901



Ground floor
Source: Niels Prak p.147

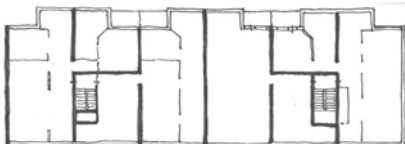
1st floor

2nd

Plandocumentation: Rebuilding 1988



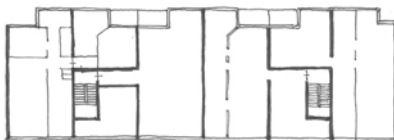
Ground floor



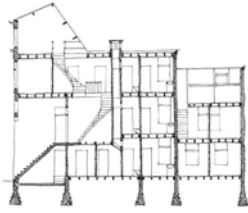
1st floor



2nd

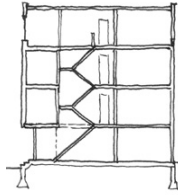


3rd floor



Original section

Source: Niels Prak p. 147



section of the rebuilding in 1988

Source for the rebuilding in 1988: Dienst Stedelijke Ontwikkeling Den Haag, Loosduinseweg 15

B: Approach, appearance and character of the building

- *The aspect of representation: face, impression and character*

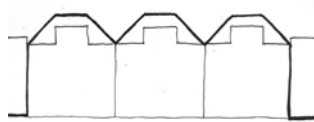
The original design of these three houses has changed very much. Therefore the appearance today is quite different than it had been hundred years ago. In part A of this chapter you can see the original approach. The three houses seemed to be individual urban townhouses with a strong accent in the middle of the house, formed by the high opening with the open stair in it. It seems to be a portal. It is not visible how many apartments are hosted here at the first view. Observing the building more in detail you understand that there were 6 apartments in this building. You realize the small entrance doors right and left to the portals as front doors and you can see two of the four front doors on the first floor if you approach the building more closely. The sketches below show that in the original building the entrance had been one composition, even the entrances of the ground floor apartments were part of this composition. The details made by the brick, the small openings above the portal, all these details stress this composition.

With the changes in 1988 the three individual buildings are combined to be one building. The most important element, the portal, the open stairs, the details – all this is gone and what is left is a flat façade with two entrance doors which lead to an inside staircase (one at the right and one at the left building), the front doors which lead directly to the ground floor apartments and two doors to the storage rooms. There are four apartments on the ground floor instead of the original six. This is not “readable” from the outside as the storage is not visible. The roof vaults are gone and there is added another level on top of the second floor. The edge of the former roof is kept. This makes the building still fit in the streetscape. The small brick risalits which gave the original building its rhythm are kept, but as these are the only details that remind of the old entrances, it is hardly to imagine how the portal had looked like and how the entrances have been in the past. Only if you know the original buildings you can recognize them through these risalits.

Researching the *face* of this building, there is one side which is orientated to the public and which can be seen from the street. The backside is an informal side which I did not take into account for this research as it is not connected to the public.

Originally there have been three faces and now there is one left. The form as one striking part of the whole appearance changed radically. The elements of the face like the eyes, the brows, the nose, the mouth, the forehead, the chin and the cheeks –changed a lot. In the sketches these elements are drawn and the loss of them after 1988 is evident.

Original: 1901



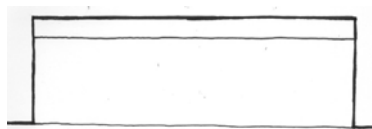
Main lines 1901



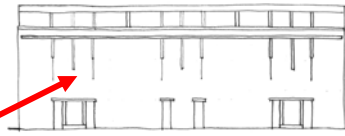
detail entrance 1901



1988:



after the changes in 1988



detail entrance 1988



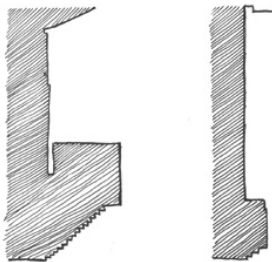
C: Relation and composition:

Originally the design was built up by three identical compositions. Each building was marked by its central entrance staircase and some details around it. By the symmetrical composition of the façade in which the stair took a central place, it became an important accent. Some details around this entrance even stress this. Everything was built up symmetrically by classical features of a composition like the classical rule of the three parts: basement, column and capital. The composition has changes radically and is not readable any more.

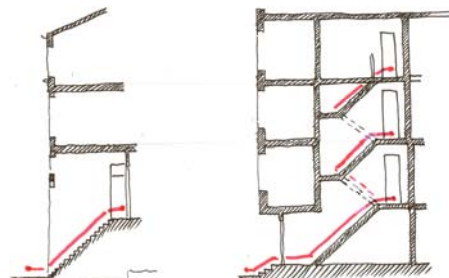
D: The filter, transition and transparency

- *Researching the aspect of the social filter – the transition from public to private:*

In the original building the transition from public to private was different for the ground floor apartment and the upper floor apartment. The idea of a direct connection with the pavement was stronger at the ground floor level. There were no sequences from street to the private except the pavement itself and the front door and a very narrow corridor behind this door. The entrances that were positioned at the first floor use the stair as an outside place which was much more protected and excluded from the pavement. But public space flows up to the first floor. With the change in 1988 this transition changed as the sketches demonstrate. Only three steps in front of the door to the inner stair case are left. The atmosphere of an own entrance at the public domain on the first floor is gone.



Section fragment of the entrance 1901 and 1988



Detail stair 1901 1988

Original sequences/ transitions: from pavement to the front door

- The pavement (1)
 - The change of direction to the front door ground floor and/or the stairs (2)
 - Step and stairs to the upper apartments (3)
 - Small open space for the dweller (4)
 - front door

E: Observation of transition zones and usage

As the façade is very close nowadays and there is no space left in front of the houses, there is nothing to be noticed at all at the transition to the private, only that there is no space for sequences at all. The new (1988) entrance area is anonym and not very inviting for individual expression ore annexing. There is a small threshold made by three stairs which are probably the old stairs, before you enter the front door and the inner the staircase.

F: Evaluation of the analysis

The ambition of Stephanus Steen, the architect who invented the Hague stairs was to give every dweller his own front door onto the pavement, as this was a very special tradition in the Netherlands. The seventies had been the decennia of the “human scale” projects and the criticism about the lack of places for interaction, in-betweens. Actually this did not effect the renovation and change of the three building in the way one would expect from the discussion which was going on.

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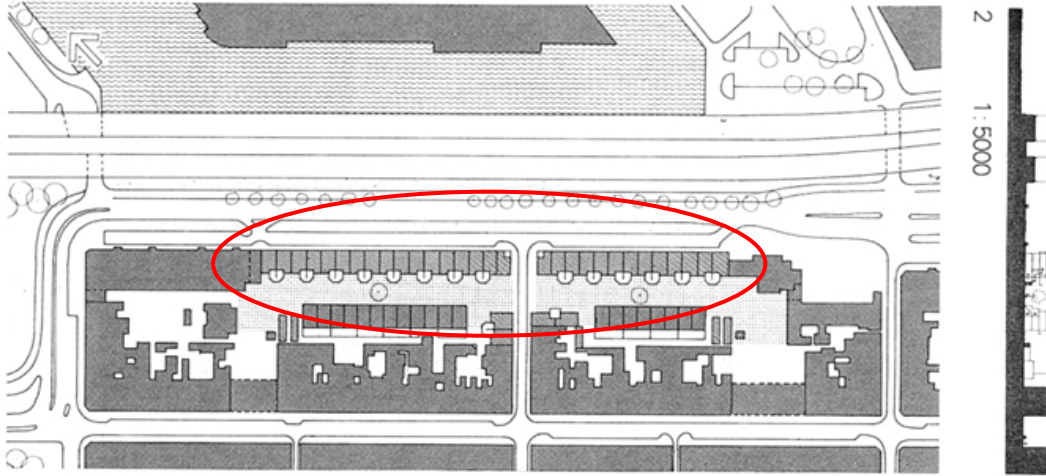
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Case 2: Haarlemmer Houttuinen 1978-82 architect H.Hertzberger

A: Facts and information



Situation

Source: LÜCHINGER, ARNULF - HERMAN HERTZBERGER. 1959-1986.
BAUTEN UND PROJEKTE; p.245



South facade

Source: LÜCHINGER, A. p.247



North Façade

The project was part of the renewal of the inner city of Amsterdam in the seventies. The main street was enlarged and a tram rail was added in the middle of the street. The photo shows a slow traffic road with parking in front of the houses running parallel to the main street.

The location of the Haarlemmer Houttuinen residential complex lies at the north edge of the city nearby the central station. Only 27 meters far away is a 6 meter high viaduct with the main railroad. This is a strong boundary to the north of Amsterdam with its harbour and the whole northern part of Amsterdam. This Main Street, noisy and busy, does not invite to open up the building here. The architect has chosen for two long slabs, with in-between the entrance to the neighbourhood on the Southside, the part where street life is more protected. The slabs form a barricade to the Main Street, the entrances of the houses are on the south side.

The design of the residential buildings Haarlemmer Houttuinen is typical for the seventies, a decennia of more human scale projects. After a time of big scale functionalistic and anonymous projects that caused lots of critics at the end of the sixties, the seventies were the time of the small scale. The criticism of the sixties was mainly about the lack of place for interaction, the monotonous residential buildings and environment and the bad quality. As Martin Vletter (2004) argues the most popular dwelling was the split-level and the maisonette, the small street that reminded the dweller on the village and the mix of functions, something which had been forbidden under the regime of the functionalists. Herman Hertzberger searched for solutions that should be generic, offering spaces and places to be interpreted by the users themselves. In this project almost the whole south facade is used to offer these spaces to the dweller. Situated to the small street, street life and private live are connected in this in-between zone.

B: Approach, appearance and character of the building –

the aspect of representation: face, impression and character

Approaching the dwelling complex from the main road, which is the obvious side to approach it, the complex seems very closed – a long slab without any portal or entrance. But coming closer you see that the opening between both slabs is a portal to the backside accented by windows on both sides. The bay windows on the North side give rhythm to the façade, they are grouped by two and surrounded by windows. The apartments are grouped and form a cluster in the façade reminding the spectator on the old and well known channel houses, all next to each other with a little difference to the neighbour. The steel beam is the finishing element at the top of every group.

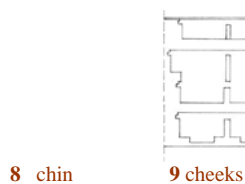
Approaching the South side of the building the spectator gets a very open picture, no private gardens or backyards, but entrances to all the apartments (except some which lie on the corners). The street is not accessible for cars; it is a living area for the dwellers. The first striking elements are the arcades which remind the spectator on Italian cities and their public arcades as a protecting element in front of shops. But here the arcades form an in-between: public and private, street and dwelling.

The complex has an open character, friendly and calm. The dweller can expose his way of life if he wants, the bay-windows and the terras/ balcony invite to do this.

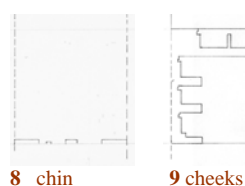
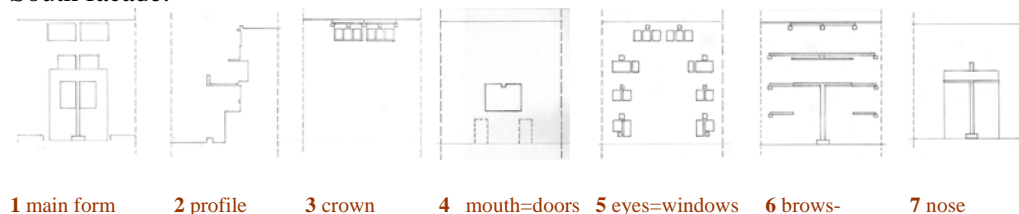
Researching the *face* of this building there is one striking point: these two slabs have two faces, one to the north and one to the south. The north face is build up by identical groups of faces, the cluster of two bay-windows, surrounded by other windows. Each floor has accents in the facade in itself by white concrete beam above the windows.

When I was building up a method I compared the face of a human being with the face of a building. Now it gets obvious. The striking elements of the face are not only the form, but also the eyes, the brows above the eyes, the nose, the mouth, the forehead, the chin and the cheeks. In the following I sketched all these elements in an extract drawing to show the amount of elements that work on the façade. It is incredible how much elements are used, very carefully, to build up the face of the building in this project. In both facades the function of dwelling is shown, the groups of dwellings that use one access commonly is clear as well. As the inhabitant can annex space in front of the house at the south side, there is a way to make this building your own.

North façade:



South façade:



C: Relations and composition

Both facades, the north and the south, are built up by several identical groups. These groups make the rhythm of the facade. There is not really a classical basement, but there is a crown at both sides, made by the windows and the concrete eaves above them (on both sides). Here Hertzberger is using the same family of elements for the same accents. Everything is built up in symmetry. At the south façade, the accent gets a very central point of interest; the big column in the middle of the group is carrying the balcony, but at the same time marking the entrance of the upper two houses. On both sides it is possible to understand that there are dwellings behind the screen, not very clearly shown that there are 4 dwellings per group – but once searching for the entrances this gets clear. Next to the symmetry at both the main facades, the portal is overlap in articulation by the windows at the corner. They are places at both sides. Because this articulation happens only at the portal, it gets a strong element.



North Façade



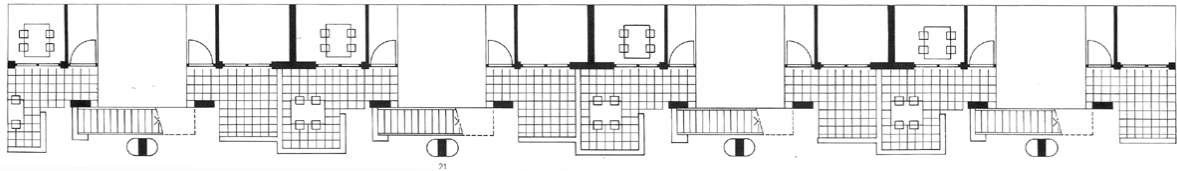
South facade

Source: LÜCHINGER, A. p.246

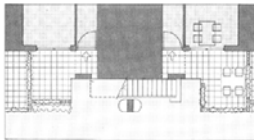
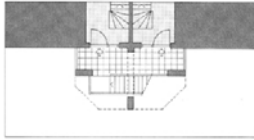
D: The filter, transitions and transparency

Researching the aspect of the social filter – the transitions from public to private:

Entering the house at the Haarlemmer Houttuinen is a process which starts already at the pavement. Walking through the port of the two buildings you reach the more informal street at the south side. A corner of glass marks this portal (1). Again a turn to the right or left and you see the in-between of the south facade, the arcades, stairs, balconies, and terraces (2). There is a very clear line where the street ends and the in-between begins, it is marked by the change of material of the in-between floor and by very small walls of concrete blocks, which the architect introduced as a clear border and which is used by the dwellers (see fragments of entrances and fotos under). Some dwellers have placed concrete tiles, some wood tiles. Some have even built up a wooden fence (3). You have to enter a terrace of the dweller if you want to reach the front door. This is a threshold marking a zone to be more private (4). Once entered, you are at the front door. The upper apartments need a stair which is positioned in the in-between as well. As the upper entrance area seems to be a balcony, here as well the suggestion of a private area is done, and –as it is the south side of the dwelling, the inhabitant will use this area as a balcony on sunny days. All together there are 5 or 6 transition zones, but the flower pots and the trees, as well as the furniture of the dwellers form an extra layer of more or less flexible or addable transition elements. When do you know you are inside a boundary? In this project the most striking step is the step to the in-between zone, the area where the dweller starts to annex the space by building terraces, small gardens, hedges and fences. Even small attributes like one meter of fence is getting important at this transition. The tools to create privacy can be seen on the photo's: the materialization of the in-between, concrete blocs that mark the border, fences added by the dweller, the stairs, a threshold concrete beam at the terrace and in front of the stair, the private articles of the dwellers. Sometimes borders are not clear and belong to two different systems, to the outside and inside. This project does not have zones that belong to inside and outside simultaneously, but there are zones that belong to the private outside and the semi- public of the street life. These are the terraces in front of the house and the balconies in front of the upper entrances. Following Rowe's definition of transparency, these are the ambiguous zones of the transition.



Ground floor entrances; source Lüchinger p.252

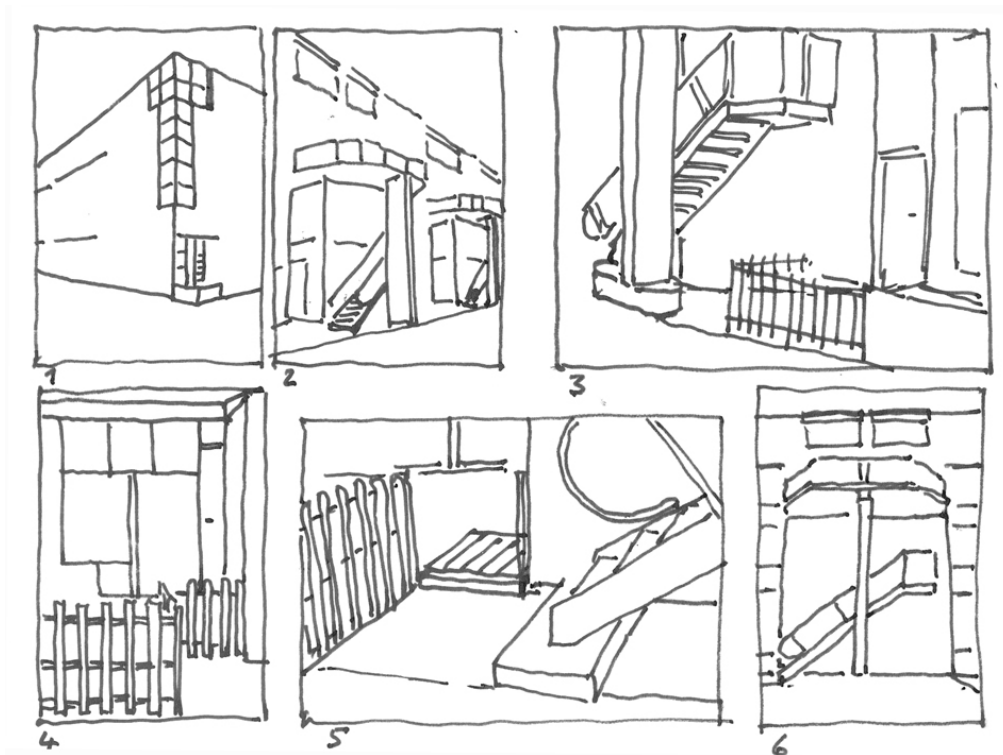


Ground floor entrance, first floor and 2nd floor;

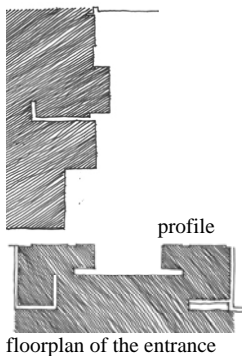


the small concrete bloc wall;

source Lüchinger p.248 and 252



Sequences/ transitions: from pavement to the front door



- The glass corner to the port (1)
 - The change of direction to the street with a view onto the balconies and stairs (2)
 - Change of material from the street to the entrance area, concrete blocs placed by the architect and attributes the owner placed like hedges and plants (3)
 - Terrace of the dweller as a threshold (4)
 - Front door
 - Step and stairs to the upper apartments (5)
 - Small balcony of the dweller (6)
 - front door

E: Observation of transition zones and usage

Between the start of the building and today lay almost 30 years of usage.

In the meantime, no changes are made to this plan. The entrances with their terraces and balconies are still annexed by the users to make these areas more private. Every entrance is built up in the same way, but is made personal by the inhabitants. This in-between zone is the place to make the house your home already at the outside.

F: Evaluation of the analysis

The ambition of Herman Hertzberger was to create dwellings which the inhabitant can identify with. He wanted to offer spaces for freedom to be interpreted by the users. The complex is 30 years old and from the beginning up to now it is used like the architect wanted it to be used. The facades are visually divided into groups of four apartments. This is done with a rhythm in bay-windows (north side) windows, concrete beams and small concrete cantilever roof slabs and a steel beam at the top of the house. It makes the façade working like several individual faces to north. At the south side the whole amount of elements like the stair, the arcades, the balcony and the windows which again end up with a crown (the two windows) let this long slab be seen as several individual houses. The elements to build up the face are simultaneously used as elements to build up the transition very carefully. Stepping on the threshold of the terras or the one in front of the stairs, you know that you are entering private terrain, even when you are still outside.

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