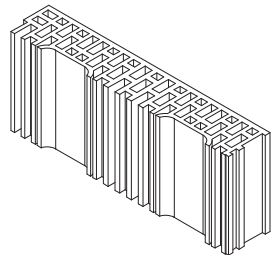
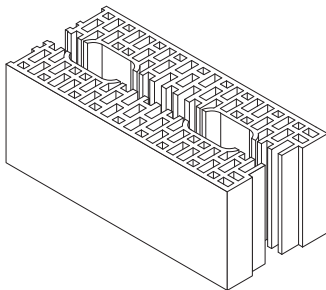
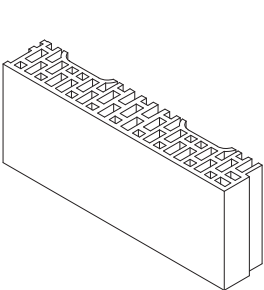
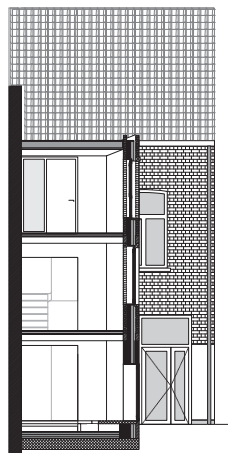


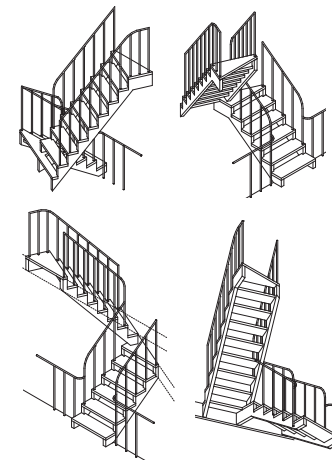


Bovenbouw Architectuur

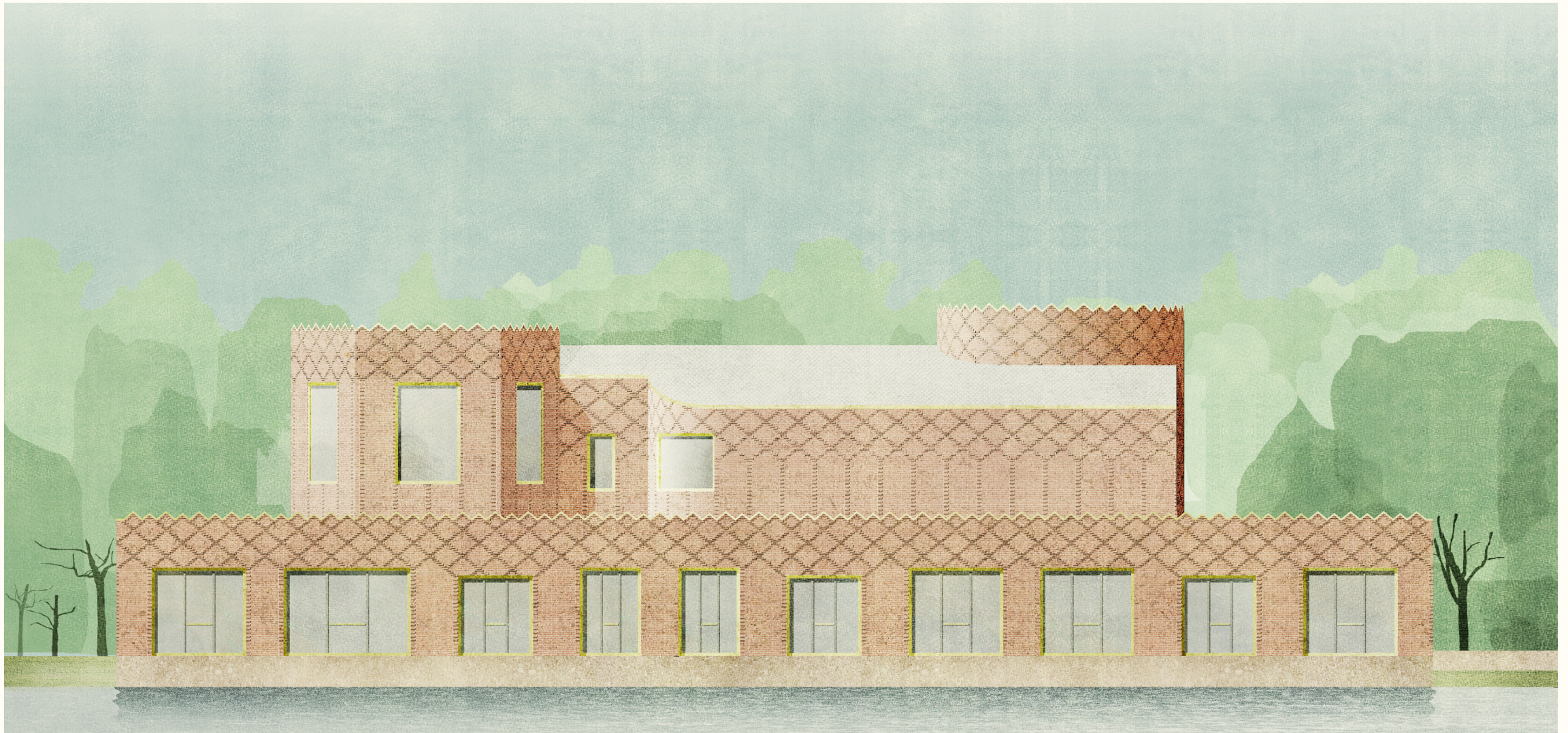




Cross section



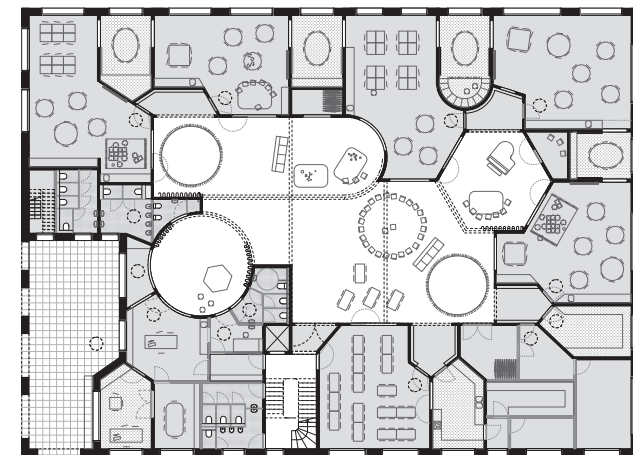
Unfolding of the staircase



School on the Site of a Former Castle in Antwerp

The historical site of a vanished castle stimulates the imagination and evokes childhood memories. Sham castles have been constructed for centuries: free exercises hovering between utility and fantasy. Nothing could have excited us more than building a school in this location, a contemporary 'castle of learning'. The design combines the site's history with a unique spatiality, the latter of which is achieved via an unconventional and layered form. A large polymorphic atrium sits at the heart of the school, both aiding circulation and serving as a morning assembly point. Different activities can run concurrently in the hall, which is also an ideal venue for the annual school party. The polygonal classes support different learning methods: independent and group work or traditional lessons. The redbrick school is surmounted by a decorative pattern. A subtle relief terminates in a saw-tooth roofline.

Site plan



Ground floor



130



131



Selection of documentary images showing the condition of the rooms



Axonometric drawing

Collage City

“Certainly, in considering the modern city from the point of view of perceptual performance, by *Gestalt* criteria it can only be condemned. For, if the appreciation of object or figure is assumed to require the presence of some sort of ground or field, if the recognition of some sort of however closed field is a prerequisite of all perceptual experience of figure, then, when figure is unsupported by any recognisable frame of reference, it can only become enfeebled and self-destructive. For, while it is possible to imagine—and to imagine being delighted by—a field of objects which are legible in terms of proximity, identity, common structure, density, etc., there are still questions as to how much such objects can be agglomerated and of how plausible, in reality, it is to assume the possibility of their exact multiplication. Or alternatively, these are questions relative to optical mechanics, of how much can be supported before the trade breaks down and the introduction of closure, screening, segregation of information, becomes an experiential imperative.”²

—Colin Rowe (1920–1999) and Fred Koetter (1938–2017)

In *Collage City*, Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter criticised, from a phenomenological standpoint, the universalist and object-oriented approach to modernist architecture and urban planning. Architectural egocentrism, they argued, creates its own degradation on an urban scale. The architects saw the existing city as a complex jigsaw, to which new building clusters and urban fragments, as pieces of the puzzle, are added. These fragments both complete and merge with the existing urban fabric, the latter being the background against which the interventions take shape.

150

² Rowe, C. and Koetter, F. (2006). *Collage City*. Cambridge: MIT Press, pp.64–65.



A typological study showing a visual approach to the suburban fabric

Picturesque Suburbia

“Only the sensibility of the picturesque allows us to observe this territory with new eyes, to understand the differences, the contrasts, the mixtures and the nuances and to appreciate them. This sensibility leads us to observe the edges, the borders, the lines of contrasts or superimposition of different worlds, more than the homogeneity that is to be found within each of the elements, small or large. [...] Dissymmetry and variety, irregularity, the unexpected, the intertwined, raw materials, tactile values, all that becomes part of the picturesque. The picturesque is inclusive, which is to say that it incorporates the surrounding landscape into the gaze, it accepts individual expression, it blurs the traditional distinction between natural and artificial. What heretofore have been considered negative elements in the contemporary city—heterogeneity, excessive variety, disorder, disharmony, the incongruous coexistence of different pieces—now constitute a resource, a quality with which to define the new landscape.”³

—Mirko Zardini (b. 1955)

During the early 1990s, the focus in Belgium shifted towards suburban development, a trend that was reflected throughout Western Europe.⁴ Since the second half of the previous century, shameless land and property speculation in the north of the country has resulted in a diffuse urban landscape: a difficult to read, disorderly, unruly environment. Whereas contemporary landscape photography helps us to decode and even appreciate aspects of the illegible landscape of suburbia, the picturesque tradition also offers us very concrete tools for actual interventions in the existing fabric. Painters and landscape artists working in

151

³ Zardini, M. (2000). ‘Green Is the Color’ in: Rem Koolhaas & Harvard Project on the City, Stefano Boeri & Multiplicity, *Mutations*. Bordeaux/Barcelona: Arc en rève centre d’architecture/ACTAR, p.436.

⁴ See, amongst others: GUST (Ghent Urban Studies Team). (1999). *The Urban Condition: space, community and self in the contemporary metropolis*. Rotterdam: 010 publishers.



The diffuse urban landscape as a working terrain

in the interior. In a doll's house, however, the interior is cut open, laid bare and unmasked. The house has been stripped of its facade and subjected to a degrading dissection. The objective overview and analytical gaze allow for the discovery, in the stacking of rooms and the juxtaposition of atmospheres, of new starting points from which to design.

As a representative architectural form, the doll's house has a specific allure. While it is related, as a toy, to the construction kit or box of building blocks, the nature of the game is fundamentally different. The wooden bricks, the Meccano set and even jigsaw puzzles entail the assembly of various components into a legible and understandable form. The doll's house, on the other hand, is about mimesis in both the narrative and theatrical sense of the word. With a doll's house, the child projects (from a position outside) an almost infinite number of plausible everyday situations onto the rich collection of rooms. Their childlike fantasy animates the inert structure and brings the toy to life. It isn't so much the architecture's material form that makes playing with a doll's house so delightful, but the imaginative worlds and fantasies that we project onto them. The doll's house verges on the theatrical. Although the language of architecture, according to Perret, is rooted in construction and building, the example of the doll's house reveals the way in which designers' proposals evoke scenarios for the use of the building, and which are then given a setting via the architecture.

Character

“Although architecture may seem only to be concerned with what is material, it is capable of different genres, which make up, so to say, its forms of speech, and which are animated by the different

192



A Baroque approach to a staircase in the new visitor centre at the Rubens House

characters that it can make felt. Just as on a stage set, a Temple or a Palace indicates whether the scene is pastoral or tragic, so a building by its composition expresses that it is for a particular use, or that it is a private house. Different buildings, by their arrangement, by their construction, and by the way they are decorated, should tell the spectator their purpose; and if they do not, they offend against the rules of expression and are not as they ought to be.”³⁵

—Germain Boffrand (1667–1754)

Via this second quote, we anchor the preceding observation about the doll's house within the architectural-theoretical debate. Boffrand's notion of 'character', as this citation makes clear, was derived from poetics, narrative genres and other varied theatrical forms. Of course, the transferal of concepts from one artistic discipline to another is not always an unqualified success. The idea that buildings are 'characters' that play a role in lending expression to the architectural programme lay at the heart of the fierce eighteenth-century debates on architectural form, compositional schemes, the arrangement and opening up of building elements, and decoration and ornament. The most systematic development of 'character' can be found in J.F.-Blondel's essay of 1776, which he taught at the Académie des Beaux Arts and published as *Cours d'Architecture*.³⁶ In chapter four, volume one, of the *Cours*, Blondel describes the range of 'characters' that are possible in architecture. Listing no fewer than thirty-eight, he included noble, free, male, firm, virile, light, elegant, delicate, pastoral, naive, feminine, mysterious, frivolous, grand, bold, barbaric, flat, ambiguous, vague, terrifying, etc... When referencing the 'style for the job' in the previous chapter, we naturally made the link with the rich semantic arsenal that was previously recognised in the production of architecture.

193

35 Boffrand, G. (1745). *Livre d'architecture: contenant les principes généraux de cet art, et les plans, elevations et profils de quelques-uns des batimens faits en France & dans les pays étrangers*. Paris: Chez Guillaume Cavelier; on the history of the use of character in the classicist French architectural discourse see the accurate and detailed survey: Szambien, W. (1986). *Symétrie, Goût, Caractère*. Paris: Picard.

36 Blondel, J.F. and Patte, P. (1771–1777). *Cours d'architecture ou traité de la décoration, distribution et constructions des bâtiments contenant les leçons données en 1750, et les années suivantes ... Tome premier (neuvième)*. Paris: Dessaint.



Drilling a round window through the wall in the container park in Luchtbal



Bovenbouw Architectuur

Living the Exotic Everyday takes you on a tour through the world of Bovenbouw Architectuur. Bovenbouw explore the possibility of an inclusive and diverse practice that combines a high responsivity to circumstances with a firm view on how buildings can relate to their surroundings. This book contains a wide selection of built, unbuilt and upcoming projects and offers a solid insight into the thinking and references that drive the practice.

Flanders

Architecture

Institute

ISBN 9789492567130

