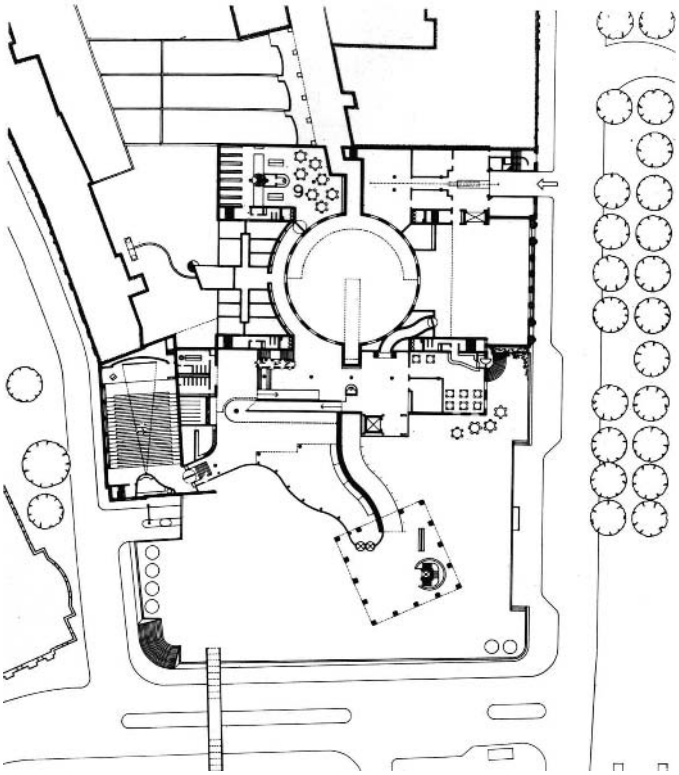

Figure 2.8 Drawing of the ground plan, project for the Nordrheine-Westfalen Museum in Düsseldorf.

Stuttgart the topography required a climb up the hillside and this climb was negotiated by a spiralling ramp along the walls of the circular courtyard or rotunda (see Figures 2.7 and 2.9). Although public, these spaces were very much part of the architectural design solution for the museum buildings themselves, thereby fusing public urban pedestrian movement with the museum-going experience. This theme was so powerful that in fact it became the main design concept of the three museum projects.

In accordance with this concept, Stirling was very concerned with the architectural elements that served as vessels for pedestrian movement: the path, the ramp, and their relationship to the open spaces they interconnected. Questions of open versus closed spaces, narrow and linear versus spacious and equi-dimensional places, and meandering as opposed to straight paths were investigated. The angle at which a path penetrated a square was important. Everything was geared to enrich the experience – primarily the visual experience – of those who proceed along the walkways or stop in the public spaces. At the same time the architects attached prime value to the formal compositional qualities that resulted from the combination of the various elements that lay alongside the circulation routes. In Corbusian terms, Stirling worked on the promenade architecturale that for him crystallized the major concept of each of these designs (Le Corbusier 1935; Baker 1992a, b).

Pictorial Design Narrative

When the time came to publish the designs, Stirling apparently felt that presenting final plans was inadequate. This was not a conventional building that could be represented through plans, sections and elevations. In fact, elevations were a tricky business – the Staatsgalerie, for instance, does not have a street elevation (facing the highway), so to speak. Stirling thought that for this new and dynamic urban complex that was all about movement, a different mode of representation was called for if he was to let the reader share, at least to some degree, the experience of the movement systems with all of their intricacy and the story of having created them. There was a story to tell, a narrative that was to be presented using pictorial images rather than words. As pointed out above, narrative was in good currency at the time: Klotz (1988) sees narrative representation as one of postmodernism's principal tenets. Stirling, however, appears to be the first architect who literally translated the narrative imperative into a series of images, with no particular sequence to them, that as an ensemble "collaged together" the desired narrative. In doing so he made transparent what Schön (1983) has described as the "felt-path" through a building that an architect explores through his or her drawings, thus anticipating the experience of moving along a path.

Interestingly, the series of images that were chosen for publication give one the impression that they are a selection taken out of a continuum, like frames out of an animated film. In our view, the cinematic association is not an accident. When asked by Enrico Morteo in an interview (Stirling 1992), "Have your sources of inspiration always come from architecture or are there other influences?" (ibid., p. 19), Stirling replied, "They are mainly architectural. Perhaps the cinema may have been important to a certain degree. My generation grew up with the cinema . . . If I could, I went two or three times a week; I was obsessed by it and so it must have had an influence on me" (ibid., p. 19). The cinema is, of course, the ultimate medium for pictorial narrative and it is therefore quite plausible that Stirling, and others who followed suit, were consciously or unconsciously influenced by it. Cinematic imagery may well be one of the sources of what might be seen as "serial representation," which Stirling was a pioneer of, and which was later practiced by other postmodern architects like Rossi, Tschumi, Libeskind and others.

Figure and ground

Stirling's typical mode of designing, whereby he combined volumes (containing functional space) alongside primary and secondary axes of movement, and in the case of the museums also a variety of open spaces of different kind and size, yielded an intricate pattern of "solids" and "voids." Because of the primacy of circulation in Stirling's work the "voids" attain great importance, practically equal to that of the "solids" and not subservient to them, as is often the case in traditional architecture. To convey this state of affairs in drawings is not an easy task. Stirling had two main strategies to do so (not necessarily consciously): selectivity in representation and the manipulation of figure-ground relationships. The selectivity principle licensed the architect to present abstractions, selected elements: sometimes only open spaces, or voids, were drawn (e.g., Figures 2.6 and 2.7). But when looking at a drawing like this,