

In the early seventies Lucien Kroll, chosen by the students as the executive architect, designed a residential in Woluwé St. Lambert, Bruxelles, or, rather said, an entire neighborhood, 'la Mémé'. Shortly after the completion of la Mémé (Maison Médicale) a spate of publications on the complex appeared, in which it was called a not yet entirely demolished popular neighborhood, a large pile of rocks with blunted angles, ruins recaptured by vegetation, a big sponge traversed by internal and external circulations, etc. The journal Plan published the most critical article, written by Geert Bekaert. He stated that the building had less to do with architecture than with literature. That the building proclaimed a critique on modernism you could either agree with or not, but that it included nothing more than that particular message. He blamed the architect of the complex on bargaining away the architectural profession to the users. By letting the users participate actively in the designing process, Kroll would find a way to externally legitimize his wish to escape his situation, professionalism and artistry. With this project, Kroll had placed himself completely out of the architectural history and had taken a road that would prelude the end of autonomous architecture, thus said Bekaert. For the sake of official architecture, it would be wise to further remain silent about the *anarchitecture* that had been produced here. In his article in Wonen TABK of 1976, Francis Strauven wondered whether themes like freedom and plurality, when programmed in an expressed formal way, would not lead to exactly the opposite of what they are aimed at. Can architecture be incorporated in the spontaneity of life, be different every single day? Now, after thirty years, these questions can be answered. Although, paradoxically enough, the project is nominated to be classified as a monument, it is the only post-war neighborhood that did not yet have a need for restructuring. Since its completion, La Mémé finds itself in a permanent, spontaneous state of vibrant restructuring.

Where it was fully programmed with group residences, studios and facilities in favor of the students in the early seventies, nowadays it is filled with nurseries, individual apartments, family homes, shops and cafés. In the late seventies, a subway line was built underneath the neighborhood, with a subway station underneath la Mémé designed by Kroll himself. With astonishing ease, the complex adapted itself throughout the years to all the changing residential needs and user requirements. Condition for this has been, undoubtedly, the underlying SAR-methodology, which has, unlike in many other SAR-projects, nowhere proven to be constrictive. Of greater importance is, however, that the irregular supporting structure, the space dividing elements and the façade consisting of a nigh endless variety of elements, are developed and elaborated completely independent of one another. In combination with the cutouts on several locations in the concrete floor fields, this organization easily allows functional and spatial adjustments in all directions. In its design the project was a manifest, a reaction on modernism, and perhaps it initially had, as Bekeart among others proclaimed, no intrinsic reason to exist besides this rejection of modernism. In the book 'componenten 2' ('components 2'), Dieter Besch calls it, precisely because of its heterogeneous appearance and the numerous turnarounds and twists in the designing process, the very first deconstructivist building. Thirty years later we can conclude that the project, as many other projects Kroll has undertaken ever since, has grown into a flourishing urban landscape. It is strange and characteristic for architectural criticism that when the complex occasionally appears in an article, it is always linked to the *image* of that peculiar, anarchistic façade, while the actual achievement is in the process and the concept and the realization of the landscape.

Just like Louis le Roy, who was at the time involved in the project as landscape architect, Kroll embraces the notion of complexity. In analogy to natural systems, living environments will become more powerful and thus more capable to maintain and keep developing themselves when the complexity of the system increases. Therefore, he invites all those who are possibly involved to participate in the process. Think of future residents, construction workers, office staff and technicians. Not to build one-to-one what the inhabitants wish for, but to create the richest history possible, preferably even before the project is built. And to create a living environment that belongs to all, from which the architect can withdraw after some time, without fearing future developments. Kroll's view on the nature of architecture and how it is established is shared by few colleagues. It includes a remarkable tolerance towards all situational qualities that is often hard to comprehend for other architects. Where residents are generally the laity who are guided by professionals, and economical motives or esthetical inconveniences usually lead to rapid demolition of existing buildings, in Kroll's vision, on the contrary, every trace, every element, every story forms a layer of meaning that promotes an increasing complexity and should therefore be preserved and cherished.

Thus, when in 1994 the Government Buildings Department asked him to participate in a design team that was supposed to engage, in the framework of the DTO-program (Sustainable Technological Development), in designing a sustainable office block for the year 2040, he took the preservation of the existing building involved in the assignment as the starting point. Not so much based on technical considerations, but because he was convinced that it is wrong in principle to speak of sustainability if a building has to be demolished first in order to achieve it. When, a few years later, the development of the calculation software reached the point where the different outcomes of the designing assignment could be compared with each other on environmental utilization, of course his design proved, due to this starting point, to yield the most favorable results. In Kroll's view, sustainability is a matter of civilization rather than science. And in this, it makes no sense to time and again break down that which is built by previous generations and replace it by something new. Also when this implies building on to constructions of low cultural-historical value, and even when it concerns buildings from the period of time Kroll opposed most in his constructed manifests, namely the time of modernism.

Perhaps it is precisely in this type of projects the idea of the *sympiotic city*, in which two dissimilar organisms coexist, is presented in its best way. Work is being done on restructuring assignments regarding the post-war housing stock in all the major cities for several years now. However, this rarely occurs in the shape of transformation of the existing by adding or intertwining new layers of meaning. The common strategies can be roughly divided into perfection of the existing design or demolition and replacement by new building. While a complete neighborhood was blown up in Bordeaux several years ago, to music by Jean Michel Jarre, Kroll niches himself in restructuring assignments he has worked on the past decennia, in the current situation, to provide new impulses from that position. Structures of importance are, for him, that of life in the neighborhood; the worn paths, the stories of the inhabitants, youth hangouts, the unofficial routes, the self-organization of the particular quarter. Often fragile, slightly hidden qualities, the whispers of the place. In the context of several projects in European cities, office employees take up residence in neighborhoods that are to be transformed. Over several months, they attempt to map these qualities and engage inhabitants in the process.

Kroll considers the transformed buildings that result from such interventions, as well as a new construction like the complex 'de Zilvervlood' that is currently being realized in Dordrecht, as an intermediate stage in a state that has to evolve and lead its own life. All the coincidences, clumsiness and contradictions are used to increase the complexity; to anyhow let diversity emerge. Even if diversity is artificially achieved, it still does not wish to be a closed system. It aims at development through the activity of the residents, by contributions that were unnoticeable in the beginning, but gradually become more observable. And if, after the first, more residents follow, it is always easier to live with the decisions made by the predecessors than the ones made by the architect. Kroll's buildings encourage change. His work culminates precisely then, when anything that possibly still makes it resemble a "Kroll", is canceled out. The day a Japanese photographer called the office, because he could not find the residential area Cergy Pontoise in Paris he had to capture, and he appeared to be right in the middle of it, must have been one of the happiest for Kroll.

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