

SPACE PRODUCTION.

51N4E

Name: 51N4E, Brussels (Belgium).

Abstract: 51N4E is a Brussels based office working on matters of space production, and visual aspects of buildings. Space production implies the creation of an adapted reality. 51N4E does not consider reality as a mere given or context, instead, it provides a new uncanny context – a necessary luxury for the production of successful space. Advanced domestics, European space, scaling and outsmarting building regulations are but a few tools in the quest of mastering space production. Today, 51N4E's main activities focus on: E.D.E.N. (public park Luxembourg Brussels), CELL (a mass producible mini-dwelling), LAMOT (production centre for an urban culture) and E-space.

51N4E

SPACE PRODUCERS

Espace exploring BXL

60

23 projects production overview

LAMOT IM

E.D.E.N. public garden center

CELL outsmarting building regulations

opinion on 51N4E by Xavier De Geyter

advanced domestics



60



€ space

Europe might be considered as an upgraded lineal descendant of Benelux¹. One of Benelux's particularities is that it hardly takes up any physical space. It being a predominant economical prefabrication, Benelux merely exists through law, anthologized travel guides and tourist maps. It has no logo, no epicenter, no heroes, no fans, no monuments of its own. Europe for that matter relies on a more 'nationalistic' propaganda toolbox: it has an anthem, a flag and indeed a capital city - Brussels.

At this point Brussels is but a stopping place for Europe. The city's self-inflicted lack of collective identity - combined with a spot-on geographical location and a political vagueness - has attracted the bees. Europe in this case. The city feels no shame at openly confessing its non-ambition when it comes to discussing successful urban space, bowing all too willingly

to the upcoming European battering-ram. Europe is virtually leasing Brussels, but at what return? For the moment Europe dramatically fails to (mis)use Brussels as the ideal marketing prop. Brussels awaits as symptomatic as ever. The stakes are high.

Brussels is a close match to what an urbanistic pleasure garden could feel like - bendable urban regulations, a kneadable identity, the virtual opportunity to start ex novo. On a spatial level the city is kept together by a network of monumental edifices, laid out by Belgium's own king-urbanist (Leopold II *1835 †1909). His megalomaniac Haussmanian operations define Brussels, even up to now, as an oxygenous space. Leopold's monumental output has prevented the city from pursuing its faint pre-destiny: that of your next provincial town. And though 'urbanistic Brussels' missed last century's spatial

¹Benelux, since 1957, acronym for the personal union of the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg. Since 1991 it has the status of monetary flows.

/architectural handout, its depleted modernist infrastructure still holds fertile guarantees for enticing globalization, so it seems. This quasi outlawed city profiles itself as an attractor for alliances, allowing ambition without the need of an ambitious plan of its own.

Right now it is hard to be impressed by Europe - can one ever love Europe, or at least like it? By now it may be clear that Europe as yet is in need of a visual core, a dress code. The European presence in Brussels today corresponds to sheer mediocratic private building endeavours. These common denominators have nothing to do with the city as a space - and even less with Europe (as a space). They embody a mere ad hoc 'architectural' development. In this respect Europe's totalitarian claim on Brussels raises the question on European space: What is it? Is it urban? Do we need it anyway?

European space does not imply a specific scale, nor a predetermined image. European space or € space aspires a space bigger than life: sometimes literally, sometimes iconographically, sometimes simply disarming. It triggers a highly reality-driven undemanded (and perhaps unwanted) research on a new format of public space - to be implemented on the existing context. € space should radically redefine Brussels (and thus Europe) as we know it. Eventually the forced siamese union between Brussels and Europe will surpass its freakish character allowing world-class urbanism. There are no losers here. Not for the moment anyway.

visual output planned april 2002



usb 1997



garage MH: 1998



installation de Singel_1998



h II 1999



apartment_1999-03



upscul'd landscape dwelling 2000



expo network_2000



kitchen_2001 ④



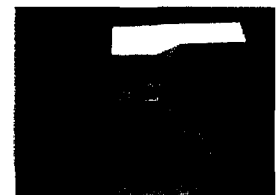
E.D.E.N. luxembourg 2001 ⑤



max CELL_2001 ⑥



seven room apartment 2001



skyroom 2001



swimmingpool/bathroom_1998 ④



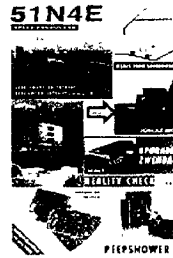
allotment athletica_1998 ①



landscape dwelling_1999 ⑥



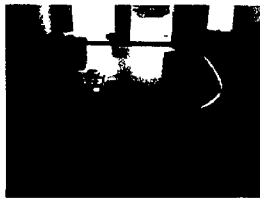
expo 3cc_2000



expo supernova_2000



expo supernova_2000



living_2001



CELL 21m_2001 ②



lemot production center_2001 ⑤



offices/dwelling_2001



euro space_2001



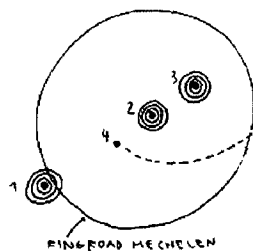
pages 1 to 7 for the most interesting
don't call us, we'll call you
pages 12 to 13

LAMOT TM . AMBITION CHECK (PHASE 1)

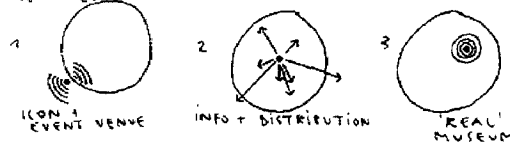
NOW HALF A YEAR AGO, THE CITY OF MECHELEN - PROVINCIAL TOWN BETWEEN ANTWERP AND BRUSSELS - ASKED US TO WRITE A SCENARIO FOR A BUILDING. THEY BOUGHT AN OLD BEER BREWERY - LAMOT - IN THE HISTORIC CENTER, WHICH THEY WANTED TO TURN INTO A MUSEUM FOR 20TH CENTURY ART / CONGRESS CENTER. AFTER VISITING MECHELEN AND VIEWING THE ART COLLECTION, WE DECIDED TO RETHINK THE INITIAL QUESTION AND CHECK THE CITY'S POTENTIAL - CULTURAL - AMBITION FIRST.



SINCE YEARS THE CITY IS PLANNING A - LITERAL - MUSEUM AXIS, COMPRISING 4 MUSEUMS, EACH DEALING WITH A SPECIFIC HISTORIC PERIOD.



LAMOT, AS THE 20TH CENTURY ART MUSEUM, SEEMS TO BE THE MISSING LINK BETWEEN MECHELEN AND THE 21ST CENTURY. AT PRESENT, THE AXIS EVOKES A MORE ART - HISTORICAL APPROACH, NOT AN URBAN ONE. ADDITIONALLY, NOT ALL OF THE MUSEUMS ARE EQUALLY ACCESSIBLE NOR VISIBLE WITHIN THE CITY. WE PROPOSE TO RE-INTERPRET THE AXIS, BY TAKING A CLOSER LOOK TO THE SPECIFIC ASSETS OF THE VARIOUS LOCATIONS AND ENHANCING THEIR IDENTITY FROM THAT POINT OF VIEW.

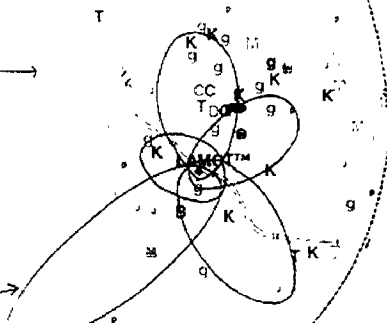


LAMOT SHOULD ADD UP TO THIS THREESOME, TAKING THIS OPPORTUNITY TO PUT MECHELEN BACK ON THE CULTURAL MAP.

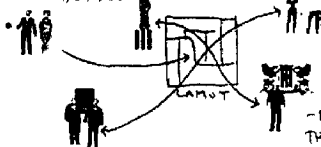
MECHELEN IS IN FACT, DESPITE ITS OWN IMAGE, A LIVING CITY WITH ACTUAL CULTURAL DYNAMICS, IN THE BROADEST SENSE OF THE TERM. THIS DRAWING SHOWS THE MECHELEN YOU'LL NEVER SEE AS A WHOLE. IN THIS LIGHT WE FEEL THAT LAMOT ON A CULTURAL LEVEL SHOULD ACT IN A THREEFOLD MANNER:

- STAGING - REVEAL WHAT IS HIDDEN
- ENHANCING - SUPPORTING LOCAL INITIATIVES
- PRODUCING - STARTING UP NEW EXPERIMENTS.

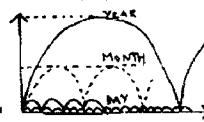
THE TASK OF LAMOT SHOULD BE TO PERFORM THESE RELATIONSHIPS



LET'S RETURN TO THE PROGRAM: THE QUESTION OF COMBINING A CULTURAL FACILITY AND A COMMERCIAL CONGRESS CENTER. THIS COULD PROVE TO BE RATHER A BENEFIT THAN A BURDEN.



IMPORTANT IN THIS IS THE POTENTIAL WIDE PUBLIC RANGE, FROM LOCALS TO INTERNATIONAL USERS, WHO VISIT THE BUILDING FOR VARIOUS REASONS BUT MEET NEVERTHELESS. AS FOR THE FREQUENCY OF ITS USERS, LAMOT WILL OFFER AN EXPLOSIVE MIX - RANGING FROM ONE-OFF EVENTS TO THE DAILY CAFÉ VISIT, AND ALL IN BETWEEN VISITS.



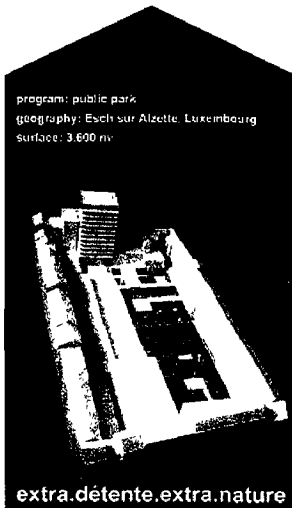
arrival entrance urban room reception desk cultural conference club drop-off side wing auditorium side foyer





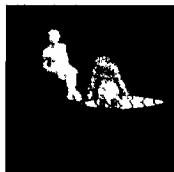
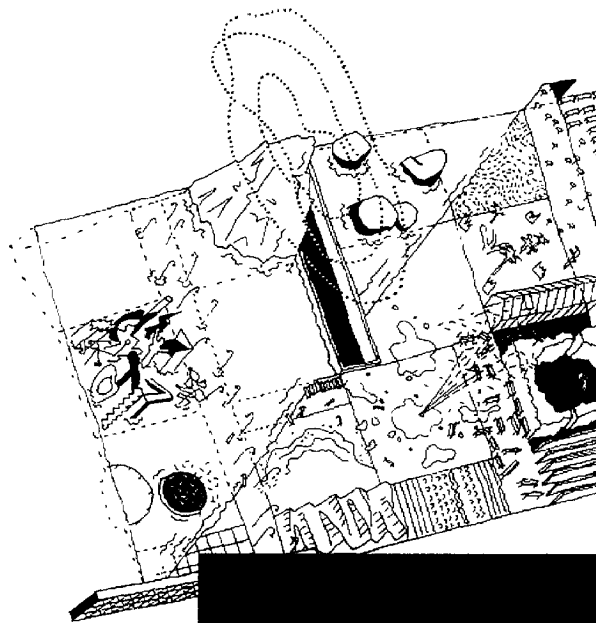
The existing standard trees (13 in total) suggest a nature that can be perceived as pure and iconographic. The trees are preserved. Apart from the trees the park is initially thought of as cleared.

The Park Cockerill was once a luxurious private garden owned by the Cockerill concern. The now degenerated park is being appropriated in an ad hoc way by various neighbours — as an improvised parking lot, a green decorum, a kindergarten playground. E.D.E.N. wants to encourage these appropriations/privatizations, though be it in a more diverse and temporal manner.



program: public park
geography: Esch sur Alzette, Luxembourg
surface: 3.600 m²

extra.détente.extra.nature
E.D.E.N.

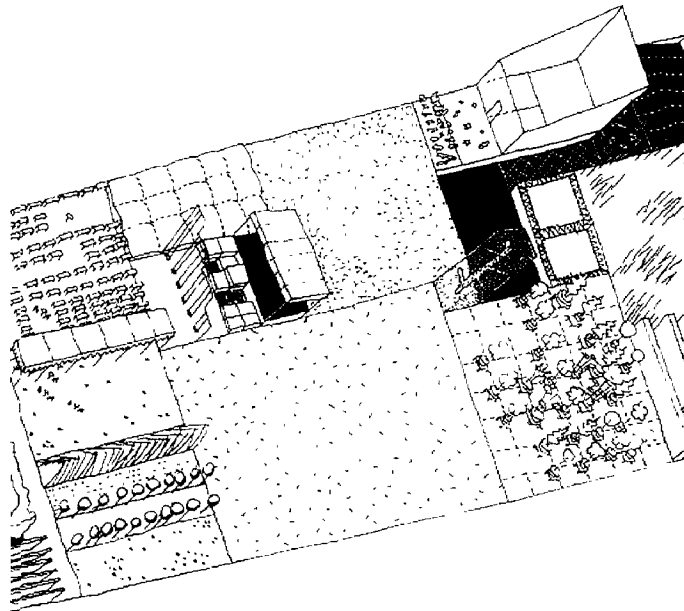


The park derives its layout concept from the garden café, where every item is set up next to one another in an equivalent way. E.D.E.N. is a multiple choice cornucopia of gardens, a permissive urban platform allowing for an unrestrained natural imagination.

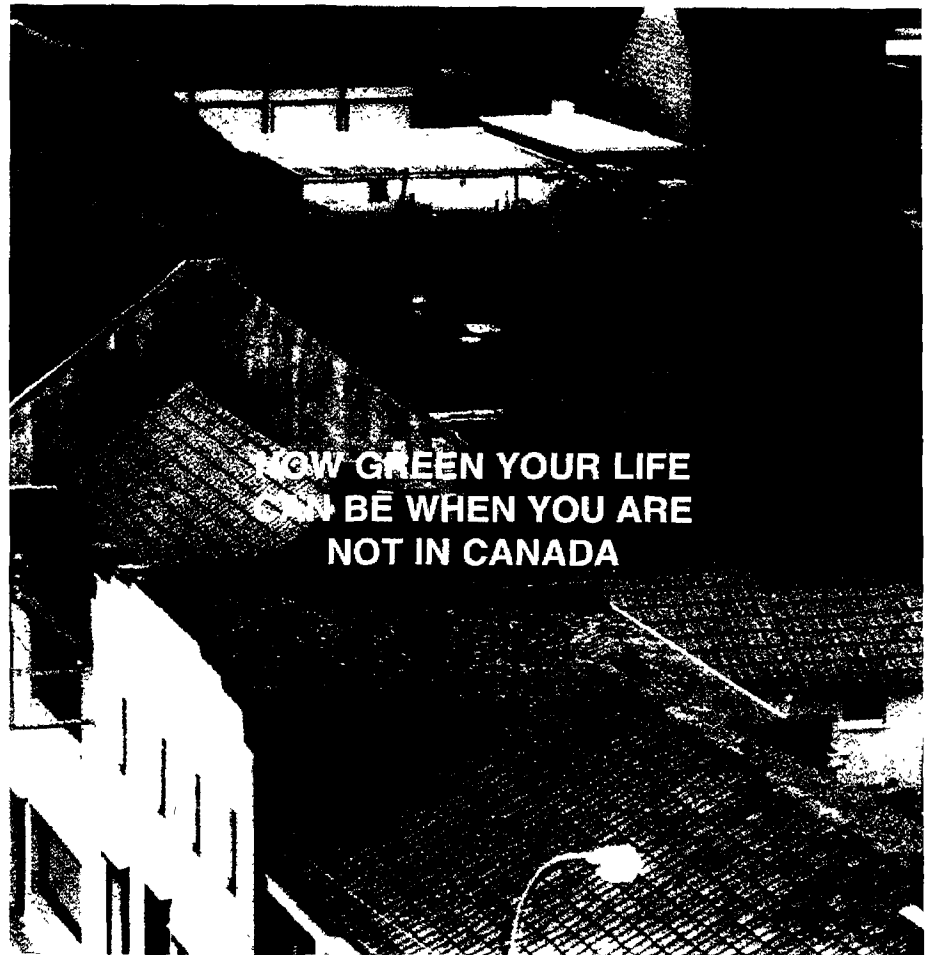




Subsequently the Park Cockwell is parceled out into 121 plots, each with their specific functions. Each kind of division between the gardens is deliberately lacking. The underlying idea is that a plot can be brought in line directly through the exceeding use of its neighbouring plots. EDEN promotes a virtual privatization: its users can decide how to use on how the gardens will shape themselves because function, purpose, content, location, open/closed. The final result will be an amalgam, some-times chaotic, sometimes beautiful, sometimes impossible at first glance.

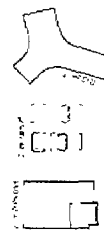


The proposed garden plots are starting points rather than definitive functional arrangements. The park comprises different natures: spa, BBQ, showers, relax sofas, rock pits, fitness, laptop garden, foot-baths, kindergarten, trampolines, soft patch, swings, Marilyn Monroe garden, mega Zen garden, fountain, chambre intime, pergolas, glass houses, pond, willow arcade, heather, squash, flower tables, mobile decorama, exotic nature, sculpture garden. These natures are completed by three supernatural phenomena: tide-water, a fog labyrinth and a light-landscape.



Resolution by the Finnish Government on the alteration of the Royal Decree of 16 December 1971 concerning the situation of works and acts tried for the interference of an architect or a building permit.

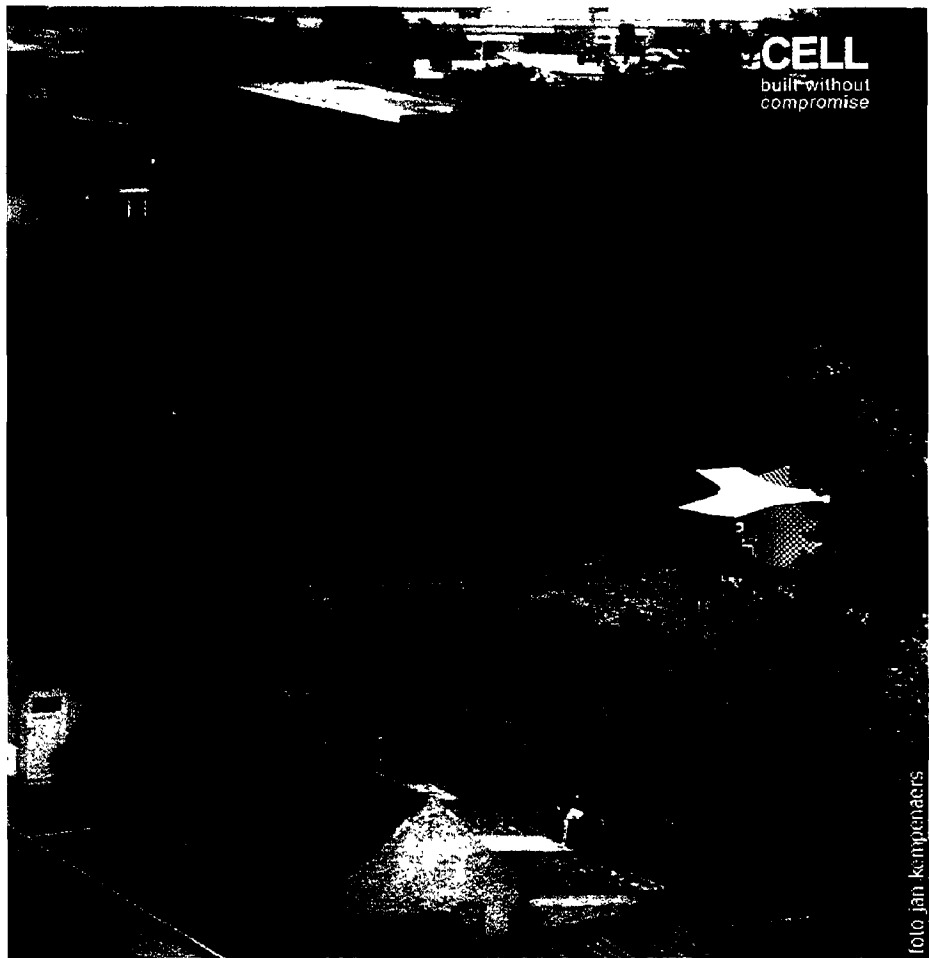
Art. 2. This chapter applies to constructions, which are permitted residence or build within a radius of 10 meters of the particular permitted residence, with a maximum surface of 21 square meters, a cornice height reduced to 2.50 meters and a slope height of 7 meters.

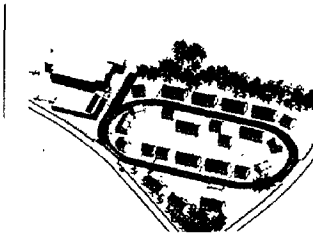


CELL
can be built without building permit.
extra room for outdoors or indoors.
size: up to 21m².
starshaped, 3 differentiated areas.
freestanding or adjacent to main building.
poth version: alu honeycomb struc./ acrylate.
basic version: plywood/ polycarbonate.
elec & water supply by main building

photo: you architect 2022
presentation: oktober 2022

 HITLUM PROJECT TOP





DONT CALL US, WE'LL CALL YOU

In 'Allotment Athletica' (1) by 51N4E the allotment's prevailing idiosyncrasy - juxtaposition of fantasy - is almost entirely approved of. Only the pipe-bowl, the traditional representation of the 'res publica' in this type of dwelling, has been replaced by a state athletics track. This equally practical and surrealistic injection shatters the snug allotment, modifies its identity and drastically changes the proportions of the area. This allotment no longer represents a mere addition of individual entities with an absolute minimum of communality. First and foremost we are dealing with a manifestly public location.

An unbidden pavilion (2), which is nevertheless liable to mass production, represents yet another key project the collective has enrolled in. It is based on the legal principle that for every structure smaller than 21m² a construction permit is not required. The largest variant measures exactly 21m² and although it is given a definite Berlaymont-like shape, the object can be adapted to various situations. According to the patron's, or rather the client's demand, it can serve as a veranda, a chalet, a large piece of furniture, an isolating cell, an office or a mini-lounge. It can be appended, suspended, encased, or independently mounted and it can take a poetic or a straightforward shape.

The architect's traditional role is wasted on the members of 51N4E. Their fellow craftsmen frequently and concededly fence off the outside world and coop up in a cocoon of aestheticism. They have learnt nothing from the commerce's omnipresence and its marketing strategies. They don't cope with the reality they are surrounded by, but create a small, detached world, which preferably will never be affected by the surrounding triviality. And if the outside world does rouse their interest, they don't dispose of the armamentarium to assimilate it. Finally,

they are exclusively orientated towards architecture and construction, even in situations where this is subordinate and inessential.

The 51N4E architects start from these observations. In the first place their 'oeuvre' consists of a series of all sorts of candid strategies which cope with a rather uncontrollable reality. They are masters in the avoidance of inevitable regularities and when they fall in this these regularities are turned to their own advantage. They persuasively succeed in dispelling certainties and in other cases they merely reduce reality.

Their armamentarium includes upgrading, copying, branding, restyling, transposition, deleting, collage, benchmarking, concentration, recycling, transformation, synthesis, image-building and these strategies become operational by means of every feasible market force. 51N4E will bombard you with leaflets, flyers, advertising brochures and business policies.

The fact that the unsightly and the breadcrumb is on equal terms with large-scale undertakings, is one of the surprising results of this orientation towards strategies instead of projects. There is no substantial difference in approach between the arrangement of an exposition and the drawing of an urban development blueprint.

Thus, the redecoration of an apartment (3) is more or less reduced to the erection of a rack: a sliding system of closets, which is generally used for the functional classification of archives. In this case the rack satisfies every want of accommodation, but it is mounted right before the entrance of the apartment; in its slid open condition it functions as a dressing room and obstructs the entrance.

The manner in which they tackle the decoration of a cottage (4) bears witness to a similar forthrightness: in the shape of a swimming pool, which is erected on the patio as if it were a large piece of garden furniture, the confined construction obtains a new centre. In one of the buildings all sorts of storerooms and adjacent buildings are organised in a no-nonsense manner. In a totalitarian fashion designermania and refinement can thus be concentrated upon a single gem: a kitchen in Carrara-marble.

In downtown Mechelen their plan (5) for the transformation of an old farm into a vehicle of culture implies the breaking down of the local cultural orbit. The interaction with other institutions is essential and determines the prospects within the brewery. The

project consists of a mutual position finding and it implies that the city is incorporated in the brewery and that the expositions are projected into town. In order to realise this one does not necessarily rely on architecture.

Yet another way of reshaping everyday life consists of recycling old building concepts into a new context. On entering a contest for a social allotment (6), old building typologies, which imply a specific relationship towards the landscape, are taken out of the closet. The rectangular farm, the crescent, the villa Palladiana and the ranch. These four are assembled in a non-composition and this results in an open sanctuary in the midst of an ocean of allotments. Once again the straightforward attack on petty individualism is omnipresent.

In Esch-sur-Alzette - of all places - a collection of city gardens, which already show a propensity towards communal usage, is transformed into a large park (7). Yet the park's shape is inspired by the existing allotment's configuration. The variety of applications and the various designs are tightened up and the contrasts are enlarged. The average garden centre, where one strolls from one item to another is the spatial bench-mark of this project.

51N4E's work is simultaneously radical and endearing. It attacks and annoys. It is empathic and withdrawn? It undermines and it validates. It shocks reality and it melts into thin air.

Xaveer De Geyter

DONT CALL US, WE'LL CALL YOU

In Verkaveling Athletica (1) van 51N4E wordt de gebruikelijke gang van zaken bij verkavelingen - juxtapositie van gebreidelde fantasie - bijna helemaal geaccepteerd; alleen wordt de pijpenkop, de traditionele vorm van de res publica, bij deze woonvorm vervangen door een verschaalde en berijdbare atletiekpiste. De tegelijk praktische en surrealistische injectie ontredert in één klap de knusse verkaveling, geeft er een gezicht aan en verandert drastisch de verhoudingen binnen de wijk: deze verkaveling is niet langer een optelsom van individuele entiteiten met een absoluut minimum aan gemeenschappelijkheid, maar

eerst en vooral een manifeste publieke plek

Een ander sleutelproject (2) van de groep is een paviljoen waar niemand om gevraagd heeft, maar dat toch voor massaproductie vatbaar is. Het is gebaseerd op het wettelijk uitgangspunt dat voor elk bouwseil kleiner dan 21m2 geen bouw aanvraag vereist is. De grootste variant is precies 21m2 en hoewel het een vaste vorm heeft die doet denken aan het Berlaymontgebouw, kan het ding aan allerlei situaties aangepast worden naargelang van de vraag van de opdrachtgever, sorry, de klant: veranda, vakantiehuis, megameubel, isoleercel, kantoor of minilounge. Het kan aangebouwd, opgehangen, ingekapseld of vrijstaand opgesteld worden, en het kan zowel een poëtische als een recht-voor-de-raapse gedaante aannemen.

De traditionele rol van de architect is niet aan de architecten van 51N4E besteed. Hun vakgenoten sluiten zich vaak zelfgenoegzaam af van de wereld in een cocon van esthetica. Ze hebben niets geleerd van de alomtegenwoordige commercie met haar marketingstrategieën. Ze gaan niet om met de werkelijkheid rondom hen. Ze creëren een wereldje ernaast dat liefst niet geaffecteerd wordt door de omringende alledaagsheid. En als de buitenwereld hen al interesseert, dan beschikken ze niet over het instrumentarium om die te assimileren. Tenslotte zijn ze puur op architectuur en bouwen gericht, ook in situaties waar dat bijkomstig is of helemaal niet hoeft.

Vanuit deze observaties werken de architecten van 51N4E.

Hun 'oeuvre' bestaat dan ook in de eerste plaats uit een reeks van allerhande franke strategieën om met - niet echt controleerbare - realiteit om te gaan. Ze zijn meesters in het ontwijken van onontkoombare wetmatigheden; als dat niet lukt, zetten ze die wetmatigheden in voor eigen voordeel, ze slaan er overtuigend in om zekerheden weg te nemen, in andere gevallen reduceren ze de werkelijkheid gewoon. Tot hun instrumentarium behoren: upgradering, kopiëren, branding, restyling, transposities, deleten, collage, benchmarking, concentratie, recycling, transformatie, synthese, imagebuilding. En die strategieën worden met alle mogelijke marketinginstrumenten aan de man gebracht. 51N4E slaat je om de oren met leaflets, flyers, publiciteitskrantjes en bedrijfsideologieën.

Eén van de verrassende gevolgen van deze gerichtheid op strategieën in plaats van op

projecten is dat in hun werk het onooglijke, de broodkrumel, op gelijke voet komt te staan met het grootschalige. Er is geen wezenlijk verschil in aanpak tussen de inrichting van een tentoonstelling en het maken van een stedenbouwkundig plan.

Zo wordt de herinrichting van een appartement (3) min of meer gereduceerd tot de opstelling van een compactuursak, een schuifstelsel van kasten dat in de regel gebruikt wordt om archieven maximaal nuttig in te richten. In dit geval lost het gevaar ook alle bergbehoeften op, maar het wordt pal voor de ingang van het appartement opgesteld: in opengesloten toestand fungeert het als kleedruimte en verspert het de toegang.

Ook de aanpak bij een inrichting van een woonboerderij (4) getuigt van dezelfde economie: de gesloten bebouwing krijgt een nieuw centrum in de vorm van een zwembad dat als een groot buitenmeubel op de binnenplaats geplaatst wordt. In één van de gebouwen worden allerlei bergingen en bijgebouwen op een no-nonsense manier gereorganiseerd zodat alle ontwerpwoede en raffinement op een totalitaire manier geconcentreerd kan worden in één kleedruimte: een Carrara marmeren keuken.

Hun scenario (5) voor de transformatie van een oude brouwerij in de Mechelse binnenstad tot cultuurfabriek impliceert het omploegen van het hele plaatselijke cultuurlandschap. De wisselwerking met de andere instellingen is essentieel en bepaalt de mogelijkheden binnen de brouwerij. Het project bestaat uit die onderlinge positieve relatie; het impliceert ook dat de stad in de brouwerij naar binnen wordt gehaald en de tentoonstellingen naar buiten worden gehaald. En om dat te realiseren heb je niet noodzakelijk architectuur nodig.

Nog een andere vorm van herwerken van alledaagsheid bestaat in het recyclen van gebouwconcepten in een nieuwe context. Voor een wedstrijd voor een 'sociale' verkaveling (6) worden enkele oude bouwtypologieën uit de kast gehaald die elk een specifieke verhouding tot het landschap impliceren: de vierkante hoeve, de crescent, de villa Palladiana en de ranch. De vier worden samengebracht in een non-compositie en het resultaat is een grote open vrijsplaats binnen de zee van omliggende verkavelingen. Ook hier is het opzet een regelrechte aanval op het benepen individualisme alom.

In Esch-sur-Alzette - of all places - wordt binnen een bouwblok een verzameling pri-

vétuities, die al de neiging naar gemeenschappelijk gebruik vertoonden, omgesmeed tot een heus park (7). Maar de vorm van het park wordt eigenlijk al gegeven door de bestaande kavelstructuur. Vooral de variëteit aan gebruiken en inrichtingen wordt opgedreven en de contrasten worden verhoogd. De ruimtelijke referentie voor het project is het gemiddeld tuincentrum, waar je gewoon van het ene item in het andere tuinmelt.

Het werk van 51N4E is tegelijk radicaal en aandoenlijk. Het slaat en zalf. Het is empathisch en contactgevoel. Het ondermynt hier, het bevestigt daar. Het choquert de werkelijkheid en het verdwijnt enn.

Xaveer De Geyter

1-7 : for visual reference see pages 4-5 - 23 projects, production overview

1-7 : voor beeldmateriaal zie pagina's 4-5 : 23 projecten, overzicht productie

