From *Penser la Ville* to *Faire la Ville*
Architecture’s and Brussels’ Engagement with the Real

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*Proefschrift*

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*Brussels’ and Architecture’s Engagement with the Real*

Proefschrift

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Ten propositions accompany the dissertation *From Penser la Ville to Faire la Ville. Brussels’ and Architecture’s Engagement with the Real*, by Isabelle Doucet.

1. The challenge of research is neither to access a spatial situation through a priori ideologies and fixed theoretical categories of analysis, nor to treat it as a truth ‘out there’ that can be accessed by presumably neutral disentanglements and descriptions, but to enact an interaction between theoretical sensitivities, ethical perspectives, and practical understandings of the real.

2. Particularly in theoretical works that aspire to challenge architecture’s tensions between theory and practice, the practice of writing (structuring the argument, narration, giving an account) deserves special attention.

3. The built realisations that are recognised by professional and disciplinary discourses often form a deceptive source for understanding the architectural and urban situation of a city.

4. Unravelling how Brussels’ architecture and urban production is practised, and disentangling (at least: some of) the different Brusselsses ‘at work’, allows for certain agents (e.g. architek, language, Bruxellisation, an urinoir) to be articulated, while it also allows for challenging research attitudes and assumptions, such as, typically, those related to participation and the everyday.

5. The Brussels’ emancipation from the ‘fear of the new’ proves a unique product of the emancipation within Flemish architecture culture, French critique, and a pragmatic urban-artistic activism. It, as such, challenges a too narrow categorisation of architecture in branches, styles, or ethical camps of good and bad, critical and compliant practices.

6. From the current Brussels’ architecture culture emerges a ‘concerned pragmatism’ that can inform a critique-from-within that is hopeful, not fatalist or cynical.

7. Architecture critique requires being handled and shaped in both interdisciplinary (informed by social, political, cultural theory) and transdisciplinary registers (discipline and profession; designers, theorists and consumers). However, due to architecture’s par nature transdisciplinary and projective nature, mere accounts of the real (induced by Technology Studies, Actor-Network-Theory and the Anthropology of Architecture) will always fall short.

8. The recent introduction of ‘agency’ as an analytical tool in architecture theory and research – in line with social and cultural theory’s recent redefinitions of ‘agency’, namely beyond its binary relation to structure – proves promising in understanding critique in architecture.

9. Endeavours that do hybridise architecture’s professional and disciplinary concerns towards critical ends, often remain, despite their promising proposals, either limited to radical albeit marginal interventions (think of numerous spatial interventions informed by self-organisation, temporary use, space appropriation…) or locked within the constraints of academia (for example, research projects focussing on agency and practice). Due to a lack of leverage, the former risk to endorse the anomalous character of their playground. The latter, by not impinging on the channels and formats of mainstream architecture production, risk to leave large parts of practice and discourse unaffected.

10. The struggles met by those architecture branches to effectuate a concerned engagement with the real resonate with architecture education’s failure to productively integrate studio work with reflection, and radical, critical analyses with corresponding design proposals.

*These propositions are considered opposable and defendable and as such have been approved by the supervisor Prof. dr. Arie Graafland.*
1. De uitdaging van onderzoek is niet zozeer om door te dringen tot een ruimtelijke situatie via a priori ideologieën en gefixeerde theoretische categorieën, noch deze situatie te benaderen van op een afstand, door middel van zogenaamd neutrale ontleidingen en beschrijvingen; maar de uitdaging is om een interactie te genereren tussen theoretische gevoeligheden, ethische perspectieven en een praktisch begrijpen van de werkelijkheid.

2. Zeker in theoretische werken die ernaar streven de spanningen tussen de theorie en de praktijk van de architectuur te bestuderen, verdient de praktijk van het schrijven (structuur argument, verhaallijn, hoe een verslag brengen/rapporteren) bijzondere aandacht.

3. De gebouwde realisaties zoals erkend binnen professionele en academische debatten vormen vaak een misleidende bron voor het begrijpen van de architecturale en stedelijk-ruimtelijke situatie van een stad.


5. De Brusselse emancipatie van de ‘angst voor het nieuwe’ blijkt een uniek resultaat van de Vlaamse architectuuremancipatie, Franse kritiek, en een pragmatisch, stedelijk-artistiek activisme. Zodoende vormt het een uitdaging voor een al te eng categoriseren van de architectuur in stromingen, stijlen, of ethische kampen verdeeld tussen goede en slechte, kritische en inschikkelijke praktijken.

6. De huidige Brusselse architectuurcultuur getuigt van een ‘bezorgd pragmatisme’ dat instructief kan zijn voor een kritiek-van-binnenin die hoopvol is, veeleer dan fatalistisch of cynisch.

7. Architectuurkritiek dient te worden benaderd en vormgegeven in zowel interdisciplinaire (geïnformeerd door sociale, politieke, cultuurtheorieën) als transdisciplinaire registers (discipline en professie; ontwerpers, theoretici, en gebruikers/consumenten). Desalniettemin, door de par nature transdisciplinaire en projecterende aanleg van de architectuur, schieten louter beschrijvende uitspraken over de werkelijkheid (zoals in Technology Studies, Actor-Network-Theory, en Anthropology of Architecture) steeds tekort.


9. Pogingen tot het hybridiseren van de belangen van de architectuurprofessie en discipline en deze in te zetten tot kritische doeleinden, blijven vaak, ondanks veelbelovende voorstellen, ofwel gelimeert tot radicale maar marginale interventies (denk aan de vele ruimtelijke interventies op basis van zelforganisatie, tijdelijk gebruik, ruimtelijke toe-eigening...) ofwel gevangen binnen academische beperkingen (bijvoorbeeld, onderzoeksprojecten gericht op ‘agency’ en praktijk). Door het gebrek aan hefboom, riskeert de eerste de marginale aard van diens speelruimte juist te bestendigen. De laatste, door niet in te grijpen in de kanalen en formaten van de doorsnee architectuurproductie, riskeert zo grote delen van de architectuurpraktijk en -debatt ongeroerd te laten.

10. De worstelingen waar architectuur praktijken mee te maken krijgen om een bezorgd engagement te effectueeren, resoneert met het falen van het architectuuronderwijs om op een productieve manier de ontwerpstudio te integreren met reflectie; en radicale, kritische analyses met overeenstemmende ontwerpvoorstellen.

Deze stellingen worden opponeerbaar en verdedigbaar geacht en zijn als zodanig goedgekeurd door de promotor Prof. dr. Arie Graafland.
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Additional credits:
The cover image was created by a student who participated in an international workshop I organised in 2004 in Brussels, whose identity I have not been able to retrace.

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Ouverture

Brussels is a knot, an intractable tangle. And it’s stuck. This is not a judgment, but a starting point. It’s what can be called the ‘Brussels Situation’. It’s the canvas to the painter. It’s the piece of land to the architect. It’s the first page to the novelist. It’s what appears as blank and neutral. Yet it’s populated and animated. The ‘Brussels Situation’ is where everything inevitably starts. It sabotages any neat distinction between Brussels as a case and Brussels as a context for research. It forces one to look into Brussels as it is ‘practised’. But what exactly is it composed of?

Brussels is the capital of Belgium, a country of just over 10.5 million inhabitants, at the intersection of German and Latin culture - ‘a crossing and threshold become city’\(^1\) – and only a few hours away from Amsterdam, London, Frankfurt and Paris. Belgium is famous for its chocolate, waffles, beer and lace. But it is also known for its incomprehensible politics, rules and legislation; for its notorious fiscal fraud; and for its vigorous fights between the French and Dutch-speaking parts of the country. Belgium has gained a dubious reputation through its Dioxin crisis (the meat scandal) and Marc Dutroux (the paedophilia scandal). But it has also been front-page news, more recently, for delivering the first President of Europe. Whereas opponents couldn’t swallow that, of all peoples, a Belgian would lead and represent Europe, pros were convinced that, if one had managed to keep a country like Belgium together, he must be capable of handling pretty much everything. The bad news is: the pros are right. With seven governments - federal government, three regional governments, and three community governments (French, Flemish, German) – ten provinces and 589 communes (municipalities); and with the on-going rivalry between the language communities, ruling this tiny nation is no sinecure.

Belgium is politically federalised in three independent regions. In the north of the country, one finds the Flemish Region called Flanders; in the south, the French Region called Wallony. In the centre of the country, as an enclave within the Flemish territory, one finds the Brussels Capital Region. Three communities (French, Dutch and German-speaking) populate the three regions, but communities and regions do not geographically overlap. The Flemish Region houses the Dutch-speaking community: the official language is Dutch, as it is known also in the Netherlands, but in Belgium it is ‘localised’ as Flemish and comes in many dialects. The Walloon Region houses the French-speaking community and, in the East, near the German border, a German-speaking community. In the Brussels Capital Region, however,

the French and Dutch-speaking communities live together, with a predominance of the French. Also, in contrast to the subsidiary provincial and municipal levels within the Walloon and Flemish region, Brussels lacks a provincial level. Instead, the Brussels Capital Region is governed by a regional Minister-President (and his Ministers), and, on the local level, by 19 municipalities. Brussels therefore has not one single Mayor but nineteen. Efforts to install integrative and transversal regional politics often prove fruitless vis-à-vis the political stubbornness with which these nineteen burgomasters, also called ‘the nineteen barons’, rule their municipality. Due to Brussels’ complex administrative structure – one Region, 19 municipalities, two language communities – policy making is, more than in other cities, an extraordinarily entangled and multi-layered business. For example, whereas social and cultural affairs (education, culture, social welfare) are community matters (and thus beyond Brussels territory), urban planning, employment, environment, public works, and economic development are regional responsibility, effectuated through regional policies that are applied on the municipal level. With, moreover, the Belgian State (and Europe) being involved in Brussels’ planning through solidarity principles and funding programs, many of Brussels’ urban policies involve a myriad of partners around the table.

This complex governance in combination with a very strong local force (the nineteen barons) has resulted in a governance culture that is strongly based on self-organisation or auto-gestion. Central, regional policies may be developed; their success depends entirely on the local reception or rejection of these policies. Since local, regional and communal representatives often work across different levels simultaneously (for example: a regional minister may also be one of the 19 Burgomasters or a local alderman), one should add to auto-gestion, also the multiple casquettes syndrome as a crucial element of Brussels’ governance. The combination of both phenomena leads to an overall impression of a city that is autogéré in a very localised and secretive manner; and of a governance that is based more on compromise, laissez-faire, and vriendjespolitiek (networking and favouring throughout the political levels) than on legislative regulation. The complexity and opaqueness of such tangled web of political and personal intricacies, has generated an overall assumption that, in Brussels, ‘it is all just politics after all’.

‘It’s all just politics after all’.
Let’s keep that in mind.

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2 With the Brussels Region I refer to ‘political Brussels’. The morphological agglomeration is much larger.

3 For example the national-regional collaborations Beliris and Politique des Grandes Villes / Grootstedenbeleid; European urban renewal program such as Urban.
There's a story about a Belgian who takes his son salmon-fishing in western Canada. They arrive in a small Native American village on British Columbia's upper plateaux. The father starts up a conversation with a local and tells him where he's from. “Ah Belgium,” the local nods knowingly. “Dioxin and Dutroux.”

For years, those who had heard of Belgium associated it with lace, beer, chocolate and waffles. Then came the 1996 paedophilia scandal and this summer’s contaminated meat crisis. Belgium was on the map, but for all the wrong reasons.


Along the multi-layered governance, Belgium’s but even more so Brussels’ day-to-day administration has turned into a Kafkaesque undertaking. The simplest matter easily turns into a bureaucratic hassle. Bureaucrats themselves often don’t find their way throughout Brussels’ complex set of rules. As a result, the Law tends to change from one bureaucrat’s desk to another: it is interpreted, reformulated, applied to the letter, but also handily bypassed. I wouldn’t know where to begin with examples of the advantageous, hilarious, frustrating, or harmful effects this may and does have on ‘living in Brussels’. A person’s daily life depends on the capacity to turn such chaos to one’s advantage; hence Belgium’s notorious tax evasions; hence Brussels’ nicknames Absurdistan or Italy-of-the-North. A Federal webpage for reporting administrative and legislative impasses is called ‘Kafka’,\(^4\) and surrealism seems to evoke art as much as politics amongst the Belgians.

And then there is language. French and Dutch versions of the same official document are not always identical. Most administrators don’t speak Flemish, which causes miscommunications or bad advice. Not to mention the less amusing misunderstandings occurring in supposedly bilingual hospitals (in reality: French). The historical roots of Belgium’s language issues - and the occasional indifference and frustrations that come with it - are intertwined with everyday life in the most complex, even surprising ways. A year ago or so, I was in FNAC, a large multimedia store, where I found two identical DVD-boxes (same language and subtitle selections, same content and extras), but one with the cover text in French, the other in Dutch. The French version was sold for 42.5 euros; the Dutch one for 85.9. When confronting a salesperson with this double price, he responded, with not the tiniest bit of astonishment: ‘Yes, I know, it’s perhaps weird, but that’s what it is, I also can’t help it, and, by the way, it is not really the double price since that would have been 85, not 85.9 euros.’ In Brussels, it is not always possible to draw clearly distinguishable language boundaries, which is perhaps best demonstrated by the fact that, in Brussels, the ultra-Flemish nationalist party Vlaams Belang has many French voters. Also, French-speakers have often typically Dutch family names and vice versa.

Brussels has a population of just over one million, which makes it a rather small capital city (Capital of Europe, Capital of Belgium, seat of the European NATO division).\(^5\) Yet, every day, more than 350,000 people commute into the city to work in the numerous administrations and national or international headquarters. 5,000 diplomats are active in

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4 [www.kafka.be](http://www.kafka.be) is the website where citizens can report administrative impasses. It is part of the Federal service for ‘administrative simplification’ ([Dienst Administratieve Vereenvoudiging](http://www.kafka.be)).

Brussels. Moreover, approximately 40,000 people (many of them expatriates living and working in Brussels) work for European institutions, international delegations and other related services, representing, apart from EU-countries, more than 180 countries from all over the world.\(^6\) It is common knowledge that these European expatriates hardly ever have any contact with the local population. They live in different neighbourhoods, eat in different restaurants, read different newspapers. In total, 28% of the Brussels population is not Belgian.\(^7\) If we add naturalisations of previous immigrants (primarily workers from Italy, Spain, Morocco and Turkey), we can say that, in certain neighbourhoods, half of the population has no Belgian origins. Mohamed is the second most popular name for men in Brussels, after Jean.\(^8\)

To say the least, Brussels is a truly pluri-cultural, cosmopolitan city, where a plethora of languages are spoken, the most exquisite and varied ethnic cuisines can be found, and where vibrant cultural exchanges emerge from both highbrow and underground cultural productions. It is a city of difference, a city of minorities (not one dominant group), a city that is experienced by many as one that changes each time one turns a corner. The combination of Brussels’ cosmopolitanism, with its ambiguous, chaotic governance, gives it that typical laboratory function that attracts artists from all over the world to come and exploit Brussels’ wealthy landscape of (spatial, cultural, but also financial) interstices. It is said that Belgium is ‘held together by little more than the King, the public debt – and a gnawing collective sense that things cannot continue as they have’.\(^9\) And Brussels? More than by the 19 barons, who save no efforts or means in keeping Brussels divided, it is art and culture that seems to unite the city.\(^10\)


\(^7\) In 2008, this was 28.1% - Observatorium voor Gezondheid en Welzijn Brussel, Welzijnsbarometer. Brussels armoederapport 2009 (Brussels: Gemeenschappelijke Gemeenschapscommissie, 2009), p.13. In 2007, this was 27.5%; on a total population of 1,031,215, 747,688 is Belgian and 283,527 non-Belgian – Brussels Instituut voor Statistiek en Analyse, Statistische Indicatoren van het Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest, uitgave 2008 (Brussels: Iris Uitgaven), p. 24.

\(^8\) This list continues with French names such as Michel, Philippe, or Pierre, and on the 14th place: Mohammed, again, this time with double m. Data from 1/1/2007, Brussels Instituut voor Statistiek en Analyse, Statistische Indicatoren, p. 53.


Also part of the ‘Brussels Situation’ is Brussels’ performance as a city of paradoxes. It is the capital of Belgium and of Europe, yet nationally it is conceived of dismissively rather than with pride. It is the capital of Europe, but many foreigners arriving by Eurostar, ICE or TGV in the Gare du Midi, admit to having been shocked by their first impression of a dysfunctional third world country – ‘I thought I had arrived in Nairobi’. Brussels has the impressive and diversified cultural offerings of a true cosmopolitan city, yet it fails to reconcile its own Flemish and French cultural productions. As a flourishing capital as well as business and administrative city, Brussels is a significant employment and revenue generator. And yet, these assets fail to trickle down to the local level, where one finds one of the highest unemployment and poverty rates of Europe. In 2009, Brussels reached an unemployment peak of 100,000.\(^\text{11}\) The problem is not as much the lack of jobs per se but the discrepancy between the ‘capital’ job market and the skills and profiles of the local population. One in four adult Brussels males (and one in five females) don’t finish school,\(^\text{12}\) and thus have difficulties in finding jobs in the administrative capital. Moreover, 26.2% of the Brussels’ population lives below the poverty risk boundary.\(^\text{13}\) If we know that the unemployed are especially hit by this poverty risk, and that 27.6% of Brussels babies are born in a household without income from labour,\(^\text{14}\) these are very grim figures indeed for our European Capital. We should add also the 1,771 ‘countable’ homeless,\(^\text{15}\) a number that continues to grow due to growing influxes of asylum seekers that the city (and country) fails to cope with.

The ‘Brussels Situation’ as such also refers to Brussels as a city of paradoxes and contrasts, and to a city with sharp socio-spatial segregations between east and west, centre and periphery. On the one hand, ‘the Europeans’ and the European Institutions have settled in the wealthier upper town quarters and suburbs of the east. On the other hand, one finds heavily decayed and impoverished downtown quarters, in the historical core and the former industrial neighbourhoods of the west (along the canal). This ‘Brussels Situation’ is unique, and is due to a series of factors, including Brussels’ unique post-war development in comparison with other cities. Firstly, since Brussels was relatively undamaged by the Second World War, its

\(^{11}\)Corresponds with approximately 20% of its active population. A total of 92,928 unemployed on benefit - Brussels Instituut voor Statistiek en Analyse, *Statistische Indicatoren*, p. 220.

\(^{12}\)Observatorium voor Gezondheid en Welzijn Brussel, *Welzijnbarometer*, p. 66. Add to this 38.7% low-skilled adults (those aged 25 or over who never finished school), p. 67.

\(^{13}\)Ibid., p. 15. According to ‘objective’ criteria (income), the number is between 16.3 and 40.1% - 25% of the active population; 45% of the unemployed. Compare with Flanders: between 9.1 and 12.7%, Wallony: between 16.1 and 21.5%. The Belgian average is between 13.5 and 16.9%. According to ‘subjective’ criteria – declaring to not be able to get by – gives a similar number of 28.3% for Brussels, whereas for Belgium the average is 15.3%, in Walloeny 21.6%), and in Flanders 9.6%.

\(^{14}\)Ibid., p.60. Numbers from 2007.

\(^{15}\)Ibid., p. 59. Street counting of 2008 – in streets, in shelters, squatters… .
housing stock of the historic city centre (called the Pentagon), and the first couronne (the 19th-century extension to the Pentagon) is old and poorly maintained. Secondly, in contrast to other cities, Brussels (and Belgium) did not build mass social-housing schemes as we can find, for example, in the French HLM’s (Habitation à Loyer Modéré, better known as the Grands Ensembles) or the Dutch New Towns (such as Bijlmer). A pact between Christian-Democrat politics and a liberal mentality moulded spatial planning and housing policies in favour of allocating grants directly to families, to build single-family houses outside of the city, rather than financing, via housing corporations, the construction of rental housing in social estates. Thirdly, if not more radically than at least more destructively than in many other cities, Brussels transformed into a modern administrative and business city. Endless construction and demolition works were to drive away large parts of the population. By the 1980s, those who could afford to do so had fled. Those who couldn’t, such as the elderly, the Belgian poor, and the low-skilled immigrant populations (who had been hit hard by de-industrialisation), depended on the cheap hovels on offer on the inner-city housing market. If we add to this a fourth factor, namely Brussels’ chronic shortage of social housing provision – only 7.7% of the total housing stock is social housing; over 30,000 Brussels’ households are on the waiting list – it becomes clear how these inner-city hovels would function as a sort of private social housing market. And it is precisely here that gentrification has spread significantly during the past decade, displacing not just the existing populations, but also the substitute social housing they rely on. The fact that half of the Brussels population currently lives in neighbourhoods that are recognised as ‘deprived’, is thus unavoidably seen as part of the ‘Brussels Situation’.

16 Ibid., p. 57. On 1/1/2009, Brussels had a social housing stock of 38,526 units, which means only 12 units more than in 2008 – data from the BGHM Brusselse Gewestelijke Huisvestingsmaatschappij. The number of social housing in comparison to private housing thus did not change: 7.7%. The shortage in social housing - according to the NAPindex-indicator, comparing the number of households on the waiting list with the available social housing units - is in Brussels only getting worse: 78.4% in 2009; 67.6% in 2008; 65.2% in 2007. In 2009, 30,207 households were on the waiting list.

17 11% of the Brussels private housing lacks basic comfort (this means: no individual bathroom or toilet within the house), Welzijnbarometer, p. 57. People living on social benefit, in housing without basic comfort (and with one bedroom or less) spend more than 50% of their income on rent (p. 58).


19 503,549 on a total population of approximately one million – Vandermotten, Kesteloot, Ippersiel, Dynamische Analyse van de Buurten in Moeilijkheden, p. 20. In this study, it is clear that Brussels ‘wins’ all the statistics in comparison to other cities. Of the ‘deprived’ neighbourhoods, a large number are immigrant quarters (180,113 inhabitants; in the first couronne of the west) or neighbourhoods in gentrification (117,460 inhabitants; almost all of the city-centre and the first couronne of the east) - pp. 23-24 and p. 53.
Image 3: From The Bulletin’s guide to Brussels, Brussels Insider 2007, pp. 4-5. We see the 19 municipalities; downtown Brussels (in green); the EU-quarter (in blue); and uptown (in pink); and we also see that the South-East-part primarily, is considered as residential area by Brussels’ expatriates.

Image 4: Population in neighbourhoods in difficulty, per type and per city region. We see how Brussels differs from other cities particularly in respect to immigrant neighbourhoods (in orange, ‘migranten in grote moeilijkheden’) and neighbourhoods under gentrification (blue, ‘in gentrificatie’). Source: C. Vandermotten et al., Dynamische Analyse van de Buurten in Moeilijkheden in de Belgische Stadsgewesten, p. 23.
And what about everyday life in Brussels? Cash machines for example, are more often than not empty. The overall impression is of a city that simply can’t cope, yet where, somehow, everything does work after all. ‘Nothing ever works here!’ and ‘Why does one always need a plan A, B, and C in order to get something done here?’ And yet: ‘Don’t worry, we’ll find a way’ and ‘Shhh, no problem, I know someone….’. The overall impression is that the Brussels’ tangle blocks everything, doesn’t allow things to move forward. The weird sensation is that nevertheless, against all odds, everything moves; that it is precisely Brussels’ tangle that allows one to move, to ‘get things done’. A city that attracts and repulses; that one seems to either love or hate. A city where one somehow continues to pardon its defects. Also, one with a total lack of interest in (and thus little respect for) public space and the collective.

When a packed tram arrives in a Brussels station, people will push to try and get in, even if first letting out people would make everyone move faster.

‘A city of paradoxes’ and
‘The everyday chaos that disturbs but also allows to “get things done”’

Let’s keep also this in mind.

One day, after my wallet had been stolen, I was fortunate: it had been handed in to the local police station. But then I realised it had been lost again, this time within the police station, only to re-appear weeks later … in the police’s ‘lost objects’ department! I keep on imagining an officer finding a wallet within the police station, thinking: ‘oh my, someone’s lost his wallet here, how odd.’

The flatmate of a colleague of mine, after having identified the person he witnessed doing a violent hold-up in a line-up, was afterwards ‘mistakenly’ confronted by the criminal in the police station. Panicked about the possible consequences, the police simply asked: ‘do you have someone in Flanders or somewhere like that where you could lie low for a couple of months?’.

The north-south tram junction is either delayed or stuck. For fun, we’ve run the test several times: sometimes the fastest connection between the Gare du Nord and the Gare du Midi is by foot.

Two years after having moved out of a house in the Rue van Artevelde, I received a phone call from a jolly technician: ‘Bonjour Mademoiselle, what would be a good time for us to come and fix that leak in the roof?’ Well, what could I respond: ‘three and a half years ago’?
These anecdotes tell us something about the, at times, absurd, funny, and charming but also at times nerve-wrecking, counter-productive and scandalous ways 'things get done’ in Brussels. As this dissertation will repeatedly show, knowing how to 'get things done’, and thus knowing how things work, and are kept at work, is absolutely crucial for resisting or giving way to the agencies that constitute Brussels, and that hold it together. A thorough understanding of Brussels’ numerous paradoxes and tangles is crucial for developing modes of response to them. The more Brussels’ paradoxes, absurdities and contradictions get acknowledged, the more they are seen as what makes Brussels into Brussels, something that adds to its charms. In short, rather than being a burden, Brussels’ weaknesses, or at least disturbances, are presented as assets. Brussels’ self-organising tendency is seen more and more as an inventive playground where the ‘real’ Brussels appears. Everyday tactics tend to be seen as expressions of creativity and invention (which, of course, they are), rather than, as is unfortunately also often the case, sheer necessity. By celebrating Brussels’ everyday tactics, its laboratory function, surrealism and fragmentation, one risks black boxing the very complex networks that compose the everyday, the tactics that constitute and have generated the very need of everyday pragmatism, and the responses to that need.

‘How not to black box the very complex networks that compose the everyday?’
To remind as well.

By now, I suspect the reader must be anxious to intervene: ‘Very well, but what has all this to do with architecture?’ and ‘What on earth do waffles, Kafka, the 19 barons, or French-Dutch tribes have to do with it?’ I take a deep breath, clear my throat, straighten my shoulders and can only respond: ‘Everything. Absolutely everything! Well, that is, perhaps except for the waffles.’

The Belgian tendency to embrace chaos, creative deviation of rules, and ni vu ni connu (what is not known does not harm), is expressed perhaps first and foremost in architecture and urban planning. In planning: the chaos and fragmentation, the eating up of the landscape, the endless urban sprawl, the excessive highway and railroad infrastructure that connects even the remotest corners with the cities (let’s commute, and if possible: by car!). Also in planning: a four-façade single-family house for everybody; and if space runs out, we’ll build them in agriculture areas, or even in the flood plains, and why not a weekendhuisje as well? In architecture: the diversity of styles: a Spanish-style hacienda next to a mini French château or turnkey pseudo-modern villa. Also in architecture: the Belgian fermette, a domesticated copy of a typical rural farmhouse, including the obligatory rural nostalgia and kitsch ornaments - the ultimate expression of the vigorously defended but fake Belgian individuality. Also
architecture: the koterij! The koterij or backroom refers to the series of extensions that Belgians add themselves to the back of their houses: first an extra kitchen space, then a laundry corner, a hobby room… Because these parts of the house often become the most lived spaces, the koterij is the symbol of the Belgian secretive life and liberal freedom (ni vu ni connu). Whereas the koterij shows the Belgian dislike of being controlled in what they can and cannot do, the fermette demonstrates that Belgians as much dislike the taste of architects being imposed on them.

In the Brussels dialect, the word Architek is one of the fiercest insults.

For decades, the Brussels population has been haunted by the demolition fever of developers. The infamous ‘Brussels trauma’ today still complicates the attitude of the population vis-à-vis the city’s architects and architecture. The deeply rooted fear of the tabula rasa continues to legitimise architectural pastiche. It appears that pastiche is even better appreciated than the real thing. The ongoing fear of the tabula rasa also turned la participation citoyenne into a very active and sensitive topic: to be consulté par la politique is very important to the Brussels population.

In Brussels, the political fragmentation affects numerous layers of everyday life. For example, tourists and visitors suffered from chaotic organisation and aggressive publicity of the city’s hop-on/hop-off tourist busses, because three (government-authorised) companies run simultaneous services and compete for clients. In contrast to other cities, where schedules and itineraries can be controlled directly by the city’s Mayor, Brussels’ bus companies benefit from the fact that they run across several municipal territories.

But Brussels’ complex administrative structure also directly affects urban planning and architectural production. When, for example, one municipality is mercilessly tearing down an Art Nouveau building, a bordering municipality may be fighting for years to get one protected as part of the patrimony. Each municipality has its own design and style for street furniture and public spaces. Large-scale development projects have lobbied skillfully across municipal

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20 In the final chapter we’ll study the everyday urban traumas and their impact on architecture, in greater detail.

21 In 2000, the Brussels’ public transport company STIB/MIVB had officially appointed only one private company to organise tourist bus tours. Meanwhile there are now three. The regional level has no authorities in tourism affairs. Steven Van Garsse, ‘Pascal Smet maakt einde aan busoorlog’, Brussel Deze Week, nr. 1118, 7-14 February 2008, and www.brusselnieuws.be, 6 February 2008 [last accessed 26 January 2010].

22 Van Istendael, Het Belgisch labyrint, p. 150.
boundaries, seeking for flexible building permissions and favourable political climates. More generally, Brussels’ urban development is strongly influenced by certain architects’ and developers’ talent for plantrekerij or se debrouiller (finding/getting one’s way). If 19 barons govern Brussels’ municipalities, so too does the local urbanism nobility. Moreover, political ‘clubs’, private developers, entrepreneurs and architects (that is, a few large, mainly French architecture firms) meet in exclusive lobbies, which is where, in fact, most major deals are really made. Thus, some actors seemingly do find their way through the Brussels political labyrinth, and manage to glue the fragments effectively together into a workable piece. In other words, even if, despite its complexity, the Brussels’ tangle also allows one to move, there remains the question as to who can make it move and towards what end.

Moreover, language also plays a role in the production of Brussels’ architecture. It is a crucial agent for the lobbyists, for these are predominantly French: Jean-Michel Jaspers, one of the major Brussels architectes-promoteurs proves that alliances with French firms, such as Atelier d’Art Urbain, are more lucrative than collaborations with Flemish ones (who are less represented in these lobbies). On a larger scale, these lobbies meet at the yearly MIPIM real estate meeting in Cannes. Interestingly, it is at MIPIM, and not within the international architecture debates, that Brussels’ architecture is discussed. In other words, the largest architecture projects - think of the buildings for the European Institutions, corporate seats of banks and multinationals; these ‘smart buildings and office towers, neatly packaged in decorative post-modern architectural jackets’ that are classified in Brussels as architecture promoteur - contribute generously to the construction industry while not participating whatsoever in (international) architecture debates. By contrast, the global ‘most wanted’

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23 Such as the Manhattan project near the North Railway Station, which lobbied across the St Joost / Schaarbeek municipal border.

24 In certain municipalities it is crucial to know the local urbanism échevin and in particular the core decision-making networks in order to get projects realised: most notably one can think of the impact of Philippe Moureaux in Molenbeek, Guy Cudell in St. Joost, and Charles Picqué in St. Gillis (who is at the same time Regional Minister-President). Conversation with Marc Dubois 26 August 2009.

25 Involved in such clubs are large construction firms such as Jacques Delens and Blaton, and large, French architecture firms such as Atelier d’Art Urbain and Montois, and as a major Flemish exception: Michel Jaspers. One of the most infamous clubs is the Cercle Royale du Parc. See chapter three for more details.

26 See also conversation with Marc Dubois, 26 August 2009; and interview with Michel Jaspers, 28 January 2008.

architects, such as Rem Koolhaas and Jean Nouvel, are skilfully excluded from the Brussels’ building production.²⁸

This working condition, perceived as inevitable, has generated amongst many architects a paralysing fatalism (being frustrated, sometimes even refusing to work under such circumstances by avoiding projects in Brussels altogether), while it has brought success to a few architectes-promoteurs who hold the monopoly on the larger commissions.²⁹ However, neither fatalism nor frontal assaults vis-à-vis ‘it is all just politics after all’ – through withdrawal/compliance or sheer opposition, respectively - are efficient responses because they render abstract the complex set of agencies that constitute this phenomenon and that keep ‘it is all just politics after all’ alive; in other words, that maintain and affirm its force.

One way to start unravelling the production of architecture and the urban is to unravel the complex and multiple workings of the ‘real’ and to disentangle the different agencies at work. Rather than the idealisations, hopes, curses and aversions projected onto it, it implies starting from Brussels itself, from, at its most basic, Brussels the ‘harsh city’. It is not an evaluation of what architecture and the urban mean in Brussels that is at stake, but the complex, closely tied knot of agencies that constitute that harshness. At stake is the meticulous understanding of why, in Brussels, the statement ‘it is all politics after all’ is (and should be) a question, not an answer. At stake is the careful understanding of why, in Brussels, ‘architecture proves a harsh business’. Likewise what is at stake is what nourishes, rescues, polishes and takes tremendously great care of the Brussels people’s ‘fear of the new’; and the frustrations, malfunctions and astonishments of Brussels’ everyday life. In other words, the various elements that constitute the ‘Brussels Situation’.

This dissertation therefore will have to allow more, not less complexity. It will have to look at both the established, technical, expert knowledge and, as in Foucault’s genealogies, those ‘disqualified knowledges’, ‘subjugated knowledges’ or the ‘noncommonsensical knowledges

²⁸ Koolhaas/OMA was excluded from the Ground Euro competition because of an administrative shortcoming (a missing signature) – Bert De Muynck, ‘Brussel en “Ground Euro”, a theatre in regress’, Archined, 3 February 2003, www.archined.nl [last accessed 21 January 2010].

²⁹ I refer to the interviews done with Brussels architects and urban planners (see overview list in annex) and informal talks with Belgian and Brussels architects (both Flemish and French) over the past years. Several architects working in Flanders (and to a less extent in Wallony) expressed their refusal to work in Brussels because of its complexity, vriendjespolitiek, corruption, extreme delays in getting building permissions and burdensome bureaucratic procedures. Doing architecture in Brussels is generally considered as frustrating and non-lucrative business, especially by more established offices. Younger architects seem more prepared to pay that price in exchange for assignments. Among the larger firms that control the Brussels architecture production one can count Jaspers-Eyers, Atelier d’Art Urbain, Montois & Partners, and Art & Build.
that people have’. Importantly, Foucault’s ‘people’ does not refer to patients (users) alone but also to doctors and nurses (architects and planners). This dissertation attempts to unravel the messiness of architecture’s being-in-the-world, to disentangle the Brussels’ imbroglio by taking into account as many as possible elements and agencies. It attempts to render Brussels intelligible through a montage of Brusselses: by looking at Brussels from several, but partial views. The aim is not to discover the hidden Brusselses, in the sense of what is purposefully hidden or oppressed, but to look at what is invisible because it is not immediately evident, not fully intelligible: because it is perhaps only one of many threads of a complex imbroglio. Also, rather than using Brussels as a ‘single case’, as either a touchstone or resource for theoretical insights, Brussels is considered here a practice, in the sense of Isabelle Stengers’ ‘ecology of practices’ (écologie des pratiques), which is not about what is or what should be, but it is a matter of ‘making think’ and ‘thinking through what is happening’.

This resonates with Paul Auster’s comparison, in The Invention of Solitude, between the Disney version of Pinocchio and the story as originally told by Collodi. Auster argues that the Collodi story is more genuine in that it does not explicate the inner motivations of the story but shows the ‘muddling through’ of Pinocchio and his father: ‘In Disney, Gepetto prays for a son; in Collodi, he simply makes him. The physical act of shaping the puppet […] is enough to convey the idea of the prayer’. Stengers’ suggestion to ‘make think’ - Collodi showing the ‘act of shaping’ – implies a slowing down (ralentir) in order to ‘create the occasion for a

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31 Ibid., pp. 7-8.

32 Imbroglio was used as the name for www.imbroglio.be, related to the ‘The loyalties of knowledge’ research project, funded by the Belgian Science Policy, and involving amongst others Serge Gutwirth, Isabelle Stengers, and Bruno Latour. It is dedicated to the study of imbroglios of knowledge, institutions, actants and things.


36 Paul Auster, The Invention of Solitude (London: Faber and Faber, 1992 [1982]), p.132. Auster argues that: ‘In Collodi, there are no directives. Pinocchio simply blunders about, simply lives, and little by little comes to an awareness of what he can become’ (p. 132), so no need for the Blue Fairy to tell him what to do, how to behave.
slightly different sensibility vis-à-vis the situations that mobilise us.\textsuperscript{37} This we find also in Alain De Botton’s fascination for Marcel Proust’s curiosity for all the details of an event, expressed most vividly by a typical Proust-evaluation of a too quick and jumpy narrator: ‘Mais non, mais non, vous allez trop vite. Recommencez. Vous prenez la voiture de la Délégation. Vous descendez au Quai d’Orsay. Vous montez l’escalier. Vous entrez dans la Salle. Et alors? Précisez, mon cher, précisez’.\textsuperscript{38}

This is how I have attempted to study Brussels, by slowing down in describing it. I have not attempted to narrate a ‘new’ Brussels or ‘explain’ it anew. Instead I attempted to understand the workings of agencies such as ‘it is all politics after all’, ‘the architects destroy the city’, ‘Brussels is a jungle’, or ‘we need more citizen participation’. Describing Brussels as a practice allows for being sensitive to the multifarious agencies that make Brussels, that produce and maintain it. It means looking at all (or at least many) forces that ‘hold’ Brussels together, all those energies that allow it to thrust forward, to get interrupted but then reassembled again. It allows looking at the Brussels that is ‘at work’ rather than the made Brussels.

Even if, throughout this dissertation’s endeavour, the goal-orientedness, intentionality and transcendence so cherished by critical social theories, may be put aside, this is only for their behaviour as guiding principles, never in terms of ethics. Indeed, throughout the disentanglement of the Brussels knot, it will take good care of the ‘what can we hope for?’ question.\textsuperscript{39} Rather than aspiring to solve the ‘Brussels Situation’ and formulate alternatives, this dissertation aims to problematise that situation.\textsuperscript{40} It is through problematisation, rather than fatalism, cynicism or denunciation, that assumptions such as ‘it is all politics after all’ can be challenged. Problematisation moreover implies neither the application nor the verification of theories on the Brussels ‘case’; and yet it can’t deny a ‘theoretical


\textsuperscript{39} Scott Lash in ‘Agency and Architecture: How to be critical? Scott Lash and Antoine Picon in conversation with Kenny Cupers and Isabelle Doucet. Comments by Margaret Crawford’, \textit{Footprint Journal}, issue 4, Spring 2009, pp. 7-20, p.14. Lash refers to Kant’s third critique, namely the utopian next to knowledge (what do I know) and ethics (what should I do). Even if I will put into question precisely the utopian aspect of the ‘what can I hope for’, this third critique will nevertheless return regularly throughout this thesis, often in the form of the ‘to what end’ question, as to keep in mind the question about the drive, and the goal behind actions.

sensibility’. At stake are the ‘discursive and non-discursive practices that [...] constitute it [the ‘Brussels Situation’] as an object of thought’. In this dissertation, the ‘what can we hope for’ and ‘theoretical sensibility’ therefore resonate with Foucault’s definition of critique through care - ‘the care one takes of what exists and what might exist’, and thus a ‘sharpened sense of reality’ – and his method of critique through a ‘genealogy of problems, of Problématiques’.

How does Brussels-as-a-practice connect with architecture theory? Is it a call for more interdisciplinary or trans-disciplinary work? Not only that, it is a call to include several disciplinary visions, to include theories and practices, disciplines and professions, as part of one and the same endeavour. It is not just about extending the boundaries of architecture theory in order to find ‘meaning’ through the insertion of other disciplines (urban and human geography, urban sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, urban design and planning theory) but it is about including such insights as part of the work of the Brussels collective. Nor is it a call for adding ‘on the ground’ activism to so-called elitist, abstract, ivory-tower theory, or for better translating the concepts of architecture into design practice. It is not about adding software to the hardware of space; replacing top-down strategies with bottom-up tactics. Rather than choosing bottom-up over top-down, I am much more interested in understanding what precisely constitutes the notion of ‘bottom-up’ in a city where citizen participation, despite being severely corrupted by both policy making and traditionalist branches of architecture, is still considered the very core of urban emancipation. And what to think of ‘top-down’ when such citizen activism has also paralysed architecture production, and when we are confronted with a city that also needs a strong top-down vision and strategy if it wants to ‘get things done’ (such as, for example, tackling its housing crisis). In other words, I am not interested in the absolute and indisputable value of notions such as ‘emancipation’, ‘bottom-up’, or ‘participation’, but I am interested in how they are (partly or


entirely) effectuated, how they are practised, and even more, I am interested in what, along this effectuation, gets lost or is gained. When, very concretely, I am interested in the design and shaping of architecture, I defend neither architectural autonomy (critical, aesthetic, formalist) nor design ‘for the people’, but I would like to understand how the practice of design is shaped, is hold together, in that specific situation, by theories, education, history, construction, politics, prejudices, everyday literature, aesthetics, ‘the people’, taste, urban legislation…

By unravelling the ‘Brussels knot’, this dissertation thus aims to narrate the multifarious fault lines and ruptures that have contributed to Brussels’ urban and architectural crises, such as the consolidation of a ‘fear of the new’, the ambiguous force of the Brussels’ everyday, and the paralyzing effect of ‘it is all politics after all’. Rather than a new, grand proposal for Brussels, this dissertation offers the details and intricacies of the Brussels Saga; and along this narration, it also aims to challenge, even if on a second plan, a broader set of theoretical preoccupations: the role, shape, and locus of critique; the potentials and pitfalls of everyday pragmatism; the importance of paying attention to also the less appreciated branches of architecture culture;\textsuperscript{45} and the relevance of including everyday forces, no matter how trivial or astonishing they may seem, in the workings of architecture.

\textsuperscript{45} Such as the role of architectural traditionalism for Brussels, and, more generally, the forged democracy of Community Architecture; see chapter one and four.
Ouverture
Chapter One

Brussels’ Urban and Architectural Questioning 1958-2000

One way to understand the current state of architecture and the urban in Brussels is by looking at the entanglement of agencies that have contributed to this state. Such agencies are multifarious and exceed the confident boundaries of spatial disciplines. Therefore, rather than aiming at a watertight, exhaustive historical overview, I have opted to follow these agencies that allow to throw a light on the questions regarding the current state of affairs, such as: How come that the spatial envisioning of Brussels (through architecture, urbanism, planning) happens as it happens today? How is it possible that, despite great opportunities such as the instalment of the European Union and despite architecture’s mounting stardom in the neoliber firmament, Brussels has hardly delivered architecture worthy of a capital city? What is, today, the role and status of architecture and urbanism in a city that has suffered severe traumas because of architecture and urbanism, and for a population that, consequently, has developed an earnest ‘fear of the new’? Is there, in such a context, any hope that the unruly but mediocre building production could transform into architectural and urban innovations? Can Brussels finally come to terms with its complex and painful architecture history, by neither trivialising the mistakes made in the past nor by glorifying a longing for the time foregoing the urban traumas? In other words, is Brussels capable of finally coping with its past, to start living in the present and, paraphrasing Anthony Giddens, to ‘make a difference’ to the existing state of affairs, and perhaps, by doing so, gain agency and allow other possible futures?

The year 1958 seems a good starting point for unravelling such a myriad of agencies. Not only was 1958 the year of the ‘legendary’ World Expo 1958. It also was the summit of an


epoch of change and the very birthplace of agencies that would, throughout the following
decades, assemble into firmly entangled knots that, until today, complicate Brussels’
arquitectura and urban production. Before addressing these knots, this chapter will look into
the events that constitute the so-called ‘Belgian Situation’ or Belgitude, and into some earlier
Belgian architectural heydays. Without suggesting historical completeness, a chronological
order will nevertheless be deployed in order to understand and explicate these knots and
agencies.

1. The heydays of architecture and urbanism in Brussels and Belgium

1.1. Snapshot one: the late 19th – early 20th-century avant-garde: Art Nouveau and the
rise of the modern movement

At the turn of the 19th century, in fact during a very short period between 1895 and 1905,
Brussels occupied a central position on the international architecture scene as the breeding
ground of Art Nouveau, represented by a quite large group of artists and architects, but
primarily by its protagonists Henri Van de Velde and Victor Horta. The movement would
trigger a European avant-garde eventually leading to the international modern movement of
the 1920s and 1930s.

In particular, Henri Van de Velde’s theoretical and educational work would exercise
a major influence on the Brussels’ architecture scene. In 1927, one year before the
foundation of CIAM at La Sarraz, Van de Velde would, inspired by the Bauhaus model,
establish, in Brussels, the Institut Supérieur des Arts Décoratifs de la Cambre, in short La
Cambre, or the ‘Belgian Bauhaus’, and would direct it until 1936. At two instances, La
Cambre would prove a protagonist of the developments on the international architecture
scene.

3 Of all Belgian cities, Brussels in particular housed numerous individual Art Nouveau houses, including
masterpieces by Horta, such as the Tassel House, the Maison du Peuple (the seat of the Union of Socialist
Workers), and his later, neo-classicist works for the Palais des Beaux-Arts, and the Brussels Central Station; and
the renown Palais Stoclet by Joseph Hoffmann. Other members of the movement, mainly active in Brussels, were
amongst others Paul Hankar, Gustave Serrurier-Bovy, Paul Sainteny, Gustave Strauven, and Ernest Blérot. See
would be an important step (as both book and exhibition catalogue), for Maurice Culot and the Archives
d’Architecture Moderne, and as such connect the two ‘waves’ at La Cambre. Also see Geert Bekaert, ‘Operating
Architecture in Belgium, edited by Mil De Kooning, pp. 7-43; and Dario Matteoni, ‘Il Belgio di fronte al
Movimento Moderno’, in: L’architettura in Belgio 1920-1940, Rassegna, nr. 34, 06/1988, pp. 24-34.

4 Van de Velde, being well-connected in France, Germany and England, would play a key role in the rapid spread
of Belgian Art Nouveau over Europe - see Leonardo Benevolo, History of Modern Architecture, Volume 1: The
teach in the Nouvelle Université, created in 1897 by teachers of the Université Libre de Bruxelles (p. 273); from
1902 to 1914, he would direct the Weimar Kunstgewerblicher Institut (the later Bauhaus of Gropius), to then
create his own school in Brussels in 1927: L’Institut Supérieur des Arts Décoratifs de la Cambre.
Firstly, surrounded by talented young architects such as Victor Bourgeois, Antoine Pompe, Louis Van der Swaelmen, and Jean J. Eggericx, Van de Velde would turn La Cambre into Belgium’s breeding ground of the modern movement. Not only would Victor Bourgeois, in 1930, host the third CIAM Congress in Brussels; La Cambre also completed the architecture education of the St Luke’s schools by offering a degree in Urbanism.  

Secondly, about four decades later, and in the wake of May ’68, La Cambre would once more prove an important breeding ground, this time of the very resistance to the outcomes of the modern movement - centred around ‘le couple célèbre, Krier-Culot’. Even though the La Cambre resistance resonated with the international anti-functionalist mood of the time, it would be of particular importance for Brussels, where fights were particularly vigorous as they were nourished by the battle against Bruxellisation: referring to the demolition of entire popular neighbourhoods in favour of offices, road infrastructure and other modern-functionalist planning ingredients. Recent overview works on Belgian architecture often look back primarily to the St. Luke’s heritage rather than the La Cambre one: perhaps to positively emphasise the Flemish architecture emancipation of the 1980s rather than having to zoom in on the more depressing Brussels’ situation? By contrast, this chapter will dedicate meticulous attention to the 1970s movement at La Cambre and its influence on architecture production in 1980s and 1990s Brussels. 

As much as La Cambre, so Victor Horta would prove a protagonist of both periods - the heydays of Art Nouveau and the 1960-1970’s resistance. Though a hero of the first, Horta would also become one of the most symbolic victims of the second period: in 1965, his Maison du Peuple would, despite severe international protest, be demolished and become an

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5 The CIAM Congress was organised at the Palais des Beaux-Arts, in Brussels, on 29 November 1930, and hosted amongst others Mies Van de Rohe, Le Corbusier, and Madame Hélène de Mandroit, who had hosted the first CIAM at La Sarraz, in June 1928. See: Robert Delevoy, Maurice Culot, and Anne van Loo, La Cambre 1928-1978 (Brussels: Éditions AAM, 1979). Architecture education was at the time offered by the (Flemish) St. Luke’s Schools, founded in 1862 by Jean Bethune, as a (catholic) Neo-Gothic, arts & craft alternative to the classicism of the academies and by the (French and rivaling) Académie des Beaux-Arts (under Horta) and La Cambre (under Van de Velde). See for example Jan De Maeyer (ed.), De Sint-Lucas scholen en de neogotiek 1862-1914 (Leuven: Universitaire Pers, 1988), and Dirk Van de Perre, Op de grens van twee werelden: beeld van het architectuuronderwijs aan het Sint-Lucasinstituut te Gent in de periode 1919-1965/1974 (Ghent: Provinciebestuur Oost-Vlaanderen. Dienst monumentenzorg en cultuurpatrimonium, 2003). La Cambre’s Instituut de Urbanisme (post-graduate degree in urbanism) was an important breeding ground for both French and Flemish architects: many St. Luke graduates would continue their studies there. 


7 The French term Bruxellisation (in Dutch: Verbrusseling), appoints to the 1960-1970’s destruction of the city by real estate developers. I’ll come back to the meanings and impact of Bruxellisation at several instances throughout the following chapter, and in particular detail, in chapter five. 

8 For example, when retracing the developments of 1980’s and 1990’s Belgian Architecture, Geert Bekaert dedicates only four lines to the influence of Culot/Krier/Delevoy at 1970s La Cambre. Instead he primarily discusses the Flemish developments of the 1970’s within the St Luke’s tradition (Luc Deleu and Bob Van Reeth). See Geert Bekaert, ‘Operating Instructions for Architecture’, p. 37.
international icon of Bruxellisation. Even as international protests could not prevent the demolition of Horta’s masterpiece, so the Belgian and Brussels authorities proved as insusceptible to their, nonetheless internationally acclaimed, modern ‘treasures’, such as the Cité Moderne (Victor Bourgeois, 1922-5) and the Garden Cities of Logis-Floréal and Kappelleveld (Van der Swaelmen). These smart proposals for collective housing hardly affected Belgian authorities’ preference for private single-family housing. Moreover, La Cambre’s ‘modernist bastion’ would hardly affect the Belgian interwar reconstruction, which was instead primarily realised in ‘vieux-neuf’: a model based on historical reconstruction and the ‘nostalgia for the past’.

1.2. Snapshot two: Belgium’s role in the rise of European town planning

Early European town planning (between 1830 and 1850) had been conceived as a State response to the effects of rapid industrialisation such as uncontrolled urbanisation and the consequent sanitary conditions (overcrowding, epidemics and unregulated building practices in working class slums). Belgium had been, right after England, at the cutting edge of industrial revolution. Consequently, as in most other European countries, it had to face the problems raised by industrialisation and did so through sanitary measurements (sewage and water supply systems), infrastructural works (Belgium would be one of the first countries to build a large railway network), and large-scale urban renovation works (slum cleaning, urban boulevards).

Early town planning tended to be more functional-administrative than social in nature: urban renovation and sanitation works were in the hands of engineers and administrators rather than architects; and physical conditions and social problems were processed primarily within public housing laws.

In Belgium, slum sanitation and renovation had already been facilitated before the instalment of the 1889 Housing Act (Huisvestingswet),

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10 ‘Vieux-neuf’ had already become fashionable in World Expos. In Belgium, the 1894 World Exhibition had built ‘Oud-Antwerpen’ (Old Antwerp), the 1910 Expo ‘Oud-Brussel’ (Old Brussels), the 1913 one ‘Oud-Vlaanderen’ (Old Flanders), and the 1930 Expo included ‘Oud-België’ (Old Belgium). See Bekaert, ‘Operating Instructions for Architecture’, p. 14 and pp. 16-17.

11 Benevolo, History of Modern Architecture, p. 44.

namely through earlier Expropriation Laws (*Onteigeningswetten*), decreed in 1858 and 1867.  

In Brussels, the Haussmannian approach would be eagerly adopted under Jules Anspach, Mayor of Brussels, and King Leopold II, the ‘King Urbanist’. Yet, despite Belgium’s leading role in industrialisation, its important infrastructural works, and the early existence of expropriation laws allowing urban sanitation and renovation, it would, strangely enough, play only a minor role in the rise of European town planning. Strange? Perhaps. But perhaps not, since Belgium had always been, from its very foundation in 1830, one of the most liberal states in Europe – more liberal than France! - with a, for that time, very liberal constitution. Belgium’s liberalism would have obvious consequences for policy primarily preoccupied with collective interests, such as spatial planning and collective (public) housing. In Belgium, an overall Town and Spatial Planning Act would not be effectuated until 1962 - the *Wet houdende de organisatie van de ruimtelijke ordening en van de stedenbouw* (29 March 1962). Also, at a time when, faced with the effects of industrialisation and the human devastations in the metropolis, critique emerged against the Smith-Liberalism and Capitalism, the Belgians would nevertheless continue to consider any form of regulatory town planning intrusive to the liberal thought. Likewise, attempts for a more ‘collective’ and integrative architecture and urbanism would never get a firm foot on the ground. 

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14 Under Anspach, the river Zenne would be covered, prestigious boulevards created instead, and the *Bois de la Cambre* would be linked to the city by the grand *Avenue Louise* (see also Benevolo, *History of Modern Architecture*, p. 81; p. 84). The attempt to unite the young Belgian State by giving it a prestigious, monumental capital, failed: Brussels would never be considered a true capital; it would never become the *Petit Paris* Anspach had dreamt of.  
16 Legislation thus came much later (1962) than, for example in England, where a first Housing and Town Planning Act was approved already in 1909, and allowed a certain degree of state regulation with regard to spatial development; and the Dutch comprehensive law on town planning of 1901 (*Woningwet* 1901, in 1962 replaced by the *Wet op de Ruimtelijke Ordening* and a new *Woningwet*), which integrated all earlier popular building and town planning legislations.  
17 ‘Collective’ thinking hardly found entry in Belgian spatial thinking. The 25 August 1915 Reconstruction Decree (*Koninklijk Besluit op het algemeen plan van aanleg*), designed by Raffael Verwilghen, obliged municipalities to draw overall zoning plans (*Plan van Aanleg*) for interwar reconstruction, but was, in reality, hardly applied: municipalities simply disobeyed the law (Strauven, ‘Hoe België zijn huidige aanblik kreeg’; and ‘L’Ideologia del modernismo belga dopo l’Art Nouveau’), ‘Collective’ typologies such as the internationally recognised cooperative-socialist experiments by Van der Swaelmen and Van der Wilghen; but also the apartment building (the *immeuble*); or the post-war ‘ensemble’, would either have no effect, soon lose credibility, or arrive very late in Belgium, due to the Belgian property structure, and its individualist mentality (Conversation with Marc Dubois, 26 August 2009). The *Plan Alpha* and the *Mont des Arts* project would be the last large-scale monumental ensembles of the post-war period (Van Loo, *Repertorium van de architectuur in België van 1830 tot heden*, p. 69; Pierre Puttemans, ‘De dag niet prijzen voor het avond is… 50 jaar urbanisme en wan-urbanisme in Brussel’, in: *50 jaar architectuur Brussel*, edited by Marc Lacour (Brussels: CERAA, 1989), pp. 95-106, p. 97.

2. The ‘Belgian Situation’: worshipping anti-urban planning and an imperturbable devotion to the entrepreneurial individual

Reports on Belgian architecture and planning start, almost without exception, from the so-called ‘Belgian Situation’. Herewith one refers to Belgium’s history of liberal, anti-urban and chaotic spatial organisation, its spatial laissez-faire, which has had far-reaching consequences for both cities (abandoned) and landscapes (colonised).18 Strong incentives encouraging (psychologically, legally and financially) suburban or rural single-family housing over collective city life, has led to a typical Belgian variation on urban sprawl called the Nebular City or Nevelstad, which refers to Belgium’s almost entirely urbanised landscape.

But the ‘Belgian Situation’ also refers to an architecture profession that is obliged to manifest itself, in the absence of public assignments, largely through private single-family houses. Even the most prestigious of Belgian architects hardly triggered architectural awareness amongst public authorities. On the contrary, the extraordinariness of Horta’s oeuvre, for example, could provoke only indifference amongst 1960’s authorities (demolition Maison du peuple), while, even during his life, Horta received his first large public assignment, namely for the Brussels Palais des Beaux-Arts, only at the age of sixty.19 In Belgium, until very recently, public architecture competitions have remained extraordinarily rare: particularly in Brussels, architecture has remained largely politically tendered.20

The cause of such poor architecture and urban awareness, has often been allocated to the individualist and opportunist Belgian ‘nature’ averting any form of authority (including spatial planning and imposed architectural taste) and liable to a predestined building drift (the famous ‘brick in the stomach’). This Belgian ‘nature’ should, however, not be confused with what have always been the major driving forces behind Belgian spatial policies: non-urban,

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19 Dubois, Belgio Architettura gli ultimi vent’anni. Also after Horta, architects such as Hoste, Pompe, De Koninck, Callebaut, Baines, Kroll and Vandenhove have, despite their talent and prestige, received none or few public assignments. See Francis Strauven, ‘De negatie van de eigen bouwcultuur. Het opdrachtenbeleid van de Belgische en Vlaamse overheid’, Archis, nr. 9, 1987 (on the theme: ‘Architectuur in België na 1970’), pp. 12-17, p. 12.

20 That, in Brussels, architecture is largely politically tendered, is an understatement that contains too many sublevels to even start explaining in a footnote. This aspect will reoccur repeatedly within this dissertation, and I will also come back to it at the end of this chapter. For now, the reader can understand under ‘politically tendered’: major architecture assignments being distributed over only a few, powerful architecture firms producing mainstream developer architecture; major contracts being closed within elite lobbies (such as loges and cercles), only accessible for politicians, large construction companies, developers and certain architects; and the persistent exclusion of talented local and international star-architects, from architecture competitions, either with the help of carefully selected juries (‘friends’) or by the handy use of ‘administrative errors’ (OMA/Koolhaas was ‘officially’ thrown out a competition because one document lacked a signature).
individualist and small-scale ideals rather than large-scale ambitions, central State planning and a sense of public responsibility.21

A political preference for entrepreneurial individualism can be traced back to the 1830 Belgian Constitution and its encouragement of individual liberty (and thus wary of State intervention). A thorough liberal understanding of spatial planning and urbanism is demonstrated by the delayed arrival of planning legislation and by the content of these laws. Planning and (social) housing regulations would be strongly entrenched in liberal ideas. In particular the 1867 Expropriation Act and the 1962 Town and Spatial Planning Act, paved the way for private development and speculation. Not only did they facilitate large-scale development; private actors were moreover given the right to develop the expropriated sites themselves as long as they owned more than fifty percent of the land and as long as the new development would ‘serve the public interest’.22 These Acts moreover allowed private investors to sell the surplus conquered land… with profit.23 However, initiatives and legislation for State-led planning and public social, rental-based housing did exist, long before 1962, but never really made it into practice. Such initiatives not only ‘failed’ because of a too liberal mentality, but also because Belgian planning policies were to be guided by an explicit anti-urban, some say even anti-socialist ideology, aiming to ‘de-proletarianise’ the working classes. Belgium’s Catholic ethos prioritised the acquisition of private single-family houses in non-urban settings over socialist-reformist initiatives based on more collective concerns (such as cooperative Garden Cities), and would formulate housing legislation accordingly.24

In other words, ever since the first Housing Act of 1889, the Belgian ‘marriage between Catholicism and a certain liberalism’ with its aversion to authority and innate individualism, would prioritise housing policies that encourage, even for, or perhaps precisely

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21 Strauven, ‘Hoe België zijn huidige aanblik kreeg’, pp. 7–9; Dubois, Belgio Architettura gli ultimi vent’anni, pp. 13-14; and Strauven, ‘L’Ideologia del modernismo belga dopo l’Art Nouveau’, where he argues that the 1920–40 Belgian modern movement was interested in the ‘collective’ (influenced by Garden Cities, then CIAM), but has been systematically discouraged by policy making.

22 Large-scale development was possible thanks to the expropriation in strips (allowed by a 1867 Decreee), or for the sake of an algemeen plan der werken (Decree 1962, article 25).

23 When private actors owned more than half of the land that public authorities aimed to acquire, the Expropriation Act of 1867 allowed them to carry out the works and expropriations, themselves. As such, much of Brussels’ large urban renewal works have been in the hands of private actors: the 19th-century road infrastructures such as the Avenue Louise and the Avenue de Tervueren, and the new Leopold quarter; the 1960s Manhattan Plan and the 1970s construction of Europe in Brussels – Evert Lagrou, ‘De nieuwe stedebouw en monumenten ordonnante. Het Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest gaat zijn eigen weg’, Planologisch Nieuws, nr. 1, 1993, Jaargang 13, pp. 6-16, p. 6.

24 Initiatives for State-led planning and for public tenancy housing did exist, but never made it well into practice. Municipalities had simply disobeyed the 1915 Reconstruction Decree. The 1919 socialist-driven, Garden Cities and cooperative housing inspired Société Nationale des Habitats et Logements à Bon Marché/Nationale Maatschappij voor Goedkope Woningen en Woonvertrekken, was soon disempowered by the 1922 Moyersoen Law, which, in correspondence with the 1889 Housing Act, encouraged single family housing ownership. Also the first drafts of Regional Plans (Gewestplan/Plan Secteur), the first delivered only by 1976, would be based on a step-by-step pragmatism driven more by ‘compromise’ than by a coherent planning vision (Dubois, Belgio Architettura gli ultimi vent’anni, p. 24).
for the lower social classes, the purchasing of property outside the densely populated (socialist!) cities. The Belgian solution to the post-war housing problem would, through building incentives and accessible loans, and in line with the 1889 Housing Act, reinforced by the 1922 Moyersoen Law and the 1948 De Taeye Law, be guided by an anti-urban attitude and individual ownership. Even if, in the midst of the victory of Catholic over Socialist, individualist over collective, and non-urban over urban planning policies, cooperative planning and housing proposals did exist, such initiatives were simply suppressed (by Law) or trivialised (by blaming their failure in implementation).

3. The ‘Belgian Situation’ bis: architecture and everyday culture

A strong liberal mentality regarding both State intervention and the (everyday) individual entrepreneurialism together with politically coloured urban policies, has led to a pluralist and fragmented spatial planning situation. Moreover, an exorbitant (housing) individualism would lead to an over-emphasis on individual ‘want-to-have’ status amongst the population, which was pursued through classical pastiche rather than a modern, egalitarian architectural language, and which disparaged the role of architects for decades. The Belgian ‘brick in the stomach’ might not fully be credited for the absence of a clean-cut Belgian architecture ‘scene’. Yet, this absence can nevertheless be brought back to a deeply rooted preoccupation with the everyday, the immediate and the real (even the banal) rather than with visionary or sparkling futures, abstract ideas and high culture. In such powerful ‘culture of the everyday’, the architect is, traditionally, considered first and foremost a citizen: his task is considered ‘the same as everyone else: to guarantee posterity, to keep life alive’: he is expected to deliver...
a good ‘job’ rather than a masterpiece or contribute to an oeuvre.\textsuperscript{27} Once again, a \textit{tour de force} of Catholic ethos: because single-family houses were supposedly built \textit{forever} and for a lasting family, Belgians traditionally invest their leisure time in the building and maintenance of their house: the ultimate image-building tool.\textsuperscript{28}

But the everyday would also be a site of resistance to the imposed social and political powers. Through the unregulated, day-to-day construction of ‘backrooms’ behind their houses (in Dutch: \textit{achterkeuken} or \textit{koterijen}), the Belgians resist authority in a pragmatic rather than polemical way. Or, in analogy with de Certeau, they \textit{tactically} resist the top-down strategies imposed on them.\textsuperscript{29} Being central to private life but protected from the public domain’s control and rules, these ‘backrooms’, and ‘everyday tactics’ more generally, contain the very key to understand Belgian architecture and urbanism.\textsuperscript{30} In Brussels, citizens baptised the ICC building, which houses the European Parliament, the \textit{Caprice des Dieux}, referring to the oval-shaped French cheese but also intended to decry the political corruption (the \textit{caprices}) and urban catastrophe behind its construction. Likewise, inhabitants of the popular quarters of Molenbeek referred to the new metal-cladded housing project by Poponcini \& Lootens Architects with \textit{Boîte de conserves}.\textsuperscript{31}

But also architects would gradually discover inspiration in the Belgian planning absurdities, spatial fragmentation and everyday culture. The Flemish 1980’s generation of architects would find inspiration in the everyday banality and absurd planning regulation (we will come back to this in greater detail). Renaat Braem would re-phrase his 1968 declaration of Belgium as the \textit{ugliest} country, more ‘optimistically’ in 1987, as the \textit{most beautiful} country in the world.\textsuperscript{32} In 2006, the Belgian ‘everyday’ won the day as the theme of Belgium’s

\textsuperscript{27} Geert Bekaert, ‘The Wall is Only a Wall, a Real Wall and Nothing Else. Stéphane Beel against the fury of disappearance’, \textit{A+U}, nr. 310/1996, pp. 4-5, p. 4. Bekaert recognised such role of the architect in the work of Stéphane Beel and, more generally, in the young Flemish architects of the 1980s and 1990s, a phenomenon he would collect under the name ‘gemeenplaats’ or ‘luogo commune’ - Dubois, \textit{Belgio Architettura gli ultimi vent’anni}, pp. 45-51. This specific role of the architect has been emphasised repeatedly by, amongst others, Marc Dubois (‘Jonge Architecten in België’, \textit{Archis} nr. 4, 1989, pp. 14-25), Pieter Uyttenhove (‘The Belgian Backroom’, \textit{Archis}, nr. 2, 1997, pp. 9-24), Emmanuel Doutriaux (‘Flandre, la nouvelle génération’, \textit{L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui}, nr. 292, 1994, pp. 78-115), and Geert Bekaert (‘Belgische Architectuur als gemeenplaats. De afwezigheid van een architectonische cultuur als uitdaging’, \textit{Archis}, nr. 9, 1987, pp. 10-11).

\textsuperscript{28} The Belgian free-standing bungalow reinforces the desire to distinguish oneself from the neighbours, and emphasises the house as a status symbol: fences and hedges protect the house yet allow just enough view into the front garden and driveway - Wim Cuyvers, ‘The Belgian House – The Waiting Façade and the Field of Fire’, \textit{A+U}, nr. 392, 5/2003, pp. 20-23, p. 21.

\textsuperscript{29} Michel de Certeau, \textit{The Practice of Everyday Life} (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988 [1984]).

\textsuperscript{30} Uyttenhove, ‘The Belgian Backroom’, p. 15.

\textsuperscript{31} Bruno De Meulder, ‘Molenbeek, or what became of the welfare state. La Rue, La Fonderie and La Poudrière, labs and credos in the city of industry and squalor’, \textit{Archis}, nr. 4, 1996, pp. 30-37, p. 34.

contribution to the Venice Architecture Biennale: *La beauté de l’ordinaire. Ou comment je me suis disputé avec mon voisin*. Here, ‘the beauty of the ordinary’ was not just proposed as a tool for appreciating the disordered image of the Belgian everyday landscape. It was also, in line with an internationally renewed attention for the quotidian, a way to revalorise the particular, improbable, and anecdotic in an increasingly generic, homogenised globalised society. The struggle between the emancipating power of the everyday and the socio-political authority of ‘top down’ interventions, has of course been a longstanding dispute within the architectural and urban disciplines, expressed by a plethora of everyday theories and participatory models. In Belgium, this dispute has been picked up again by the current generation of architecture theorists and had been most vigorously fought between architecture critics Lucien Kroll and Geert Bekaert, in particular on the occasion of Lucien Kroll’s icon of participatory architecture, *La Mémé*, which Bekaert rejected as fraud participatory architecture and which he would counter with the more poetic notion of *gemeenplaats*. As we will discover in the following chapters, in Brussels, the everyday plays a much more complex role than the one presented by architecture discourse. Also the ‘Belgian situation’ or *Belgitude* will prove, in Brussels, a particularly everyday-related phenomenon (see chapter five).

4. Post-war Brussels and World Expo 1958: the rise, but not the downfall, of the ‘crisis of the new’

4.1. The post-war situation

Faithful to its liberal-Catholic roots, the Belgian post-war welfare state would be construed as a hybrid between a socio-democratic social security system and a rather liberal housing market model. In comparison with other capital cities and also in contrast to Flanders, Brussels was – and still is – unique for its dominant rental market and its limited public and social housing provision. Post-war housing and planning legislation would follow the liberal,

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33 The Biennale on the theme ‘City, Architecture and Society’ took place from 10.09.2006 - 19.11.2006; Belgian participation by Label Architecture. See also the film *La beauté de l’ordinaire* by Liberski, made for this occasion, which demonstrates the ‘constructive’ aspects of the banal, disordered and contradictory everyday by gradually shifting from initial long stills of desolate urban fringe landscapes into more urban landscapes and *lived* spaces as well as by blurring traditional contrasts such as quiet/loud, lived/desolate, slow/fast, urban/rural, peaceful/threatening, old/new, and figure/ground.

34 Everyday theories will be discussed in greater detail in chapter two; participatory models in chapter four.

anti-urban lines set out since the 1889 Housing Act and 1867 Expropriation Law. The 1962 Town and Spatial Planning Act would not only reinforce the anti-urban mentality; it would also, by allocating expropriation rights to private developers, reinforce speculation opportunities. If housing and planning seemed ‘too important to be left to the State’, an attitude that was ‘unique’ in Europe, also the existing urban fabric seemed ‘too important to be conserved’.

Indeed, post-war development was not only for a large part in private hands, it was also applied by the ‘bulldozer technique’. Post-war urban renewal was based on a public policy supporting the demolition rather than renovation of slum dwellings. Several laws created in the 1950s, encouraged the expropriation and demolition of slums through financial State support for municipalities, social housing corporations, and even for private initiatives. What was worrying was not as much demolition itself – from a pragmatic rather than ideological standpoint one could argue that some houses were perhaps genuinely ‘irreparable’ - but the fact that legislation allowed demolition without re-housing the original populations and without re-allocting the original (residential) function. As a result, urban renewal would facilitate radical slum clearances in favour of either social estate housing (often for a ‘better’ population than the expelled one, and still limited in number compared to for example the French Grands Ensembles), or, as was more often the case, in favour of new office developments. 1960’s ‘corrective’ measures that encouraged renovation rather than demolition, would, due to a lack of financial encouragement, have little effect.

As a result, between 1954 and 1970, about 100,000 houses were demolished, of which 75% were on private initiative. The 1962 Town and Spatial Planning Act had not just reinforced expropriation as an instrument for urban renewal; it was ultimately at the service of economic expansion and speculation. The price paid for such economic drift, has meanwhile become internationally known as the Belgitude or Belgium’s laissez-faire urbanism, which has led to both inner-city destruction (Bruxellisation) and a total, uncontrolled urbanisation of the open landscape (the ‘Nebular City’).

36 Law of 7/12/1953, created by Minister De Taeye; of 27/6/1956 and the KB of 10/2/1955; with housing corporations I refer to the NMGWW Nationale Maatschappij voor Goedkope Woningen en Woonvertrekken and NMKL Nationale Maatschappij voor Kleine Landeigendom.

37 Such as the 1967 Law (KB 10/8/1967).


39 Through municipal APA’s (Algemeen Plan van Aanleg) and more neighbourhoud or quarter-based BPA’s (Bijzonder Plan van Aanleg), public authorities and private initiators could easily expropriate (when owning more than fifty percent and when serving the ‘public interest’). Already in 1971, Bekaert argued that it was in the end just a means to encourage speculation – Geert Bekaert, ‘Bouwen in België 1945-1970’, in: Bouwen in België 1945-70, edited by Geert Bekaert and Francis Strauven (Brussels: Nationale confederatie van het bouwbedrijf, 1971), pp. 11-85, pp. 30-31.
4.2. Expo 1958: a painful divorce between the existing and the new, tradition and progress, and the city centre and its periphery

In 1952, King Baudouin could finally inaugurate the North-South railway junction and the new Central Station. The works had started already before the First World War and had left an enormous scar throughout the Brussels historic centre. Two years later, the monumental reshaping of the nearby Mont des Arts would start. Whereas in those early post-war years, Brussels’ architecture would, through journals and education, still be influenced by the French, more ‘classical’ tradition; the Golden Decades would generate an architecture characterised by a belief in modernity and progress, and introduced consumption as a crucial part of a new (American) life-style.40 1958, the year of the World Expo, would become seen as the ‘symbolic milestone in the evolution of the architectural and urban image of Brussels’.41 Architecture would gradually become more pragmatic than ideological: post-war modernism would reduce the societal concerns of the early modernists to an aesthetic, pragmatic and formal dimension;42 and the ‘radicalism’ of the modernists would gradually make place for a mere ‘compromise’ and loose its appetite for ‘urban aesthetics’.43 Consequently, in spite of Brussels’ splendid modernisation, its architecture was also criticised for its refusal to negotiate building and context, tradition and modernity, and heritage and creation: a critique that resonated with the broader crisis of the Modern Movement.44

In Brussels, especially the Institut Supérieur des Arts Décoratifs de la Cambre would play a key role in the post-war development of the Modern Movement. Influenced by Le Corbusier-minded teachers such as Léon Stynen and Victor Bourgeois, students at La Cambre would also develop an interest in the emerging attention for tradition and history, as adopted by Northern architects such as Asplund, Aalto and Jacobsen: an architecture that seemed to

40 Joseph Victoir, ‘Een halve eeuw bouwkunst’, in: 50 jaar architectuur Brussel, edited by Marc Lacour (Brussels: CERAA, 1989), pp. 119-37, p. 120. Many Belgian architects were accredited through the French Diplôme par le Gouvernement (DPLG); most Brussels architecture education and important architecture journals were in French – L’Architecture d’Aujourd’Hui, Techniques et Architecture, Bâtir.


42 More ‘pragmatic’ architect-engineer faculties would be established; urbanism would get a more bureaucratic and narrow-minded tenor; and individual architecture oeuvres would turn more pragmatic - Van Loo, Repertorium van de architectuur in België, pp. 70-74; Puttemans, ‘De dag niet prijzen voor het avond is’, p. 97; Bekaert, ‘Operating instructions for Architecture’, p. 23.


44 Burniat, ‘De Overgangsjaren (1939-1958)’. Most exemplary for the new autonomous architecture was the reconstruction of the scars left by the North-South junction where buildings were erased as isolated objects, not part of an overall plan, and disconnected from their context - Mil De Kooning and Iwan Strauven, ‘Brussel 1945-1970: Verwachtingen en illusies’, in: Een eeuw architectuur en stedebouw: Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest, edited by Yves Jacqmin (Sprimont: Mardaga, 2000), pp. 119-35.
make the modern functionalism more ‘human’ and ‘warm’. Modern architects including Jacques Dupuis, Roger Bastin and Peter Callebout would adopt more attention to the traditional, the regional, the vernacular and integration in the landscape while others, such as Renaat Braem, would give their societal concerns an explicit Utopian-Marxist bias.

Such efforts to reconcile the modern project with more societal, contextual and historical awareness, could not avoid that Brussels would fight its schizophrenia between the traditional and the new ever since. Even though articulated only in the aftermath of May ’68, the tensions between tradition and progress can be traced back to World Expo 1958, where two visions for the future were confronted: futurist pavilions expressing a fascination for progress - such as the Pijl van de burgerlijke bouwkunde, the atomium, and the Philips-pavilion by le Corbusier and Xenakis – and the La Belgique Joyeuse village promoting a cherishing of tradition.

The modern side of Expo 58 would for many be associated with the impressive road infrastructure works that would render Brussels more accessible – the ‘Expo-tunnels’ and the spectacular Koekelberg/Leopold II viaduct. Others associated it with new modern icons such as the Foncolin building by André Jacqmain, Victor Mulpas and Jules Wabbes (1958) and the Banque Bruxelles Lambert (BBL) by Bunshaft from Skidmore, Owings and Merill (1959).

Still others would remember the new ‘modern’ (read: based on demolition) proposals for one of Brussels most popular quarters: les Marolles.

The decade following Expo 1958 would see the emergence of office towers of varying architectural quality, but with as common features: their isolation from the surrounding landscape, and the merciless expropriation and demolition that had made them possible. The once clear modern sky would soon be polluted with spectacularly destructive modernisation projects (the Manhatten Plan!). With the settlement of the EU and NATO in Brussels and thus the need for office space; the introduction of American-style apartment

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45 Van Loo, Repertorium van de architectuur in België, p. 75. Léon Stynen was director of the Institut Supérieur des Arts Décoratifs de la Cambre from 1948.

46 Ibid., pp. 77-79.

47 Ibid., p. 79. La Belgique Joyeuse by Lucien François displayed copies of typical Belgian buildings and was one of the most visited areas of the expo.

48 The Foncolin building was built between 1955 and 1957. The BBL building was for Skidmore, Owings and Merill nothing more than a ‘variation on a theme’ that had started with Bunshaft’s 1951 Lever House in New York. Yet, in Brussels, the lever House would be very influential: for example the Prévoyance Sociale, Tour Madou, Tour du Midi, Tour Lotto, The Hilton, Louisa Tower, Westbury hotel, Brusilia, Sheraton, Tour Albert, many of those along Brussels city boulevards - Victoir, ‘Een halve eeuw bouwkunst’, p. 126. Other iconic architecture of the time: the Rogier Tower.

49 The city of Brussels organised two competitions for Les Marolles, of which almost all proposals were in line with Le Corbusier’s proposals for Paris – following a quartier insalubre approach.
blocks; and an overall lack of systematic architectural an urban reflection,\(^{50}\) the inner-city (and its fine-grain residential function) would soon be taken over by large-scale development mainly favouring offices. Since, moreover, most urban renewal plans of this period proposed demolition,\(^{51}\) 1950-1960’s Brussels would go into history, not as much as a modern triumph, but as a shameful period of demolition fever, producing ‘icons’ of its own: most notably the demolition of Horta’s *Maison du Peuple* and its replacement by an office tower, and the so-called progressive but disastrous urbanism of the *Manhattan Plan*, which led to the expulsion of thousands of inhabitants.\(^{52}\) All these factors taken in account, led Bekaert to conclude that the ‘postwar generation for a large part has been a lost generation’.\(^{53}\)

By contrast, the traditional side of the Expo would resonate with the 1960 *Bijzonder Plan van Aanleg/Plan Particulier d’Affectation du Sol* (BPA/PPAS) for the *Ilot Sacré*, the historic core of the city including the Grand Place. This plan would not just protect the existing situation but defend the very ‘reparation in traditional style’.\(^{54}\) Moreover, by celebrating ‘pastiche and shallow ancient times’ within a well-delineated perimeter, it implicitly evoked indifference towards the anything-goes mentality *outside* this perimeter.\(^{55}\)

In other words, ever since Expo 1958, Brussels faced an artificial if not impossible choice between a modern yet destructive innovation and a conservational yet hypocrite reconstruction of the past (such as the *Ilot Sacré*). To understand the continuing and unresolved tension between progress and conservation, one should hence not only retrace Brussels’ decades of architectural, urban and societal destruction, but also the zealous sabotaging of the new and the opportunistic enhancement of the past. Placed in such light, it seems historically incorrect that Brussels’ everyday culture continues to mourn Brussels’ urban traumas but hardly acknowledges that a protectionist-conservational plan, such as the BPA for the *Ilot Sacré*, has been around for forty years!

If 1958 and its aftermath embodied a key turn for the tension between progress and conservation, it would also embody a key moment in the growing discrepancy between the development of Brussels inner city and its periphery. Brussels inner city had been gradually abandoned by its inhabitants - fleeing the slum clearances and the continuous construction

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51 Such as the 1962 *Plan Tekhné* for the Brussels Pentagon, which suggested the demolition of 75% of the existing slum houses. Most proposals received in urban renewal competitions proposed demolition - Cécile Feron, ‘Het Nieuwe Brussel (1955-1975)’, in: 50 jaar architectuur Brussel, edited by Marc Lacour (Brussels: CERAA, 1989), pp. 23-38, p. 23.


54 Van Loo, Repertorium van de architectuur in België, pp. 80-81.

55 Puttemans, ‘De dag niet prijzen voor het avond is’, p. 99.
works or being seduced by the government incentives promoting a suburban life-style - and taken over by mono-functional office areas. Not only did this downgraded city lack qualified architecture; the few qualitative examples that did emerge, simply ‘disappeared in the urbanistic chaos and the disfiguredness that Brussels had suffered’. While the city centre would develop according to infrastructural needs (road infrastructure, tunnels, parking) and the logic of the most profitable location, the Brussels periphery, by contrast, would be honoured with a few architectural ‘pearls’, free-standing in a lost, fragmented landscape (such as the Royale Belge and Glaverbel headquarters), and the thrilling metropolitan, car-based experience along its grand boulevards. By the late 1960s it was overtly clear that both Brussels city centre and periphery had as common features the total absence of any form of coherent plan. As early as 1970, pleas were made, most notably by Bekaert, to recognise next to the problems also the potentials of this fragmented and dispersed Belgian landscape. And yet, for decades to come, the Brussels debate would remain in the tight grip of the desire to reconstruct the lost cohesion and urban integration.

5. Brussels’ fertile breeding ground for the ’68 movement

If 1958 had been the climax of Brussels’ post-war modernisation, the following years ‘celebrated’ its drawback. Throughout the 1960s, the darker side of Brussels’ modernisation fever would be explicated, particularly in Brussels’ historic core, where the merciless demolition, flourishing speculation, and office development would make the city grow increasingly inhabitable. In combination with the unbreakable appeal of suburban single-family housing, the city centre was loosing its battle for the citizen.

By the late 1960s, this process would reach a climax. In 1967, a plan for a megalomaniac central business district was presented: a group of two times four office towers, a pedestrian base elevated 13 metres above the street level where cars would drive on urban highways – a genuine CIAM footprint. The project, also called the Manhattan Plan,

58 Peripheral development from the late 1960s such as shopping malls (Woluwe Shopping Centre, Basilix and Westland), corporate offices (Glaverbel, Royale Belge), hospitals (Erasmus hospital and Jette), and new university campuses after the language split (VUB, ULB, and the Université Catholique de Louvain: new town Louvain-la-Neuve in Ottignies and medicine faculty in Woluwe, where Kroll would build his La Mémé) and was not guided by an overall planning vision but the availability of cheap and accessible lots.
59 Bekaert’s 1970 exhibition Bouwen in België 1945-1970, and in his later work on the commonplace (gemeenplaats). Appreciations for the metropolitan experience, for example, in Marc Didden’s movie Brussels by Night.
would become an important symbol of the failed modernisation and of the grievous battle of
the Brussels’ citizens against the destruction of their city.60 Also the popular inner-city quarter
Les Marolles was threatened by bulldozers for the sake of an extension of the Palais de
Justice. More than modernisation itself, Brussels’ inadequacy to deal with it, was criticised.
Due to its complex political structure, the lack of a coherent urbanism and trustworthy
juridical frameworks, Brussels would, in comparison with other cities, have greater
difficulties in dealing with the major post-war societal changes and with the ups and downs of
the building sector. The hostility towards modern architecture – ‘away with modernism!’;
‘hands off our neighbourhood!’ - had therefore more to do with the incapability to integrate
modern architecture in a coherent urban policy rather than with the quality of modern
architecture itself.

Against this situation, severe protest would emerge by the late 1960s. Several decades
earlier, when the Marolliens had been harassed and expelled for the construction of Joseph
Poelaert’s demonic Palais de Justice, they introduced a new Brussels curse word: Architek!
Also the 1960’s events would give rise to a new set of terminologies including Bruxellisation
and an urbanisme du fait accompli.61 Also the international architecture press would start
criticising Brussels’ urban and architectural policies. In 1967, right before Brussels (and
international) revolts would break loose, Ian Nairn referred to Belgian architecture as ‘of such
splendid and full-blooded chaos that the visitor suspends all normal judgement’.62 Five years
earlier, E. Kidder Smith stated that ‘the mediocrity of its [Belgium’s] architecture can be
explained only by the indifference of its officials, the inadequacy of its educational system
and a flabby materialism […] the total situation is lamentable’.63

Regardless the architectural situation, postwar Brussels had also been the bone of
contention between the political, economic and cultural struggles of the French- and Dutch-
speaking communities. In 1963, after this debate had reached a peak with the 1961 and 1962
Flemish mass demonstrations in Brussels (the marsen op Brussel), the bilingual

60 The Manhattan Plan for the North Quarter was developed by Groupe Structures and was considered an icon of
‘progressive urbanism’. After approval in 1967, it would lead to the expropriation of approximately 11,000
inhabitants (Van Loo, Repertorium van de architectuur in België, p. 82). In the same period, two ‘CIAM’ office
towers - in Y-form, located on a more than ten meters elevated base – were built not far away, along the inner city
Grand Boulevards. For an overview of the citizen struggles in the North Quarter, see Nicole Brasseur, Jozef
Lievens and Albert Martens, De grote stad: een geplande chaos? De noordwijk van krot tot Manhattan (Leuven:
Davidsfonds, 1975); Albert Martens and Myriam Vanden Eede, De Noordwijk: slopen en wonen (Berchem: EPO,
1994.

61 Whereas Bruxellisation refers to the destruction of the city by demolition and speculation, ‘urbanism of the
accomplished fact’ (in Dutch: Stedebouw van het voldongen feit), decries specifically the feeble (and corrupt)
attitude of public authorities, when faced with pressure from private developers.

62 Ian Nairn, The Observer, 24 September 1967, quoted by Strauven, ‘Hoe België zijn huidige aanblik kreeg’, and

Arrondissement Brussels was established and limited to 19 municipalities. In 1968 and 1969, the Catholic University of Leuven and the Free University of Brussels would split into a French and Flemish part. Federalisation - the creation of three distinct regions (Flanders, Wallony and Brussels) - was planned in 1970 but, for Brussels, only effectuated in 1989 (since agreements could not be found between the Flemish and French demands). As a consequence, Brussels would be governed by the Agglomeration in the 1970s, while in the 1980s it would be ruled by ‘temporary’ authorities who could govern for many years in a quasi-untouchable political vacuum. Such political instability would have far-reaching consequences for the organisation of spatial planning, mobility and many other competences.

Also from the 1960s onwards, Brussels would become an increasingly international city. On the one hand the European Community (now: European Union) would rule, from 1967 onwards, largely from Brussels. Of the three EU seats – Brussels, Luxemburg and Strasbourg – Brussels would grow in importance, hence house a growing amount of EU-offices, their employees and families. Additionally, throughout the 1960s, and until the crisis following the 1973 Oil Crisis, Belgium attracted significant amounts of foreign low-skilled labour forces, first from France, Italy and Spain, then from Morocco and Turkey. Since the EU-immigrants would settle mainly in the beautiful upper town quarters of the East, while non-EU labourers would settle in the decayed, more affordable quarters of the West, the existing socio-spatial segregation would sharpen from the 1960s onwards. As the distinction made by the Brussels’ dialect between ketje (an autochthonous inhabitant) and zinneke (an immigrant), demonstrates, immigration in itself was not what was new in the 1960s – Brussels had always been a city overwhelmed by foreigners. What was new was that the immigration influxes massively confirmed the existing social, spatial and economic boundaries, and that, together with deindustrialisation, Brussels would turn into a ‘city with two faces’.


From the mid-1960s, the international architecture and urbanism scene would develop a growing protest against a functional urbanism obsessed with progress and modernity and an architecture that had failed in creating a better world as much as it had withdrawn from setting up any dialogue with its environment. By the time that Daniel Cohn-Bendit had inflamed the Parisian student revolts, also the established disciplinary epistemologies and ideologies were challenged. In architecture and urbanism this led to the re-phrasing of the

urban question and the questioning of the political, societal and critical role of the intellectual landscape.

Several works of this period would add politics to architecture’s preoccupation with aesthetics and form. In 1968, Henri Lefebvre published *Le droit à la ville*; Manuel Castells, in 1972, *La question urbaine*. By that time, also Advocacy Planning and Jane Jacobs’ *Death and Life of Great American Cities* had infiltrated the Belgian debate. Also, at the same time that the city’s *genius loci* was re-introduced, the city was, by repairing the link between urban morphology and typology, redefined as a form of architecture. Influential writings of the period include Christopher Alexander’s *Notes on the Synthesis of Form* (1964), Edward T. Hall’s psychology-anthropological work *The Hidden Dimension* (1966), Kevin Lynch’s *The Image of the City* (1960), Steen Eiler Rasmussen’s *Experiencing Architecture* (1959), Aldo Rossi’s *L’architettura della città* (1966) and Françoise Choay’s *Le sens de la ville* (1972), on the semiotics and decoding of the urban system. Such typo-morphological work would be most prominently introduced in Belgium through Jean Castex and Philippe Panerai (*Formes urbaines: De l’ilot à la barre*, 1977, by Castex, Panerai and Jean-Charles Depaule; translated in Dutch in 1984, *De rationale stad: van bouwblok tot wooneenheid*), but also through Choay, who started, in 1965, with a Sémiologie Urbaine course at *La Cambre*. In 1976, Manfredo Tafuri’s seminal work *Teorie e storia dell’architettura*, originally published in 1968, would become available in French.

That, by 1972, modern architecture had died, was not only ‘proved’ by Charles Jencks’ declaration of its death on the occasion of the demolition of the modernist housing complex Pruitt-Igoe, or suggested by Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown’s 1972 publication *Learning from Las Vegas* or the *New Domestic Landscape* show at the Museum of Modern Arts in New York. In these early years of revolt, also long-established icons of architecture culture would be dismantled. In 1969, the *Grand Prix de Rome*, which had existed since 1702, was discharged; in Belgium, the *Société Bruxelloise des Urbanistes et Architectes Modernistes* (SBUAM) was dismantled in 1971.

In the years around 1968, against a background of a destitute Brussels and an international atmosphere of revolt, three organisations were established that would have far-reaching and long-lasting effects on the development of Brussels’ architecture and urbanism. In 1968, the (Flemish) *Sint-Lukas Archief* and the (French) *Archives d’Architecture Moderne* would be established. 1969 would see the foundation of the *Atelier de Recherche et d’Action Urbaines*.

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The *Sint-Lukas Archief* (SLA) was founded by Alfons Hoppenbrouwers - architect-priest and director of the Architecture School Sint-Lucas – and invested mainly in sensitising the public for the value of architectural patrimony.

The *Archives d’Architecture Moderne* (AAM) were dedicated to the creation of architectural archives, exhibitions and publications and were founded by a group of architects and historians, including Robert-Louis Delevoy (its president until 1982), and Maurice Culot (who today still manages the AAM). As founders of the AAM but also for their role in the 1970’s architecture education at the *Institut Supérieur des Arts Décoratifs de la Cambre*, Delevoy and Culot would soon reveal themselves as protagonists of the 1970’s Brussels architecture scene.

The *Atelier de Recherche et d’Action Urbaines* (ARAU) was founded in the wake of the 1969 ‘battle of the Marolles’. The fact that 1,500 inhabitants were saved from the expropriation that would have been required for the extension of the *Palais de Justice*, was considered the first symbolic victory of David over Goliath and a motive for establishing ARAU. ARAU’s official inauguration took place on the occasion of yet another event, namely the 8 May 1969 press conference regarding the design for the *Carrefour de L’Europe* site in Brussels. This site, near Brussels’ Central Station, was one of the ‘open wounds’ that had been left behind by the North-South Junction. This project site would, as we will see later, play a key role in the architecture debate of the 1970s, the 1980s and the 1990s - and would therefore become another protagonist of Brussels’ post-‘68 architecture. ARAU was founded by René Schoonbrodt, AAM’s Maurice Culot, and Jacques Van der Biest. Founded by a sociologist, an architect-urbanist, and a theologian who was at the same time Pastor in the *Marolles*, ARAU explicitly combined activism with research and citizen participation.

Especially ARAU and the AAM revoluted passionately against the Brussels’ urban condition by denouncing not only the post-war building fever but the entire development of the Brussels modern metropolis. The historical starting point of their critique was therefore 1840, when ‘the urban compositions deteriorated into academism and graphic abstraction’: a development that reached its peak around 1880 in the form of vast urban sanitation works such as the covering of the *Zenne* river and the expulsion of hundreds of *Marolliens* for the construction of Poelaert’s *Palais de Justice*. For ARAU and the AAM, this period formed ‘a sinister pre-figuration of the rupture that would be undertaken fifty years later by the central government, against the will of the people […] [the construction of the North-South junction] leaving the city centre for ever deadly pale’ as well as the start of a metropolisation process triggered by ‘successive traumatising urbanistic operations […] the work of (bad) geniuses

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[...] due to whom in Brussels the word architect! has become an insult’. ARAU’s actions would therefore attempt to ‘repair’ the traditional urban fabric and its organisation in quartiers, public spaces and the human scale.

What distinguished the ’68 movement (around the AAM and ARAU) from earlier revolts against the Brussels state of affairs was the fundamental nature of its resistance. Rather than punctual issues or projects, it revolted against an entire tradition of thinking the city and called for a more socially concerned and politicised architecture and urbanism. Supported by students, (an international movement of) architects and citizens, the AAM/ARAU activism would trigger a whole series of events throughout the 1970s.

A major event in the Brussels ’68 movement was the Etats Généraux de l’Architecture et de l’Urbanisme, held at La Cambre in 1968 as a response to the student revolts. In its wake, architects such as Culot, Françoise Terlinden, Bob Van Reeth, Marcel Smets and Marcel Rijdams, would fight for more respect for the urban fabric and the replacement of the strategy of demolition with one of ‘urban renewal’. The Etats Généraux would prove influential, not for the direct outcomes of the event itself but for it represented one of the two camps in the intellectual battle that kept La Cambre in its grip throughout the entire 1970s. At La Cambre, similar to the Beaux Arts in Paris, student revolts had emerged already before May ’68. Students requested, in alliance with the younger generation of teachers, amongst others, a more transparent and less authoritarian educational system, and a more pronounced link with the urban reality ‘out there’ including a more social engagement of the architect and the right to bring political actions in the school – the droit de l’affichage. The contestation at La Cambre would as such bifurcate between the students on the one and the established teachers on the other hand. In response to the former’s request to repolitisier l’urbanisme, for an enseignement critique, and their refusal of the ‘individual project’, the latter would organise the Etats Généraux during the summer break of 1968, concentrating on questions regarding architecture education, architecture and the public, the industrialisation of the building, and architecture and urbanism.

In this period, also numerous pressure groups would emerge: VZW Kunstwijk in 1967, Habitat Humain (in the Marolles) in 1968, and of course, in 1969, the ARAU. The fact that the ARAU had been founded on urban ‘victories’ would trigger an explosion of Comités de

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68 Ibid., p. 6 (first quotation), and p. 8 (second quotation).

69 Terlinden was affiliated with the AAM, and Rijdams with BRAL (a subdivision of ARAU, see further). Note that Van Reeth and Smets would become the first and second ‘Vlaams Bouwmeester’.


Quartier and would give Brussels its new nickname: ‘city of a hundred committees’. ARAU would serve the double purpose of intellectual activism and the coordination of the Comités de Quartier (Action Committees). For the coordination task, ARAU founded three sub-organisations: Inter-Environnement (in 1971, national level), Inter Environnement Bruxelles (IEB, in 1973, French-speaking) and the Brusselse Raad voor het Leefmilieu (BRAL; Dutch-speaking). As a pressure group (the intellectual work), ARAU would use colloquia and publications to fight the destruction of the city and the adoption of planning ideologies that disadvantage the life of citizens. Even if intellectual, such actions were not considered ‘grand discourses’, but precise and detailed. Moreover, as director of both ARAU and IEB, René Schoonbrodt would guarantee in persona the integration of the intellectual and the coordination tasks.

Early crystallisations of ARAU’s intellectual work are the 1970 Charte Urbaine that formulated ‘concrete directions for the Brussels Agglomeration’, and the ‘directives for a democratic structure of the Brussels environment’. Other achievements include the selection of Les Marolles as a pilot project for the 1973 national urban renovation programme (under Minister Califice); the 1974 establishment of a ‘roundtable’ or ‘union of the isles’ as a form of consultation between owners and inhabitants (by Van den Boeynants, Minister of the Brussels Capital Region); and the establishment of the Agglomeration (also called the ‘Agglo’). ARAU’s actions would moreover grow in scope and capacity thanks to its collaboration with the AAM. The AAM formed, apart from an institute and archives, also an important platform for Belgian and international like-minded architectural thinkers. Through book publications, often bi-lingual French-English, as much as through the journal Bulletin des Archives d’Architecture Moderne, thinkers including Culot, Delevoy, Léon Krier, Bernard Huet, François Loyer, Jean Castex, and Philippe Panerai were given voice.

Apart from the activities linked to ARAU, the AAM and La Cambre, numerous other events throughout the 1970s would resonate with the changing international architecture and

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72 Puttemans, ‘De dag niet prijzen voor het avond is’, p. 103. Victories included the abolishment of the city of Brussels’ project for Carrefour de l’Europe, the halt to the expropriation in Les Marolles, and the actions around the ITT Tower.


74 Ibid. A typical ‘precise’ intellectual action was ARAU’s function-map of the Brussels city centre (office vs. dwelling) that ‘proved’ that, due to the post-war developments, entire quarters had lost their population, and that hence the city had lost its organisation in quarters.


76 The ‘Agglo’ would support the urban renewal ideas of the action groups, Matthu ‘De Opkomst van de urbaniteit’, p. 44.
urban climate. Bernard Rudofsky’s *Architecture without Architects*, first exhibited at the New York Museum of Modern Arts in 1964, would be exhibited in Brussels. In 1971, the same year that Venturi’s seminal work would become available in French as *De l’ambiguité en architecture*, Geert Bekaert organised the exhibition *Bouwen in België 1945-1970* in Brussels, an occasion he used to encourage architects and urbanists to pay more attention to the *potentials*, rather than the mere *problems*, of the fragmented and dispersed Belgian landscape. Inspired by the Philadelphia School around Venturi, Bekaert would argue to theorise the Belgian architecture situation no longer from a mere theoretical-historical viewpoint but from the point of view of the consumer and dweller of the Belgian landscape.77 Also in 1971, Lucien Kroll would organise the *Journées Internationales de l’Architecture* in an explicit anarchistic manner: the forum was organised in tents where discussions took place around bar-tables and lacked any form of concrete scheduling.78 In 1973 the *Centre d’Information en Architecture, Urbanisme et Design* (CIAUD) would be founded, and offer a new platform for Belgian architects through the publication of the journal *A Plus*. Even the Belgian King couldn’t resist the desire to establish a ‘foundation for the people’. In 1976, when the revival of the city and the social meaning of architecture were in full swing, he would found the *Fondation Roi Baudouin/Koning Boudewijn Stichting*, which would gradually develop into a well-financed and powerful think tank for societal themes varying from patrimony, public space, poverty, culture, education, to urbanism. As we will soon discover, this foundation would play an important role in the debates on urban renewal and in particular the design of public space. Also in this period, the Belgian architecture education would undergo reorganisation, and, finally, a renewed attention for architectural heritage and patrimony policies would emerge: 1975 would be declared ‘European year of architectural heritage’; in 1979, SLA published a patrimony ‘urgency-inventory’; and the young journal *A Plus* would dedicate two 1979 issues entirely to the rehabilitation of the built environment.79

7. Architectural production and the resistance movement in 1970’s Brussels

The diversity of post-modern utterances that characterised 1970 architectural production would, in Brussels, in contrast to other cities, be settled in favour of the *Reconstruction de la*

77 Bekaert, ‘Bouwen in België 1945-1970’, pp. 16-18. According to Bekaert, this exhibition, together with the two years earlier organised exhibition *Antoine Pompe et l’effort moderne en Belgique 1890-1940* (by Maurice Culot and François Terlinden), announced a reversal in Belgian architecture (Bekaert, ‘*Operating Instructions for Architecture*’, p. 37).

78 Matthu, ‘Tussen modernisme en traditie’, p. 58. The *Internationale Dagen van Bezinning en Gedachtenuitwisseling* were organised at the Sablon, in Brussels, by Lucien Kroll and Henri Doyen, supported by the *Fédération des Sociétés d’Architectes de Belgique* (FAB, founded in 1905).

Ville movement around Culot and Krier. Not that Brussels lacked a diversity of approaches, but a confluence of factors would bend the Brussels situation towards the side of traditionalism.

7.1. Urban traumas

Firstly, since Brussels, compared to other cities, had come through the 1950s and 1960s with significant trauma (for example, the Manhattan Plan), it was highly receptive to the ARAU/AAM plea for a return to the past and a repairing of the urban and social fabric. The Reconstruction de la Ville appeared as the ideal cure for Bruxellisation.

7.2. Challenging the Reconstruction de la Ville movement

Secondly, many other architecture experiments – such as in evolutionary architecture and ecology, collective housing and participatory designs – may have gained a foothold on the ground in Brussels, but would never grow into a true challenge to the Reconstruction de la Ville movement. One can blame the architectural ignorance amongst policy makers: it is well known that two of Belgium’s most internationally acclaimed architects of that period, Lucien Kroll and Charles Vandenhove, have remained largely under-valued by Belgian authorities, even architecture critics. Kroll’s La Mémé project – a participatory design project for student housing at the Faculty of Medicines in St. Lambrechts-Woluwe – would become a monument of the democratic movement and participatory architecture, and a symbol of the ’68 movement. With its several housing types, restaurant, shops, a kindergarten, and post-office, it formed a typical ‘city within the city’. Despite the international attention – it was the first post-war Belgian architectural work discovered by the international press - Belgian critics rejected it. Especially Geert Bekaert evaluated Kroll’s attempts to give form to the complexity of everyday life, as a mere simulation of celebrated anarchy.80 ‘Expelled’ from his own country, Kroll would develop a flourishing career in France and the Netherlands. Similarly, the Walloon architect Charles Vandenhove would cause more sensation in the Netherlands than in Belgium.81 Not Belgium, but the Dutch Stichting Wonen - forerunner of the current

80 Bekaert, ‘Operating Instructions for Architecture’, p. 35.

81 In Belgium he is best known for his Hors-Château project in Liège (1978-85). Most renowned Brussels realisations include the 1986 renovation of the Brussels Opera (Muntschouwburg/La Monnaie).


NAI (Nederlands Architectuur Instituut) - would honour this maestro of a neo-rationalist approach to architecture with a first solo-exhibition (in 1986). 82

Apart from architectural ignorance, one could also blame the fact that non-Reconstruction de la Ville projects were in most cases located at the outskirts of the city. Their peripheral location, remote from the hot, steamy clouds of inner cities luttes urbaines, meant that they hardly challenged the hegemony of the Reconstruction de la Ville in the historic city centre. Kroll had been the forerunner of new experiments with collective housing and participation. His 1963-64 housing project in Oudergem, constituting 15 units, would trigger a series of experiments and alternatives to the 1960’s anonymous high-rise estates. 83

As much as Kroll’s La Mémé and Oudergem project, also other collective housing realisations of the 1970s - such as the Cité de l’Amitié and the new, pedestrian-friendly neighbourhood of Les Venelles – were located in the Brussels periphery. 84 As an alternative to such scheme, Les Venelles offered housing in the green, entirely devote from cars, a maximum of five floors, and collective housing based on a mixture of housing types, each keeping a more or less individual status. 85 Within the same spirit, the university New Town of Louvain-La-Neuve would be developed about twenty kilometers outside Brussels (in Ottignies), according to the principles of respect for the traditional urban morphology, yet still based on functional zoning, resulting in a ‘new closed town on a human scale, human here meaning pedestrian’. 86

Apart from these collective housing experiments, also projects that aesthetically and formally challenged the modern heritage, such as the Monsanto Offices by S.R.Z and the Les Terrasses and La Galaxie projects by Blondel and Filippone, emerged primarily in the Brussels periphery. 87 One can conclude that the different development of the city centre and the periphery that had manifested itself already through the 1950s and 1960s would be reinforced throughout the 1970s. The experimental projects in the Brussels periphery could, due to their

82 The Royal Loge project, including artwork by Sol Lewitt and Daniel Buren, which was part of the renovation works at La Monnaie in Brussels, was presented at the Beurs van Berlage in Amsterdam, as an impressive real-scale mock-up, before it was exhibited in Belgium.

83 Collective housing experiments formulated an explicit critique against the failures of 1950 and 1960s urbanism and its high-rise estates or tours de logement, often associated with the French HLM’s (Habitation à Loyer Modéré) - better known as Grands Ensembles.

84 Both projects by AUSIA (Michel Benoit, Jean de Salle and Thierry Verbiest). The Cité de l’Amitié (1972-1979) was a pilot project in mixed use for disabled and non-disabled people; Les Venelles (1973-1976) was a housing project of 364 units - mixture of social and middle-class housing.

85 Such as individual houses with private garden and entrance, loggia-houses grouped per five or six, and penthouses with gardens; and in different sizes. Streets and parking were hidden underneath the parks, houses and passerelles.


87 Monsanto Offices in Woluwe St. Pierre, 1974-6, R.S.Z (Patrick Van der Stricht, André Van Ryn, Isidore Zielonka); Résidence Les Terrasses in Uccle, 1966-8, Jean-Pierre Blondel and Odette Filippone; La Galaxie in Uccle, 1984-6, involving Pierre Blondel.
location, not challenge the *Reconstruction de la Ville* movement, while, appearing as isolated objects within the suburban landscape, they neither challenged the urban integration, continuity of the fabric, and the healing of urban wounds that so preoccupied the *Reconstruction de la Ville*.88

### 7.3. La Cambre’s ideological turn towards the *Reconstruction de la Ville*

A third reason for the victory of the *Reconstruction de la Ville* branch in Brussels, was its embedding in the architecture education of *La Cambre*. Throughout the 1970s, the traditionalist movement would grow more strongly at *La Cambre* than, for example, at the London-based Architectural Association (AA). As much as the AA, directed by Alvin Boyarsky between 1971 and 1990, would turn into one of the world’s leading homes of architectural experimentation, so Robert Delevoy would, as director of *La Cambre* between 1965 and 1979, transform *La Cambre* into a major platform for discussion and place of resistance to the dominant spirits of the time. However, whereas Boyarsky’s lively, international AA would produce avant-garde architects including Zaha Hadid, Rem Koolhaas and Bernard Tschumi, Delevoy, as co-founder of the AAM, would do so largely in favour of the traditionalist movement.89 Under Delevoy, and architecture and urbanism teachers such as Maurice Culot and Marcel Pesleux, central attention went to the continuity of the city, its patrimony and social context. Progress, innovation and production would be redefined as a ‘return to the past and recuperation of lost values’;90 the architectural act was to be ‘demystified’;91 and the societal duty of the architect and urbanist was to *changer la vie* and *s’engager et militer*.92 Culot had returned from the United States, precisely when May ’68 broke loose and student revolts had broken out not only within the walls of the school, but also into the streets.93 By hooking up with the students’ preoccupations and being supported

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90 Delevoy, et al., *La Cambre 1928-1978*, p. 426. The ‘society of profit’ and the ‘religion of growth’ were questioned in favour of a more coherent political analysis (p. 426).

91 Maurice Culot, ‘Bruxelles, la longue marche’, *L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui*, nr. 180, July-August 1975, pp. 18-29, p. 19. There was an explicit refusal to ‘bring the debate on the level of art, aesthetics, or beauty: values they considered bourgeois’ (p. 18).


93 Students for example distributed pamphlets on the occasion of the inauguration of the new *Grand-Poste* building in Brussels (November 1968), which they considered a typical speculation project, a *scandale*: ‘il est moins cinq pour sauver le centre de Bruxelles’ - Aron, *La Cambre et l’architecture*. pp. 157-60. Culot declared to have needed ‘ten years to get rid of the functionalist reflexes’, he had inherited from his education – Maurice Culot, Thierry
Image 7: ARAU’s counterprojects clearly focus on the Brussels city centre (the Pentagon). Source: ARAU, Bruxelles vu par ses habitants, Quinze années d’action urbaine (Brussels: Commission Française de la Culture et de l’Agglomération de Bruxelles and ARAU, 1984), pp. 52-53; selection from larger image.

by Delevoy, Culot would establish a strong group of architectes-militants at La Cambre. To such impression that it made Thierry Paquot suggest to call Culot the ‘Cohn-Bendit belge’.  

Through colloquia, exhibitions and student reviews, La Cambre would maintain international contacts with the architecture scenes of Paris and London, and with key international figures including Bernard Huet, Peter Cook, Colin Fournier, Bernard Tschumi, Jean Castex, Philippe Panerai, Léon Krier, Paolo Soleri, and Massimo Scolari. Through contacts with the AA, La Cambre took part in the emerging ‘oppositional’ education that encouraged ‘the investigation of architectural issues as a form of criticism’.  Nevertheless, La Cambre would soon deviate from the more conceptual and experimental AA laboratories ran by amongst others Peter Cook, Tschumi and Koolhaas, and keep primarily contact with the group around Léon Krier. By additionally reinforcing contact with the French scene around Bernard Huet, La Cambre would soon narrow down the debate in favour of the international traditionalist movement, in which it would come to play a central role. In addition, as chief editor of the French journal L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui between 1974 and 1977, Bernard Huet would offer a crucial platform for the ideas of Culot and the likes. Huet celebrated his inauguration with a ‘revolutionary’ issue called recherche-habitat, countering forty years of Le Corbusier-inspired editorial work under André Bloc, and would interlace most of his following editorials with a tirade against l’architecture financière and against his own profession, which he blamed for taking part in this. In a 1975 issue of L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui dedicated to ‘Centres historiques face au développement’, the Marolles would serve as the major Brussels example. In this issue, Culot would also publish one of the seminal texts of that period, ‘Bruxelles, La Longue Marche’, on the ‘massacre du centre de Bruxelles’.  

But even with the support of La Cambre’s director Delevoy, the question remains how Culot and the ARAU could have gained such power at La Cambre, a school that, in contrast to the privatised AA under Boyarsky, fully depended on state financing. One would expect that quarrels of such a fundamental nature, would be soothed by the Ministry before they would get out of hand. On the contrary, what happened is that La Cambre, as a state

94 Culot in ‘L’Invité: Maurice Culot’.  
97 Violeau. Les Architectes et Mai 68, p. 283; Culot, ‘Bruxelles, la longue marche’. Two other crucial texts of that period were: Bernard Huet. ‘Formalisme – réalisme’, L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui, nr. 190, April 1977, editorial, pp. 35-37; and Maurice Culot and Léon Krier, ‘L’unique chemin de l’architecture’, Archives d’Architecture Moderne, 14, 2nd trimester 1978. Both texts were included in English translation in K. Michael Hays’ Architecture Theory since 1968, as ‘Formalism – Realism’ (pp. 254-60), and ‘The Only Path for Architecture’ (pp. 348-355). The latter had been translated into English, already in 1978, for Oppositions, Fall 1978.
school, would be in the middle of the educational reformation of the 1970s. At the same time, the position of Delevoy and Culot would be significantly reinforced when H.F. Van Aal, a supporter of ARAU, became Minister of Culture, and decided to support ARAU’s representatives at La Cambre. Concretely, this led to the fact that, between 1974 and 1979, ARAU could play a decisive role in the development of the Plan Secteur for Brussels, a process that had never been so open in the public. It also led to the Minister’s appointment of Culot as Professor of Urbanism at La Cambre, against the advice of his administration. As a consequence of this ‘double support’, Culot’s students could develop, within the educational curriculum of the school, proposals that served ARAU’s political negotiations, as such turning La Cambre into ‘une usine à fabriquer des contre-projets’.

7.4. The role of counterprojects

‘Counterprojects’ (contreprojets) were not just very characteristic for the Reconstruction de la Ville movement; they also played a key role in the architecture education at La Cambre and the urban thinking of Brussels. Since, for Brussels above all, their role cannot be underestimated, counterprojects deserve particular attention here.

7.4.1. Counterprojects and the AAM’s re-assessment of the past

The AAM and ARAU’s formulation of counterprojects went hand in hand with a re-assessment of the architecture of the past and the aim to discover the Belgian architecture ‘roots’. Such historic research found support in the Italian Tendenza approach of Aymonino and Rossi, based on the historical work of Tafuri, and amongst key theoreticians of the Brussels 1970’s debate on architecture and the city. Numerous exhibitions and publications throughout the 1970s, in Brussels, would not only demonstrate the renewed interest in a re-assessment of the past, but also encourage the protection of architectural patrimony and

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98 Educational reorganisation regarded the status of architecture education as it was taught at architecture institutes such as La Cambre and the St. Luke Schools, and the architect-engineer education of the universities. In 1977 the educational situation would be settled: the French La Cambre and Horta Architecture Academy would be integrated in the Université Libre de Bruxelles; its Flemish brother, the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, would create an architect-engineer program; a communitarian split would take place between the Flemish Sint-Lucas and the French St Luc Schools. For a detailed overview of the educational reformations at La Cambre, see Aron, La Cambre et l’architecture, chapter on ‘L’organisation de l’enseignement de l’architecture en Belgique’, pp. 105-12; and Van Loo, Repertorium van de architectuur in België.


Apart from a search for the ‘roots’ of architecture, the AAM’s ‘dynamic approach to the past’, also intended to fight functionalism, ‘architecture for architecture’ and ‘pedestal-architecture’. It is in that sense that counterprojects functioned as a critical-theoretical tool. They were not intended to ‘prefigure reality’ (to be built) but as a ‘reflection of the consensus of opinion on the global project and the legitimate aspirations of the inhabitants, as a trenchant weapon in the anti-industrial resistance movement’. Since, as Léon Krier argued, the need for a global (and not a fragmented) reconstruction project, stemmed with the need for a global theory, counterprojects formed a work of resistance that was not taking place ‘in the trenches’ of the battlefield, but that was theoretical and strategic in nature. Within the theoretical work of counterprojects, drawing and writing interacted: the project was a manifesto. Theoretical counterprojects were posed as the only instrument available to resistant architects: because, by building, architects were believed to unavoidably collaborate with society’s process of self-destruction, Culot left no doubt: ‘a responsible architect cannot possibly build’. Ironically, as we will soon discover, several of these counterprojects would be built after all and serve as major aesthetic references for the developer-architecture of the 1980s and 1990s.

Numerous publications of the AAM (and ARAU) would, faithful to Rossi’s argument for urban history as the most appropriate form of research on the city, combine a reassessment of the past with the formulation of counterprojects. Typological analyses – based on the theoretical development of ‘types’, the ‘ontology of the city’ and ‘tradition as a vehicle’ - would serve as design guidelines or ‘toolboxes’ for reconstructing the city. Since for the

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102 Important exhibitions, by the AAM, include Antoine Pompe (Culot and Terlinden, 1969) and Bruxelles 1900, capital de l’Art Nouveau (Delevoy, Wieser and Culot, 1972); and by SLA Brussel, breken, bouwen (1979) and straten en stenen (1982). Important publications include the first overview catalogue of the AAM collection (Maurice Culot, Anne Van Loo, Eric Hennaut, Liliane Liesens, Musée des Archives d’Architecture Moderne: collections (Brussels: AAM, 1986), and Apers, et al. Brussel-hoofstad, urgentie-inventaris.


105 Léon Krier ‘The reconstruction of the European city or anti-industrial resistance as a global project’, in: Contreprojets – Controprogetti – Counterprojects, no page nr. Counterprojects are displayed as a text combined with a (project) drawing. For example, an image of Brussels North-South scar is barred with a red cross and titled ‘Modern urbanism has destroyed more than all preceding wars put together’, to then clarify that the destruction of the Brussels historic city started already at the end of the 19th century. See also the 15 counterprojects for the Brussels’ city centre in ARAU, Bruxelles vu par ses habitants, pp. 151-59.

106 Culot quoted in Krier, ‘The reconstruction of the European city’, no page nr.

AAM and ARAU, the *Campagne Européenne pour la renaissance de la cité* 1980-1981 demonstrated that, after the inhabitants, also municipal, national and even supra-national authorities had become aware of the degraded state of cities, the time seemed right for the reconstruction of the European city and for a *concrete* anti-industrial project.\(^{108}\) The counterprojects developed by the AAM and ARAU, would no longer address architects alone, but increasingly also public authorities, who were finally saying again ‘Oui à la Ville!’\(^{109}\)

Perhaps the most striking, and unmistakably the most influential utterance of project-manifestoes was the *Déclaration de Bruxelles*, published in 1980 and based on the 1978 colloquium *La Reconstruction de la Ville Européenne* (I will come back to the role of this seminal event). The *Déclaration de Bruxelles* presents counterproposals for a mixed city-within-the-city in neo-classical aesthetics, accompanied by expressive chapter titles such as ‘the distress of the visible’, ‘modernity and inhibition’, ‘the myth of creativity’, and ‘urban traditions and struggles’.\(^{110}\)

Also the 1981 publication *Les espaces publics Bruxellois: analyse et projets* combines an analysis of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ existing situations with the formulation of concrete public space projects for Brussels. Also here, the proposed *petits équipements* refer, in both type and looks, back to the 18th- and 19th-century city and its typical street lanterns, iron fences, kiosks, public *urinoirs* and public clocks.\(^{111}\) Public space is enhanced as the place *par excellence* for fighting the zoned, alienating and functionalist city. Space ‘embellishment’ is enhanced as the most appropriate weaponry not only for aesthetic reasons but for it reintroduces collectivity, cohesion and nature in public space.\(^{112}\)

Numerous, more recent, publications would follow the line set by ARAU and the AAM in combining urban analysis

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\(^{110}\) André Barea (ed.), *Déclaration de Bruxelles: propos sur la reconstruction de la ville Européenne* (Brussels: Éditions des Archives d’Architecture Moderne, 1980). Drawings include craftsmen construction workers, alternative production processes such as the moulding and bringing to site of natural stone (p. 87), and proposals for popular quarters (*Les Marolles*) including a square with a workers’ bar and an atelier for making marionettes.

\(^{111}\) AAM, et al., *Les Espaces Publics Bruxellois*, pp. 409-15. The selection of ‘good’ existing situations shows that the city before industrialisation and modernisation, counts as the norm, whereas Brussels’ terrible condition is demonstrated by ‘bad’ existing situation and by the problematic *n’importe quoi* approach to do something about that situation (p. 23).

\(^{112}\) Ibid., p. 40; p. 69; p. 55. Not surprisingly, Léon Krier’s quasi-scientific method to measure the ‘public comfort’ of a quarter serves as a key inspiration (p. 67), as does Charles Buls’ *Ésthétique des villes* (Brussels: Bruylant-Christophe, 1894).
Image 8: Culot and Krier’s hatred towards modern architects.

with design proposals. Many of these works would directly or indirectly influence Brussels’ urban policy making.\footnote{Several publications by the Fondation Roi Baudouin/Koning Boudewijnstichting throughout the 1980s and 1990s, such as Marie Demanet, Jean-Pierre Majot (eds.), \textit{Handboek van de Brusselse Openbare Ruimten} (Brussels: Iris, 1995), in collaboration with Brussels Capital Region and the AAM, very influential, and published in French and Dutch; the 1995 Tracé Royale Project, which crystallised in two publications by the Koning Boudewijnstichting, in 1995: \textit{Koninklijk tracé: het charter voor de inrichting van de openbare ruimte}; and \textit{Koninklijk trace: enkele beschouwingen over stedelijke Kunst}.}

7.4.2. Counterprojects and teaching at \textit{La Cambre}

Counterprojects formed an important tool for the further development of the \textit{Reconstruction de la Ville} movement; not the least within the architecture education at \textit{La Cambre}. Even though counterprojects had been developed since 1968 within \textit{ateliers publics} involving ARAU, young architects, students and citizen groups; their status and role would further consolidate as soon as \textit{La Cambre} started to work ‘at the service’ of the Brussels \textit{luttes urbaines}.\footnote{Violeau, \textit{Les Architectes et Mai 68}, p. 284.} Especially in the period between 1972 and 1979, counterprojects would become a central element in the design teaching of Maurice Culot, Marcel Pesleux (the Culot-Pesleux unit), and André Jacqmain (the Culot-Jacqmain unit).\footnote{Culot had become professor of urbanism in 1974, and adjunct-director of architecture in 1977; Pesleux was architecture professor since 1973. Jacqmain was involved only in the academic year 1977-78. Celebrated for his Glaverbel HQ, Jacqmain would nevertheless, with his architecture practice \textit{Atelier de Genval} (founded in 1967), prove a vivid supporter of Brussels’ obsession with space ‘beautification’ and ‘embellishment’.} The unit taught students how to ‘formulate coherent political analyses’ and how to resist the hegemonic forces of industry in architectural production, a conviction that made Culot formulate rather bizarre statements on resistant architecture such as ‘la fenêtre démocratique est la fenêtre étroite et verticale’.\footnote{Philippe Panerai, ‘Re-écrire Krier’, \textit{Bulletin des AAM}, nr. 20, 1980, pp. 51-62; quoted in Violeau, \textit{Les Architectes et Mai 68}, p. 363.} But another major educational responsibility was to ‘dédramatiser le projet’ by means of modest interventions, even if by ‘a banal architecture that accepts the typological constraints of urban tissues’.\footnote{Quote from Violeau, \textit{Les Architectes et Mai 68}, p. 365.} A prototypical example of such 1970’s education based on ‘an articulation of the link between education and research on the one and \textit{luttes urbaines} and the contestation of the discipline on the other hand’ would be \textit{La Cambre}’s \textit{Bateau d’Élie}.\footnote{Quote from Violeau, \textit{Les Architectes et Mai 68}, p. 365.} The \textit{Bateau d’Élie} was a group of students and teachers around Maurice Culot, dedicated to the collective work on counterprojects: concrete renovation proposals for, primarily, Brussels - from entire quarters to patrimony and metro entrances – but also for other contexts such as for the \textit{Centre...}
Beaubourg in Paris.\textsuperscript{119} No less than eighty counterprojects developed by Culot students between 1972 and 1975, were exhibited in 1975, first at La Cambre - inaugurated by the minister himself; then at the AA. Also in 1975, Culot would dedicate an article to these projects in the inaugural issue of the Bulletin des Archives d’Architecture Moderne.\textsuperscript{120} But there would be more reasons to pinpoint 1975 as a crucial year for Culot and ARAU: Wonen TA-BK published an issue entirely dedicated to ARAU; Culot published his seminal text ‘Bruxelles, la longue marche’ in L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui; and, not to be underestimated, La Cambre (under Delevoy) officially placed its infrastructure at the disposal of ARAU for organising Saturday meetings.\textsuperscript{121}

For Brussels, the role of La Cambre would prove important for two reasons. Firstly, through counterprojects, the Culot students would play an important role in the emerging traditionalist post-modern movement - they, for example, organised the La Reconstruction de la Ville Européenne colloquium in Brussels in November 1978; but also in the ‘activation’ of the AAM’s historical research and in the enhancement of counterprojects for generating a better future for Brussels - in some cases even commissioned by public authorities.\textsuperscript{122} In particular three counterproposals produced in the Culot unit would be repeatedly published and set a significant mind-set that was to influence the future development of these Brussels’ sites throughout the 1980s and 1990s. A first project, for the Marolles by Philippe Lefèbvre, was published in the 1975 L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui issue on ‘Centres Historiques’.\textsuperscript{123} Two other projects of the academic year 1977-78, would prove influential: a proposal for the Quartier des Arts, by Brigitte D’Helft and Michel Verliefden; and a proposal for the Reconstruction du centre de Bruxelles – ‘la partie éventré par la réalisation de la jonction ferroviaire Nord-Midi’, by Sefik Birkiye, Gilbert Busiau and Patrice Neirinck, including a proposal for Carrefour de l’Europe.\textsuperscript{124}


\textsuperscript{121}Aron, La Cambre et l’architecture’, p. 168.

\textsuperscript{122}Colloquium organised 15-17 November 1978, featuring amongst others Pierre Laconte, Serge Moureaux, Van der Biest, Culot, Schoombrot, Jean Castex, Antoine Grumbach, Léon Krier, Pierluigi Nicolin, and Bernard Huet. In Brussels, some student projects, such as for re-designing recently installed metro entrances, were commissioned directly by Minister Guy Cudell (Delevoy, et al., La Cambre 1928-1978, pp. 390-95).

\textsuperscript{123}L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui, nr. 180, July-August 1975. Under Wynants and Culot (Culot as assistant).

\textsuperscript{124}I’ll come back to these examples in greater detail. The drawing for the La Reconstruction de la Ville Européenne colloquium poster, called le portique de maîtres carriers, was designed by Culot-students Birkiye, Busiau and Neirinck.
Secondly, the Culot units would produce a generation of architects, many of whom are today still very influential in the Brussels architecture production: as principals of major architecture firms, as curators, writers or as public administrators.  

Most notably, Sefik Birkye and Dominique Delbrouck would found the Atelier d’Art Urbain immediately in 1979 - renamed Vizzion Architects in 2008 – and would turn it into one of the most powerful Brussels architecture offices. Brigitte D’Helft and Michel Verliefden would first develop careers within different bodies of the Reconstruction de la Ville movement, to then co-found, in 1983, the architecture office A.2R.C Architecture et Construction entre Reve et Réalité. Also the Culot assistants Anne Van Loo and Caroline Mierop would remain ‘faithful’ to the Reconstruction de la Ville movement. Van Loo has worked for the AAM since 1980 (since 1992 as conservator of its collection), and is, since 1993, also secretary of the Koninklijke Commissie voor Monumenten en Landschappen (within the Administration de l’Aménagement du Territoire et Logement or AATL, of the Brussels Capital Region). Mierop would, in 1986, become the first director of the Fondation pour l’Architecture (until 1992), an architecture foundation under the strong legacy of the AAM, initially through its co-founding by Culot, and from 1999, through the integration of the AAM and the Fondation into the CIVA (Centre International pour la Ville, l’Architecture et le Paysage). She is currently, as is Elie Lévy, still involved in teaching at La Cambre. With Patrice Neirinck as its coordinator, one can read the unmistakable traces of the Reconstruction ideas in the ambitious Tracé Royale Project.

In other words, many Culot graduates, so-called ‘activists’ would after all become principles of the most commercial Brussels’ architecture offices; or they would pursue a ‘bourgeois activism’ through activities linked to the AAM and ARAU. Still others would continue their influence by adopting administrative positions within the several departments

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125 Students of the Culot-Pesleux and Culot-Jacqmain units included, amongst others, Philippe Lefèbvre, Élie Lévy, Anne Van Loo and Caroline Mierop (who would become assistants), Michel Verliefden, Brigitte D’Helft, Sefik Birkye, Dominique Delbrouck, Gilbert Busieau, Patrice Neirinck, Michel Leloup and Anne Marécaux. Offices created by students include AVA by Patrice Neirinck, Atelier 55 by Leloup and Heene, and AAU and A.2.R.C (see further).


127 In 1980, the Institut Supérieur des Arts Décoratifs de la Cambre spun off its architecture department resulting in two schools: the Institut supérieure d’architecture de La Cambre and the École nationale supérieure des arts visuels de La Cambre, of which Mierop is director since 2003. Also Élie Lévy currently teaches as chef d’atelier at the interior architecture department of the same school.

128 Initiated in the mid-1990s by the Fondation Roi Baudouin. See further.
of the newborn Brussels Capital Region (1989).\textsuperscript{129} The success of Culot’s architecture education can therefore not be brought back to the fact that his students were, in contrast with the ‘salon’ intellectualism of the AA under Boyarsky, more engaged with ‘the world out there’, but to the fact that his students secured the distribution of his ideas, and, of course to the agency of Culot himself, who would keep, through his activities at the AAM and the Fondation pour l’Architecture, the Brussels debate in a tight grip. Consequently, the forced resignation of Delevoy and his teacher corps, in 1979, may have freed La Cambre from its militants, but it could not free Brussels from the Reconstruction de la Ville movement. On 11 October 1979, the day the dismissal of ‘les exclus de La Cambre’ was made public, a banner would decorate the school’s façade saying ‘1933: les Nazis ferment le Bauhaus, 1979: la bêtise prend le pouvoir à l’école d’architecture de La Cambre’. On 6 December, the story of a decade of quarrelling would find a bitter-sweet ending with a Maurice Culot walking through the corridors of La Cambre, disguised as Saint-Nicolas and reciting texts by Loos: ‘Spoken into the Void’\textsuperscript{130}

7.4.3. Counterprojects and citizen participation

In a movement founded on the luttes urbaines of the traumatised Brussels population, counterprojects would of course be an important aspect of citizen participation, which was organised by ARAU in Comités de Quartier. Even though project design was in the hands of architects, ARAU insisted to involve citizens in the development of a program for a neighbourhood. Counterprojects hence fulfilled the double aim of generating citizen participation and formulating concrete proposals that could convince public authorities to make an alternative choice to the profit-based proposals of developers while at the same time seizing the opportunity to please their electorate\textsuperscript{131}. In some cases, a Boutique Urbaine was introduced: a local neighbourhood agency connecting inhabitants with architects and authorities. A Boutique Urbaine provided information, organised and animated meetings, information sessions or even spectacular happenings; it produced a newspaper, and organised

\textsuperscript{129} Several municipal and regional administrations house La Cambre graduates of the 1970s resistance movement. Paradoxically enough, those who had remained convinced activists throughout the 1980s would all of a sudden work for ‘the enemy’ (urbanism administrations of Ixelles, Anderlecht). Some responded to this paradox by turning into simple, obedient bureaucrats, while others, such as Marie Demanet (Ville de Bruxelles and ULB) have clearly furthered their ideas - informal conversation with Pierre Blondel, La Cambre, 22 April 2009.

\textsuperscript{130} Aron, La Cambre et l’architecture, p. 184; p. 186. For more details on les exclus de La Cambre, see the chapter ‘Léclatement’, pp. 179-88. In total 24 teachers were dismissed. Culot, followed by forty students, would first create the private École d’architecture pour la reconstruction de la ville (1980-1981), to then move to Paris - Delevoy’s inauguration speech in Delevoy, ‘Discours d’inauguration’, Bulletin des AAM, nr. 18, 1980, pp. 88-89. ARAU would also set up alternative education through an École Urbaine.

\textsuperscript{131} Culot, ‘Bruxelles, la longue marche’, p. 19.
public surveys.\textsuperscript{132} However, the role of these \textit{Boutiques Urbaines} would transcend the concrete world of neighbourhood projects. As most other AAM/ARAU initiatives, such as the ‘Urban Promenades’ and ‘Urban Schools’, they would serve the ‘higher’ purpose to sensitise for the \textit{Reconstruction de la Ville}.\textsuperscript{133} One can think of the polemical and sermonising writing of Schoonbrodt and Culot, expressively using the word \textit{éventrer} (to pierce, penetrate, intrude) when describing the attitude of new constructions towards the existing urban fabric; and, by contrast, using a more picturesque-heroic jargon when it comes to describing their own urban renovation proposals: ‘Une belle ville qui assure la fierté de ses habitants’.\textsuperscript{134}

One of the strengths of the movement lies precisely in its participatory aspect. Rather than addressing critiques and discourses to architects and other experts, ARAU and the AAM addressed \textit{directly} the public at large. This is a smart move in a city like Brussels, where everyday citizenship often appears as more powerful than established disciplines, professions or authorities. By making their catalogues and thematic exhibitions for as large an audience as possible, the aim was in fact to ‘faire honte aux architectes contemporains’ and to ‘démontrer aux yeux de tous l’ignorance des professionnels’.\textsuperscript{135} Similarly, the use of a graphic ‘à la Tintin, la fameuse ligne claire’ within counterprojects, did not just reinforce the ‘manifesto’ character of the drawings; the reference to \textit{bandes dessinées} (comic strips) popularised its effect, and made it accessible ‘à tous les publics’.\textsuperscript{136}

7.5. The \textit{Reconstruction de la Ville}’s golden combination of local victory and international support

Next to the effect of urban traumas, the lack of significant challenges, the support by education at \textit{La Cambre} and the use of counterprojects as a tool for activism, the victory of the Brussels’ \textit{Reconstruction de la Ville} movement can be explained by the combination of local achievements - the 1979 \textit{Plan Secteur} for Brussels – with its participation in a strong European movement devoted to a European Urban Renaissance.

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\textsuperscript{132} AAM, et al., \textit{Les Espaces Publics Bruxellois}, p. 97; and the included cases.

\textsuperscript{133} Established by ARAU; aiming to educate the public at large on an alternative urban vision. The Urban Promenades attract about 800 visitors a year.


\textsuperscript{135} Culot in ‘L’Invité: Maurice Culot’.

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid.
7.5.1. The 1979 heydays

By the late 1970s, some of the achievements of the Reconstruction de la Ville movement would become apparent. The actions of SLA and AAM would trigger a new mentality and policy towards cultural heritage. From now on historical buildings would no longer be demolished per se but would be considered for renovation. This is not to say that the bulldozer-urbanism had disappeared – several architectural masterworks would still be ruthlessly destroyed – but that a mentality had grown of renovating rather than erasing historical heritage. In Brussels, this was effectuated in the moderation of Bruxellisation.

The activism of ARAU and the AAM would moreover achieve a major triumph with their ideas included in the negotiations for and final version of the Brussels Gewestplan/Plan Secteur of 1979. Thanks to significant press attention, numerous events, and the formulation of concrete counterprojects, ARAU (and the AAM) had gradually been taken seriously as stakeholders in Brussels urban policy making. As such, the Gewestplan/Plan Secteur would include goals related to functional mixtures and the protection of the residential function; it would put several (old-school functionalist) office and road infrastructure plans on hold; and it would be more ‘democratic’: more transparency in decision making and citizen consultation. Since, for ARAU, the city is ‘the organisation of coexistence of men and activities, in all their diversity’, the legal recognition of citizen consultation was considered a major triumph: ‘la plus grande victoire des comités d’habitants’. ARAU’s participatory urbanism got formalised in the new Gewestplan/Plan Secteur: since 1976, each urbanism permission is, in Brussels, subject to an obligatory public survey (Enquête Publique/Openbaar Onderzoek) and consultation commission (Commission de Concertation/Overlegcommissie).

As such, whereas dark clouds (the demolition of La Maison du Peuple, Manhattan Plan) had polluted the once-sparkling days of Expo 1958, the year 1979 was believed to announce a truly new heyday for Brussels urbanism. So important, that Jacques Aron recognised in the events that had led towards the approval of the Gewestplan/Plan Secteur, a genuine turning point or tournant for Brussels urbanism. The Brussels authorities had grown more open towards public debate and acknowledged that inhabitants could have a say

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138 Such as les écoles urbaines de Mars, les midis de l’urbanisme, trips and voyages – Schoonbrodt, Vouloir et dire la Ville, pp. 137-47.

139 Schoonbrodt in ‘L’Invité: René Schoonbrodt’.


From Penser la Ville to Faire la Ville

in projects influencing their living environment.\(^{142}\) _Penser la ville_ was no longer about radical transformations by experts and politicians, but involved developments in correspondence with the existing fabric and in collaboration with the local population. A typical outcome of this new planning mood was the creation of the new journal _La Ville et l’habitant_ by IEB (in 1978) which would both reflect on Brussels and create more transparency in decision making by publishing newly planned projects, _enquêtes publiques_, and counterprojects.

Yet, it would not take long before the disadvantages of this conservative-preservationist vision would become apparent. The _Gewestplan/Plan Secteur_ may have proved strong in its democratic objectives (participation); but its paralyzing fear of change, justified by the recent past, would obstruct any strong, ambitious planning vision. Moreover, the fact that _each_ modification of the existing situation had to go through stringent control and examination (the obligatory public survey and consultation commission), would soon prove impractical and lead to almost perverse side-effects. Also, as we will see in the discussion of the 1980s and 1990s, _pastiche_ and _façadism_ would soon become the new tools, for developers in the first place, to ‘get things done’ in Brussels. And yet, Culot would - and here he disagreed with Krier: ‘un inventeur de l’architecture au Coeur de la ville’ - remain intellectually faithful to the plea for imitation and pastiche. In Culot’s world, counterprojects excluded invention and were instead supported by ‘la copie, l’imitation, le pastiche, le “à la manière de”’.\(^{143}\) Finally, despite ARAU’s attempts to counter Belgium’s anti-urban mentality - by taunting the peaceful portrait of the rural dwelling and by making the city attractive again - a true ‘return to the city’ has not taken place: urban renaissance applied to only a small sample of the population and generated new problems such as gentrification and social displacement.\(^{144}\)

7.5.2. The European Urban Renaissance Movement

One of the additional assets of the ARAU/AAM movement was its anchoring in a broader international architecture movement. Whereas most post-modern architects would adopt a

\(^{142}\) Aron recognised such sign in events such as the _La Reconstruction de la Ville Européenne_ conference and the editorials of the AAM Journal. It is interesting to appoint to the difference between the _Plan Secteur_ of 1969, by Group Alpha, and the one of 1979, which was developed by the Brussels agglomeration and inhabitant committees. See also Benoît Moritz, _Du ‘premier tournant’ au ‘deuxième tournant’_, lecture within the Brussels Architecture Institute lecture series on the theme ‘le deuxième tournant’, commissioned by Isabelle Doucet and Vincent Calay, 8 May 2008, Recyclart, Brussels.

\(^{143}\) Culot in ‘L’Invité: Maurice Culot’. Pesleux would interpret this ‘à la manière de’ quite opportunistically, giving him the perfect alibi to teach the most popular styles of the time (from Krier to Himmelblau).

\(^{144}\) ARAU aimed to counter the image of the ‘perfect’ rural family with wife, children and dog waving goodbye the husband-commuter – Schoonbrodt in ‘L’Invité: René Schoonbrodt’.
hybrid language and even foreground architecture as a language itself,\textsuperscript{145} the more traditionalist branch that would emerge in Europe throughout the 1970s would, rather than celebrating the architect and architecture, place urban cohesion at the foreground.\textsuperscript{146} Brussels would become, with the \textit{Déclaration de Bruxelles} (1978), an important centre for this movement’s search for a revaluation and reconstruction of the traditional city.\textsuperscript{147} The \textit{Déclaration de Bruxelles} would, together with the \textit{Rational Architecture} exhibition (London, 1975) and the \textit{Palermo Declaration} (1978), form a key event in the enrolment of this movement. For Brussels this meant that, for the first time since the \textit{Art Nouveau} almost a century earlier, Brussels would be placed on the international architecture map again, this time not for its architectural avant-garde but for its nostalgic call for a return to the pre-modern, pre-industrial city.

7.5.2.1. The \textit{Rational Architecture} exhibition (1975)

The 1975 \textit{Rational Architecture} exhibition (and accompanying publication of 1978) collected a series of proposals dedicated to the renewal of architecture and the European City, and formed as such a first important event in the development of the international \textit{Reconstruction of the City/Reconstruction de la Ville} movement. The movement’s starting point was the declaration of a new era, in which ‘the new is no more new’, building was no longer a promise but a ‘threat for the collectivity’, and in which both architecture practice and theory were in need of renewal.\textsuperscript{148} A first alternative to the impasse of architects - having become mere executers of the building industry and shamelessly displaying merchandise architecture – had been recognised in Also Rossi’s XVth Triennial in Milan. However, where Rossi’s 1973 \textit{Architettura Razionale} also included work of the New York Five and Venturi, these would be barred from the 1975 London exhibition. Because the revolutionary aspect of the \textit{Rational Architecture} movement was believed to lie not in its ‘form but in the model of its social use, in its coherency, in the reconstruction of the public realm’, and in the ‘ontology of the city’,\textsuperscript{149} the exclusion of Venturi and the New York Five from the London exhibition, was


\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., pp. 5-6.


hoped to avoid that Massimo Scolari’s recognition of a new *tendenza* in the Milan Triennale, would end up in a mere discussion of ‘style’.\(^{150}\)

The ideal model for social use and coherence was found in the pre-industrial city, with its complex visual codes, and in a cities-within-the-city model consisting of ‘urban quarters where work, leisure, culture are integrated within walking distance’.\(^{151}\) With reference to Rossi, the history of the city was studied as the history of and interaction of ‘types’ (of settlements, spaces, buildings): a dialectics of building, monument *and* urban fabric.\(^{152}\) Any solution was hence to be found in the ‘dialectical relationship between productive forces, architectural typology and urban morphology’.\(^{153}\) That, following Rossi, the architecture ‘type’ - in contrast to function - was the closest to architecture’s essence, would be stressed to the extreme by Maurice Culot’s drawings of old-fashioned car models in his design sketches, referring to the uncorrupted, unpolluted historic version of the car-type.\(^{154}\)

The new ordering principle, the *dialectics of types*, would replace functional zoning and search for its validation in the city that *is* rather than in any legitimacy *outside* architecture. A project was supposed to learn from the traditional city’s organisational principles by understanding its logics, creations and development, a principle that was perhaps most clearly expressed by Rob Krier’s drawings of the artist/architect for the first time taking of his mask and letting in ‘the blinding light of reality’.\(^{155}\)

Rather than the expression of an established movement, the 1975 *Rational Architecture* exhibition formed a collection of projects and debates that belonged to what one could call a *European* Postmodernism that was more based on ‘the architecture of the city’ than on the (US) functioning of buildings as carriers of meaning, signs or symbols.\(^{156}\) Brussels would play, even in these early days of an emerging movement, a central role.

Firstly, from the very beginning, Maurice Culot would offer a platform for discussion within the body of the *Archives d’Architecture Moderne* – as Bernard Huet did with *L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui*, Not only would seminal works, exhibition catalogues (such as

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\(^{150}\) Krier, ‘The reconstruction of the city’, p. 39.

\(^{151}\) AAM (ed.), *La Reconstruction de Bruxelles*, p. 166.

\(^{152}\) Krier, ‘The reconstruction of the city’, p. 41.


\(^{154}\) For Culot, ‘driving a car in the city should become again a luxury and not an act of labour’ – Maurice Culot ‘Un peu de ce que nous avons appris’, in: *La Reconstruction de Bruxelles*, pp. 11-16, p. 11; Culot, ‘L’ARAU et les architectes’, pp. 29-30; Rossi, *The Architecture of the City*, pp. 35-41.


\(^{156}\) Ibelings, *Unmodern Architecture*, pp. 71-72. Common characteristics were the attention for themes such as conservation, morphology, urban space, types, quarters and housing – Krier, ‘The reconstruction of the city’, p. 42.
Rational Architecture), and conference proceedings be published by the AAM. The Bulletin des AAM (the AAM’s journal published since 1975) formed a crucial discussion platform for this emerging European movement, especially after Huet would be removed as chief editor of L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui. In contrast to Huet, who had been ‘punished’ for his cynicism and severe criticism of the architect-author and the architecture profession’s legacy with industry, Culot had total freedom at the AAM, which he had himself co-founded and carefully constructed with like-minded thinkers, often his ex-students of La Cambre. As such, in the Bulletin des AAM, Culot could quietly pursue the radicalism that had cost Huet his job. Over the years, Culot’s position would be further consolidated by his involvement (often as co-founder or president) in several foundations that would see the light throughout the 1980s and 1990s - and most notably the Fondation pour l’Architecture.

Secondly, Brussels was important for its impressive production of counterprojects with La Cambre students, the AAM and ARAU – published as early as in the Rational Architecture exhibition catalogue which offered the young movement an important influx of concrete cases, allowing it to enrich and refine its research on the city.

7.5.2.2. The Palermo and Brussels Declaration (1978)

Two other key events were the 1978 meetings in Palermo and Brussels. The Palermo meeting was organised by Pierluigi Nicolin, at the time editor of Lotus International, and resulted in the Déclaration de Palerme. In November 1978, the La Reconstruction de la Ville Européenne conference was organised in Brussels, resulting in the Déclaration the Bruxelles, a manifesto published by the AAM in 1980. If the Rational Architecture exhibition still displayed a rather loose-fix movement, the Déclaration de Bruxelles would establish a new ‘international family of contemporary traditionalism’, supported by journals such as the Bulletin des AAM, Lotus International, amc Le Moniteur Architecture and L’Architecture.

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157 One of the most important financers of the AAM was Philippe Rotthier, another proponent of the Reconstruction de la Ville (Conversation with Marc Dubois 26 August 2009).

158 A proposal by Brigitte D’Helft and Michel Verliefden (monumental panoramic square); ARAU’s ‘closing’ of the Museum Square (1973-7); proposals for the reconstruction of the Quartier Nord and its derelict building sites, by Gilbert Busieau and Patrice Neirinck, and by Sefik Birkye and Patrick Kelly (1977); and the reconstruction of the Botanic Garden, by Busieau, Neirinck, and Birkye.

159 Barey, Déclaration de Bruxelles, pp. 20-21. Signed by Léon Krier, Pierluigi Nicolin, Angelo Villa, Maurice Culot and Antoine Grumbach.

160 Signed by, amongst others, Culot and Delevoy, Schoonbrodt and Van der Biest, Nicolin, Grumbach, Léon Krier, Bernard Huet, Jean Castex, and Philippe Panerai.

161 Ibelings, Unmodern Architecture, p. 73. This movement would resonate with the ideas of Rossi, Giorgio Grassi, Ricardo Bofill, Oswald Mathias Ungers, Castex and Panerai’s Formes Urbaines. De l’îlot à la barre (1977), Kevin Lynch’s The Image of the City, and the Stadtreparatur of the 1980’s Internationale Bauausstellung Berlin under Josef Paul Kleihues (p. 64).
d’Aujourd’hui. Especially Léon Krier would become an important liaison for expanding the ‘family’ and generating educational and personal exchanges amongst its disciples.\textsuperscript{162}

The \textit{Déclaration de Bruxelles} announced, for some, a true ‘Copernican Revolution’ vis-à-vis the Athens Charter and industrial society.\textsuperscript{163} It centred on the statement that the industrial logic destroys the physical and social logic of cities and that the modernist concept of ephemeris – adaptable to progress - is nothing more than a ‘hard drugs for greedy consumers’.\textsuperscript{164} It dismissed the ‘terrorism of modern architecture’ and ‘la froideur bourgeoise’: the destructive modern urbanism of functional separation, ‘politics of bulldozers’, and the ‘bestiale fatalité du profit’.\textsuperscript{165} As an alternative, the \textit{Déclaration de Bruxelles} referred back to the functional mixture and coherent urban project of the pre-industrial, artisan 18\textsuperscript{th}-century European city with its ‘quarter, street, and place as the basis for reconstructing the cities that have been destroyed by modern urbanism’.\textsuperscript{166} As victimised cities, Palermo, and especially Brussels, were evident hosts for such debate. The \textit{La Reconstruction de la Ville Européenne} conference combined the discussion of Brussels as a major case for ‘exemplary disaster’ with the discussion of citizen initiatives and counterprojects, considered instructive for a new democratic urban project.\textsuperscript{167}

Despite the international architecture scene’s aversion towards the neo-traditionalist movement, its impact has been significant in Europe, and especially in the mind and mentality of public authorities dealing with urban renewal. The continuing impact of the \textit{Déclaration de Bruxelles} would be affirmed by the numerous realisations of its proponents, by the 1996 Triennial in Milan where the \textit{European Urban Renaissance Movement} would be established, and later, in 2003, by the \textit{Declaration of Bruges}, at the occasion of the foundation of the \textit{Council for European Urbanism}, the European variant of the American New Urbanism.\textsuperscript{168}

\textsuperscript{162} Léon Krier worked at the James Stirling London office in the late 1960s-early 1970s and was involved in some of the Prince Charles projects; he worked for Kleihues in Berlin, and participated in the birth of New Urbanism in the US, where he designed a house in Duany and Plater-Zyberk’s Seaside Florida.


\textsuperscript{165} Culot and Krier, ‘L’Unique Chemin de l’Architecture’, p. 30; p. 28.

\textsuperscript{166} Ibid., p. 27.

\textsuperscript{167} Barey, \textit{Déclaration de Bruxelles}, pp. 31-38. The first conference day was entirely dedicated to Brussels, including proposals for the \textit{Carrefour de l’Europe} (an important case in the establishment of ARAU), and proposals by Culot students Birkye, Busiau and Neirinck. The evening event included a popular fest in \textit{Les Marolles} – a soirée anti-industrielle - where songs were sung such as \textit{le tango des styles} and \textit{soyons modernes} – Delevoy, et al., \textit{La Cambre 1928-1978}, p. 400; Barey, \textit{Déclaration de Bruxelles}, pp. 42-43.

\textsuperscript{168} The \textit{Council for European Urbanism} or CEU is the ‘European New Urbanism’. The Declaration of Bruges was signed during a 2003 congress in Brussels and Bruges (http://www.ceunet.org/bruges.html).
Image 9 and 10: Façadism at work near the European Parliament. Images taken from the Internet; source unknown.
LA PRATIQUE DU CONTRE-PROJET

Projet de nouveau boulevard dans le quartier Nord [ARAU, S. Birklov, G. Boissen, P. Neirinck, 1978]

8. The *Reconstruction de la Ville* movement ‘in action’.

Ever since the *Déclaration de Bruxelles*, the traditionalist movement continued to gain importance.\(^\text{169}\) Whereas most theoretical and ideological concerns have remained unchanged, implementations in *practice* have gradually illuminated the contradictions at the very heart of these concerns. Such contradictions relate to the role allocated to the architect, the defence of close-knit artisan communities, and to the ‘pact’ with urban renaissance.

8.1. The dubious role of the architect as creator of the organically grown city

A first contradiction relates to the discrepancy between a *theoretically* defined role for the architect and the way this role could be adopted *in practice*. Since architects had to learn from the traditional city’s organisational principles and were to overcome their ‘fear of the past’ by moving in reverse, towards a craft, ecological and historicist architecture,\(^\text{170}\) a hold was put to the glorification of creativity and ‘the use of the city as a field of experimentation for architects’.\(^\text{171}\) In a context where ‘there are almost no further discoveries to be made’ and where one was believed to have to put a halt to ‘the spectacle of destruction […] [and the idea that] the mission of the world is to be a permanent building site’, the role of the architect (and urbanist) was to learn from the city’s heritage, and use ‘tradition as a vehicle for passing on technical and artistic knowledge’.\(^\text{172}\) Moreover, the movement’s *political* project – ARAU’s socialist city – was considered incompatible with avant-garde, progressive or futurist architecture. Since what was at the stake, was not aesthetics but the *political* struggle against power, imitation was prioritised over invention as the ‘creative process of intelligence’.\(^\text{173}\) But how the democratic, non-signature architect was supposed to build the organically grown city,


\(^\text{173}\) The major criterion for evaluating a project was its ‘evocation of an existing edifice or public space, appreciated by all and approved by time’ (Culot ‘Un peu de ce que nous avons appris’, p. 16). One would go as far as to ‘correct’ modernist architectural monuments such as Chandigarh and Louis Kahn’s Plan of the Capitol in Dacca - AAM (ed.), *Rational Architecture*, pp. 182-86.
proved problematic on two fronts, as is demonstrated by the new towns and inner-city regeneration projects that have emerged under the banner of traditionalism: firstly, the creation of diversity was possible only under very strict design guidelines; and, secondly, the architect’s democratic pose was unavoidably overshadowed by style preferences.

Indeed, the creation of organically grown, architecturally diverse, but aesthetically coherent towns, proved achievable only if the architect’s diversity would be controlled through strict design guidelines. Such guidelines would include instructions for the architectural composition, materials for façades, and used typologies such as porches, greenery, setbacks, and garages. For example, in order to assure ‘a wild variety of buildings as in any “normal” town’, Rob Krier would commission different architects within a single assignment. However, in order to guarantee an overall aesthetic unity, these architects were to work under strict guidelines and with historical architectural ‘types’.

Also the New Urbanism projects of the US in the early 1990s had picked up the ideals of traditionalism and its return to the cohesive community, and would demonstrate such paradoxes. New Urbanism attempted to counter the new towns’ negative reputation of being homogeneous and dull, by recognising – and hence solving - it as a design problem. New Urbanism did not ground its work in theory or rhetoric, but opted to ‘affect’ critics, scholars, citizens, planning agencies and private developers alike. It did so through the organisation of participatory charrettes, involving architects, community leaders, local officials and other interest groups. The main aim of the charrettes was not so much the

174 For example, in the Noorderhof project (Amsterdam), the commissioned architects were requested to ‘clearly structure [the facades of their buildings] with a basecourse, window zone and sculptural cornice’ - Kleefisch-Jobst and Flagge, Rob Krier: a Romantic Rationalist Architect and Urban Planner, p. 153.

175 Ibid., p. 151. This control of architects was not considered a constraint for it explored architectural ‘truth’ beyond ‘individual displays of architectural bravura’ and beyond the ‘spirit of the age’ – Richard Economakis, Nicola Hodges and Iona Spens, Rob Krier: architecture and urban design, Architectural Monographs nr. 30, (London: Academy Editions, 1993), p. 7.


178 Bressi, ‘Planning the American Dream’, pp. xxv-xxvi. Also in Brussels, a ‘Nouveaux Urbanistes’ charrette was organised by local new urbanism proponents like Christian Lasserre, for a project around the modernist Brusilia tower, near Parc Josaphat, in Schaerbeek (12-20 September 2001). It was organised and financed by the Fondation pour l’architecture (and Bernard Clerfayt, burgomaster). On 19 September Belgian Prince Laurent himself would participate in the charrette. See Karim Fadoul ‘Quartier Brusilia à la mode USA’ available online: http://www.dhnet.be/dhjournal/archives_det.phtml?id=42318 [accessed 27 April 2009].
presentation of innovative design but of appealing visualisations (both hand-drawn romantic sketches and digital visualisations) that would allow the stakeholders involved to grasp the future project and develop a practical concern for implementation and the building process. Vernacular, diversified designs with particular attention for construction details would both counter the suburban banality and ‘impart a greater level of civility to the streetscape’. However, to make each building contribute to the functioning of public space, building lots were to be clearly designated - building types, setback regulations – and architectural style was to be orchestrated through design guidelines - prescribing local vernacular styles, the placement of architectural elements such as windows, balconies and even decorative columns or the detailing of brick work.

But the desire for aesthetic unity can also be considered a violation of the very democratic intentions of the traditionalist project. Charles Jencks has, in relation to the English movement linked to the Prince Charles Foundation, pointed to the problematic assumption of overall harmony and the smoothening of aesthetic desires into an aesthetic unity. According to Jencks, this is an impossible task due to the inherent conflict between the architect and his ‘right to build in any style he or she can negotiate with the client […] and the public […] not be confronted with inappropriate or discordant imagery’. But Jencks pointed to yet another democratic deficit of the traditionalist architects. Behaving like ‘spokesmen’, these architects create the assumption to speak for ‘most of us’, the ‘majority’ or ‘general public’. As such they present an homogeneous whole that is, in reality, an amalgamation of groups including ordinary people, the underprivileged but also the aristocrats not at ease with the dominant architecture professionals.

8.2. A socialist city for the élite?

The desire for artisan building production and pre-industrial vernacular aesthetics would prove, as is demonstrated by several projects by Rob and Léon Krier and the New Urbanists, highly successful amongst the middle classes, while remaining financially unachievable for the working classes.

180 Ibid., p. xxxv.
181 Ibid.
183 Ibid., p. 9. Jencks of course refers to the Prince Charles (upper-class) fans amongst the larger public.
For example, the Brandevoort New Town and its centre De Veste responded to the growing need of the wealthier middle class to move out of town, by creating a small-scale medieval shape. De Veste’s high standards and looks clearly appeal to a specific social stratum with conservative values; its delineation with monumental city gates and bastion towers - an appearance that can only be read as a gated community - seems legitimised by historical references.

Also Rob Krier’s older projects for Ritterstrasse (1977-80) and Tiergarten (1980), both in Berlin, form a softly gated ensemble through the composition of building blocks around a common green area, protected from the public streets through a ‘gateway’ building. Krier’s so-called integrative projects are in reality often isolated from the surrounding fabric, while his new towns are in the end only accessible to upper middle classes, or, as Deborah Berke already argued in the early 1980s: Krier’s critical architecture is misleading, as his social critique is only interesting when expressed through projects, not through buildings. More generally one can conclude that the New Urbanism model proved inappropriate for low-income housing schemes and naïve in its expectation that communities can be created and maintained with design alone.

Also in more general terms, it has become apparent that inner city urban renaissance has not created anything like a socialist city for the working classes, but, on the contrary, has generated side-effects inimical to the working class such as gentrification and social displacement. Even though these effects have been studied extensively by human and urban geographers including Neil Smith, Erik Swyngedouw, David Harvey, Neil Brenner, and, in Brussels, Mathieu Van Criekingen, urban renaissance is still enhanced by authorities - and certainly by developers - as an ‘innocent’ regeneration tool. Possible negative side-effects are ‘dealt with’ through compensations (community services, participation, planning ‘for the people’) that often prove highly inefficient; or they are ‘waved away’ by the hopeful expectation that ‘good planning’ can keep such effects to a minimum.

In that sense it is remarkable that what remained in practice of the close-knit, working-class communities was often nothing else than elite, middle- to upper-class settlements. Moreover, urban renaissance, including its negative side-effects, has meanwhile grown into a broadly accepted official planning tool. If the socialist city, so desired by

184 Kleefisch-Jobst and Flugge, Rob Krier: a Romantic Rationalist Architect and Urban Planner, p. 156. Brandevoort is a new town for 20,000 inhabitants in the Netherlands, designed by Rob Krier.

185 Rob Krier’s ‘urban repair’ for the Berlin IBA exhibition in the Tiergarten (Rauchstrasse 1984-87). Also the properties in the more recent Noorderhof project (Amsterdam, Rob Krier) were sold in only two weeks.

ARAU, has emerged from our Western inner cities or suburban landscapes, it has been one that is perhaps ‘artisan’ and ‘socially cohesive’ but that is, above all, inhabited by SUV’s rather than anything near the working classes.

8.3. The Reconstruction de la Ville movement ‘in action’ – in Brussels.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the effects of the Reconstruction de la Ville movement on Brussels would become apparent. Not only were its theoretical ideas reduced to a mere external image; but ideological inflexibility sometimes even led to missed opportunities.\(^\text{187}\) The urban renovation ‘mood’ would moreover be eagerly used by developers as a selling argument for large-scale office projects: marketed as so-called ‘catalysers’ for the surrounding neighbourhood.

8.3.1. From Culot’s architect-bashing to Brussels ‘fear of the new’

In Brussels, the Reconstruction de la Ville movement remained under the influence of Culot, Schoonbrodt and the like, not surrendering one bit of their radicalism. For architecture, Culot’s hatred of the entire figure of the progressive architect would have particularly severe consequences. Culot denounced the ‘architecte-artiste (peu importe le style)’ and blamed architects for being ‘demiurges, qualifying themselves as resolutely modern and men of their time’.\(^\text{188}\) Culot fiercely attacked architects who, while ‘consuming aluminium and hamburgers […] Ah Monde ingrat!’, intended to re-invent their profession solely in the name of pluralism, this ‘genial concept meaning that everyone acts as he likes […] and escapes from critique since in pluralist philosophy all stupidity is justified as experiment or research’.\(^\text{189}\) As a consequence of this aversion to urban and architectural innovation and the still on-going urban and architectural catastrophes, a ‘fear of the new’ would settle firmly in Brussels.\(^\text{190}\) It is symptomatic that, three decades after La Déclaration de Bruxelles, the ambitious and

\(^{187}\) Dubois, Belgio Architettura gli ultimi vent’anni, p. 29. Most notably, ARAU’s revolt against Roger Bastin’s proposal for the extension of the Brussels’ Museum of Modern Art, resulted in a museum that, rather than showing itself proudly to the public, is located underground and entirely invisible.


\(^{189}\) Culot, ‘Un peu de ce que nous avons appris’, p. 13.

\(^{190}\) And as such complete the ‘fear of the past’ that had been so vigorously fought by Culot. Mentioning the on-going ruthless speculation and vast demolition of urban tissue within the European Quarter and around the HST-hub of the Gare du Midi, would suffice to demonstrate the on-going catastrophe.
provocative ‘A Vision for Brussels’ proposal, had to come from abroad, from outside the Brussels architecture scene.¹⁹¹

8.3.2. From the renovation of popular working quarters to ‘sablonnisation’

Still very recently, René Schoonbrodt (ARAU) proudly claimed to have always remained ‘faithful’ to the workers movement: ‘Je n’ai pas fait de mariage avec une bourgeoise. Je suis resté à ma place’.¹⁹² However, political correctness on the scale of a city proved quite a different challenge.

When in 1973 the Brussels Les Marolles was selected as a pilot project for a national urban renovation campaign, ARAU and the AAM’s counter-planning proved more productive in principle than in reality. The Comité Generale d’Action, founded by ARAU-architects already in 1969, would not only formulate counterprojects together with the inhabitants, but would now also act as the official ‘buffer’ between authorities and inhabitants. In reality, however, a true social urban renewal would not be achieved and successes would be more on the safeguarding of the architectural rather than the social character of the quarter.¹⁹³

Moreover it is remarkable that precisely these quarters that ARAU defined as most appropriate for urban repair – the so-called comfortable quarters – have been hit the most by gentrification, or in Brussels terms: sablonnisation.¹⁹⁴ Yet, the encouraging of gentrification has not prevented ARAU and the AAM from defending space embellishment as the method par excellence for countering the functionalist doctrine. Instead, urban embellishment was

¹⁹¹ From the Berlage Institute – more details in chapter three. See also Isabelle Doucet, ‘A Vision for Brussels: Fuel to the Urban Debate or, at Last, an End to the Brussels Trauma?’, Footprint Journal, nr. 1, Autumn 2007, pp. 97-105. Available online: http://www.footprintjournal.org/.

¹⁹² Schoonbrodt, ‘L’Invité: René Schoonbrodt’. By contrast, Culot admitted that New Urbanism has resulted in homogeneous, gated communities, yet waved all accusations away by the rather vague statement that ‘pour nous, Européens, la ville s’adresse à tous, ou en tout cas devrait s’adresser à tous’. And the commercial new town for Eurodisney (Val d’Europe)? ‘C’était sans doute le prix à payer pour démarrer la construction de la ville’ – Culot, ‘L’invité: Maurice Culot’. Culot’s office has branches in Paris, Bologne and the Belgian coastal town of Knokke-le-Zoute.

¹⁹³ Citizens were patronised rather than empowered, social displacement was not avoided and local cohesion not guaranteed, Marcel Rijdams, ‘10 jaar stadsvernieuwing – de “zeventiger” jaren - in de Marollen’, in: Verslag van de studiedagen stadsvernieuwing, pp. 83-98.

defended as a search for ‘la ville belle partout et pour tous’, and the *Renovation de la Ville* model was, despite its failure to create a better city for all of us, not questioned. In line with ‘industrialisation’ and ‘modernisation’, a new scapegoat was now found to blame socio-spatial segregation: globalisation.

### 8.3.3. From ‘activist’ renovation to the developers’ golden alibi

Culot’s call for architects to ‘faire de la petite musique et pas de l’opéra’ and his preference for imitation and pastiche over experimental design, would not just affect architects but also developers, who would soon smell business in the experiment-free (hence risk-proof) design. A golden team was born! The urbanism-through-architecture method, so typical of the *Reconstruction de la ville*, offered developers and their architects a licence to sell even the most monolithic and autonomous projects as ‘urban regenerators’. By disguising their *prima donna’s* in neo-classical outfits (with the help of pastiche and façadism), and by staging them in an urban renaissance décor, they could make *opéra* after all. Charles Jencks had warned that architectural creativity is not the sole agent in the fight between Revivalist and Avant-Garde architects, and that architects are, despite being ‘lesser partners to a deal’, often ‘the major scapegoats’. In Brussels, this would become literally true.

Also the New Urbanism model would be easily picked up by developers and reduced from a planning tool to a mere style preference. Perhaps the best illustration of New Urbanism’s ultimate artificiality is the film *The Truman Show* (1998, Peter Weir), which portrays the seemingly perfect town of *Seahaven* that soon becomes the location of deception and a ‘normality’ that has to be maintained at all costs. The film is shot at *Seaside Florida*, a new town at the Beach in Florida that has been designed by Andres Duany and Elisabeth Plater-Zyberk. Master-planned along the idea of a ‘strong sense of community’, it is ironic that Seaside’s more than 300 cottages and homes are used primarily as high-standard holiday resorts.

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196 Schoonbrodt, ‘L’invité’.

197 Quotation from Culot, ‘Bruxelles, la longue marche’, p. 19. On imitation and pastiche see also Violeau, *Les Architectes et Mai 68*, pp. 367-73. Culot blamed architects for evaluating classicist architecture too easily as elitist or totalitarian (Yes to post-modern kitsch! No to classicism smelling like death), Culot, ‘Un peu de ce que nous avons appris’, p. 13. In Brussels, potentially avant-garde architects were doomed to work either on small projects or take building commissions abroad.


200 Seaside’s promotional video refers to values such as ‘nostalgia for days gone by […] shopkeepers knew each customer by name […] candy-coloured houses […] time seems to slow down […] the moments that are cherished are not grand but small and rich of meaning […] learn to feel small again’ (http://www.seasidefl.com/video/video.htm). Seaside contains all the New Urbanism core elements: priority given
8.4. The best way to conclude: concrete Reconstruction projects in Brussels

1980’s Brussels would consolidate the 1970’s tendency to narrow down the multifarious post-modern utterances to the traditionalist branch. This traditionalism was further encouraged by the first architecture Biennale in Venice, organised in 1980, around the theme *The presence of the Past*, commissioned by Paolo Portoghesi; and by the 1981 *Festival d’Automne à Paris* on *La présence de l’histoire. L’après-modernisme*. The Belgian contribution was curated by Culot and the AAM and focused, not surprisingly, on *contreprojets*. It would additionally benefit from the overall efforts to generate a return to the city, most notably by the 1982 ‘European year of urban renewal’.

In Brussels, the influence of the movement would, despite its victories (1979 *Gewestplan/Plan Secteur*, numerous counterprojects and *Comités de Quartier*), hardly translate into concrete realisations. In fact, only one *Reconstruction de la Ville* project would be realised (the *Lakensestraat* project – see further). Nevertheless, the *Reconstruction de la Ville* ideology was very present implicitly: in project proposals, exhibitions and publications, in particular those emerging in the Brussels historic core (the Pentagon), and, more generally, as a dominant mindset in Brussels’ way of *penser la ville*. Moreover, the spirit of urban rehabilitation and embellishment would gradually get interlaced with Brussels’ urban legislation. Of course, the movement’s inner-city idiom served the Brussels authorities’ anxiousness to claim a successful return to the city - even if statistics indicated the opposite. Likewise, it would not take long before private and public actors started developing strategies around this resource. Along this process, the *Reconstruction de la Ville* architects were not just acting *naïve* when approaching a complex set of problems with a simple re-instalment of small-scale, socially cohesive quarters. Their defence of *façadism* or...

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202 Culot and Krier, *Contreprojets*. By 1980, more than 100 counterprojects had been made by the AAM, in collaboration with ARAU – Culot, ‘The counter-projects’, no page nr.


204 Ibid., pp. 69-106.

205 Hilde Heynen and André Loeckx, ‘Studio Open City. In search of a multicultural urbanity’, *Archis*, nr. 4, 1996, pp. 38-49, p. 49. Heynen & Loeckx gave the example of the KBC as a so-called ‘reconstructing the city’ project.

‘empty box’ architecture\textsuperscript{207} would perversely offer developers the ultimate alibi for their vast office projects. Many of Culot’s \textit{La Cambre} graduates would exchange the political anti-industrial project for a mere aesthetic-stylistic, even decorating reinterpretation of the past.\textsuperscript{208}

Three books in particular demonstrate the implicit but severe influence of the \textit{Reconstruction de la Ville} on urban policy making: the 1982 \textit{Vernieuwing van Openbare Ruimten in Brussel} and the 1995 \textit{Tracé Royale Project}, both initiated by the \textit{Fondation Roi Baudouin}; and the 1995 \textit{Handboek van de Brusselse Openbare Ruimte/Manuel des espaces publics}, initiated by the AAM.\textsuperscript{209} All three works combine a critique of the current Brussels situation with the analysis of best practices and formulation of concrete proposals, which helped to turn these works into would-be ‘bibles for both authorities and designers’.\textsuperscript{210} The \textit{Handboek} explicitly aimed to deliver a handbook for designers, decision makers and technicians for creating more ‘integrated space’, urban ‘scenery’ and ‘sequences’.\textsuperscript{211} For their design proposals, these works looked for references neither in the projected future nor in the existing situation, but in the \textit{lost} past and space’s original state of affairs.\textsuperscript{212} All three works moreover focus on public-space design, not as a source for experimentation, but as a crucial element in local community life: ‘Renewal of public space should not be a fashion trend […] should not form an occasion for experimentation with new forms […] is not aimed at designing impressive spaces […][but] is in function of the inhabitants’.\textsuperscript{213}

\textbf{8.4.1. Musée des Arts Modernes/Museum van Moderne Kunst}

Another way to understand the impact of the \textit{Reconstruction de la Ville} movement is by having a closer look at a few of the projects realised in 1980’s and 1990’s Brussels. A first project wherein the paradoxes of the \textit{Reconstruction de la Ville} would become apparent is the extension of the Museum of Modern Arts (\textit{Musée des Arts Modernes}) at \textit{Place Royale}. A

\textsuperscript{207} Heynen and Loeckx, ‘Studio Open City. In search of a multicultural urbanity’, p. 49.

\textsuperscript{208} The 1989 \textit{Marquis} building by Atelier de Genval (André Jacqmain), and the work of the \textit{Atelier d’Art Urbain} (Birkye and Delbrouck) and A.2.R.C (D’Helft and Verliefden).

\textsuperscript{209} Koning Boudewijnstichting, \textit{Vernieuwing van Openbare Ruimten in Brussel} (Brussels: Koning Boudewijnstichting, 1982); other references see footnote 113.

\textsuperscript{210} Pierre Puttemans, ‘Handboek van de Brusselse Openbare Ruimten: book review’, \textit{A Plus}, nr. 137, December/January 1995 (nr. 6), p. 79. This was in particular the case with the \textit{Handboek} and the \textit{Charter} that was developed within the frame of the \textit{Tracé Royale Project}.

\textsuperscript{211} The \textit{Handboek} was an outcome of a study day organised in 1991 by Charles Picqué (Minister-President of the BCR) and the AAM, followed by three years of research. As it aimed to deliver a first overview work on public space it analysed in detail the different aspects of public space in a conceptual, spatial and material way: lighting, paving, greenery, traffic signalisation, street furniture…

\textsuperscript{212} For example, the \textit{Handboek} uses the 1561 Green Boulevard along the Canal as a reference (p. 81), and refers back to 18\textsuperscript{th}- and 19\textsuperscript{th}-century references for street lighting and furniture. \textit{Vernieuwing van Openbare Ruimten in Brussel} proposes, for the design of the \textit{Martelaren Square}, to return to its original 1775 state (pp. 9-10).

\textsuperscript{213} Koning Boudewijnstichting, \textit{Vernieuwing van Openbare Ruimten in Brussel}, p. 79.
building permission for Roger Bastin’s proposal had been rejected in 1973, under ARAU-pressure. ARAU and the AAM, who evaluated Bastin’s proposal as ‘barbaric modern architecture […] a concrete bunker’, would soon start making their own counterprojects.214 Bastin would complete the project in 1984, after he had been forced to severely compromise his original design and place the new constructions entirely underground.215 After, as such, the Museum of Modern Arts had become a ‘museum without a face’,216 also a second opportunity for giving it a prestigious and contemporary expression would be ruined. The 1990’s decision to create a housing project on an adjacent lot would allow the museum the possibility of extending and hence to give it a presence at last. Such a decision typically expresses Brussels’ problematic urban ambition to create a functionally mixed city at all costs, and to prioritise the ‘slow city’.217 Of unmistakeable influence in such a decision was the 1990 Chemins de la Ville initiative by Charles Picqué, which aimed at reconciling downtown and upper-town Brussels through pedestrian itineraries allowing one to ‘découvrir plusieurs sites remarquables de la capitale, de ressoudre le tissu urbain et de favoriser la convivialité bruxelloise’.218 Through five ‘axes’ and, since 1992, a Prix du Quartier des Arts, the Chemins de la Ville initiative would grow into an important instrument for the reconstruction of the public space of the Brussels ‘Quartier des Arts’ (also known as le haut du Pentagone) and into a mental reference for urban regeneration. Not only would it defend the ‘slow city’ of the pedestrian, it would also encourage the reconstruction of the city through a ‘vocabulaire urbain cohérent’ and a reconciliation of ‘quartiers divisés par l’histoire urbanistique Bruxelloise’. That innovative contemporary architecture was seemingly not part of this, could

214 ARAU started developing counterprojects within the same year, with La Cambre students. Daniel Lelubre, who had graduated in 1970, proposed a restoration of the surroundings and reconstruction of the demolished buildings in 1975. His proposal was included in the Belgian Biennale contribution of 1980 (Culot and Krier, Counterprojects). For an overview of the procedures and different stages of the project, from the point of view of ARAU, see chapter 14, ‘Le Musée d’Art Moderne n’aime pas la ville’, in: René Schoonbrodt, Foulouir et dire la ville (Brussels: AAM Editions, 2007), pp. 303-27; and ARAU, ‘Le musée qui n’aimait pas la ville’, in: Bruxelles vu par ses habitants, pp. 68-72.

215 Bastin had been forced to make a study for a Puits de lumière (in 1979). Paul Emile Vincent, La Cambre a 60 ans, Les Cahiers de La Cambre Architecture nr. 4 (Brussels: ISAE – La Cambre, 1978), pp. 54-55.

216 Marc Dubois, ‘Individualisme en afkeer van structuren – architectuur in Belgïe 1980-1987’, Archis, nr. 9, 1987 (theme: ‘Architectuur in België na 1970’), pp. 18-23, p. 20. The only visible element from the outside is a glass well. It was argued that, ‘such light wells have been used in other constructions [Giancarlo de Carlo’s Faculty of Education (University of Urbino), 1968-76.] but seldom as inconspicuously as here’, Micheline Nilsen, Learning from Manhattan. The Dialogue of Concrete, Glass and Brick between America and Post World War II Brussels, submission for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts of the College of General Studies University of Pennsylvania, 4 September 1997, no page nr.

217 The ‘slow city’ or the city reconstructed for the pedestrian, was opposed to the ‘fast city’ of culture, work and prestige – Pierre Loze, ‘Hofberg, het einde van een lang verhaal’, A Plus, nr. 115, 2/1992, pp. 36-39. The neoclassical, pastiche and nostalgic Hofberg housing project by Charles Vandenhove, fitted within the slow city, and prioritised an architecture that ‘gives the feeling as if it has always been there’ - Charles Vandenhove quoted in Pierre Loze, ‘Gesprek met Charles Vandenhove’, A Plus, nr. 115, 2/1992, pp. 40-41, p. 41.

be concluded from the 2006 winner of the *Prix du Quartier des Arts*, who was appreciated for acting with ‘rafinement et délicatesse, sans tomber dans le travers bien tentateur de poser un geste original, voire hors de propos, signature de son inventivité’.\(^{219}\) The development of the Museum of Modern Arts demonstrates how Brussels sacrificed great opportunities for the sake of its nostalgia for an idealised past. But it also demonstrates the sheer dishonesty of such a *functional mixture* with the *slow city* ideology. *In reality*, the choice for housing often served as compensation for a too high percentage of offices elsewhere; *in reality*, so-called cohesive and mixed projects were addressed to an exclusive and rather privileged audience.\(^{220}\)

It is also important to know that Charles Picqué, the *Reconstruction*-minded man behind the *Chemins de la Ville*, has been Minister-President of the Brussels Capital Region since 1989 and could in such a capacity exercise a major influence on spatial planning (1990s *Structure Planning* and the more recent *Plan de Développement International de Bruxelles*), urban renewal (*Neighbourhood Contracts*) and cultural patrimony.\(^{221}\)

### 8.4.2. Carrefour de l’Europe/Europakruispunt

*Carrefour de l’Europe/Europakruispunt* referred to the large vacant lot opposite Brussels Central Station, one of the many ‘scars’ left behind by the construction of the North-South railway junction. Used as a parking lot, it had been the subject of design proposals since the late 1960s. The very foundation of ARAU had been linked to this site: ARAU was officially founded with a press conference on 8 May 1969, on the occasion of its successful inhibition of the existing proposal for *Carrefour de l’Europe*.\(^{222}\) New plans would only appear by the mid 1970s, when the City of Brussels commissioned the office *Groep Planning* to develop a proposal, which would soon be followed with a counterproject by ARAU.\(^{223}\) Interestingly, ARAU’s counterproject would not differ fundamentally from the *Groep Planning* project, but merely replace its ‘too modernist architectural translations’ into a more ‘traditionalist

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\(^{219}\) The 2006 winner: Christophe Gillis, Bureau d'architecture OZON, renovation of the public space connecting the Sablon, the *Quartier des Minimes* and the *Palais de Justice*.


\(^{221}\) With the interruption of only one legislature (1999-2004).


\(^{223}\) *Groep Planning* was commissioned in 1976, following an unfruitful architecture competition in 1970 (no winner was allocated, but the entry by *Groep Planning* would be used as a basis). The counterproject by ARAU and *La Cambre* students Neirinck, Busieau and Birkiye, was presented in the 1978 *La Reconstruction de Bruxelles* colloquium and the 1980 Architecture Biennale (Culot and Krier, *Contreprojets*).
This would of course confirm Jencks’ conclusion that the debate between the Modern Architects, and the Community Architects, Classicists and Conservationists, was in fact, more than anything, a ‘taste war’ or ‘style war’.225

Yet the differences between the town-planners and town-lovers226 would grow more radical in the 1980s and 1990s. On two occasions, the architect Xaveer de Geyter would participate in a competition for Carrefour de l’Europe and come up with a radical, refreshing design, and on both occasions his proposal would be rejected. Firstly, the 1983 competition entry by the Bonduelle Prize winning Hoogpoort Team (including Xaveer de Geyter, Stéphane Beel, Arjan Karssenberg, and Willem-Jan Neutelings) had, rather than downplaying the metropolitan potential of the site, celebrated its differences and clashes. By the mid-1980s, the site would be refurbished, not according to de Geyter’s ideas nor following the winning entry by Georges Baines, but in Flemish Renaissance pastiche: a speculative development ironically in line with ARAU’s ‘aesthetic alternative’.227 A second occasion occurred in 1997 when the Boulevard Impératrice Competition was organised for refurbishing the remaining open space. Once more, de Geyter opted for a radical stance by not proposing a reparation work of trees, street furniture and public space art but opting for ‘extreme fullness’.228 Once more, not de Geyter’s proposal, which accurately placed a speculative finger on the wound while reflecting a bona fide problematic issue, would win, but the well-behaving, virtuous project by Alain Sarfati.229

The history of the Carrefour de l’Europe demonstrates how Brussels does not suffer from a shortage of good ideas but a lack of sturdiness. In fact, the project would be a showcase of how architectural competitions in Brussels often suffered from a lack of courage to consider controversial proposals. That controversial proposals such as the ones by de

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224 Matthu, ‘De Opkomst van de urbaniteit’, p. 47; compare images p. 45.

225 Jencks, The Prince, the Architects, and New Wave Monarchy, p. 7.


227 De Meulder, ‘The Boulevard de l’Impératrice’, p. 56. The competition was organised by the Académie Royale de Belgique and won by Georges Baines for a proposal that was more contemporary in vocabulary yet integrated well with the existing situation. After the BPA approval in 1983, the final project was commissioned to still another architect, Bontinck and Vandenbossche, who would deliver a mediocre pastiche design (Matthu, ‘De Opkomst van de urbaniteit’, pp. 47-48): an ‘unbelievably banal realisation’ and ‘proof of cultureless barbarism’ - Dorothée van Hooff, Jouke van der Werf and Guy Goethals, Langs moderne architectuur (1945-heden). Architectuurroutes in Nederland en België (Utrecht&Antwerpen: Kosmos-Z&K uitgevers, 1994), p. 194; Paul Lieevrouw, ‘Stad en investering’, A Plus, nr. 109, 4/1990, pp. 18-23, p. 23; Borret, ‘Brussels X’, pp. 79-80.

228 Borret, ‘Brussels X’, p. 80; Geert Bekaert (ed.) Xaveer de Geyter Architects – 12 Projects, pp. 82-95.

Geyter were systematically put aside is illustrative of Brussels’ habit of ‘distract[ing] attention away from the fact that authorities and planning services are losing their grip on the built environment […][and] symptomatic of Brussels’ one-sided approach to urban planning’. Carrefour de l’Europe also demonstrates how the Reconstruction de la Ville ideals got shamefully trivialised and conveniently used by developers. At the same time, fiascos such as Carrefour de l’Europe would be silenced by the popular press: when Le Soir published an article about ‘sept hideurs au Coeur de Bruxelles’ neither the Carrefour de l’Europe nor the European Quarter was included.

8.4.3. Lakensestraat/Rue de Laeken
The only literal Reconstruction de la Ville realisation in Brussels would be the Lakensestraat project, completed in 1995, but for which a competition - Oproep aan jonge Europese architecten - was organised in 1989 by the Fondation pour l’Architecture. The project showed how the 1970 resistance groups had become more ‘flexible’ by showing their keenness to finally realise a project. In this project, two former opponents would join as partners: the Reconstruction de la Ville proponents (AAM and the Fondation) and the bank/developer AG, who had earlier adopted a modernist approach to the city in its participation in the Manhattan Plan. Apart from this practical collaboration with a production system that was theoretically criticised, the artificiality of realising the Reconstruction de la Ville ideas was also expressed by the fact that in order to reproduce an image of the organically grown city, seven different teams of architects were commissioned. However, difference was, as we have seen in the examples of Krier and New Urbanism, controlled by regulative competition guidelines based on neo-classical design references, which were supposed to create ‘an ideal street’ and ‘a typology of more sympathetic dwellings’. Moreover, the so-called victory of the ‘gentlemen’s agreement’ between architects, investors and activists was a phoney victory as it was based on an a priori stylistic and

232 Roland Matthu, ‘Neo-klassieke inspanningen’, A Plus, nr. 109, 4/1990, pp. 28-39, p. 36. Not unimportantly, the project also included the demolition of the modernist Blue Tower, the Blauwe Toren.
233 First quote: Caroline Mierop, ‘Kroniek van de bouwwerf’, in: Oproep aan de jonge Europese architecten, ed. by Caroline Mierop and Françoise Deville (Brussels: Fondation pour l’Architecture, 1995), pp. 19-27, p. 20; second quote: M. Lippens, ‘Investeren in de stad’, in: Oproep aan de jonge Europese architecten, p. 9. For 15 dwellings in total, seven project teams of European architects were selected from 400 applications. The project was declared the ‘Best European Renaissance Project’ by the CEU.
ideological consensus; a pre-established harmony.\textsuperscript{235} Therefore, notwithstanding its (self)-proclaimed role of a European trendsetter and because of its implicit elitist character, the Lakensestreet project cannot be considered a best practice of innovative Brussels urban renewal. Instead it is in fact only a reference for its translation of an urban theory or vision into practice, defended throughout the entire building process up to the performance of architecture.

Interestingly, two nearby realisations of the same period demonstrate the possibility of an entirely different approach to Brussels’ chaotic downtown cityscape. Whereas the Beplantingenblok project would demonstrate that respect for tradition can meet innovation and the commissioning of one single architect does not necessarily lead to monotony; the contemporary architecture of Gallery Meert-Rihoux, by Robbrecht and Daem, openly confronted and contrasted with the city.\textsuperscript{236} This urban corner of diverse projects probably demonstrates most literally how, throughout the 1990s, Brussels became characterised by ‘neo-modernist structures in a city overwhelmed with the preponderance of post-modernistic façades’.\textsuperscript{237}

\textbf{8.4.4. KBC Bank/Banque CBC}

Similar to AG in the Lakensestraat, so the KBC Bank/Banque CBC would adopt the role of ‘urban renovator’ for the building of the new KBC-headquarters along the Brussels Canal. Now that private-public consortia were considered the only realistic approach to urban renewal, a similar scenario would take place. In order to fully fulfil its partner role, the KBC would be granted generous support from public authorities, in the form of smoothing planning restrictions and adjustments. Moreover, the predominance of private investors in the partnership would generate reluctance towards experimental – i.e. risky – architecture: the commissioning of Michel Jaspers Architects was proof of such reluctance.\textsuperscript{238} Moreover, the Jaspers project conveniently enhanced urban renewal operations as a way of selling its

\textsuperscript{235} The architects involved already shared an enthusiasm for the traditional, historic city. It was seemingly tolerated that developers participated in the Reconstruction de la Ville out of mere opportunism. The reconciliation of public authorities, private investors (supported by Belgian New Urbanist Christian Lasserre and the project coordinators Olivier De Mott/Atlante/Caroline Mierop), architectural bodies (Fondation pour L’Architecture and initiator Henri Montois), and inhabitants, is an achievement based on a shared ideology.


\textsuperscript{237} Kelly Shannon, ‘Redesigning the Belgian Dream. Social Housing in Belgium’, \textit{Archis}, nr. 8, 1998, pp. 11-25, p. 23.

\textsuperscript{238} The permitted 250 m\textsuperscript{2} offices were adjusted to a sporting 45,000 m\textsuperscript{2} of development with the help of a BPA, using socio-economic circumstances as a justification. Designs that were considered too innovative or experimental were banned from the competition for ‘we are of course a bank and a bank does not normally jump into risky experiments’ – Patrick De wolf, Patrick Van Buyten, ‘Vijf ontwerpen voor een nieuw kredietbank hoofdkantoor. De Terugkeer van Haussmann?’, \textit{A Plus}, nr. 116, 3/1992, pp. 40-47, p. 41.
architecture: the project was appreciated for its ‘integration with the context’, its ‘liveability’, and ‘its friendly effect on and return to the neighbourhood’; for being traditional but modern and respectful to the city; and for its creation of a ‘city within the city’. 239


239 Ibid., p. 46.
Image 14 and 15: ARAU's proposal for Carrefour de l'Europe (source: ARAU, Bruxelles vu par ses habitants, p. 67), and de Geyter's proposal (source: Bekart (ed.) Xaveer de Geyter Architects – 12 Projects).

9.1. Brussels’ twofold dealing with the remnants of ’68: the impact of social geography and an urban design obsessed with the past

After the turbulent 1970s, much of the ’68 revolution either waned or got integrated into policy making. The explicit Marxist ideology would, especially after the fall of European Socialism in 1989, gradually make way for more ecological orientations – Daniel Cohn-Bendit himself would take off his revolutionary boots and become member of the German Green party (die gruenen) in 1984. In Brussels, the ’68 actions were incorporated in the participatory planning model of the 1979 Gewestplan/Plan Secteur, regional advisory commissions and subsidies to action committees. In this socio-economically segregated city that moreover continued to cherish its modernist traumas from the past, two Marxist legacies would live through the 1980s and 1990s: on the one hand a social-geography driven process planning preoccupied with governance, stakeholder analysis and participation (rather than with design); on the other hand an urban design faithful to Culot, Krier and ARAU’s Marxist reading of Rossi’s *Architecture of the City* and an obsession with a reassessment of the past.

In social geography in particular, Marxist thought would retain a strong grip on urban research. Social geographers and - since planning education was closely connected to geography departments – planners, would develop a specific interest in urban poverty and socio-spatial segregation and would produce numerous studies on deprived neighbourhoods, poverty control and the segregating effects of the emerging late capitalist and neo-liberal urban development - such as gentrification, glocalisation, and large-scale UDP’s. That social geographers adopted the role of ‘socio-urban guards’ was demonstrated by both their interest in the revaluation of deprived neighbourhoods and their critical analyses of (the

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241 And the invitation of action leaders to join socialist ministerial cabinets – Ibid., p. 63.


243 See Evert Lagrou, ‘Is de ruimte in België nog te redden? Een bezinning over de ontstedelijking in België’, in: *Over Stedelijke Ontwikkelingen*, pp. 23-47. In Belgium one can think amongst others of the geographers linked to the KULeuven (Christian Kesteloot, Henk Meert), the IGEAT department at ULB (Mathieu Van Criekingen, Christian Vandermotte), and the Cosmopolis department at the VUB (Eric Corijn, Stefan Decorte), and of the numerous neighbourhood-based studies such as the ‘Atlas van Achtergestelde Buurten in Brussel en Vlaanderen’ (first published in 1996, updated in 2008, both under C. Kesteloot). Internationally the INURA network (International Network for Urban Research and Action) has become an important source; as well as the numerous studies on the late capitalist and neo-liberal city by Erik Swyngedouw, Neil Brenner, Bob Jessop, Neil Smith, David Harvey, Nigel Thrift, and others.
effects of) renewal policies and initiatives that attempted to achieve such revaluation. As such, the journal Planologisch Nieuws - founded in 1980 and renamed in 2000 into Ruimte & Planning - would include many geographers in its editorial board. Also, from the eighties onwards, a new, rising star would join Bruxellisation on the Brussels Bühne: neo-liberalism, which had proved an established actor in the US and UK’s regeneration of global cities New York and London.

From the 1980s the consequences of the 1979 Gewestplan/Plan Secteur would also become apparent. With its encouragement of small-scale renovations, the existing situation taken as the norm, and obligatory public inquiry for amendment to the existing situation (spatially or functionally), the Gewestplan/Plan Secteur formed a burden for both the emerging large-scale developments and any attempt to develop a comprehensive urban planning vision. As a result, rather than being preoccupied with a strong multi-layered project for the future, Brussels would be caught in a web of studies and initiatives dealing with deprived neighbourhood regeneration, socio-spatial segregation, cultural heritage and the reassessment of architectural and urban typologies from the past. In terms of architecture, it is striking that, at a time when Flanders would, through the 1984 creation of Stichting Architectuurmuseum (S/AM), herald an architectural ‘emancipation’ and focus on contemporary architecture, Brussels would, in 1986, still be ‘honoured’ with the Fondation pour l’Architecture: another Culot-bastion and another re-emphasis on historical research.


In 1989, when the fall of the Iron Curtain put an end to the Cold War, new boundaries would be established in Belgium with the completion of Belgium’s federalisation. The institutional transformation into three regions – the Flemish, Walloon and Brussels Capital Region – would have a significant impact on both spatial planning and Brussels’ role as a capital city. All soil-related policies including planning and design of the built environment, would become a competence of the regions - Flanders, Wallony and Brussels – whereas culture-related issues such as education and cultural policies would become ‘Community’ matter: the French-, Dutch- and German-speaking Communities. The three regions have responded quite differently to this new situation. The Walloon, and even more so the Flemish Region, would attempt to put an end to the sprawl of the built environment. Additionally, Flanders would increasingly acknowledge the potential of architecture as a tool for image building and thus for development (see further below).

Brussels, by contrast, would, after federalisation, suffer a serious financial hangover once it had lost its prosperous suburbs to the Flemish Region. Such an economic downturn in times of a more market-oriented economy would also affect Brussels’ urban and architecture
activities – turned once more into a politics of compromise. Being directed towards short-term profits, buildings would often be unsustainable and composed of a mediocre architecture beautified with decorative envelopes. In Brussels especially, where untreated urban wounds kept history alive and developers were under pressure to soothe the *Comités de Quartier* with ‘modest’ (yet, profitable!) proposals, *façadism* offered the ideal solution. Moreover, a search for profit and minimal risk would encourage developers and authorities alike to commission large assignments primarily from large, well-established (primarily French-speaking) architecture firms - such as *Montois Partners, M. & J-M. Jaspers – J. Eyers & Partners, Atelier d’Art Urbain, and Atelier d’Architecture de Genval* – rather than smaller, more experimental offices.

As another consequence of the institutional reformation, the new regions and communities needed to decide on a location for their respective parliament, government, ministries, and administrations. As such, Brussels would become, apart from the obvious location of the Brussels regional authorities, also the capital of the Flemish Region, the Dutch-speaking community, and the French-speaking community (the headquarters of the Walloon *Region* would be located in Namur). Apart from those in the North quarter, all governmental bodies were located in the historic city centre. Whereas the Flemish Region established its political bodies in symbolic or at least recognisable places - its government at the *Place des Martyrs*, ministries in the North Quarter, and Parliament near the Central Park / Royal Palace - the French bodies as being less recognisable by being distributed throughout the city. Since Brussels would also become the *cultural* meeting place of the Dutch- and French-speaking communities, it would house a French and Flemish national theatre, a French and Flemish capital public library. Yet, Brussels’ reinforced status as a capital and meeting-point of the German and Latin cultures would not be immediately enhanced as a new opportunity for public architecture: for example, *façadism* and not *contemporary* architecture was preferred for the buildings on the *Place des Martyrs*. For such a mentality to change it would take until the 2000s - with the new buildings for the *Théâtre National* and the *Koninklijke Vlaamse Schouwburg*.244

By the time Brussels became an independent region, it had become apparent that what had remained was not only an ‘abandoned urbanity […] a stone-dead city’ but also a ‘stone-dead architecture’ that lacked concepts, ideas, imagination, and hope.245 There was strong consensus on the need for more coherent urban policies, visions for the future and

244 See chapter three.

245 De Meulder, ‘Old England’, p. 89.
representative contemporary architecture. Indeed, in comparison with other European capital cities, and despite its large number of architecture schools, Brussels suffered from a serious lack of contemporary architecture. This is confirmed by Brussels’ remarkable absence from those 1980’s publications reporting on Belgian architecture. International attention would go either to the private single-family houses distributed over the Belgian landscape, or, when one spoke of Brussels, to Art Nouveau and Interbellum heritage.

In conclusion, post-1989 Brussels would fail to take advantage of the economic boost and its reinforced role as a capital, and would painfully waste the ‘historic opportunity’ to counter its ‘anti-urbanism’ image, grow into a true metropolis and exploit its numerous wastelands and vacancies as an asset. Moreover, at a time when new problems emerged, such as the architect’s unavoidable collaboration with private developers, Brussels was still fighting its old enemies – such as its habit to distribute architecture assignments ‘amongst friends’. Once more, Brussels had no choice but to muddle through its paralysed present, hoping for yet another chance in yet another future.

9.3. New planning instruments for a new Capital Region

Of the three regions, Brussels was the first to approve a Regional Structure Plan: the Gewestelijk Ontwikkelingsplan or Plan Régional de Développement (GewOP/PRD I) was published in 1995 whereas Flanders approved its Ruimtelijk Structuurplan Vlaanderen (RSV) only in 1997 (23/9/1997), and Wallony its Schéma de Développement de l’Espace Regional (SDER) in 1999 (27/5/1999). Brussels’ hurry can be explained by the fact that the Brussels’


248 For example, Archis 1987 (nr. 9) on Belgian architecture lists: only nine Brussels projects in a total of 150 (pp. 1-12) of which none were further discussed in the project description section (pp. 24-43); an article in De Architect on new shop architecture in Belgium, includes only two Brussels projects (of ten in total), Liesbeth Melis, ‘De winkel als deel van de stad. Tien winkelinterieurs in België’, De Architect, nr. 5, May 1991, jaargang 22, pp. 53-71; L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui nr. 292/1994 on ‘new Flemish architecture’ discusses only two projects located in Brussels.


situation was more ‘alarming’ after federalisation. Before 1989, planning had still been based on the 1962 Town and Spatial Planning Act (on national level) and the 1979 Gewestplan/Plan Secteur for Brussels. Since the Gewestplan/Plan Secteur confirmed ‘the existing situation as the norm’ and hence silenced any further urban evolution, the major priority of post-1989 planning was to develop a more cohesive and straightforward urban planning vision.

This was realised in the first place through the 1992 Urban Planning Ordinance (Ordonnantie houdende organisatie van de planning en de stedebouw), which made a distinction between Soil Allocation and Development Planning, had reworked the procedure for building warrants, and included participatory measures. A distinction was made between Regional Land Use Plans (Gewestelijk Bodembestemmingsplan GBP/Plan Régional d’Affectation du Sol PRAS; GBP/PRAS I in 1998, GBP/PRAS II in 2000) and Regional Development (or Structure) Plans (Gewestelijk Ontwikkelingsplan GewOP/Plan Régional de Développement PRD; GewOP/PRD I in 1995, GewOP/PRD II in 2001). Also, a Regional Development Commission (Gewestelijke Ontwikkelingscommissie GOC/La Commission Régionale du Développement CRD, installed on 4 February 1993), was allocated the task to analyse, consult and advise the regional government on new regional and municipal plans and planning ordinances.

Together with the Municipal Consultation Commissions (Gemeentelijke Overlegcommissies/Commissions Communales de Concertation) wherein region, municipality and citizens assemble around municipal planning proposals, these new planning instruments combined an integrated development approach with participation.


Citizens can be heard by the Municipal Consultation Commission: for each planning proposal subject to a public survey, the Commission organises a public hearing where the applicant, citizens, associations and members of the Commission alike can express there opinion and concerns. Its advice is not binding but consultative to the warranting authority.

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251 Segregation between strong and weak functions, affluent and deprived neighbourhoods, (high) east and (low) west fiscal incomes; a growing commuter city lacking tax income (from its suburbs and international institutions); traffic congestion. Lagrou, ‘De nieuwe stedebouw en monumenten ordonnantie’, p. 8.


253 Late 1980’s - early 1990’s discussions and articles in the journal Planologisch Nieuws give proof of this.

254 Approved 29 August 1991; operative 1 July 1992; see Lagrou, ‘De nieuwe stedebouw en monumenten ordonnantie’.

255 The GOC is composed of 48 members from a variety of backgrounds - social, economic, environment, monuments and landscapes, mobility – and with regional or municipal competences or independent expertise. It has worked amongst others on the GBP, GewOP, GemOPs, the GSV or Gewestelijke Stedenbouwkundige Verordening, BBP’s and all sorts of requests for exceptions on the planning legislation. See http://www.humanarc.be/OW_bxl_planning.php, and http://crd-goc.be/NL/NL_home.php.

256 Citizens can be heard by the Municipal Consultation Commission: for each planning proposal subject to a public survey, the Commission organises a public hearing where the applicant, citizens, associations and members of the Commission alike can express there opinion and concerns. Its advice is not binding but consultative to the warranting authority.
Verordening and Municipal Development Plans (GemOP/PCD); and the 2004 Brussels Wetboek van Ruimtelijke Ordening/Le Code Bruxellois de l’Aménagement du Territoire.257

10. The Brussels Capital Region and a consolidating neo-liberalism

At the time when this newly independent region was still fighting its old demons it had to deal with the new neo-liberal mood that, after a warm-up in the UK and the US, had placed a firm foot on European ground.258 Not only had architecture become an important Neo-liberal tool, especially in large-scale Urban Development Projects (UDP’s); under Urban Renaissance, each downgraded quarter would become a development playground. In Brussels, as the projects discussed earlier demonstrate (Lakensestraat, KBC/CBC etcetera), Urban Renaissance would grateful follow the paths freed by the Reconstruction de la Ville. At the same time, the problematic way in which UDP’s landed in a context that was devoid of any form of integrated planning vision, but receptive to private development, would become apparent. Therefore, it is worth looking at the reception of the new neo-liberal mood in Brussels: how did it affect its legendary ad hoc planning and notorious architectural poverty?

10.1. Urban development and the neo-liberal turn

In the Western world, the proposed outcome of the 1970’s economic recession had been a more market-oriented economy and the gradual dismantling of the post-war Welfare State. Regulatory transitions had succeeded one another rapidly: from a Fordist-Keynesian welfare perspective over a series of regulatory experimentations throughout the 1970s, up to a reformulated liberalism or neo-liberalism in the 1980s (inspired by the post-war writing of Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman) that encouraged a competitive-driven, free market economy and new private-public forms of development.259 Such State transitions initially occurred in North American and European contexts, with Thatcherism and Reaganism as its


most aggressive variants, to gradually expand worldwide and become, by the mid 1980s, the ‘dominant political and ideological form of capitalist globalisation’. The replacement of the Fordist production system with service industries and the growing privatisation of typical public and welfare responsibilities had significant repercussions for ‘regulated practices’ such as spatial planning. Moreover, along the transition of Welfare States into scale-sensitive and economically competing Rescaled Competition State Regimes (RCSR), also the role of cities would change. Cities would exchange their role of a ‘dramatic city’ – an arena for fighting out confrontation and difference and wherein each social question was automatically also an urban question – for a ‘topological city’ that consists of social fragments with minimal interaction. Cities would as such become ‘key politico-institutional arenas’ or places where neo-liberal ideologies would be tested in practice. The emergence of new private-public development models such as large-scale UDP’s, and the intensification of urban renaissance strategies, pushed the urban and spatial professions (planning, urbanism, architecture), into the awkward position of being used as the very motor of capital accumulation (city-marketing, city-management) and an involuntary contributor to undesirable side-effects such as social exclusion, displacement and socio-spatial segregation.

Late 1980’s and early 1990’s planning literature and events would concentrate on the changing role and status of the planning discipline, its new challenges as well as democratic deficit. Key conferences on the new neo-liberal mood’s consequences for planning include the ‘Regional Policies at the Crossroads’ conference (1987, K.U.Leuven) and the ‘Tussen plan en markt - naar een marktgerichte ruimtelijke ordening’ conference (1987, Amsterdam). Other events would demonstrate that (European) planning was going through an up-scaling (urban networks and city regions) and responded to the new challenges in an explicit international way: in 1987 the Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP) would be founded as a European planning discussion platform; in 1991, AESOP/ACSP would organise a congress on ‘transatlantic planning: global change and local


261 Think of Thatcher’s abolishment of the Greater London Council.


264 Brenner and Theodore, ‘Cities and the Geographies of “Actually Existing Neoliberalism”’, pp. 20-21; p. 28. They emphasised the importance of contextual embeddedness for understanding the impact of neo-liberalism.

265 Such conferences were closely followed by the Planologisch Nieuws journal.
problems’ while OTB TU Delft hosted the ‘European Cities Conference’ inviting amongst others Manuel Castells and Peter Hall; and in 1992, a new academic journal, *European Planning Studies*, was established.\(^{266}\)

The Belgian journal *Planologisch Nieuws* would thematically join in with these international events by publishing extensively on the new planning style and a critical analysis of its first implementations in practice: the changing roles and responsibilities of planning (including a democratic deficit under neo-liberalism), the societal position of the planner, and new planning instruments such as large-scale UDPs. It was concluded that one was facing a crisis in planning as much as a crisis of planning, namely the reinforcement of several *existing* disciplinary tensions under the emerging neo-liberalism.\(^{267}\) Since planning remained, despite, or maybe because of deregulation, a public activity and political problem, the societal position of planners was re-emphasised: planners were encouraged to continue integrating societal processes as a constitutive factor of planning.\(^{268}\) Yet, the societal role of the planner was no longer promoted by a mere grassroots activism aiming at the empowerment of the oppressed, but by the condemnation of the all-integrating, all-regulating planning of the welfare state, in favour of a more localised, bottom-up planning. ‘Bottom-up’ no longer referred to citizen activism and *luttes urbaines* but to a development that is more ‘open’ to economic development and to partnerships with (local) private investors.\(^{269}\) The planner’s task of being more ‘practice-based’, ‘action-oriented’ and ‘on the ground’ indicated a higher sensitivity to *specific* areas. He was now supposed to *combine* expert-knowledge with user-experience and to adopt an operational, entrepreneurial, *and* responsible approach.\(^{270}\)

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\(^{266}\) *European Planning Studies* included sound planners and geographers such as Louis Albrechts, Patsy Healey, Kunzmann, Erik Swyngedouw, Nigel Thrift, and Henk Voogd in its editorial board.

\(^{267}\) Amongst others: Swyngedouw, ‘Sociaal-economische crisis en planningscrisis. De ontsluiering van een mythe’, *Planologisch Nieuws*, 1988, nr. 3, Jaargang 8, pp. 118-24, pp. 119-20; Albrechts, ‘Ruimtelijke Planning Herbekeken’, pp. 4-6; and the discussion Forums in *Planologisch Nieuws* such as on Regional Planning (1985), on political and institutional fragmentation (1986) and on the failure of spatial planning and liberalism (1991, nr. 3).

\(^{268}\) Throughout the 1970s, the image of the planner as the competent expert standing outside society had been replaced with the planner as ‘catalyst’, combining a political, technical and managerial task – Swyngedouw, ‘Sociaal-economische crisis en planningscrisis’, p. 120. Planners were also criticised for preferring international debates and experiments with new technologies (such as GIS) over their societal responsibilities (editorial *Planologisch Nieuws*, 1991, nr. 1). See for example Albrechts, ‘Ruimtelijke Planning Herbekeken’ pp. 7-8; Editorial *Planologisch Nieuws*, 1991, nr. 1; Piet Saey, ‘De Zelfperceptie voorbij: ruimtelijke ordening als praktisch object’, *Planologisch Nieuws*, 1988, nr. 4, Jaargang 8, pp. 180-93; and *Planologisch Nieuws*, 1990, nr. 2, Jaargang 10, pp. 97-109; J. Gorissen, D. Verté, ‘Naar een ontspanning van de ruimtelijke planning?’, *Planologisch Nieuws*, nr. 1, 1989, Jaargang 9, p. 29.


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In a context where tensions increased between planning’s concepts and the often uncontrolled social effects in implementation, planners both benefited from and were criticised by social geography: for being ignorant about existing conditions and naïve about planning’s ‘vain dream that voluntaristic spatial design could influence social behaviour and relations’.

Whereas for some, the death of the societal planner had been accomplished at last, others assaulted the planners for being too much preoccupied with societal concerns, hence trivialising their duty to design and the very specific and important task of translating societal concerns into prospective design solutions. Now that the effects of early neo-liberal projects became apparent, more direct criticism of the Neo-liberal system would mount: California’s ‘proposition 13’, the 1978 Mother of neo-liberalism, suggested the need for re-regulation; Thatcher’s work with the Urban Development Corporations, climax at Canary Wharf, was forced to demystify its ‘trickle down myth’.

10.2. The neo-liberal turn in Brussels in confrontation with a predominantly private housing market

Reinforced liberalisation would, in an already socio-spatially segregated city like Brussels and an already liberal country like Belgium, sharpen the existing socio-economic boundaries and lead to ineffectively-controlled development.

Due to Brussels’ lack of public control on the housing market, urban renewal efforts in deprived, heavily decayed neighbourhoods would fail on two fronts. On the one hand, by being only sporadic, such efforts failed on their very own terms to generate a true middle-

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272 The death of the planner and of the socially concerned planning was announced in the editorial of Planologisch Nieuws, 1991, nr. 1, ‘het tekentafelsyndroom’ (the drawing table syndroom). Social planners and geographers such as De Decker, Meert and Kesteloot blamed planning for being seduced by the ‘spectacular’ while neglecting the less attractive sides of urban life. By contrast, planners such as Lagrou, Albrechts, and Marcel Smets argued for more attention for urban design and appropriate architectural translations of planning problems, as the only way to make good intentions concrete: Evert Lagrou, ‘Schoenmaker keer terug naar uw leest’; Planologisch Nieuws, 1994, nr. 2, Jaargang 14, pp. 86-89, p. 86; Louis Albrechts, ‘Omtrent Ruimte’, Planologisch Nieuws, 1991, nr. 1, Jaargang 11, pp. 73-75; Marcel Smets, ‘Een specifieke oplossing voor een thematisch probleem’; Planologisch Nieuws, 1994, nr. 2, Jaargang 14, pp. 127-41.

273 Pascal De Decker, ‘P.P.P.P.P’. Planologisch Nieuws, nr. 3, 1991, Jaargang 11, pp. 184-87. See also the 1994 international conference on social justice and fin-de-siècle urbanism, organised by Swyngedouw and Merrifield at the Oxford School of Geography, to celebrate the 20th anniversary of David Harvey’s Social Justice and the City, and to set an ‘agenda for the new millennium’. It hosted the most important (neo-Marxist) social geographers of the time, amongst others David Harvey, Edward Soja, Neil Smith, Doreen Massey, Zukin, Mike Davis, and Richard Sennett.
class return to the city. On the other hand, being largely in private hands, they failed to address the needs of the existing, mainly immigrant working-class populations.

In comparison with other cities, Brussels had always been unique for its dominant private rental market, from which had emerged a vast ‘residual rental market’ of old, poorly maintained private housing (about 40% of the total housing stock!) as well as a ‘residual property market’ as the only way out - buying a cheap hovel even without having a renovation budget was the only way out of the uncontrolled rental market. When, throughout the 1980s, housing markets liberalised and real estate speculation flourished, those residual markets were the first to be hit by gentrification. What happened is that as soon as this market segment was hit it became in effect the equivalent of social housing. Due to the confluence of a devastating housing situation, a developer’s logic of ‘economic rationality’, and public authorities having little legal or financial impact on housing speculation, discussions on the ‘return to the city’ went hand in with those on the ‘return of the slum’.

Moreover, in response to social displacement and gentrification, the original poor populations would develop their very own liberal and corporatist survival techniques through the setting-up of small businesses, through informal (more or less illegal) income, and through the self-support offered by social and ethnic networks. As such, planning strategies were challenged by everyday citizens’ tactics in the form of alternative supports and incomes, which were often referred to by authorities as ‘societal dysfunctional survival strategies’. The combination of gentrification and intensified socio-ethnic self-reliance, would therefore contribute to the sharpening of Brussels’ socio-spatial segregation. Not surprisingly, it was precisely in this period that some of the strongest Belgian myths would be denaturalised: Belgians were not born with a brick in the stomach; Belgium was not a housing Valhalla; and so-called significant public housing investments were neither elaborate nor very effective.


275 In the long run, this would not only affect Brussels’ most vulnerable populations - the disappearance of lower skilled jobs and the insecure labour that came with a flexible economy - but increasingly the middle classes would also be affected.


277 De Meulder, ‘De eeuw van het krot’ p. 4; see also Meert, et al., ‘Maatschappelijke fragmentatie in Brussel’.

278 Ibid., chapter three ‘overleven in de gefragmenteerde stad’ pp. 331-37.

279 Ibid., p. 337.

280 The myth of the Belgian ‘housing paradise’, as it was known thanks to deregulation and privatisation, proved a paradise that was not accessible for everyone. The myth of the Belgians ‘born with a brick in the stomach’ and the so-called excellent housing quality, did not apply to all layers of the population (Pascal De Decker, ‘Wonen in Vlaanderen: mythen en realiteit’, Planologisch Nieuws, nr. 3,1988, Jaargang 8, pp. 151-58, p. 151). The myth of important ‘public housing investments’ was invalidated since policies had encouraged private rather than public and social housing projects.
10.3. The neo-liberal turn in Brussels: the rise of large-scale UDPs in the absence of cohesive planning

As much as the effects of inner city regeneration would be strongly influenced by Brussels’ lack of control on the housing market, so the development of large-scale UDPs would, due to the absence of a clear and comprehensive planning vision, be effectuated in a more-or-less uncontrolled manner.281

10.3.1. UDPs and the Belgian situation

1990’s journals in both architecture and planning would report increasingly on large-scale urban development projects (UDPs). In 1990 and 1991 A Plus dedicated three entire issues to new forms of public-private investment.282 Planologisch Nieuws studied new working formats, and in particular Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) and large-scale UDPs, from both a national and international point-of-view. UDPs were understood as large-scale urban plans combining a qualitative vision with concrete projects for the future, and were tested in several contexts including Baltimore Inner Harbor, London Docklands, Rotterdam’s Kop van Zuid, Ij-oever Amsterdam, Euralille.283 UDPs were believed to dissolve but also reinforce the tensions between planning theory and practice. They indeed translated a global vision into concrete project implementations, but since such projects often embraced a strong opportunism and defended the profits of a few stakeholders rather than the well-being of a society, local populations and the ‘common good’ hardly benefitted from the profits generated by these projects. The question was whether Brussels (and Belgium), with its historical tendency to private-friendly legislation, would be better prepared for developing UDPs - in comparison with other Western cities – or, on the contrary, if it had reasons to be preoccupied that the Manhattan doom scenario would repeat itself.284

10.3.2. First UDPs in Brussels

The first major UDP in Brussels is the development around the Brussels South Station (Bruxelles Midi) since 1987, on the occasion of the new High Speed Train terminal (HST). Today Bruxelles Midi has grown into the main international railway station serving Thalys,

281 From 1993 onwards, Brussels is increasingly present in Planologisch Nieuws, either in the discussion of large-scale UDPs such as the new HST terminal (Brussels South Station) and the European Quarter or in relation to housing problems. It seemed representative of the effects of a more ‘entrepreneurial’ planning style.


283 Editorial Planologisch Nieuws, 1999, nr. 1; A Plus, nr. 136, 5, 1995; A Plus, nr. 145, 2, 1997, on prestigious new museums under the Bilbao effect.

Eurostar and ICE. Despite its self-claimed model-operation for public-private partnerships, this UDP was widely criticised for the social displacement it generated and for being a pivotal case of planning failure. Due to privatisation and the lack of strong legal planning instruments, the planning of the HST-hub took place in an extremely uncontrolled manner: planning questions were ‘fought’ out in an uncoordinated way, sectorally, and according to the law of the fittest - mostly in favour of private developers. Neither ideologies nor new ‘trends’, but the changed status of public actors would influence the eventual shape, scale and impact of the project.

One such actor was the National Railway Company or NMBS/SNCB (Nationale Maatschappij der Belgische Spoorwegen/Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer Belges). Since the NMBS went through a serious financial crisis and could not count on state support, it decided to seize the major development opportunity by becoming, under the name NV Eurostation, a developer in its own right. The problems around the HST development emerged from the conflict of interest between NV Eurostation and the Brussels Capital Region. Whereas NV Eurostation planned (lucrative!) commercial and office development, the Brussels Capital Region was determined - if necessary, by means of expropriation - to create new housing and functional mixture in order to re-attract residents to the city. To guide such urban renewal operation and ‘take care of’ the consequences of expropriation (re-housing, social assistance) the Brussels Capital Region established a public-private organisation: NV Brussel Zuid. As a result, in order to give shape to public-private partnerships, two public actors, the NMBS/SNCB and the Brussels Capital Region, established new consortia, NV Eurostation and NV Brussel Zuid respectively. Even though these consortia were believed to adopt a proactive, cohesive planning approach rather than a developer-like profit-logic, they proved powerless when faced with yet another consortium: NV Espace Midi, a 100% private consortium established in 1991. Moreover, the expropriation needed for realising the authorities’ plans, became a serious, if not impossible,


287 For details on the ‘private’ behaviour of a ‘public’ company see De Corte, ‘Pokerspel rond een station’, p. 135.

288 Ibid., pp. 135-36. Demolishing entire housing blocks to achieve such new housing (and thus functional mixture) was considered part of such intentions.

289 Ibid., p. 138.
financial burden because most property prices had been raised to astronomic heights through
scandalous speculation.290

The HST project demonstrates how a collaboration between two public actors in
financial and fiscal needs and a powerful private consortium turned into a fight rather than a
partnership. It demonstrates the small impact of public authorities on private speculation and
how the Brussels Capital Region’s ‘offensive (pro-active) urban policy’ hardly addressed
existing populations: being of no fiscal or electoral interest, these populations were simply
‘rehabilitated’.291 Moreover, at a time that architecture competitions had become a decisive
instrument in the development of UDPs, the HST was criticised for not having organised a
single one.292 Additionally, the action groups were also believed to add to the problem by
their refusal to recognise the opportunities generated by UDPs and by sticking to old
preoccupations with ‘the Brussels typology […] our ancient Brussels, our avenues, Victor
Besme, the good old days’.293

Apart from the HST case, the development of the European Quarter would also prove
to be a downright planning failure to which several doctorates and research projects have
been dedicated. Not only did its development take place in a rather corrupt atmosphere; the
inhabitants’ struggles to protect the area as a living environment against the planned mono-
functional office zone have been undervalued by public authorities. Even if a unique
agreement was achieved between inhabitants and private developers, public authorities failed
in their task to defend the public stakes and balance the public and individual interests.294

10.3.3. The unbearable metropolitan dimension of UDPs

The HST project had clearly demonstrated how, in Brussels, UDPs got easily ‘squeezed
between regional rivalries, the Brussels speculation and the demands of the action groups’, as
much as it demonstrated the sheer mediocrity of architecture produced in the ‘Brussels and
Belgian swamp’.295 Moreover the emergence of large-scale UDPs forced cities to reflect on
what it means to be ‘metropolitan’. In Brussels, this would generate the rather perverse

290 Private developers had purchased houses for very low prices by making use of the panic for expropriation that
accompanied the announcement of the project. They then sold the properties to companies within the same holding
as to artificially raise the prices; meanwhile they left the houses to decay for years, until building could start –
Stalenhoef, ‘Pokeren over hoofden heen’.

291 De Corte, ‘Pokerspel rond een station’, p. 140.


293 Ibid., p. 62.

hedendaagse Brusselse legende (Brussels: Brukselbinnenstebuiten, 1993).

295 Loze, ‘Het Nieuwe HST station van Brussel-Zuid’, p. 63-64. Nothing more than an attempt to ‘please’ action
committees and the larger public with “large avenues and tall buildings, but not too tall, fitting within the local 19th
Century [sic] tradition that one wishes to revitalize”’ (p. 63).
colliding of a total aversion of any debate on the metropolitan scale with the enhancement of that metropolitan scale to legitimise public money injections in UDPs.

11. In the meantime, in Flanders: a true urban revolution and architecture emancipation?

11.1. Flanders and the Urban Renaissance

Flanders would respond to the intensified urban renewal of the 1980s by focusing on both social urban renewal and large-scale UDPs. In the wake of the European Urban Renewal Campaign of 1980, Flanders had launched a Flemish campaign in 1980-1982, with an explicit focus on social renewal and citizen participation. 296 Yet, the Flemish Urban Renewal Act of 1988 (Stadsvernieuwingsbesluit), also called the ‘public-private act’, announced a shift from social, neighbourhood-based to more large-scale renewal based on economic attractiveness and public-private partnerships. 297 As such, by the 1990s, urban renewal had entered a new phase. As publications of this period demonstrate, urban renewal had become a major interest but was also received with mixed feelings. For example, since legislation focussed primarily on subsidies for private owners rather than for the most vulnerable groups in society, doubts were raised about how effective social urban renewal was in practice.

In comparison with Brussels, Flanders responded in an altogether different way to the emerging large-scale urban renewal of the late 1980s and 1990s. Two initiatives in particular demonstrate this: the Stad-aan-de-Stroom project in Antwerp, which was the Flemish UDP of that time, and the events around Antwerp 1993 – Cultural Capital of Europe. The importance of both events is demonstrated by their inclusion, as a priority, in the Beleidsnota Antwerpen 1989-1994. 298

The Stad-aan-de-Stroom project established a public-private partnership, in the shape of a non-profit association, but also – and this is very different from Brussels – it attempted to counter planning’s negative image and generate more qualitative spatial


297 Knops, Stadsvernieuwing in beweging, p. 129. Nevertheless, in comparison with other cities (Docklands, Baltimore), Flanders adopted (at least on paper) a still more social variant of urban renewal.

design. By simultaneously generating awareness and attracting investors, *Stad-aan-de-Stroom* showed how planning could simultaneously become a cultural, social and economic activity. For achieving qualitative design, and in line with the *General Structure Plan of Antwerp’s* objective to merge global spatial policy lines with concrete strategic projects, an international architecture competition was organised in 1989-1990. For several reasons the project was considered innovative. Firstly, the competition integrated the development of a vision with the mobilisation of the public through exhibitions, theatre, art, guided tours, conferences, seminars, and press attention. Secondly, the way the public-private partnership was organised allowed a safeguard of public control through a non-profit foundation (which negotiated private and public stakes), a planning group (mandated by public authorities but largely funded by private capital) and a development agency.

The initiative *Antwerp 1993, Cultural Capital of Europe* explicitly used the city as both a stage and a laboratory. In particular the collective Open City aimed at developing a true urban culture with particular attention being paid to the urban everyday. Its activities were organised around three themes - inter-connectedness & complexity, open future, and reading the city – and through three sub-divisions - Studio Open City (reflection), Open City Observatory (exploring the city), and Open City Forum (discussion). Activities included thematic walking tours, films and exhibitions, debates, urban research workshops (for example, on the 19th-century industrial belt), and lecture series. The reflective work, by Studio Open City, would, years later, also prove influential in Brussels’ architectural and urban emancipation.

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301 The *Structure Plan* aimed to develop a global plan for the 19th-century port quarters and an urban design proposal for each of the three project areas: eilandje, kaaien, and het zuid. The initial idea competition selected proposals from amongst others Yves Lion, Manuel de Sola-Morales, Bob Van Reeth, Rem Koolhaas and Toyo Ito.

302 Public control was eased by the fact that most of the land was public property. Vanreusel, ‘*Antwerpen 1990 – “stad aan de stroom”***.

303 *Open City* was founded by Pieter Uyttenhove, graduated at the KUL under Smets and influenced by Bekær – hence the attention for the ‘everyday’, which expressed the social and democratic aspect of *Open City*: ‘because we *all* contribute to the making of our cities’ – Uyttenhove, quoted in Patrick Van Buyten, *Antwerpen Culturele hoofdstad van Europa*, 1993. Het publieke debat omtrent de XIX-eeuwse gordel rond Antwerpen stimuleren*, *A Plus*, nr. 1/1993, nr. 120, pp. 74-76, p. 74.


305 Walking tours on themes such as on patrimony, everyday trajectories, city narratives, and the city-by-night; Lecture series featured amongst others Peter Cook, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Paul Virilio, David Harvey, Manuel Castells, Richard Sennett, Toyo Ito, and Manuel De Sola-Morales.
Despite the no doubt emancipating effects of initiatives such as *Stad aan de Stroom* and *Antwerpen 93* on the architectural and urban culture, *Stad aan de Stroom* was also received with scepticism. It was criticised for being *too* formalist, for being nothing more than a mere ‘urban renaissance sauce’ and for producing ‘pretty plans’ while ‘suffering from social amnesia’. The architecture competition was also criticised for having produced barely realisable proposals and for being non-marketable after all. The planning group stopped its activities on 1 March 1994, officially due to a lack of financial (public) means, but according to the group itself because of insufficient political support and implementation guarantees. As such, *Stad-aan-de-Stroom*, as a best practice for bridging the gap between vision and implementation, public control and private investment, theory and practice, seemed to have fallen through the gap between plan (Antwerp city) and market (owners, developers, investors).

### 11.2. Architecture culture and the ‘Flemish emancipation’

Within a context of political liberalism and an everyday mentality based on the ‘Belgian as individualist’, the established 1970’s and the emerging 1980’s generations of architects had no choice but to practice their talents through private projects, via politically assigned public tenders (rather than competitions), or through an occasional enlightened commissioner such as the BAC Bank who appointed several promising architects to design their new branches. As a consequence, qualitative architecture was fragmented and concealed by the banality of allotment architecture and suffered an overall lack of prestige. Additionally, the Belgian architecture profession has been, since 1939, organised by the *Orde van Architecten*. To protect the profession and the title architect, the *Orde* obliges each building – even a self-constructed single-family house – to be designed and realised by an architect. The outcome of this rule is that the architect is considered a ‘necessary evil’ and, even more perversely, that

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307 The competition’s experimental but quasi-unrealisable proposals were criticised for serving new middle classes rather than existing populations (editorial, *Planologisch Nieuws*, 1991, nr. 1), and for private investors who were not prepared to take the risks linked to such experimental design solutions (Vanreusel, ‘Antwerpen 1990 – “stad aan de stroom”’).


310 *Belgische Arbeiderscoöperatie* (BAC), since 1994 called BACOB Bank, today DEXIA. The BAC commissioned amongst others Stéphane Beel, Georges Baines, Marie Josée Vanhee, and Paul Robbrecht. In the Netherlands, by contrast, young talents could grow much faster into larger (also public) assignments.
certain architects ‘sell’ their signatures to real estate promoters and developers.\footnote{Thus giving the realisation of the project out of hands – Dubois, \textit{Belgio Architettura gli ultimi vent’anni}, p. 22.} In Flanders, large projects such as \textit{Flanders Expo} but also prestigious projects such as the new seats of the Flemish administrations and government in Brussels (after federalisation), all had proved to be a missed opportunity.\footnote{Strauven, ‘De negatie van de eigen bouwcultuur’.} Indeed, the pseudo-gothic \textit{Marquis} building and the \textit{façadism} of the buildings on the \textit{Place des Martyrs} displayed a caricatured, if not cynical attitude towards architectural and urban quality.\footnote{Ibid.; Dubois, \textit{Belgio Architettura gli ultimi vent’anni}, p. 15. An inexpressive design was prioritised over Bob van Reeth’s proposal for the Flemish government at the \textit{Place des Martyrs}. The \textit{Marquis} building by André Jacqmain (Atelier de Genval), 1989.} The Flemish administrations in the North Quarter were not even built by the Flemish authorities but rented.\footnote{Banal, inexpressive \textit{architecture-promuteur} – Conversation with Marc Dubois 26 August 2009.} Early experiments with more ‘politically neutral’ architecture competitions, such as the 1984 WISH competition, proved institutionally too fragile to survive the slightest political change of office.\footnote{The \textit{Wedstrijd Ideeen Sociale Huisvesting} (WISH), initiated by Jo Crépain in 1984 under Minister of Social Housing Buchmann, was only short-lived. Its last (yearly) edition dates already back to 1985.} 

By the late 1980s, the situation started to change. Privacy claims of private clients and the absence of a recognisable architecture ‘movement’ had made Belgian architecture for a long time poorly published and promoted, especially on the international scene.\footnote{The very individual journey of Belgian architects further complicated their collection into ‘architecture movements’ (see the questioned declaration of a \textit{Luikse School} around Charles Vandenhove and Bruno Albert) – Dubois, ‘Individualisme en afkeer van structuren’, p. 18.} The Belgian post-war reality, until way into the 1980s, had been one of indifference, amongst the population, architects and political classes alike.\footnote{Dubois, \textit{Belgio Architettura gli ultimi vent’anni}, pp. 16-17; Marc Dubois, Jonge Architecten in België (Ghent: Stichting Architectuurmuseum, 1986), p. 7.} By the late-1980s, after a long period of neglect, international journals started to develop an interest in Belgian architecture production, and in particular in projects located in the Flemish Region. In 1987, \textit{Archis} dedicated an entire issue to the inventory of about 150 interesting Belgian architecture projects; in 1988, \textit{Rassegna} dedicated an issue to Belgium’s modern architecture of the period 1920-1940; in 1993, the Italian \textit{Tendenza dell’Architettura Contemporanea} series dedicated an entire book to Belgian architecture of the last twenty years.\footnote{Archis, 1987, nr. 9, pp. 1-12: mainly single family houses in Flanders (by Beel, Van Reeth, Baines…). \textit{Rassegna}, nr. 34 (06/1988): included garden cities, individual houses and utopian projects. Dubois’ \textit{Belgio Architettura gli ultimi vent’anni} was published in the series \textit{Tendenza dell’Architettura Contemporanea} and reported on Flanders, Brussels \textit{and} Wallony.} Even if it would still take time for the dispersed Belgian architectural landscape to be fully accepted as a condition \textit{sine qua non} for understanding Belgian contemporary architecture, something nevertheless
appeared to have changed.\textsuperscript{319} It would gradually become clear that Belgian architecture could no longer be depicted by aesthetic quality alone, but also by its pluralism, believed to form a unique and fertile ground for architectural creativity and experimentation. In contrast to the more mainstream architecture and ‘standardised citizenship’ of serial housing projects in the Netherlands, Belgian architects were believed, through their engagement with individual clients, to celebrate the role of both architects and inhabitants, and thus, to engage directly with the everyday.\textsuperscript{320}

Also in the 1980s, the first revolts emerged from within the Flemish architecture community. Luc Deleu taunted the over-deterministic Orde van Architecten by openly selling his signature for one fermette after the other. In 1988, Guillaume Bijl ridiculed, with his Fami-Home installation at the Venice Biennale, the fact that the Belgian pseudo-rural nostalgia and banal housing is legally protected by an architect.\textsuperscript{321} Also in 1988, on the occasion of the exhibition Jonge Architecten in België (De Singel, Antwerp), twenty architects wrote an open letter to the public authorities requesting the de-politicising of public tenders as well as more transparency in architecture commissioning.\textsuperscript{322} Flemish Foundations such as Stichting Architectuurmuseum (S/AM) and the architecture cell of De Singel in Antwerp, delivered an important contribution – through architecture exhibitions, events and publications - to give a face to young Belgian architects.\textsuperscript{323} Prominent architecture critics of the time, including Geert Bekaert, Francis Strauven, and Marc Dubois, would contribute to the historical understanding of Belgian modern architecture through indispensable architectural overview works. Besides, and in contrast to the Brussels’ critics around Culot, these Flemish architecture critics would also promote Belgian contemporary architecture.\textsuperscript{324}

\textsuperscript{319} This change would become apparent with the A+U double issue on Belgian architecture (2003, nr. 392-393), which no longer looked at the houses of Beel, Robbrecht and Daem, Baines… but tried to grasp these individual oeuvres somehow in a larger whole. It aimed to first understand the ‘houses’ (nr. 392) to then get grip on those ‘objects in the urban landscape’ (nr. 393). The issue title ‘driving through Belgium’: projects were often hardly visible because of there small-scale (houses) and dispersion over the countryside and urban fringes.

\textsuperscript{320} For example, the exhibition-village ‘Papeye’ in Aalbeke (near Kortrijk), an initiative of Vlaanderen Bouwt (Vlabo), is composed of Fermettes and villas but also includes 22 dwellings by about ten (more experimental) Flemish architects, invited by Frank Delmulle, and including amongst others Xaveer de Geyter, Beel, and Liebaut – Arjen Oosterman ‘Een huis met rondom tuin. Voorbeeldwijken in Nederland en België’, Archis, 1991, nr. 10, pp. 24-29; Annette Marx and Ady Steketee, ‘Pure architectonische improvisaties van Frank Delmulle’, De Architect, nr. 7/8, July/August 1991, jaargang 22, pp. 24-35.

\textsuperscript{321} Dubois, Belgio Architettura gli ultimi vent’anni, pp. 22-23.

\textsuperscript{322} Dubois, ‘Jonge Architecten in België’, p. 14.

\textsuperscript{323} SA/M was founded in 1984, and would in 2002 be integrated in the VAI. See further.

\textsuperscript{324} Overview works include Geert Bekaert and Francis Strauven’s Bouwen in België 1945-1970; Strauven L’architecture en Belgique 1970-1980; Dubois, Belgio: Architettura gli ultimi vent’anni; and numerous historical works on Art Nouveau and Art Deco (by AAM and the SLA). Strauven vividly criticised the public authorities’ longstanding disinterest in architecture; while Dubois links this to the situation of the architecture profession itself. Other critics of the period include Maurizio Cohen and Joel Claisse (Van Loo, Repertorium van de architectuur in België, p. 93).
In their study of contemporary architecture, Flemish architecture critics, and in particular Geert Bekaert, discovered how the ‘Belgian situation’ with its typical everyday preoccupations and logic of banality, had become a productive force, rather than a mere burden for architectural designs. In the Belgian ‘commonplace’ or gemeenplaats they recognised hidden challenges for architects, namely to place architecture within daily life.

The role of Geert Bekaert was significant for the 1980s ‘Flemish Emancipation’ for three major reasons. Firstly, with the term ‘commonplace’ or gemeenplaats – something trivial and quotidian, but poetic, of which the original strength and meaning is no longer explicit - Bekaert summarised the Belgian situation, its chaos and banality and valorised its impurity over the sterility that one could find in the Netherlands or the French Grands Ensembles.

Secondly, and more polemically, with his 1988 work Architectuur zonder Schaduw, Bekaert addressed the problematic position of contemporary and innovative architecture in the face of too stringent patrimony policies and too conservationist urban ideologies. Finally, as a critic, Bekaert would encourage and support the emerging Flemish talents in the 1980s. He would do so by criticising the Belgian architecture mediocrity and atrocities, not as an academic, but oriented towards architectural practice. Consequently, he would introduce the gemeenplaats also in architecture critique: ‘Apart from the opinion of specialised circles, such as architects and art historians, there exists a general (popular?) opinion, and these two not always correspond’.

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326 Bekaert developed this idea of gemeenplaats already in the 1970s, in his 1975 essay Mensen Wonen, where he linked the concept to Loos’ theories on the user agency in architecture, and to the conviction that ‘architects cannot determine what makes people happy’ hence cannot intervene in people’s way of living - Van der Speeten, ‘Toen architectuur een scheldwoord was’, De Standaard, 18 April 2008. But he implicitly introduced the gemeenplaats already in 1971, in: Bouwen in België 1945-1970; by emphasising the importance of looking beyond the dispersion of the Belgian landscape, in order to appreciate its architecture. Also see Bekaert ‘Belgische Architectuur als gemeenplaats’; Hilde Heynen (ed.), Wonen tussen gemeenplaats en poëzie.


328 Apart from vigorous and numerous contributions (ever since the late 1960s) to Belgian architecture critique, Bekaert was also the ‘godfather’ of Van den Hove, Beel and Van Reeth (Van der Speeten, ‘Toen architectuur een scheldwoord was’), influenced policy makers, and, as part of his sensation campaign with the larger public, he made a series of architecture documentaries for the Belgian national television (BRT) throughout the 1970s and 1980s, together with Jef Cornelis.

11.3. A new architectural movement? A new architecture critique?

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Flemish architecture went through a phase of growing self-confidence and growing awareness of its numerous hidden architectural treasures. This awareness within architecture culture would gradually infiltrate public authorities and generate a real turn from the mid-1990s onwards.

These emerging architecture talents would initially appear as incidents rather than a new generation: because of their still highly individual architectural écriture and because of the lack of publication and critique.\(^\text{330}\) Only gradually, and supported by ‘Belgium specials’ in international journals, national and international expositions, and architecture yearbooks, a new generation or movement of ‘Beautiful Young Gods’\(^\text{331}\) would be recognised in the pluralism and diversity of architectural expressions.\(^\text{332}\) Whereas Francis Strauven recognised a new ‘Flemish movement’ or ‘Flemish School’, the so-called ‘New Simplicity’ (or: Nieuwe Eenvoud), Arthur Wortmann emphasised the individuality and importance of separate œuvres.\(^\text{333}\) Since, for others, these architects had, rather than a style, a pluralism of elements in common, the new face that was given, at last, to the Belgian ‘architectonic no-man’s-land’ was a plural one.\(^\text{334}\) Still others recognised a common urge for a more ‘contemporary’ architectural expression and a re-emphasis on autonomous architecture and aesthetics.\(^\text{335}\) In other words, regardless of the common characteristics of this new generation of young Flemish architects; there was less agreement whether they also formed a new ‘movement’ or ‘style’. Some critics even warned of the risks embedded in the declaration of a movement because the quotidian, considered at the basis of the new movement, had been - though in


\(^{331}\) Bekaert, Hedendaagse architectuur in België.

\(^{332}\) Amongst countless events and publications, we can think of the renewed attention for Belgian-Flemish architecture by international journals such as Archis, Bauwelt, or L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui; the Jaarboeken Architectuur Vlaanderen, published by the Ministerie Vlaamse Gemeenschap; and exhibitions such as: the 1988 exhibition ‘Jonge architecten in België’, Museum voor Sierkunst, Ghent, by Stichting Architectuurmuseum, and the 2001 exhibition ‘Jonge Architecten in Vlaanderen’ at De Singel; ‘architecten van Flandrië’ Architecture Biennale Venise 1991; or ‘Nouvelle architecture en Flandre’ at Arc en Reve, Bordeaux, 1996. Numerous exhibitions and articles were also dedicated to the individual œuvres of this generation, to which one includes Stéphane Beel, Eugène Liebaert, Paul Robbrecht and Hilde Daem, Henk De Smet and Paul Verleule, Marie-José Vanhee, Xaveer de Geyter, Bob Van Reeth, Christian Kieckens, Frank Delmulle, Jo Crépain and Luc Deleu.

\(^{333}\) Francis Strauven, De Rijkdom van de eenvoud. Hedendaagse architectuur in Vlaanderen, exposition catalogue (Brussel: Fondation pour l’Architecture, 1997). Wortmann wondered whether the recognition of such movement is not more based on a personal moral stance than on objective common characteristics in the works – Arthur Wortmann, ‘Architecture in Belgium: from identity to individuality’, Archis, nr. 8, pp. 8-10, p. 9.

\(^{334}\) Doutriaux, ‘Flandre, la nouvelle génération’, p. 83; Dubois, ‘Jonge Architecten in België’, p 17; Dubois, Belgio Architettura gli ultimi vent’anni.

\(^{335}\) Van Loo, Repertorium van de architectuur in België, p. 101. According to Van Loo, the hyper-simplicity, elitist style and building cost points to the difficulty (or impossibility) to integrate such works with the existing situation.
very different register - enhanced by other architects too; because an international recognition of a ‘Flemish School’ might translate its typical down-to-earthiness into a pure formal competition; and because it might deviate attention away from the urgent need for changes in Belgian architecture and urban policies.\textsuperscript{336}

In the wake of the Flemish emancipation, the international architecture scene developed a fascination for the chaotic and organic character of ‘Belgian situations’\textsuperscript{337} and for the Belgian architects’ ‘alchemistic [sic] talents for blending fire and water, the “ugliest” and the “most beautiful”, within a single architecture’.\textsuperscript{338} Belgian architects’ capacity to work in complex and chaotic settings was considered a valuable skill for rehabilitating areas that were difficult and grown-wild, which had already been demonstrated by the regular casting of Lucien Kroll in France as a ‘housing doctor’ and an ‘expert in everyday life’.\textsuperscript{339} But it was also considered a guarantee for liveliness and diversity, which was appreciated by more rationally organised countries such as the Netherlands. Despite such international fascination, a true export of Belgian architecture – similar to the ‘Super Dutch’ – never took place. Belgian architects were commissioned abroad for their individual personalities rather than for their Belgian-ness.\textsuperscript{340} Moreover, international recognition did not necessarily guarantee more national commissions.

But the mounting interest in the Belgian and Flemish situation contained also paradoxes and new challenges. Would the fascination with ‘Belgian Situations’ not fade the more its territory would be organised, its competitions ‘fair’ and its fermette-dwellers and rules-addicted bureaucrats ‘educated’?\textsuperscript{341} Also, what would be the future of Flanders’ newly discovered ‘beauty’ when faced with an emerging scholarly fascination for the everyday aesthetics, banality of highways, fermettes and strip architecture?

Not surprisingly, through the new architectural production deriving from the Belgian quotidian and gemeenplaats, a new style of architecture critique would also emerge. A common denominator of the new generation of critics, including Paul Vermeulen, Maarten


\textsuperscript{337} Willem Jan Neutelings, ‘Belgian situations’, \textit{Archis}, nr. 10, 2000, pp. 60-61.


\textsuperscript{339} Ibid., p. 50; p. 52.

\textsuperscript{340} Most notably Charles Vandenhove and Lucien Kroll. Not all architects responded so successfully to the international context. Whereas Stéphane Beel moved with great difficulty within the Dutch context, Jo Crépain’s office soon started to run largely on Dutch assignments. Van Synghel ‘Made in Belgium’.

\textsuperscript{341} Precisely these elements that had been attractive in the first place – Neutelings, ‘Belgian situations’; Arthur Wortmann, ‘Two houses by De Smet vermeulen and Wim Cuyvers’, \textit{Archis}, nr 10, 2000, pp. 55-59, p. 8.
Delbeke and Christophe Van Gerrewey, is the fact that they were hard to classify as a family or school, and also their connection to Ghent. But more importantly, Bekaert recognised a common characteristic in their more ‘playful’ approach to architecture critique (in contrast to the ‘hot’ critique of the 1960s), and their lucidity and directness (in contrast to critical distance and polemics). Paul Vermeulen did so by adopting himself a hybrid position as theorist and practitioner. Maarten Delbeke, by revaluating so-called ‘popular’ publications focussing on the private house, opened up the idea of architecture as a mere ‘high art’ to more popular architecture media. Christophe Van Gerrewey has experimented with a new ‘style’ for architecture critique in the form of ‘fictional architecture critiques’. Such new architecture critique moreover resonated with a more generally recognisable emergence of an interest in the relationship between architecture and literature, and in the re-validation of the everyday, the real, as a starting point for spatial research.

11.4. Towards new architectural policymaking

Through the changes in architecture culture, and the sensitisation work carried out by Stichting Architectuurmuseum (S/AM) and Architectuurwerking De Singel, since 1984 and

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342 Bekaert, ‘Een Hachelijke Taak’, pp. 12-13. Ghent had become, according to Bekaert, the very epicentre of the new architecture and the new architecture critique. Most architects had studied in Ghent; and it was also the seat of architecture foundations such as S/AM and Vlees & Beton. S/AM was created by Marc Dubois and Christian Kieckens in 1984; Vlees & Beton was a book series initiated by Mil De Kooning, also in 1984. New critics such as Van Gerrewey and Delbeke would publish much of their work in Vlees & Beton: Maarten Delbeke, Paul Vermeulen, Christophe Van Gerrewey Moderne Tijden: Teksten over Architectuur, Vlees & Beton nr. 72, (Ghent: WZW, 2007); Christophe Van Gerrewey, Werkelijkheid zonder weerga: fictionele architectuurkritieken, Vlees & beton nr. 65, (Gent : RUG Vakgroep architectuur en stedebouw, 2004); Maarten Delbeke, Aangenaam verblijf, teksten 1994-1997, Vlees & Beton nr. 32 and 34, (Mechelen: Aa50/cAD, 1997).

343 Delbeke argued that, in a country gaining its architectural quality mainly from private housing projects, one should not trivialise those so-called ‘popular’ publications focussing on the house (and even interior). He recognised opportunities in new hybrid forms of architecture publications such as Joel Claisse, et al., Vlaanderen Nieuwe Architectuur – Flanders New Architecture, Flandre Nouvelles Architectures (Brussels: Priame Éditions, 1997); Marc Dubois and Liesbeth Melis, De compacte woning op prijs gesteld (Bruges: Stichting Kunstboek, 1998); Maarten Delbeke, ‘Wonen in Belgische architectuur’, Archis, no. 8, 1998, pp. 41-47.

344 In the form of ‘fictional architecture critiques’ his writing is fictional - it tells stories – while using architecture at once critically and obviously as a ‘lived décor’ (Van Gerrewey, Werkelijkheid zonder weerga, front cover).


1985 respectively, it would take another decade for Flemish authorities to respond.\textsuperscript{347} In 1994, under impulse of the \textit{Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap}, the first \textit{Yearbook of Architecture in Flanders 1990-1993} was published, and would appear every two years.\textsuperscript{348} In 1995, Flemish Minister Wivina Demeester published the Policy Note ‘Flanders Recognisably Present’, which proved, together with Antwerp 93, that architecture was believed to play a role in the attempts to place Flanders on the world map. In 1999, a Flemish government architect or \textit{Bouwmeester} was installed. And in 2002 a Flemish Architecture Institute (VAI) would be established.\textsuperscript{349}

The instalement of the \textit{Bouwmeester} can be considered a radical policy turn and a ‘great leap forward’ for architecture. Rather than becoming a new instrument to ‘defend’ the architects, major objective of the \textit{Bouwmeester} was to re-emphasise the crucial role of the commissioner, in particular commissioning authorities.\textsuperscript{350} Especially young architects would benefit since they would discover new challenges, through the \textit{Bouwmeester}’s organisation of architecture competitions, which took the form of ‘open calls’ or \textit{open oproep}, and aimed at guaranteeing a more intimate interaction between the client and the architect.\textsuperscript{351} Rather than focusing primarily on architects, the \textit{Bouwmeester} aimed, through such open calls, at the education of (public) commissioners and at the creation of procedures for securing high architectural quality. To do so, the \textit{Bouwmeester} forced a dialogue between the several ministerial cabinets and administrations involved in the design and planning of the built environment, aimed to transform such dialogue into concrete actions and to promote qualified architecture, particularly amongst private developers and the public opinion.\textsuperscript{352}

\textsuperscript{347} S/AM was created by Marc Dubois and Christian Kieckens with the aim of sensitising the wider public to architecture. It operated out of the existing \textit{Sierkunstenmuseum} in Ghent, where it organised architecture exhibitions and events. It was active between 1984 and 1992, and participated in the Venice Biennale of 1991 (\textit{Horror vacui}). The cover of the last S/AM journal saw Sterling visiting S/AM - conversation with Marc Dubois 26 August 2009.

\textsuperscript{348} The \textit{Jaarboeken} were an indirect follow-up of the S/AM. When S/AM stopped its activities in 1992, and Kieckens went back to work in practice, Dubois started to negotiate with the Ministry of Culture (Minister Hugo Weckx), where such idea was received with enthusiasm, also thanks to the fact that one of Dubois’ ex-students was working there at the time - conversation with Marc Dubois 26 August 2009. From the 6th edition onwards (2002-2003), the VAI would take over the publication of the Yearbooks.

\textsuperscript{349} Yearbooks, \textit{Bouwmeester} and VAI were triggered by Wivina Demeester, at the time Flemish Minister of Budget and Patrimony – André Loeckx, ‘Master builder for a rowdy class. Flanders to have a government architect’, \textit{Archis}, 1998, nr. 8, pp. 38-39, p. 39; Pieter T’Jonck, ‘Pending... the Flemish architecture institute’, \textit{Archis}, nr. 10, 2000, pp. 48-54. Under impulse of Demeester, a new policy framework would gradually emerge allowing public authorities, with the help of a \textit{Bouwmeester}, to play a more pro-active partner in the production of architectural quality.


\textsuperscript{351} Heynen and Silverans, ‘Competitions and competitiveness’, pp. 37-38.

\textsuperscript{352} Loeckx, ‘Master builder for a rowdy class’, p. 39.
Through these events, one could see the emergence of more architecture competitions that finally broke with the Belgian tradition of political architecture assignments and were reinforced by the 1997 Law on public tenders. Additionally, the *Ruimtelijk Structuurplan Vlaanderen* (RSV, approved in 1997) and the new Spatial Planning Act of 1999 (replacing the 1962 Planning Act) would be an impulse for more spatial quality.

In 2002, the long-expected *Vlaams Architectuur Instituut* would be installed after a dragged out foundation process. Its foundation had taken place within a context of an up-scaling and usurping of independent architecture foundations into larger, publicly funded constructions. As such, whereas the VAI would pick up on the activities of its predecessor S/AM, the Brussels AAM and the *Fondation pour l’Architecture* would, in 1999, be integrated, together with four other organisations, in the CIVA or *Centre International pour la Ville, l’Architecture et le Paysage*, which was financially supported by the *Commission Communautaire Française*. In contrast to the CIVA, which, through the foundations it included, confessed to a clear ideological colour, the VAI had gone through a longer foundation process that had been obstructed by a search for political neutrality, an attempt to have a broad enough organisational basis to avoid a too well-delineated architecture movement or *fashion* (a problem from which CIVA clearly suffers), and by the doubts and questions regarding its link with existing academic and other research institutes, such as the CIVA. As was the case with the *Bouwmeester*, the VAI was also not intended to be a ‘promotion office’ for architecture. In Bekaert’s view, rather than converting the ignorant public to architectural taste, the VAI was meant to question architecture as a medium, surpass the low/high culture divides, to become an ‘address’, and to finally put Flanders on the world map.


As much as a *détour* to the Urban Renaissance and UDPs helped to understand Brussels’ reception of a neo-liberal planning mood in the 1980s and 1990s, so a *détour* to the Flemish

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354 Apart from the *Fondation pour l’Architecture* (created in 1986), the CIVA also includes the *Fondation Philippe Rotthier pour l’Architecture*, the *Centre Paul Duvignaud de Documentation écologique*; the *Bibliothèque René Pechère* and the *Fondation Victor Gaston Martiny*.

355 T’Jonck, ‘Pending… the Flemish architecture institute’.

architecture emancipation proves instructive in understanding the Brussels architecture situation in the 1990s. By the mid-1990s, when Flanders was making plans to install its first Bouwmeester, Brussels was only starting to effectively fight its demons from the past.\footnote{The optimism about Belgian architecture still referred primarily to the situation in Flanders, not to the ‘depressing Brussels-stories’ - Paul Vermeulen, lecture De Singel 8/9/1998 to inaugurate the \textit{Yearbook Architecture} in Flanders 1996-7; the \textit{Archis} 1998 issue on Belgian Architecture; \textit{A Plus}, Oct/Nov, 5/1998 nr. 154.}

Whereas for Flanders, the Belgian anti-urban policies had resulted in an urbanised landscape of \textit{maisons unifamiliales} or \textit{fermettes}, with their remarkable kitsch and banality, Brussels had suffered an urban exodus, a sharpening socio-economic segregation and a shortage of social housing needed to accommodate its urban poor.\footnote{In 2009, only 7.7\% of the total housing stock is social housing. The shortage in social housing - according to the NAPincl-indicator, comparing the number of households on the waiting list with the available social housing units - is in Brussels worsening from 65.2\% in 2007 to 78.4\% in 2009 - Observatorium voor Gezondheid en Welzijn Brussel, \textit{Welzijnabarometer}, p. 57.} However, instead of dealing with such issues, Brussels had seemingly cherished first and foremost its very own typology of high-rise office towers: ‘an architecture of profit and rare brutality born from a marriage between architects and promoters’.\footnote{Dubois in Doutriaux. ‘Flandre, la nouvelle génération’, p. 81.} If anything was lost in this process, it was investment in architectural and urban quality, a loss that was reinforced by the uncritical attitude adopted by the so-called protectors of architecture, the Orde van Architecten - who claimed that ‘we must promote architecture, but it is not our job to be critical’\footnote{Fauconnier in Dubois. ‘Caprice des Dieux’, p 16. When the Orde celebrated its thirty years existence on the 1993 ‘Architecture Day’ dedicated to the theme ‘Is Brussels still making a botch-up of it?’, it remained silent about the corrupt real estate development in Brussels and even dared to declare the ICC building, the symbol of corrupt and anti-urban architecture, as top-architecture, while dismissing Jean Nouvel’s alternative proposal as ‘extremely un-Brussels’.} - and by the conservatism of the Fondation pour l’Architecture.

If Walloon architects had always looked south for inspiration, the Flemish movement had been strongly influenced by Dutch architecture and planning.\footnote{Wallony was influenced by the Italian Tendenza and Rossi, and the 1968 French Marxism – Doutriaux, ‘Flandre, la nouvelle génération’. p 85; Dubois. \textit{Belgio Architettura gli ultimi vent’anni}. pp. 38-42.} In Brussels, the meeting point of both cultures, the urban debate was torn between an anxiety to deal innovatively with newly emerging urban realities, and a cramped dedication to urban renovation. A desire for ambition, innovation and progress would collide with the dream of a picturesque city of quartiers and the deeply rooted ‘fear of the new’. That this debate had often been settled in favour of the latter can be explained by the powerful entanglement of the \textit{Reconstruction de la Ville} ideas in the many layers of the Brussels’ debate (as discussed already in detail), but also by the fact that Brussels was still haunted by the unforgettable ravages of Bruxellisation. Additionally, ambitious projects and theoretical studies for Brussels \textit{did} exist, but they were hardly translated into practice. They were either insufficiently inscribed in a \textit{global} vision, or,
as in the case of Luc Deleu’s TGV Airline, they hardly triggered discussion at policy level.\textsuperscript{362} Moreover, as was painfully demonstrated by the 50 Years of Architecture in Brussels Exhibition, powerful architectural proposals \textit{did} exist but remained unrecognised.\textsuperscript{363}

In a context where \textit{any} new intervention risks being evaluated, by definition, as a future disaster, the ‘will to produce greatness’ had remained, ever since Poelaert, ‘a constant torment’ for contemporary Brussels’ architects.\textsuperscript{364} Because this ‘crisis of the new’ was moreover confronted with Brussels’ socio-spatial segregation, socio-economic crisis, and with a liberalising urban economy using architecture and urban renewal as a tool to (only partially!) address this crisis, the two competing architectural branches could in fact be interpreted as a French-Marxist critical approach (the engaged architects) versus a post-critical ‘go with the flow’ attitude (architects working largely with their own set of tools). However, as the examples of Lakensestraat, \textit{KBC}, and other realisations have shown, it was highly questionable whether ‘the critical’ was still residing on the Marxist side of the line. Hilde Heynen and André Loeckx have described this accurately as the ‘middle-class city of Rossi and Culot’ versus ‘the city of Koolhaas, the city of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century propelled on the waves of globalisation’.\textsuperscript{365}

By the mid-1990s, the struggles to emancipate from both Brussels’ abominable way to \textit{penser la ville} (largely in the hands of promoters) and the \textit{Reconstruction de la Ville} heritage with its pervert side-effects (an underground flagship museum! \textit{Façadism}!), would reach a climax. Not only had the more contemporary (Flemish) architecture movement started to penetrate the thick ramparts of Brussels historic core; but artistic and activist actions would also trigger a new urban debate: a new, more hands-on way to \textit{faire la ville} would challenge the \textit{penser la ville} legacy. Moreover, in 1995 the first integrative development plan for the Brussels Capital Region was approved: the \textit{Gewestelijk Ontwikkelingsplan} (GewOP) or \textit{Plan Régional de Développement} (PRD). As such, whereas Flanders had revolutionised its architectural no man’s land by explicating its architectural treasures, Brussels would first and foremost revolutionise the \textit{urban} question.

\textsuperscript{362} Vandenbreeden, ‘Station Europa Centraal. De kracht van het visionaire’.

\textsuperscript{363} Organised in 1989 by the \textit{Orde van Architecten}. The included work of students and young graduates confirmed that interesting work did exist but did not make it into the Brussels reality – F. Nizet, ‘50 jaar architectuur te Brussel’, \textit{A Plus}, nr. 106, 1/1990, p. 11. The catalogue argued for a re-appreciation of architecture and a radical break with the bad reputation of Brussels as a city of destruction and decay, while it proposed as \textit{solutions}: re-structuring, functional mixture, reconversion, neighbourhood revalidation and more living quality (intro by Picqué).


\textsuperscript{365} Heynen and Loeckx, ‘Studio Open City’, p. 49; and see De Meulder, ‘Molenbeek, or what became of the welfare state’. 
13. From the ‘Brussels condition’ to contemporary architecture

The Brussels architecture debate, increasingly aware of a typical ‘Brussels condition’, struggled to come to terms with its Reconstruction de la Ville heritage. The ‘Brussels condition’ referred to the fact that any transformation of the cityscape would meet opposition and controversy; to the subsequent stringent architectural regulations generating ‘building permission architecture’ and façadism rather than meaningful contemporary architecture,\(^{366}\) to the fact that architects were forced to work in a ‘consensus system’, requiring ‘easy going’ architecture that can satisfy the numerous involved actors, and that architects were treated as mere draughtsmen by private, sometimes even public actors. By emphasising the ‘Brussels condition’, it would become apparent that architects were not to be blamed for everything that went wrong, and that accusing them would be ‘barking up the wrong tree’.\(^{367}\) Such questions of course resonated within the broader international concern of whether the ’68 movements had not been commercialised, put at the service of quick profits, and become ‘a robbery of and limitation to the creative power of architecture’.\(^{368}\)

13.1. In search for contemporary architecture in 1990’s Brussels

The generation of 1990’s Brussels architects would, despite the constraints of Brussels’ urban policies and action committees, pick up the challenge to make a non-consensus design and to explore the tension between modernity and aesthetic desire on the one hand, and place and context on the other. Since it was gradually becoming clear that modern typologies could be integrated in traditional urban contexts, and that user-, patrimony- and context-friendly space should no longer exclude a modern vocabulary, architects could, at last, start to emancipate ‘from renovation to architecture’.\(^{369}\) This is perhaps best shown by the overview work Bruxelles Ville Nouvelle: Architectures 1989-1995, the first work published by Prisme Éditions, a Brussels publisher founded by Liliane Knopes in 1995, dedicated to contemporary architecture and, not unimportantly, publishing in three languages (French, Dutch, Dutch

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\(^{367}\) Ibid., p. 95; and Joel Claisse, ‘Brussels, Architecture, Public Space, and Citizenship’ in: Bruxelles Ville Nouvelle, pp. 18-20, p. 20.


\(^{369}\) Pierre Loze, ‘Van renovatie tot architectuur. Ontmoeting met Pierre Blondel’, A Plus, April/May, 2/1995, nr. 133, pp. 39-47; also see Vanbeveren, ‘Overzicht van de hedendaagse tendenzen’, p. 137. Examples include the renovation of La Bellone by René Greisch and Laurent Ney; and the renovation of the Kaaï Studios by Luc Maes.
The foundation of *Prisme Éditions* and the publication of *Bruxelles Ville Nouvelle* coincided with the publication of two works (discussed earlier) of the *Reconstruction de la Ville* movement: the AAM’s *Handboek* and the Fondation Roi Baudouin’s *Charter*. In contrast to these works, *Bruxelles Ville Nouvelle* adopted an explicitly optimistic and progressive attitude: ‘we must not be afraid of originality and creativity’.


If, in Flanders, architectural treasures had been discovered as hidden fragments scattered over the urbanised landscape, so *Bruxelles Ville Nouvelle* argued that contemporary architecture did exist in Brussels, though often modest in scale or even invisible to the public. The 1990’s architecture production could be considered a series of rather small but catalytic interventions refusing to sacrifice their identity and contemporary nature for the sake of populism or nostalgia. It is in such ‘small interventions and small events’ that Maurizio Cohen would also recognise new possibilities for architecture, even more so because architectural innovation can, in Brussels, not be implemented through abstract theories or models, but - in line with Bekaert’s work on the *gemeenplaats* – can only emerge from the ‘Brussels condition’ itself – a conclusion Cohen would confirm with his later work on architecture within Neighbourhood Contracts.

Whereas iconic, prestigious architecture in a late-modernist, sometimes minimalist styles, could be found in the Brussels periphery and in particular the new ‘office avenues’ such as the *Boulevard de la Woluwe* and the *Boulevard du Souverain*, the city centre had produced contemporary architecture almost solely around the *Rue Dansaert*. From the mid-1980s onwards, Flemish private entrepreneurs had opened avant-garde fashion boutiques in the *Rue Dansaert* in an exclusive-trendy style: patrimony-friendly but with an industrial, loft-like architecture, a trend that would be followed by the bars and restaurants emerging in its wake.

Notable examples included Marie-José Van Hee’s *Comme des Garçons* shop and the

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374 Doucet, ‘Brussels Dansaert Quarter. The *Soft* Generation’.
realisations by Peter Cornelis for the Stijl boutiques.375 Whereas both the Dansaert
development and the corporate architecture of the periphery demonstrate that the few
examples of contemporary architecture were stimulated by private investors, the Dansaert
projects additionally demonstrated an important Flemish influence in the creation of
contemporary architecture. Several contemporary projects of that period were built by
‘imported’ Nieuwe Eenvoud architects such as Paul Robbrecht, Hilde Daem and Marie- Josè
Van Hee (Huikens Gallery and House Meert), Vincent Van Duysen (Natan shops), Poponcini &
Lootens (Vlaamse Poort project), and Eugeen Liebaut (Théâtre Plateau).376 On the ‘French
side’ of the debate, the library of human sciences by Art & Build would be considered
exemplary for the 1990’s shifts in Brussels architecture: rather than typologically or
morphologically integrating with the urban fabric, the building behaves like an autonomous
object, a modern monument.377

13.2. An architecture theory for Brussels?

In the wake of the Flemish architecture emancipation, Brussels critics like Pierre Loze blamed
Flemish critics such as Geert Bekaert and Marc Dubois for marginalising the Walloon and
Brussels architecture scene. In Hedendaagse Architectuur in België, Bekaert had indeed
strongly focussed on the new Flemish architecture. Yet, these critics defended their
predominant interest in the Flemish scene with the fact that the international press had
developed a growing interest in Flemish architecture and that only Flemish architects -
Georges Baines, de Geyter, and Stéphane Beel - had been nominated for the European
Union’s Mies van der Rohe Price. The neglect of Brussels’ architecture was motivated by the
fact that ‘figures such as Montois, Jaspers, and Jacqmain have worked in a completely wrong
way in Brussels over the last couple of years [and that] when one looks at the Brussels
architectural scene – except for Samyn - one cannot be surprised that abroad there is no
interest in this grey mediocrity’.378

Apart from such French/Flemish disputes, debates would also emerge – in Brussels
and in a country where the ‘public at large’ prefers the pastiche of fermettes - regarding the

375 Van Hee’s Comme des Garçons project was the only Brussels project included in Dubois, Jonge Architekten in
Belgie, p. 15, and see pp. 62-63.

376 Other new architecture of the time included the restaurant La Manufacture (De Smedt and Cols), the Van
Backlé Opticien (Martine De Maeseneer), the ULB library of human sciences (Art & Build), ULB Medicine
Faculty Auditorium (Philippe Samyn), an apartment building in Rue des Chartreux and Mogador (Pierre Blondel).
See also Loze, et al., Bruxelles Ville Nouvelle.


‘client’ of the architecture critic. Beyond the French/Flemish disputes, Maurizio Cohen recognised a specific challenge for both architecture theory and practice and an alternative to the new-versus-traditional debate, in Brussels’ small but creative interventions. Because of the particular ‘Brussels condition’, the emerging international movement of innovative, post-critical, go-with-the-flow architects would not land as easily in Brussels as it would in cities like London, Amsterdam or even Antwerp. Due to Brussels’ sharp socio-spatial segregations, its anti-innovative tradition and everyday scepticism, such architecture would be associated with gentrification and dismissed for its grotesque and fruitless attempts to lift the city out of despair. That the shiny aluminium façade of Poponcini & Lootens’ waterfront residences Vlaamse Poort, was not deciphered as the ‘optimistic vision for the future’ the architects had in mind, but was instead baptised boîte de conserves by the Brusselians, demonstrates that, indeed, architectural innovation can, in Brussels, only emerge from the ‘Brussels condition’. It also demonstrates that the search for the raison d’être of an architecture production that neither ‘heals’ nor ‘brands’ - but is in the end considered utterly ‘unnecessary’, even ‘unwelcome’ - was far from completed.

14. The Brussels Revolution or the revenge of the metropolis

14.1. The occupation of Hôtel Central

With the emergence of small-scale but significant contemporary architecture, the publication of Bruxelles Ville Nouvelle, and the awareness that one can only deal with Brussels through a thorough understanding of the Brussels’ everyday and the ‘Brussels condition’, the mid-1990s saw a change in the Brussels architecture experience. Through such architectural emancipation struggles, Brussels’ debate on penser la ville, would reach a peak. Whereas penser la ville had always referred to the local development of inner-city quarters through the method of space embellishment and the use of typologies from the past, an alternative was now formulated. This new movement defended the development of an overall vision and an approach that was closer to artist interventions and experimentation - in line with Antwerp 93.

379 Kroll criticised Bekaert’s Hedendaagse Architectuur in België for being ‘as interesting as a Baedeker for tourist-architects ... the best of Readers Digest’ and for re-emphasising the architectural object while avoiding the most crucial question about ‘who pulls the strings that make architects move’ – Kroll, ‘lezersbrief’, A-Plus April/May, 2/1996, nr. 139, p. 86.

380 De Meulder, ‘Molenbeek, or what became of the welfare state’, p. 34. The 1993 Vlaamse Poort project is located along the canal, in prolongation of the already gentrified Rue Dansaert. It was, as a PPS (GOMB) project, hoped to attract middle classes in the popular, ghetto-like area of Molenbeek. The architects chose for aluminum for the façade for it referred to the area’s industrial past and symbolised, in reference to an airplane wing, an optimistic vision for the future, in line with the GOMB’s urban renewal policies (see http://www.polo-architects.be/polo/flash/content.asp?struct_id=344&pagetype=document&language_id=2&site=polo&pagecount=1 [last accessed 17/02/2009]).
Whereas the ‘old school’ of *penser la ville* was represented by Culot, the AAM and the *Fondation pour l’Architecture* – celebrating in 1996 its tenth anniversary with a ‘retro’ exposition on Brussels Art-Déco - the new movement emerged during the occupation of *Hôtel Central*.

In 1995, *Stichting/Fondation Pied de Biche/Open Deur*, held an epochal campaign in the heart of Brussels (near *La Bourse* and the *Rue Dansaert*) by squatting a vacant housing block destined to become a monolithic hotel complex. The *Hôtel Central* action aimed at creating awareness about the condition of the Brussels inner city – full of abandoned sites, deserted, uninhabitable. The time seemed ‘right’ to come to action: the Brussels’ authorities were preparing a regional development plan (the GewOP/PRD), and several cultural organisations had blurred the boundaries between ‘high culture’ and everyday urban life. For example, the theatre company *Dito Dito* worked with local rappers, and the *Beursschouwburg*, a theatre located in front of *Hôtel Central*, had shown an interest in life outside the theatre by setting performances in the surrounding urban fabric: in the neighbourhood, the street, even launderettes. Moreover, the *Beursschouwburg* published its programme in French and Dutch, which was quite revolutionary at the time.

*Hôtel Central* action involved artists, activists and intellectuals, all sorts of local organisations and neighbourhood groups - including the new foundation *Habitat Central*, but also established groups such as ARAU and Bral - and lasted for ten days. For several reasons, the project would become a catalyst in the Brussels’ rethinking of *penser la ville*. Rather than *penser la ville* through theoretical project-manifestoes (as did the AAM), it proposed a much more down-to-earth and concrete *faire la ville*.

Firstly, it was a catalyst due to its immediate effect. It managed to welcome 5,000 visitors, to make 120 organisations sign a manifesto, and to receive significant local, national and international media attention. Thanks to the foundation of *Fondation/Stichting Habitation Central*, which combined activism with expertise and the negotiation with promoters, the city and associations, the *Hôtel Central* building has been, at least partly, ‘rescued’.

Secondly, its role as a catalyst resided in its *constructive* way of *faire la ville*, namely by shifting the ‘Bruxello-negativism into Bruxello-positivism’. *Hôtel Central*’s achievement was to dare to turn the dark pages of 1970’s and 1980’s Brussels. And dark they were! After the decision that the EU would stay in Brussels, promoters had started to look for locations to build hotels and other EU support functions, and discovered the city centre as the

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381 Patrick Moyersoen, lecture ‘*Hôtel Central*’, 8 may 2008, Ibai Series *Le deuxième tournant*, Recyclart Brussels.

382 Ibid., The housing bloc today includes, apart from the Marriott Hotel, at least also some residential and commercial functions.

ideal setting, with its numerous opportunities, read: vacancies or cancer spots. Whereas the avant-garde fashion boutiques had chosen the area for similar motivations – large surfaces available for dumping prices – they exercised an immediately positive effect on the quarter by renovating buildings and by attracting a more avant-garde public. This was in contrast to the profit-oriented developers, who speculated with the abandoned buildings by letting them further decay. By the mid-1990s, the Brussels Pentagon had become a true ‘free state Brussels’ and a ‘city of voids’. What Hôtel Central did is turn this image into one of a ‘city to re-conquer’, which, according to Patrick Moyersoen, one of the key players in Hôtel Central, was characterised by four elements. Firstly, a new spirit of faire la ville; secondly, the creation of a more positive image; thirdly, an activism that was triggered more from the artistic-cultural world than was the case with 1970’s political and ideological urban activism; and fourthly, an activist model that responded to very clearly defined stakes.

Thirdly, the Hôtel Central occupation would be a true catalyst because it lived through several other projects and organisations that would play a central role in re-thinking the Brussels urban question. As a result, from the mid-1990s, ‘old school’ events would be increasingly paralleled by new, more activist, artistic and above all, more positive and prospective, urban initiatives. ‘Old school’ events such as the ISURU urbanism seminars and the ‘Urban Renaissance’ exhibition at the Fondation pour l’Architecture would be paralleled by urban cultural events organised by the Beursschouwburg, which had been involved in the Occupation of Hôtel Central. The Beursschouwburg would act as a host of the new faire la ville debate: breakfast debates on multi-cultural life in ‘Brussels one city’, an exhibition by Brussels’ photographer Marie-José Plissart, a colloquium on the International Rogier Centre and the future of the Rogier Square, and the promotion of urban rather than mere architectural solutions for the city. The Beursschouwburg was in fact symptomatic for a whole array of new initiatives emerging from the artistic and cultural scene that specifically addressed the

384 Moyersoen, lecture ‘Hôtel Central’.

385 Ibid. Precisely because the problems and stakes were so clear and extreme, a concrete and focussed attack could be organised.

386 For example, Nathalie Mertens would turn a vacant urban site into a vegetable garden (Stichting/Fondation Legumen). The Stichting/Fondation Sens Unique would for ten days occupy a vacant land between the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council of Europe to protest against the pressure of the European Institutions on this originally popular neighbourhood. In a huge circus tent employees and authorities would be invited to meet local residents. Also numerous projects would emerge from the ‘Urban Movement’ VrijstadBXLVillelibre (such as Cinema Nova). In 1997, CityMined was established, which would remain, with initiatives such as PleinOpenAir, MapRAC, Bara-ke and Limitelimit, an important actor in the urban debate: in Brussels, but also in Barcelona and London. More details follow in chapter 3.

387 ISURU seminars: on ‘urban patrimony’ in 1996, organised by Jean De Salle; on the planning of the North Quarter and the strategic management of cities, in 1997, by Evert Lagrou and Bernard Bermils respectively; on Municipal Development Plans and Bijzondere Bestemmingsplannen, in 1997, by De Salle and Simons respectively. The ‘Urban Renaissance’ exhibition at the Fondation ran from 24/6-17/8/1997 and defended design ‘according to the architectural and urban principles on which the most beautiful cities of Europe are based’ (A Plus, June/July, 3/1997, nr. 146, p. 107).
Brussels urban condition. Such new initiatives would either emerge in the immediate wake of *Hôtel Central* – such as the ‘squatting’ Cinema Nova, the public space and vacancy actions by Citymined, and the socio-cultural project Recyclart – or would be an outcome of ‘Brussels 2000, Cultural Capital of Europe’. With Brussels 2000, and its theme ‘the city and the urban challenge(s)’, the energy generated throughout the 1990s would reach a climax. Many artistic and cultural urban projects that would see the light within the frame of Brussels 2000 would remain active in its wake and develop a particular urban emphasis. Many of these projects would turn into foundations, apply for structural funding and hence keep the urban debate alive, even today. The multitude of such organisations involved in the urban debate would be so impressive that they were considered by some as a substitute for the failing urban debate within more official or disciplinary circles, and would be coined ‘Shadow Planning’.

In 2004, the Dutch office Urban Unlimited published a research report ‘The Shadow City’ based on a comparable study between free-zones in Brussels and Rotterdam. Even if Urban Unlimited has meanwhile tested Shadow Planning in many other cities, including New York, Amsterdam and Berlin, Brussels remains ‘a prototype of an open network-city that deals in a particular and effective way with its conflicts’. It is interesting to see that even exhibitions on a very sensitive topic such as the ‘The Century of the Office’ exhibition, organised at the Fondation pour l’Architecture in 1999, seemed to have grown out of the Brussels urban doom scenarios. In the accompanying catalogue, Christian Lasserre pleads for an urbanism that anticipates the development of offices in a positive way, so that offices can finally become a ‘contemporary monument rather than a reminder of the past’. However, one should not celebrate too soon: in Lasserre’s (and New Urbanism’s) interpretation, these monuments are not supposed to express individual architectural creativity, but ‘expressions of the collective will’.

**14.2. Brussels’ ‘alternative’ way of faire la ville**

Even if the *Hôtel Central* actions had emerged from urban culture and activism, architecture schools had also been involved, which would directly or indirectly influence a generation of

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388 More details follow in chapter three.


391 Ibid., p. 8.
teachers and teaching. For architects, this new urban activism opened a unique and alternative way of faire la ville, for it integrated a prospective, contemporary vision with a concern for the Brussels socio-economic and cultural everyday reality; and for it announced an architectural gesture that was more urban and everyday-sensitive than aesthetic or symbolic (as was the case with the Boîte de conserves).

One such alternative way was explored by Studio Open City, in the form of research-by-design workshops on the Brussels Canal Zone and its post-industrial vacancies. In line with earlier explorations within the framework of Antwerp 1993, Studio Open City would now also combine project proposals with analyses and theoretical essays. In the workshops, students and teachers from various architecture schools and backgrounds (Belgian but also from the AA and Columbia University) addressed the disciplinary question of how ‘to discover ways in which architecture and urban planning can be used to develop meaningful answers to [contemporary metropolitan] situations’. As such, no matter how diverse the formulated responses - from ethnographic field research, involving minimal interventions, to powerful architectural interventions creating strong images - a designerly approach to research on the city remained central to this question. Their work on Brussels would crystallise in the publication A City on the Move (1998) and the first Geert Bekaert Award for architectural research and reflection, in 1999.

An alternative way was also recognised in the La Rue/Fonderie initiative that attempted to work with the Brussels reality by combining a scientific background (La Fonderie) with community work (La Rue), and in Hôtel Central’s merging of a theoretical basis (critique of vacancy) with urban activism. Such events seemed to offer architects and urbanists the opportunity to ‘play a similar role as autonomous specialists and committed activists’.

A possible alternative way could also be found in the participation of the Fondation Roi Baudouin in the urban debate, as we have seen, through publications, competitions and colloquia. The Tracé Royale competition, organised in 1995, was considered one of the first attempts to concretely do something about the Brussels urban situation. It is therefore a pity that such an influential organisation - one of the few managing to get things done in the Brussels jungle – stuck so faithfully to the embellishment tradition in public space design.

392 Heynen and Loeckx, ‘Studio Open City’, p. 42.
393 Ibid., p. 49.
395 De Meulder, ‘Molenbeek, or …’, p. 37.
396 Heynen and Loeckx, ‘Studio Open City’, p. 49.
14.3. A new ‘City Project’ for Brussels – the GewOP I

In the same year of the occupation of Hôtel Central, the first Regional Development Plan for Brussels was approved (GewOP/PRD I). This plan, approved under socialist government (Charles Picqué), was important because of its integration of a City Project (Projet de Ville or Stadsproject), which intended to generate a more integrated planning approach, protect housing, and avoid any further invasion of office development. However, since the GewOP/PRD was, in contrast to Land Use Plans, not-binding – but instead was a set of guidelines for the future, and open to interpretation – its power was limited. As a consequence, by the time of its publication, land use legislation would still be based on the 1979 plan. This would change in 1998, when the Regional Land Use Plan (GBP/PRAS I) would be approved, also under a socialist government. Updated versions of these plans (GBP/PRAS II and GewOP/PRD II) would, in 2000 and 2001 respectively, be developed under a liberal government (François-Xavier de Donnéa).³⁹⁷

15. A legitimate urban optimism, but still a long way to go.

Several publications and events in the wake of Hôtel Central expressed how Brussels, in contrast to Flanders, where actions primarily addressed the ‘stone-dead architecture’, chose to tackle the ‘abandoned urbanity’.³⁹⁸ The staggered rise of architecture competitions moreover proved that policy makers had also been ‘contaminated’.

However, despite such a positive, new urban mood, the Reconstruction de la Ville thinkers were anything but eager to surrender. Already the first edition of the Dag van de Architectuur, organised by the Orde van Architecten on 10 October 1993 to celebrate its thirtieth anniversary, had heralded the struggle to generate architecture awareness amongst the general public. The Brussels buildings had been selected by the Fondation pour l’Architecture for their so-called evidence of the debate between (bad!) large-scale development and (good!) modest renovation projects.³⁹⁹ Also, a debate organised by A Plus on the occasion of the Centrale Toren competition, expressed the divergence in opinions on how to treat the hated remnants of Brussels’ destructive, modernist past.⁴⁰⁰ Some suggested simply asking ‘what is the problem, doctor?’ to finally move beyond feelings of guilt or the

³⁹⁷ The second GewOP would also lose the only legally binding part it included, namely map 7 about Land Use.

³⁹⁸ De Meulder, ‘Old England’, p. 89.

³⁹⁹ The visiting tours organised in Brussels express the preoccupations with large-scale projects (Europe) and small-scale architectural quality (modest reconversion projects) - see also A plus, nr. 4/1993, nr. 123, pp. 18-20.

desire to restore a coherence that in fact never existed; still others argued for a typological analysis and integration into the surrounding context.

15.1. The on-going influence of the Reconstruction de la Ville

That the emancipation from Brussels’ pact with the past was not at all plain sailing was also demonstrated by the attempts to reorganise the Fondation pour l’Architecture. Catherine David, the new director appointed in 1997, would meet serious trouble in emancipating the Fondation from the Reconstruction legacy that had been maintained by Maurice Culot and former directors Caroline Mierop (1986-1992) and Diane Hennebert (1992-96). David’s intentions to establish a new architecture era, through the competition for the new CIVA building, painfully demonstrated that the Fondation pour l’Architecture was in reality a Fondation contre l’Architecture. The competition was dominated by Culot & Co; and Catherine David would see no other option than to withdraw within a year of her assignment.401

The emergence of architecture competitions would also show that there was still a long way to go if Brussels was to become really emancipated. Not only would the ‘enlightened’ Flemish participation in competitions not necessarily guarantee prestigious architecture; competitions were also often still marked strongly by the context-driven, urban integration and modesty promoted by the Reconstruction de la Ville. The ‘Impératrice Competition’ organised by the City of Brussels in the period 1997-1999 is a good example of how glorious ambitions can turn into uninspiring projects. With this competition, Henri Simons, Councillor for Urban Planning, Participation and Housing Coordination of the City of Brussels, aimed to create a new look for the Carrefour de l’Europe, while at the same time use this opportunity to develop a format of architectural competition in order to create ‘an architectural and urban planning competition culture’.402 Of the seven architects selected to develop a design proposal, the Jury assigned two finalists to work out a preliminary project.403 As a result, even if the proposal by Xaveer de Geyter Architects (XDGA) was selected for being different, for its ‘intelligent, forward-looking approach’, the Technical Committee

401 Raymond Balau, ‘Fondation contre Architecture’, A Plus, October/November 5/1997, nr. 148, pp. 28-29. Of the 96 submissions, including Bernard Tschumi, six proposals were withheld, all ‘in line with’ Culot; the competition was dominated by Culot, Krier and the AAM.


403 Ibid., based on which the City Council was then free ‘to chose which architect should complete the entire assignment’ – ‘Extract of the panel of judges’ report of 6-7 October 1997’.
appointed by the City Council, would select the other winning entry, namely the more mainstream, realistic proposal - feasible for the short term - by Alain Sarfati.\textsuperscript{404}

Several architecture competitions of the second half of the 1990s would moreover involve Hervé Hasquin, Brussels Minister of \textit{Aménagement du Territoire, des Travaux Publics et des Communications} between 1995 and 1999.\textsuperscript{405} The role of Hasquin, who had also written the preface to \textit{Bruxelles Ville Nouvelle}, was important since he would, through the 1997 competition for the new buildings for the Fondation pour l’Architecture/CIVA, get into close contact with the movement around Culot and the AAM: an influence that would affect much of the 1990’s architecture competitions. In 1997, the Fondation pour l’Architecture would, with Culot as president of the Jury, organise a competition for the building of a Walloon representation in Brussels: the Espace Wallonie. Even if the project was commissioned by the Walloon government, it is important to know that Hasquin was at the time, apart from Brussels Minister, also the president of the Collège de la Commission Communautaire Française (CoCoF), which is the representation of the French-speaking Belgian community in Brussels, in charge of, among other things, relations between Brussels and Wallony.\textsuperscript{406} If we know that the winning project by Atlante-Axion-Bagon was selected for its integration with its context and the elegant use of Walloon materials,\textsuperscript{407} a Culot-ally is clearly not far away. Another competition organised in 1997 under Hasquin, in collaboration with the BCR and EU, for the public space design of the European Quarter, would take place in questionable circumstances.\textsuperscript{408}

After all, the most contemporary and innovative architecture could be found within more small-scale, almost hidden competitions such as within the frame of Neighbourhood Contracts, an urban renewal instrument installed in 1993 in order to deal with Brussels’ deprived inner-city areas; or within competitions organised by municipalities, and in particular the municipality of Schaarbeek. One of the most remarkable competitions was the one for the Maison des Citoyens in Schaarbeek: for its welcoming of innovative and controversial architecture; for its multi-disciplinary jury; and for the fact that it was one of the first initiatives where the new way of faire la ville would finally find its way into the

\textsuperscript{404}Ibid., ‘Extract of the technical report of 4 May 1998’. It reports on this decision, on the contract signed on 4/12/1998, but does not motivate the decision.

\textsuperscript{405}From 1995-1999: Ministre de l’Aménagement du Territoire, des Travaux Publics et des Communications de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale, and Président du Collège de la Commission Communautaire Française. From 1999-2004 he would become President of the CIVA.

\textsuperscript{406}The competition was called Une vitrine de la Wallonie à Bruxelles, for building a Maison de la Wallonie à Bruxelles, or Espace Wallonie.

\textsuperscript{407}A Plus, February/March, 1/1998, nr. 150, p. 74.

\textsuperscript{408}International competition 1997, by Hasquin. Art and Build would be withheld (corruption of the juries; distribution of incomplete information to candidates) - A Plus, June/July, 3/1998, nr. 152, p. 56 and A Plus, February/March, 1/1998, nr. 150, p. 73.
established channels of architecture production. Another, and probably the most daring expression of the new faire la ville, was the competition organised for the renovation of the Beursschouwburg. The Beursschouwburg’s long-standing urban consciousness, reinforced by its role in the 1995 occupation of Hôtel Central, resonated with this competition. Commissioned by the Flemish Minister of Culture, a critical and atypical jury was composed, including the academic André Loeckx (KUL), Katrien Vandermarliere (who would become the first director of the VAI), Paul Vermeulen (KUL, Smet-Vermeulen), engineer René Greisch, and Patrick Moyersoen, who had been, as activist, involved in Hôtel Central. In comparison with the Maison des Citoyens and the Beursschouwburg, the Wijnpaleis Competition was again very traditional in its jury-formation - mainly OCMW officials (commissioner), administrators, two inhabitants, but not one single architect – demonstrating the difficulty of coming up with something radically new in Brussels. Despite the hit-and-miss successes of architecture competitions, their increasing importance could be understood from the 1998 publication Architectuur en Overheidsopdrachten.

15.2. The reinforcement of the international Reconstruction de la Ville movement

To fully grasp the importance of Hôtel Central for Brussels, one should not only understand whether and how it could overcome the Reconstruction de la Ville legacy; one should also understand whether this legacy had itself gained or lost force. In Belgium, the Reconstruction de la Ville movement had hardly left any traces of its implementation. Apart from the 1980’s and 1990’s derivates in Brussels, which were isolated instances after all, the Lakensestraat, and the unrealised masterplan for the Flemish town of Aalter (by Rob Krier in 1966), not much had happened. In contrast with the Netherlands, where Krier’s homogenous-diversified town planning would be received with enthusiasm, the movement had realised no single Belgian new town or quartier – the Lakensestraat as a single, though still rather small, exception.

In 1996, the European Urban Renaissance movement would be officially established during the second Bologna Triennale of architecture and urbanism. This Triennale, like its

409 Candidates included amongst others Deleu/Top Office and Nero. The jury was composed of Christine Schaut, urban sociologist; (non-Reconstruction) architects Olivier Bastin, Blondel, and Kieckens; officials from Schaerbeek; and social workers. The winning project by Pierre Hebbelinck, was appreciated for its ‘appropriation’ of space and for its ambition to come to an architecture that has the capacity to faire la ville (Michel De Visscher, ‘Competition Gaucheret Maison Citoyenne’, A Plus, April/May, 2/1999, nr. 157, pp. 54-57, p. 55.

410 The organisers asked one of the finalists, Cooparch with Steegen/Rémy, to ‘adapt’ their proposal and make their ‘landmark’ less present (!). Winning entry by Gillis Arch & Ozon, seemingly more for pragmatic (building process in stages) than architectural reasons. Jacques Aron, ‘Wijnpaleis Brussel’, A Plus, April/May 2/1999, nr. 157, pp. 58-61.

411 Philippe Flamme, Architectuur en Overheidsopdrachten (Brussels: KBS, 1998); A Plus, April/May, issue 2/1999, nr. 157 dedicated to competitions.
inaugural predecessor in 1992, was organised by the *A Vision of Europe* association, which had been established in 1992 at the University of Bologna for the promotion of debate on the city. Both events were inaugurated by the Prince of Wales, who, through his Foundation for the Built Environment, played a central role in the English traditionalist movement.\(^{412}\) The Triennale’s catalogue, edited by Tagliaventi and including essays by Krier and Culot, allocated a central place to the *Lakensestraat* project, which was declared the very first mixed-use operation of urban renaissance in Europe. *A Vision of Europe* and the 1996 Triennale would play key roles in the further establishment of the European Urban Renaissance movement. The Triennale exhibition would travel well - in 1997 at the *Fondation pour l’Architecture* in Brussels; in 1996 in Istanbul, as part of the United Nations *HABITAT II. The City Summit*; and numerous other events addressed to young architects would be organised.\(^{413}\)

But the European Urban Renaissance movement had another feature, namely its talent to combine a growing popularity with the availability of larger budgets through private-public partnerships, which allowed for more concrete project realisations and for ever-larger experiments. Even if Rob Krier admitted that ‘the strong economic pressures in this area [the *Lavi-Kavel* in the Hague (1988-93)] throw into doubt my dream of realising small-scale residential development’,\(^{414}\) these doubts would, rather than paralyse, re-generate the movement. Probably the most exemplary case is the building of *Val d’Europe*, a new town near Paris, built in classical style and according to the urban reconstruction ideals. That the ideal settlement of small-scale cohesive neighbourhoods had smoothly allied with the profit-hunger and ambitions of private developers, is expressed by the promotion of *Val d’Europe*. Apart from offering a ‘nouvel art de travailler’ and a ‘vie des quartiers’, it allows a ‘100% emotional 100% rational choice’. Next to offering architecture and urbanism on a human scale, it is also strategically located and easily accessible by car, RER, TGV and airplane. To cosy residential areas, hospitals and shops, *Val d’Europe* adds a congress centre, office park, hotels, golf and other leisure such as Disney World Paris.\(^{415}\)

In other words, by the late 1990s, the once picturesque, small-scale and low-profile movement for workers had grown into a powerful tool for housing the middle and upper

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\(^{413}\) International Network for Traditional Building, Architecture and Urbanism (INTBAU - www.intbau.org); *Prix Rothrier pour la Reconstruction de La Ville* (since 1982). Laboratory for The European City organised in collaboration with amongst others the French Institute of Architecture (Paris), the *Foundation pour l’Architecture* (Brussels), and the Prince of Wales's Institute of Architecture.


classes, entirely adapted to the new building conditions in private-public constellations. That even a hard-core defender of the working class, René Schoonbrodt, considered *Val d'Europe* one of the best contemporary examples,\(^{416}\) demonstrates how the socialist city had yielded to the Neo-liberal turn. Nevertheless, a glance at the *A Vision of Europe* webpage, demonstrates that the battle against the modern city has not diminished. Its *Urban Lovers Newsletter* selects projects, postcards, conferences and competitions of the month as much as ‘monsters’, ‘viruses’ and ‘demolitions’ of the month.\(^{417}\)

\(^{416}\) Schoonbrodt, ‘L’Invité : René Schoonbrodt’.

First Entr’acte

In the first chapter, ‘Brussels’ Urban and Architectural Questioning 1958-2000’, we have started to unravel some of the firm tangles that have complicated Brussels’ architecture and urban production over the past decades. I have narrated Brussels’ recent architectural and urban journey, not as much through its built environment and realised projects as by unravelling the numerous agencies that have made Brussels: personalities, events, political actors, discourses, ideologies, traumas, ghosts from the past, urban policy-making and legislation, a Belgitude, educational reformations, language/taal/langue, Bruxellisation… I have enjoyed the company of such a colourful collective for it can tell us a different story from the one told in traditional architecture overview works. I have given Maurice Culot and the Reconstruction de la Ville movement, beyond my own personal antipathies, important parts in my Brussels story. Even though architectural overview works were absolutely right to neglect Brussels for its lack of contemporary qualitative architecture, they have, by doing so, also, and unjustly, underestimated the importance of this movement for Brussels’ architectural production. Therefore, I have analysed how the Reconstruction de la Ville movement managed to become, and, in contrast to most other European cities, also remain, a hegemonic force in the Brussels architecture and urban debates. We discovered how the Reconstruction de la Ville intellectual discourse gradually turned into the predominant and largely unchallenged mindset for architectural production. But we have also seen how it has been severely corrupted the more its ideas (which were explicitly opposed to building) were used in practice: through policy-making (the ‘rediscovery’ of the inner city, the glocal scale and citizen participation under urban renaissance); through the clever enhancement (not to say abuse) of the Brussels everyday; through the affirmation of the ‘urban traumas’ in Brussels’ collective memory; and through the very disciples of the movement who would turn into powerful architectes-promoteurs and, as such, control much of the Brussels’ building market.

This first chapter is significantly longer than the subsequent ones, not only because it sets the scene but also because of its detailed attention to the traditionalist Reconstruction de la Ville movement - its growths and derailments – which will prove indispensable for understanding the current Brussels situation, but also, more generally, for understanding the tensions and corruptions that (may) emerge when (architectural) ideas get used in practice, get re-appropriated and transformed.

We have seen that one cannot talk about Brussels’ architecture by looking at architecture alone. This, however, as shown by the Reconstruction de la Ville, should not make one conclude that in Brussels, ‘it is all politics after all’. What our colourful collective has shown is that a plethora of agencies have played decisive roles. We have seen how a variety of agencies have generated and consolidated Brussels’ ‘fear of the new’: the
modernisation fever of World Expo 1958, the demolition dramas of the 1960s and 1970s, and the 1968 resistance movement which revolted against such modernisation. We have also looked at the impact of the ‘Belgian situation’ with its anti-urban mentality, entrepreneurial individualism, and the particular role of the everyday in such a situation. In other words, I have chosen neither to delimit my Brussels story to the built environment, nor to give up on architecture by simply blaming politics. Instead I have accepted that Brussels acts as a collective, a collective that, as we will soon discover, will only get more crowded.

But how then may this unravelling be of assistance in rendering the contemporary Brussels’ problematique more intelligible?

Firstly, the perverted consolidation of the Reconstruction de la Ville idiom in the Brussels reality (Carrefour de l’Europe, KBC, the Museum of Modern Arts) and in a broader international context (Urban Renaissance, New Urbanism, Val d’Europe), had exposed a problematic gap between theoretical intentions, concepts, ‘truths’, and ideologies on the one hand, and practical situations, opportunities, constraints and effects on the other. Particularly in the complex politico-administrative structure of Brussels, the discrepancy between how one thinks and how things get done, between theoretical or imagined projects and the pragmatics of practice, is significant. History has repeatedly proved that such a theory/practice discrepancy is not all that new as a phenomenon. Raffael Verwilghen’s efforts to impose a well-organised post-war reconstruction plan were laughed away by local authorities. Also, in 1971, Geert Bekaert concluded that even the generation of architects with more attention for the everyday (such as Lucien Kroll and Bob Van Reeth), ‘could not hamper the cleft between architecture and everyday reality’.1 And Maurice Culot, who was so insistently resistant to building (‘a responsible architect cannot possibly build’)2 could not help but notice, and even enjoy it!, the emergence of one Reconstruction de la Ville project after the other.

Secondly, the Brussels’ way to ‘get things done’ is particular, for its political and governance complexity, for the multifarious agencies involved in architecture and urban development, and for its historical habit of negotiating everything, of treating problems ad hoc, or cas par cas, rather than by imposing one dominant vision or truth. As Brussels historian Roel Jacobs has demonstrated repeatedly, Brussels has, in contrast to the frenzied claims of the 1950s and 1960s, never been a Carrefour de l’Europe or a place ‘destined’ to become a capital. On the contrary, that Brussels did grow into a capital city has been the


result of an entire array of political, economic and other coincidences and negotiations. Most importantly, local economic and political elites would spare no efforts or means to stay on good terms with the successive courts residing in Brussels. This would result in a very typical Brussels ‘hymn to compromise’. Much of Brussels’ architectural and urbanisation works proved a ‘compromise’ of the constant tensions and negotiations between these local elites and external rulers. The fact that, in Brussels, everything is always negotiated (everything is always at stake), and that, hence, there exists no single truth, has always been a precondition for ‘getting things done’. From an historical viewpoint it is therefore not much of a surprise that grand theories and plans, no matter how solid, are doomed to fail when landing on the Brussels battlefield.

This awareness of a theory/practice gap and of the importance of negotiation was central to the emerging activism of the mid-1990s: the occupation of Hôtel Central was not only a concrete action, but it also included the negotiation with the involved economic and political actors as part of these actions. In contrast to the intellectual activism of the 1970s that had built on theoretical counterprojects, a Marxist critique and a European reconstruction project, 1990’s activism emphasised the importance of working from within the ‘Belgian situation’ and the ‘Brussels condition’. Even if the Brussels activism definitely had elements and concerns in common with other cities - such as the architects and artists occupying the post-1989 vacancies in Berlin – these 1990’s activists all worked from specific localities rather than from unifying theories. The relative coherence of 1970’s urban movements had made place for a much more fragmented activism that would emerge from concrete experiments and specific situations.

Third, an emphasis on the practice-side of activism coincided with a more general renewed attention for the everyday, the quotidían, and the self-organising aspects of our

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4 Much of Brussels’ historical embellishment was part of such efforts to make the city attractive for powerful visitors. Also the power games behind the reconstruction of the Grand Place after Louis XIV bombarded it in 1695, formed a unique case of ‘negotiation urbanism’ in a historical time of despotism and absolute power - Jacobs, ‘Het verleden van Brussels tussen Wahreit en Dichtung’. The market’s aesthetic and unified appearance is not a true one, but one that has resulted from many negotiations between dukes, monarchs and local elites - Jacobs ‘De Lofzang van het compromis’ p. 35.

5 Urban Catalysts and Urban Pioneers emerged as an alternative planning method for Berlin, based on a decade of practical experience - Klaus Overmeyer (ed.), Urban Pioneers, temporary use and urban development in Berlin (Berlin: Jovis, 2007). Shadow Planning was a theoretical-methodological response to the concrete presence of multifarious urban activists in Brussels and Rotterdam; within the Brussels Canal workshops organised by Studio Open City, the theoretical reflections would derive from empirical explorations (rather than vice versa).

living environments. In Belgium, the everyday had been introduced primarily by Bekaert, through his notion of the *gemeenplaats* and, much earlier though less explicit, in his 1971 anthology *Bouwen in België 1945-1970*. In this work, Bekaert opted, rather than showing the *oeuvres* of architects from a critic’s point of view, to show the work, inspired by Venturi and the Philadelphia School, from the point of view of the consumer (dweller, user) of architecture. Bekaert therefore criticised Kidder-Smith’s approach as an architect-tourist in search of master *oeuvres* that can be easily classified within myths, and instead defended Hans Keller’s more constructive evaluation of Belgium as a *bande dessinée* and as a country that, in contrast with many other countries, most notably France with its *Grands Ensembles*, had not submitted docilely to grand theories and doctrines. Bekaert seemed, therefore, ‘relieved’ that Venturi’s ‘complexity and contradiction in architecture […] can still be found everywhere in this country’, which he believed could generate a new approach to architecture, namely ‘no longer deriving from a predefined ordering principle, but from the concrete chaos of life itself’. Proof of the power of the everyday could already be found in the architecture of Victor Horta, whose ‘revolution took place within the narrow bounds of what has been called a “Belgian lot”, a deep, narrow strip between two neighbouring houses’. But proof could also be found in Culot and Schoonbrodt’s exploitation of the power of the everyday. By means of accessible graphics *à la Tintin* and a broad distribution of events, they addressed the public at large rather than architects. Culot and Schoonbrodt achieved significant power in Brussels precisely because of their effective use of Brussels’ everyday reality! By contrast, the Brussels 1990’s activists, who also built on the everyday, would primarily focus on the political, cultural and socio-anthropological aspects of urban space: self-organisation and everyday *bricolage*, the use, occupation and appropriation of space - re-claming the city! Even if such an approach stood in contrast with Bekaert’s focus on the hidden poetic and aesthetic qualities of the everyday and the *architectural* discipline (theory) and profession; Bekaert’s *gemeenplaats* and the Brussels re-claming of the city shared the *empowering* aspect of a knowledge construction deriving from the everyday reality.

A fourth Brussels characteristic, embedded in the ‘everyday’ work of both Bekaert and the Brussels 1990’s activists, is the shift from a negative critique under Culot and

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9 Ibid., p. 21.

10 Ibid., pp. 21-23.


12 Exhibitions, city tours, *écôles d’urbanisme*, *midis d’urbanisme*, colloquia, and *boutiques urbaines*.
Schoonbrodt – these truly Foucauldian polemicians!\textsuperscript{13} - to a more positive attitude. Bekaert had pleaded as early as 1971 for a more constructive approach to the fragmented Belgian landscape, and the \textit{gemeenplaats} was his concrete response for turning the banality, ugliness and chaos of the Belgian landscape into an asset. In Brussels, the \textit{Hôtel Central} occupation was also a positive call that would reach a peak in the Brussels 2000 Capital of Culture events. In contrast to the old-school activists-intellectuals who had gradually turned into smooth bourgeois revolutionaries, this new generation of activists fought against such a bourgeois urban vision and the way it got abused by developers. Instead they proposed a more open, multi-cultural and experimental city.

At the end of the first chapter, we have arrived at the turn of the century and the Brussels 2000 Capital of Culture event, which will prove central to the Brussels’ architecture debate. Once at this point, a series of questions emerge as to how Brussels can now effectively respond to the agencies that mould its architecture production: theory/practice tension, an urbanism based on negotiation and compromise (no unitary planning!), the role of the everyday, and a more positive reclaiming of the city.

The Flemish response to the \textit{gemeenplaats} had been formulated within architecture culture, by the foundation of two new bodies: the \textit{Vlaams Architectuur Instituut} (VAI) and the Flemish \textit{Bouwmeester}. What would be an appropriate response, in Brussels, where the \textit{gemeenplaats} is of a more urban and less high-culture nature, and where one seems less receptive to ‘imposed’ structures such as the VAI or \textit{Bouwmeester}?

Likewise, how can Brussels, despite its aversion to single truths and unitary visions, come to a truly integrated City Project, a project Brussels desperately needs if it is ever to address its severe socio-economic disparities, its socio-spatial segregations between upper-class quarters and deprived (gentrifying) downtown neighbourhoods. At the same time Brussels needs an ambitious project if it is ever to fulfil its role as a capital properly. Is Brussels, with its emphasis on negotiation and everyday culture, receptive at all for ‘one city, one vision, one future’?\textsuperscript{14} Or is Brussels perhaps in need of a peculiar kind of ‘bottom-up overall vision’, an ‘empowered force’? And if so, how to turn the numerous local activities into true catalysts that constitute a larger, more ambitious project? In other words: how to imagine the multiplicity of so-called ‘local’ or ‘small’ elements, allied in a larger whole?

\textsuperscript{13} Polemician: ‘the person he confronts is not a partner in search for the truth but an adversary, an enemy who is wrong, who is harmful’ – with only the defeat of the enemy considered a worthy outcome - Michel Foucault, ‘Polemics, Politics, and Problematisations: an Interview with Michel Foucault’, in: Michel Foucault. \textit{Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth. The essential works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume I}, edited by Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1994), pp. 112-19, p. 112.

\textsuperscript{14} ‘One city, one region; one city, one major, like everywhere else; one city, one future’, Pascal Smet, Brussels’ Minister of Public Works, in the \textit{Etats généraux} debate, 25 April 2008, Kaaithéater Brussel; and in the Disturb debate, 24 April 2009, Congress Station, Brussels.
How to allow these emerging forces to be empowering, but also, and more importantly, how to guarantee that such forces also remain *situated* and *irreduced*?\footnote{‘Situated’ as in Donna Haraway’s ‘situated knowledges’; ‘irreduced’ as in Bruno Latour’s critique of the reduction embedded in ‘entelechies turned crowd’, in ‘Irreductions’} Should one, apart from safeguarding the irreductive, empowering and frictional forces of the everyday, not also be cautious with a too naïve optimism that tends to conceal the disparate, the truly ugly, and the unacceptable aspects of Brussels’ everyday reality?

Finally, do these new concerns require a different architecture theory, more open to practice, more susceptible to ‘the real’ and the everyday reality? Can one look at Brussels through theory? Would a more everyday-sensitive theory imply a ‘contaminated’, a more ‘affected’ theory? Or would it imply a theory that, while respecting its scholarly boundaries, nevertheless contributes to the everyday by, for example, countering certain everyday myths such as the ‘brick in the stomach’, the ‘fear for the new’, or *Bruxellisation*? And how to cast an interest in (everyday) practice within the current pragmatic turn and ‘crisis of criticality’ in architecture? How can a focus on practice deliver something more than a mere projective surfing on the waves but also something more solid than a naïve fascination with everyday practices? And how can Brussels, with its very specific alliance with everyday practice and with negotiation as a crucial feature of ‘getting things done’, be instructive vis-à-vis such broader disciplinary questions?

These are the questions and preoccupations we will have to take on our journey throughout the following two chapters. They in fact allow us to refine the first chapter’s recognition of the unique way of *faire la ville* that had emerged from Brussels’ specific emancipation process and complex legacy, and that seems to offer us an opening to move beyond artificial oppositions such as that of critical theory and projective practice, and allows architecture to engage and be at *once* critical and realistic regarding the world.

In the third chapter, ‘Brussels Concerned Pragmatism: From *Penser la Ville* to *Faire la Ville*’, we will return to Brussels and analyse its architecture culture since Brussels 2000. We will look at the complex emancipation process that has been induced by a combination of factors such as the Flemish aesthetic-poetic architecture emancipation and rediscovery of the everyday (*New Simplicity*, Bekaert’s *Gemeenplaats*), the French-Brussels initiatives for promoting more contemporary, yet socially concerned and urban architecture, and the socio-artistic activism that had emerged along *Hôtel Central*.

But before wading through the Brussels mud again, we will, in the next, second chapter, ‘Architecture and the Everyday: Architecture’s Engagement with the Real’, open up our questions and preoccupations to a wider theoretical context. We will look in particular at the tensions between everyday empowerment and architecture’s urge and need to design; and
between ‘hot’ critique and a ‘cooled down’ architectural production. The second chapter could be called more ‘theoretical’ in nature, even if it is neither a theorisation of the empirical unravelling of the first chapter nor a theoretical foundation for what follows. Instead it is an analysis of the concepts and ideas that have attempted to understand, direct and evaluate architecture’s engagement with the real. It explores how, as much as in Brussels, the practice of theory has also shaped modes and attitudes in order to optimise (critically) such engagement with the real. It does so by analysing the emergence of a renewed attention to the everyday and the quotidian in the architecture debate of the 1990s, and by exploring how this re-emergence has freed the road for both a renewed critical-oppositional activism and a more compliant everyday practice. This chapter will analyse the two major tensions that I have identified within the original architecture discourse on the everyday and that, in my opinion, have also remained largely unresolved or have been smartly eschewed by the revision of that discourse (in the 1990s).

A first tension relates to the enhancement of the oppositional potential of the everyday, as part of architecture’s critical/political agency in the world. A second tension has to do with the trouble of reconciling such oppositional project with architecture’s longing for aesthetics, its duty (more than its right) to design and materialise, and architecture’s creative moment (and thus a degree of autonomy). In response to these tensions, I will argue for a more entangled dealing with the real that is more pragmatic/realistic in nature yet without throwing away architecture’s concernedness - it’s ‘what can we hope for?’. Rather than formulating a well-delineated proposal, let be a guideline or manual for a ‘critical project’, I have opted to lay bare the achievements, benefits, but also the tensions and pitfalls that may come with such an entangled approach. But let’s have no illusions: this so-called ‘theoretical’ chapter won’t bring us the unifying answers theory tends to aspire to. Nor will it dismiss such aspiration for the sake of an unbridled fragmentation. It will not even offer ‘something else’, but, instead, it will try and lay bare a few aspects that may open up towards that ‘something else’ for architecture theory. What can I say? Theory seems as messy as the Brussels’ mud, so please do keep your boots on.
Chapter Two

Architecture and the Everyday: Architecture’s Engagement with the Real

1. Why the everyday?

Why include a chapter on the everyday and architecture? First, the motivation to focus in
greater detail on the everyday is prompted by the Brussels situation itself. I have argued that
the everyday formed a core precondition for understanding the situation in Brussels and
Belgium - Belgitude, Bekaert’s gemeenplaats, and the Belgian way to ‘get things done’. I
have also suggested that this everydayness is as much a productive form of resistance as it has
been abused towards more opportunistic ends, as by Brussels’ architectes-promoteurs. In the
next chapter we will have a closer look at how, in Brussels, the resistant-activist side of the
everyday played a central role in the Brussels architecture and urban emancipation. But it will
also demonstrate that such ‘mere’ resistance of the everyday, gradually managed to run hand
in hand with architecture’s aesthetic preoccupations, a connection that often proves problematic.

This brings me to the second motivation, namely that since the 1990s, a remarkable
revival of the everyday can be observed in the architecture debates. However, it seems that
these debates have not fully managed to resolve longstanding tensions such as how to
translate everyday knowledge into an architectural project; how to combine simple everyday
preoccupations with the orchestrated spaces of politics and the architecture discipline; how to
confront (rather than reconcile) the ‘official’ creators of the built environment (architects,
planners) with the (often remarkably productive) consumers of space - users as inhabitants,
occupiers, or appropriators? What exactly can we learn from the debate on the everyday,
knowing that it bears the potential to address so many of the core questions of architecture as
a discipline, as a practice, and as an agency in the world?

Thirdly, I should once more remind the reader that such theoretical questions have
been addressed against the background of the Brussels practice, spanning from observations
within the ‘orchestrated’ spaces of the everyday – the participatory processes for
neighbourhood development aiming to give voice to citizens’ everyday needs – over
interviews and informal contacts with Brussels’ architects and urban planners, down to
observations of ‘street workers’ in deprived neighbourhoods.¹

This chapter is composed of three parts. In the first part I will discuss the revival of
the everyday in the 1990s. In the second part I will analyse the tensions that surround, even
today, the enhancement of the everyday in architecture. The final part of this chapter will be

¹ Questioning not as much how they generate knowledge ‘from the street’ but how this knowledge is further
enhanced in urban interventions.
more propositional in the sense that I will try and formulate a different mode of incorporating the everyday in the specific workings of architecture (as a discipline as much as a profession).

2. The re-emergence of the everyday in the 1990’s debate

From the late-1990s one can observe a true revival of the everyday within architecture, art, and cultural studies’ debates. In architecture, this is reflected in special journal issues on the everyday, and by exhibitions and publications with a renewed attention for the everyday and the agency of the user and consumer of space. But also, for example, in cultural studies, such revival could be observed. It would be the first great revival of the everyday since the 1950’s and 1960’s critiques against modernism’s denial of the ‘street’ and the ‘man in the street’, and since the revalidation of everyday aesthetics - via Pop Art most explicitly imported in architecture through the Independent Group, Brutalism, and, in US, Venturi and Scott-Brown – proved turning too easily into Camp elitism. Such a 1990’s revival is easy to understand seen the specific situation of the Western world at that moment in time. Interestingly, this new preoccupation with the everyday was, in scholarly discourse, based primarily on the


everyday as a (politically) resistant and oppositional practice, even though (or perhaps precisely because) the realised built environment was deriving as much from everydayness, albeit in compliance with the ruling economic establishment.

2.1. The western world and the architecture discipline in the mid-1990s

The 1980s and early 1990s had been, at least for the Western world, the period in which neoliberal policies took over many of the tasks that had been traditionally allocated to the Welfare State, beginning in the UK and the US and later in the Western world as a whole. With its focus on privatisation, deregulation, capital accumulation and globalisation, the Neo-liberal turn would have a particularly strong impact on the built environment, as it was considered an important motor of economic growth. Through urban renaissance, city branding, large scale UDPs such as Canary Wharf, and iconic architecture, cities had not only become major playgrounds for neo-liberal practices, they had also become the places where the undemocratic side-effects of this game - gentrification, social displacement, gated communities, privatisation and homogenisation of the public domain based on the exclusion of ‘the other’ - would become apparent; and where neo-liberal development would show its truly sinister face in the form of its very own measures against such side-effects. Indeed, so-called ‘glocal’ measures, intended to re-territorialise global policies, were often nothing more than an attempt to better implement generic global strategies in specific local contexts and thus to affirm rather than counter the neo-liberal dream. In terms of architecture, this period would see the emergence of ever more generic and profit-based developer architecture (as in Canary Wharf) on the one hand, and spectacular architecture intended to place even the most remote corners of capitalist empire on the global map on the other (Frank Gehry’s 1997 Guggenheim Bilbao). Additionally, the neo-liberal turn of the Western world would be reinforced by the extension of that world in 1989. The incorporation of the old Socialist world into Western capitalism would (perhaps unconsciously) generate within the discourse on the everyday, a growing concern with the perceived loss of community and the ruling of

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6 See the work of, amongst many others, Neil Brenner, Erik Swyngedouw, Neil Smith and Frank Moelaert; publications in Antipode, the Radical Journal of Geography at Blackwell; and for example Erik Swyngedouw, Frank Moelaert et al. The Globalised City – Economic Restructuring and Social Polarisation in European Cities (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore (eds.), Spaces of Neoliberalism (Blackwell, 2002); and Neil Brenner, ‘Alternative Rescaling Strategies and the Future of New State Spaces’, in: New State Spaces. Urban Governance and the Rescaling of Statehood (Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 257-304. Here, Brenner argued how since the mid-1990s the neighbourhood became an increasingly important urban policy level for fighting social exclusion, while at the same time the post-war ‘top-down’ welfare measures were replaced by more ‘bottom-up’ initiatives, by neighbourhood and community-based associations as well as Quangos or Quasi nongovernmental organisations (p. 269). Examples of such initiatives are the Contrats de Ville in France and the European Commission’s URBAN Programme.

individualism over collective preoccupation. But more than this, it would be against the general condition of ‘actually existing neo-liberalism’, that the everyday was rediscovered as a tool of resistance.

This interest in the oppositional qualities of the everyday was indissolubly intertwined with the rediscovery of the work of Henri Lefebvre on the everyday (*La production de l’espace* was translated into English in 1991) and with the linking of Lefebvre’s theories to the urban condition of the 1990s (by geographers such as David Harvey and Edward Soja). Apart from a welcome critical tool, Lefebvre’s theories also offered something that had largely disappeared in architecture theory and practice: a critical and direct engagement with the real. Now that the spatial consequences of the transition from a Fordist to a liberal economy had become apparent - for example, numerous sites and buildings once occupied for (industrial) production, distribution, and storage were now abandoned – a direct, critical and creative ‘intervening in the real’ was needed.

Locating a re-emergence of the everyday in the mid-1990s is not to say that there had been no interest in the everyday ever since the late-modernist *As Found* Movement and the early post-modern everyday aesthetics of Venturi and Scott Brown, but that the nature of that preoccupation had changed. Early 1980’s concerns with architecture and the everyday – such as the June 1982 issue of *Werk, Bauen, Wohnen* dedicated to *gewoehnlich – alltaglich – trivial*, or the creation, in 1981, of the Swiss journal *Alltag, Der Sensationsblatt des Gewoehnlichen* - focussed primarily on the existing reality of everyday (bad) taste and aesthetics as opposed to the ‘high art’ aesthetics in architecture. Also in art and design, the trivial and everyday were rediscovered as kitch in contrast to the seriousness of high art.

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8 Reinforcing, with the Community Architects in the UK and the New Urbanism in US, the nostalgia for close-knit, socially cohesive societies.


10 The 1980’s hermetic theory and the formalist, intellectual-elitist production under architectural deconstructivism.

11 Cities suffered from a whole set of consequences of the new urban, global condition such as vast warehouse and industrial vacancies now that a supply & demand distribution system was replaced by a just-in-time delivery and industrial production was replaced by service economies (in the West) and been outsourced to cheap-labour countries. See Saskia Sassen, *The Global City* (Princeton university Press, 2001). Especially in cities such as post-1989 Berlin, with its abandoned infrastructure after unification and empty treasury, an interest in the (temporary) occupation of space would become a means to work productively within the new spatio-economic voids – see Urban Catalysts, Philipp Oswalt (ed.), *Shrinking Cities* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2005-2006), in two volumes; Philipp Oswalt and Tim Rieniets (eds) *Atlas of Shrinking Cities* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2006); Overmeyer, *Urban Pioneers*; Cupers and Miessen, *Spaces of Uncertainty*.


13 A preoccupation that resonated with Venturi and ‘the Americans’ (*Werk, Bauen, Wohnen*) and with the recognition of the existence of such a thing like everyday popular taste (*Alltag*). *Alltag* was created in 1981 by Nikolaus Wyss, in Zurich and co-edited with Walter Keller.
In the 1990s, however, the debate on the everyday would complete such aesthetic concerns with an explicit political dimension. The recuperation of the everyday in architecture discourse and practice would, indeed, express a resistance to an architecture that had become too stylish and elitist and a critique against the profit- and marketing-led architecture imposed by the neo-liberals. However, through such reformulation of the everyday as a site of resistance, also a less oppositional pragmatism would emerge that was not only engaging with the everyday but was also choosing practice (rather than theory) as its locus for engaging with the world. At a time when design was ‘booming’ and a whole series of ‘self-consciously designed products’ would emerge, indeed, a specific branch in architecture would consider the generic and ordinary everyday as the very context, the situation in which design operates. Rather than an oppositional practice, architects such as OMA/Rem Koolhaas and MVRDV would propose a renewed pragmatism that considered architecture as ‘real, not abstract’ and reformulate critique as being embedded in reality rather than reflecting on it from a critical (theoretical) distance: architecture as something that ‘must be experienced, inhabited and otherwise occupied’. And this at a time that these other architectures of the everyday - vernacular design and the rediscovery of ‘the community’ and ‘the real people’ by Community Architecture – started to reveal their ultimate artificiality.

Art also saw the re-emergence of the socially participatory 1960’s art. Consequently art theorists including Claire Bishop (Participation), Hal Foster (Return of the Real), and Nicolas Bourriaud (Relational Aesthetics), expressed a concern with the ambiguousness of 1990’s everyday-based practices. Both Bishop and Bourriaud have argued that 1990’s art reintroduced the everyday through participation in art: participation not seen as a mere interaction of the audience with the work of art, but in terms of ‘collective presence’. They

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14 That the 1980’s preoccupation with the everyday was more aesthetic than political was demonstrated, for example, by the 1980 show ‘The Banal Object’, organised by Alessandro Mendini at the Venice Biennale, which looked at the everyday in terms of aesthetics and taste. Rather than simply and honestly displaying the banal, Mendini showed it as ‘exotic’ hence turning the event into a ‘fancy dress ball on the theme of the mundane’ Matthew Turner, ‘the Future of trivial Design’, Daidalos, nr. 40, June 1991, pp. 102-111, p. 103. Turner contrasted this exhibition with the 1983 ‘Genial Design of the 80s’ at the Industrial Design Centre Berlin, which ‘shocked’ its audience with its blunt and provocative banality: it placed consumer products such as Suzuki bikes literally at museum display. See also the debates along the High and Low show by Kirk Varnedoe at Moma New York: William Grimes, ‘Kirk Varnedoe Is In The Hot Seat As Moma's Boy’, New York Times, 11 March 1990.

15 Perhaps not surprisingly, first everyday architecture practices emerged in London, the Neo-liberal capital in Europe (Tony Fretton, Sergison Bates architects), and post-1989 Berlin (Urban Catalysts, Urban Pioneers).


18 The everyday was indeed no longer reduced to ‘period styles of the vernacular or the untrained informality of the anonymous’ (as in Rudofsky and Venturi) - p. 23. Major reference was Droog Design, according to Blauvelt, for their more straightforward attitude to materials, and according to Betsky, for offering an alternative to what one could call the impasse of the vernacular: since any form of aesthetics or manufacturing would turn the vernacular into design. We’ll come back to the problems with Community Architecture in chapter 4.

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refer to art works that simultaneously ‘appropriate social forms as a way to bring art closer to everyday life’ and focus on the process of making (materialisation) and the integration of the audience within that process. It’s what Hans Ulrich Obrist called - in reference to 1990’s art curators - ‘agents of trans-disciplinarity’. But Bishop and Bourriaud have also argued that, since such ‘collective presence’ has been used not only in art, but also by (consumer-oriented and commercial) reality shows on TV, business marketing, etcetera, art has to question where it differs: how it acts as a precursor of social change. Not surprisingly then, these new engagements with the real would also be read as a sign of a new ‘post-political condition’. The everyday is then no longer considered a ‘residue of contemporary life […] a sphere of overlooked ordinarness, but as the real space in which we lead or actual life’, thus spaces inherent to the current global condition (such as call-centres and commuter spaces).

2.2. Manifestations of the real in 1990’s architecture and planning

Typical of the 1990’s focus on the everyday is its emphasis on the resistant, critical and oppositional qualities of the everyday and its declaration of architectural practice (not theory) as the ultimate locus of critique. Indeed, even though, or perhaps partly because the everyday in architecture was represented not just by such alternative practices, but also by developers’ pragmatism (the at once global and re-territorialised ‘glocal’ interventions), by everyday-based urban policies (participatory inner-city neighbourhood renewal and the abuse of urban

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20 Nicolas Bourriaud, Relational Aesthetics, 2002 (published in French in 1998). He argued that 1990’s art - and in particular he discusses the work of Felix Gonzales-Torres - became more focused on the creation of a collective.

21 For they act more as negotiators and translators in curator teams than as individual curators: ‘the role of the curator is to create free space, not to occupy existing space’; it is about ‘building temporary communities’ and about ‘being involved in the creation, production, realization, and promotion of ephemeral situations’ - Hans Ulrich Obrist ‘Preface: participation lasts forever’, in: Did someone say participate, an atlas of spatial practice, ed. by Markus Miessen and Shumon Basar, pp. 14-21, p. 16.

22 For Bishop, art differed through three elements present also in Guy Debord’s work: ‘activation’ - making the audience into an ‘active subject’ allows empowerment; ‘authorship’ - sharing authorship is more egalitarian thus democratic; ‘community’ - resurrecting the lost community and collectivity under high capitalism (and after the fall of Communism) - Bishop, ‘Introduction. Viewers as producers’, p. 12. Bourriaud coined the term altermodernism as a new condition wherein artists work from within the new globalised cultural condition.

23 Everyday life under globalisation is seen as ‘a space for a new kind of “post-political” politics in which the quotidian coalesces with the political in unnoticed but pervasive ways’ – Moran, Reading the Everyday, p. ix; the intellectual climate too, as ‘increasingly in the grip of a so-called post-critical or projective philosophy’ – BAVO, ‘introduction’ and Erik Swyngedouw, ‘The Post-Political City’, in: Urban Politics Now: Re-Imagining Democracy in the Neoliberal City, edited by BAVO (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers 2007), pp. 58-76.

24 Moran, Reading the Everyday, p. 169. Not only did globalisation produce ‘new’ quotidian spaces such as call centres, suburbs motorways, etcetera, it also generated ‘an uneven development of daily life’ (p. x).
activism towards neo-liberal ends), and the ‘everyday architecture’ of Koolhaas and the likes (‘engaging’ directly with the real), one preferred to coin as ‘everyday’ primarily the truly oppositional and critical discourses and practices. Indeed, along the mounting pragmatist and reflexive engagements with the real, it became apparent that an interest in practice was in itself no guarantee for criticality. Everyday practices could be as much critical - using the everyday as a form of resistance (temporary use, space occupation, activism) – as they could be projective or compliant - approaching the everyday as a condition to be accepted as is and as a possible source of aesthetic, performative, or symbolic inspiration. For such practices, critique is no longer believed to come from the outside but from within society-as-a-laboratory, in the form of an ‘idealism inherent to reality’: all architects have to do is ‘scratch the surface for it to appear, instead of struggling to impose a form developed by theoretical idealism’.

With Koolhaas’ Generic City as its front runner - ‘Relief… it’s over. That’s the story of the city. The city is no longer. We can leave the theatre now…’ - such practices accepted, often cynically, their compliance with the existing state of affairs as a sheer destiny. Also in design more generally, irony (and kitsch) became a form of compliant resistance, or as Peter Bürger stated: the ‘ironic appropriation of kitsch [was] discovered as a sophisticated and effective means of distancing oneself from the most advanced forms of aesthetic consciousness’. Even the garden gnome, the very Prince of Kitsch, had become subversive and ‘cool’. Still different from both critical/oppositional and cynical/compliantly resistant everyday practices are those ‘new realist’ design practices that have attempted to enhance the everyday ordinariness by using what already exists and adding to it a new layer

25 The public sponsoring of activism and neighbourhood associations is not so innocent as policy makers also see it as a trigger of change (and gentrification) – Margit Mayer, ‘Social movements in European Cities’.


30 ‘A garden gnome is no longer a garden gnome […] no longer an object used to advertise one’s petty-bourgeois taste’ - Peter Burger, ‘Aporias of modern aesthetics’, Left Review, 184, 1990, p. 47. See also Turner ‘The Future of Trivial Design’.

of meaning. The Brussels of the 1990s, with its somewhat unusual engagement with the everyday, namely being critical without adopting an ideological counter-position (as was the case with the 1970’s luttes urbaines), proves an instructive case for addressing the tensions between criticism and pragmatism as the two extreme ends of the everyday spectrum.

In other words, the re-emergence of the everyday in architecture covered a whole array of gradations of critical engagement with the real. These practices may have shared a pragmatic-realist approach vis-à-vis criticality, a renewed attention for inter- and transdisciplinary working formats, and their experimenting with collaborative constellations and representation tools; their criticality spanned everything from zealous but phoney community architecture to compliant iconic architects; from developer pragmatism to downright social activism; and of course a plethora of ‘pragmatopic’ approaches that balance in-between pragmatism/realism and criticism/utopia. Architecture’s longing to


33 See chapter 3.

34 Often in order to allow more attention for the user of space. For example CHORA’s ‘game-board’ approach for participatory design - CHORA and Raoul Bunschoten, Urban Flotsam (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2000); the mobile workspaces of Creative Works (Andreas Lang, Kathrin Böhm); ‘Landscape Urbanism’ created as a cross-disciplinary ecological approach to design that is more open to change, time-issues and emergency (James Corner and Charles Waldheim, Field Operations; see Charles Waldheim (ed.), The Landscape Urbanism Reader (Princeton Architectural Press, 2006); Open Source Urbanism – Overmeyer, Urban Pioneers.

35 The charrettes and the ‘design for the people’ of Community Architects and New Urbanism.

36 The everyday ‘star’ architecture, for example though an interest in (aestheticised) banality (NL Architecture, OMA/Koolhaas), through the over-abundant data-distillation from the real (MVRDV) or through an interest in the emergent aspects of architecture, and processes such as folding (Foreign Office Architects).

37 Amongst others AAA Atelier d’Architecture AutogGéré / Urban Tactics (www.urbantactics.org); European Platform for Alternative Practice and Research on the City (PEPRAV), Urban/act (2000); Cupers and Miessen, Spaces of Uncertainty; the Journals Field and Anarchitektur; Crawford, et al., Everyday Urbanism; edited (theoretical) volumes such as Hill (ed.), Occupying architecture; Peter Blundell-Jones, Doina Petrescu and Jeremy Till, Architecture & Participation (Abingdon, Oxon: Spon Press, 2005); Jane Rendell, Jonathan Hill, Murray Fraser and Mark Dorrian, Critical Architecture (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2007); Miessen and Basar (eds.), Did Someone Say Participate?, and see Mirko Zardini’s recognition of new architectural practices that enhance the conditions of the project and the poverty of the means at hand – Mirko Zardini, ‘A Third Landscape for Architecture’, Lotus International, nr. 130, 2007, pp. 124-129; and Bryan Bell’s recognition of an alternative architecture practice in both for-profit and non-profit architecture firms, community design centres and non-profit organisations that focus also on low-income groups and ‘mere’ mainstream housing – Bryan Bell (ed.), Good deeds, good design: community service through architecture, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004).

38 ‘Pragmatopia’ = ‘an alternative territory of architectural operation […] resists the escapism of utopia […] and the automatism of the pragmatic […] rolls out a new plane of events in order to enable action (pragma) to take place (topos)’ - Andreas Ruby in Manuel Gausa et al., The metapolis dictionary of advanced architecture: city, technology and society in the information age, (Actar: 2003), p. 488.

39 Teddy Cruz’s architecture as ‘mediating agencies’ between San Diego and Tijuana; Crimson’s organisational alternative ‘Ogware’ and alternative planning ethic ‘Wimby!’ - Michel Provooost and Wouter Vanspithof, Wimby! Welcome in My Backyard. International Building Exhibition Rotterdam-Hoogvliet (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2000); practices such as Fluid Office, muf, FAT, and Mueller-Kneer; (in Brussels) V-Plus, Escaut, MSA, and Artengineering; Lacaton & Vassal, Péripéries (IN-EX projects), NL Architects and Maxwan and the

3. Defining the everyday

Much of the work on the everyday, despite claims about the difficulty of grasping it or fixing it with a definition, pursues a very specific aspect of the everyday. It appears that the very definition of the everyday – the everyday of what? - is closely intertwined with the expectations one has from, and the force one wants to allocate to it.

In its lexical meaning (Oxford American Dictionary), \textit{everyday} refers to what is ‘used every day; daily’ and what is ‘commonplace’. It is associated with the quotidian, the ordinary, the banal, the obvious, and the habitual - that what \textit{is}, what happens but goes unnoticed. But less explicit, and often stronger in its etymological than its literary meaning, the everyday also refers to what is ‘in common’ or ‘open to everyone’, with which it refers to what is or has become commonplace as much as it indirectly implies the ‘standardised’, the ‘orderly’, and hence the ‘controlled’.\footnote{Mid-18\textsuperscript{th}-century origin of the word ‘banal’: “trite, commonplace,” 1840, from Fr. \textit{banal}, adj. form of \textit{ban} “decree, legal control” (see \textit{ban} (v.)). Originally designating things like ovens or mills that belonged to feudal serfs, or else compulsory military service; in either case generalized through "open to everyone" to "commonplace, ordinary,," to "trite, petty." The ‘ordinary’ refers to ‘c.1460, “belonging to the usual order or course,” from O.Fr. \textit{ordinarie}, from L. \textit{ordinarius} “customary, regular, usual, orderly,” from \textit{ordo} (gen. \textit{ordinis}) “order”’. http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?search=banal&searchmode=none. Both the ‘banal’ and the ‘ordinary’ thus designate something ‘in common’ but also something ‘standard’ and ‘orderly’ hence a form of control. Only the word ‘quotidian’ refers strictly to the ‘daily routine’ without referring to the ‘common’ or ‘commonplace’: ‘occurring every day; daily […] ordinary or everyday, esp. when mundane’ (Oxford American Dictionary).}

Moreover, when used in terms of the ‘banal’ or ‘ordinary’, the everyday has yet another meaning that proves particularly important for the enhancement of the everyday in architecture, namely its reference to what lacks originality, is boring, or uninteresting.\footnote{‘Banal’ in the meaning of ‘so lacking in originality as to be obvious and boring’; ‘ordinary’ as ‘with no special or distinctive features; normal’ but also ‘uninteresting; commonplace’ (Oxford American Dictionary).} And yet, designs for the everyday (such as architectural ones) appear to emphasise the \textit{specificity} of the everyday. The wealthy linguistic meaning of the everyday – from the ‘daily’, the ‘habitual’ and ‘common’ to the ‘orderly’ (controlled) and the

‘unoriginal’ - corresponds with the varied interpretations and activations of the everyday in architecture and urban discourse. But it also anticipates the complexity of an agency such as the everyday as soon as it becomes one (of many!) agencies entangled in the architectural and urban imbroglio. Since which time, the everyday has been interwoven with the history of architecture and the urban in a variety of disguises: as the use and consumption of architecture and the city, as popular aesthetics and styles, as a source of opposition to dominant societal, political, or moral orders, or in compliance with the real. And each of these disguises come in variations: use has been related to habitation, appropriation and occupation of space; aesthetics to ‘high’ art, popular taste, the ‘truly ugly’, the sublime; and opposition has been related to activism, resistance, disruption and détournement, but also to a more complying engagement with the real. Finally, the self-organising appropriation of everyday space has been studied for its empowering, creative and transformative qualities more than as a downright necessity.

Moreover, notions such as ‘the user’ get easily black-boxed and normalised in order to neatly package the heterogeneous group of actors, stakes, and the different agencies of what assembles ‘the user’, into a nicely determined, smooth category. Similarly, when associating the everyday with the boring, habitual and banal, are we not tempted to account for the resistant ennui of Walter Benjamin’s flâneur and the creative inventions of the everyday urban bricoleur while we seem more reluctant to explore more embarrassing corners of the habitual human kind such as man’s capacity to reinstall the habitual even when faced with the most devastating of disasters: Don DeLillo described human kind, right after the events of 9/11, freshly rescued, complaining about the bread offered to them, as ‘not so incongruous, really, just people alive and hungry, beginning to be themselves again’. Are we not more attracted by the temporary and artistic occupations of space leading to ‘unexpected’ spatial qualities, than to the more mainstream everyday spaces (such as commuter space and mediocre business centres)? Aren’t we allergic to the ‘truly ugly’ unless it gets to the extreme heights of kitsch? And who dares to admit that much of the developers’ world is actually the ultimate example of everyday tactics, of se débrouiller, knowing as they do more than anyone how the world really works, and how ‘things get done’? In other words how much of the agency that we grant the everyday has been coloured – and thus co-fabricated – by our very own preferences? Therefore, in order to study the ‘everyday’ beyond

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43 The meaning of ‘commonplace’ (gemeenplaats) expresses this complex agency of something that is shared and common, ‘not unusual; ordinary’ but at the same time ‘not interesting or original; trite’ (Oxford American Dictionary). The fact that, what is common and shared, what belongs to the collective, is associated with the unimaginative, unoriginal, unremarkable, unexceptional, and mediocre (Oxford American Thesaurus), might explain its problematic status within architecture, so keen on individual expression and signature authorship.

its oppositional meaning, the ‘real’ seems a more suitable term as it includes a broader set of agents and agencies.

And what about our approach to the everyday by reading its unexpected, implicit or hidden qualities – of an aesthetic, poetic, social, or organisational nature? Does the intention of finding beauty in what seems at first sight to be an ugly or meaningless landscape, of finding (self-organising) order in what appears as a chaotic, uncontrolled landscape, of finding fascinating creativity and spontaneous activity in a desolate or uninhabitable place, not hide a conviction (or urge) that such a quality can be found? Does it not hide the assumption that, what just is, lacks quality?

Moreover, the fact that the everyday implies human agency in our built environment inevitably influences the relationship between spatial disciplines on the one hand (architecture, urbanism, planning), and the humanities on the other (sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, urban studies). Beyond the two extremes of environmental determinism (the built environment orchestrating the use of space - ‘space as instrument’) and architecture as a mere background for social action (‘space as receptor’), Hilde Heynen has proposed a mutual influence of the built environment and the social in the form of ‘space as a stage’. In the last part of this chapter, I will, prompted by the multifarious manifestation of the everyday, propose moving still one step further. When approaching buildings as ‘concrete and tangible elements of our everyday life-world’, and the everyday as one of many agencies involved in the shaping of that world, then architecture’s ‘being in the world’ might benefit from being formulated in a still more entangled manner. Looking at the everyday through the notion of agency allows us to connect the question about the nature of the everyday (the everyday of what?) to the motivation and method for reading the everyday (how and to what end?); as well as allowing us to avoid an a priori categorisation and qualification of the everyday.

4. Everyday tensions in architecture

Two recurring tensions seem to prevent the everyday from being fully accounted for in architecture production. These tensions can be brought back to architecture’s being-in-the-world and can be summarised as the tension related to architecture’s use of the oppositional


46 Apart from buildings, architectural designs, urban plans, utopian schemes or paper architecture, are also included, for ‘they might not define the way things work, but they do change the way we think about how they work.’ Isabelle Doucet and Kenny Cupers, ‘Agency in Architecture: Reframing Criticality in Theory and Practice’, editorial, Footprint Delft School of Design Journal, issue 4, Spring 2009, pp. 1-6, p.1.

47 Such a priori evaluation not only risks idealising and overestimating the discovered qualities; it also tends to shun a more genuine (rather than idealising) reading of the downright ugliness, emptiness and chaos of a place.
and resistant aspects of the everyday as part of its critical/political agency in the world; and to architecture’s aesthetic sensibility as part of it being a design-based endeavour. Without wanting to suggest that architecture’s aesthetic and political project are at work in isolated registers, I will here, nevertheless, for the sake of analysis, discuss them separately.

4.1. Tension one: architecture’s use of the oppositional and resistant aspects of the everyday as part of its critical/political agency in the world.

Theories deriving from the everyday have often been formulated as a critique against the prevailing zeitgeist, and have always come from a variety of corners including architecture, art, and the social sciences.

Through industrialisation and the rise of the modern metropolis, both Friedrich Engels’ ‘strolls’ in the industrial slums of Manchester and Jane Addams’ applied sociological work at Hull House, were a much more ‘lived’ engagement with the real than the intellectualism and ‘friendly visitor’ charity their class had in mind. Also modern cinema expressed, next to its fascination for everyday life in the modern metropolis, with its mechanic speed and swarming crowds – the 1920’s City Symphonies48 - also a critique against modernisation’s impact on everyday life. Hans Richter would use the modern techniques of montage, repetition, fragmented imagery and accelerated speed, so ‘celebrated’ by the City Symphonies, to emphasise – and criticise - the homogeneity and routine of everyday labour and to alienate and estrange our so-familiar everyday activities (in his 1929 short film Every Day).49 Together with Charlie Chaplin’s personification of the neurotic factory worker at the Fordist assembly line (in Modern Times, 1936), these films would, through laughter, irony or montage, show how the modern everyday was not a liberating practice based on experience, skill and slow learning, but rather a drill applied to the unskilled labourer doing serial manual labour.50 Such works, through the writings of Georg Simmel and Walter Benjamin, explicated the importance of representation (montage and estrangement) for understanding as well as criticising the modern metropolitan everyday. Likewise, the everyday critique within 20th-century art – Cubist collages, Duchamp’s readymades, the Situationist psycho-geographic mapping and happenings – went hand in hand with

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48 Such as Walter Ruttmann’s Berlin Symphony of a City (1927), Dziga Vertov’s Man with a Movie Camera (1929) and Jean Vigo’s A Propos de Nice (1929).

49 Every Day (short film, Hans Richter, 1929) show everyday activity as routine-like, homogeneous and boring, yet the escalating editing tempo demonstrates how routine and boredom also generate tension. Resistance to routine seemingly only comes only from inanimate objects (food dancing out of the lunch plates).

From Penser la Ville to Faire la Ville

a revolutionised representation. Also in architecture, early CIAM rebellion was – with Nigel Henderson’s photo-reports of East London street life and Candilis and Woods’ photographs of slums at Algiers – primarily a revolt against the modernist representation and production of space from above.

Even if modern experts of the everyday like Simmel and Benjamin, offered a reading of the everyday that was closely linked to larger societal forces, and thus to critique, such critique suffered a double burden. The use of estrangement as a basis for everyday critique, does not allow the formulation of a more or less lasting critique: the estranged everyday soon gets normalised again. Moreover, the modern urban persona – Simmel’s blasé, Benjamin’s flâneur – was still, despite his revolutionary urge, bourgeois in nature and thus representative of only a small part of modern everyday life. Even if Benjamin’s flâneur might appear as less eccentric and extravagant than Simmel’s blasé, his fascination for the everyday excitement of the metropolis was of course only made possible because he belonged to the ruling classes. His ennui, his boredom and idleness, was supported and made possible by the everyday repetitive labour of the masses of the industrial revolution. Even if flâner and domestic retreat can be considered critical behaviour – the dandy’s critique of bourgeois boredom and thus of the division of labour - such everyday idleness remains highly elitist. As Georges Teyssot reminded us, ‘ennui is to be bored by idleness, not work. Ennui is to be bored by happiness, not sadness […] a disease of luxury, a luxurious disease’. Having (public) time to kill and having a ‘room of one’s own’ as an intimate domestic space for reflection, has indeed been, until not such a long time a go, a considerable luxury.

With the emergence of modernist architecture and planning, flâneur critique, with its typical, albeit elitist, everyday streetness, would altogether disappear. Modernist architecture and planning would opt for a total orchestration of everyday life, for which precisely street life was amongst the first to be sacrificed. The creation of the new Man required a double operation: getting rid of the everyday chaos in the modern metropolis – with its swarming streets, filthy slums and dirty, dark, and dangerous alleys – and establishing a new modern way of living through a more efficient organisation of all levels of everyday life. Within such

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51 The flâneur is not a creature of the crowd but someone observing the crowd from a distance - in: Neil Leach, Rethinking Architecture, A Reader in Cultural Theory (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 32. Simmel’s blasé is a typical product of the ‘sensory bombardment’ of the metropolis (Highmore, Everyday Life and Cultural Theory, p. 43). Simmel describes him as acting rational and protective-intellectualistic – with reserve - within the urban context, while more intuitive, irrational and emotional only in the private circle. Together with the cosmopolitanism of the metropolis, this generates a need for ‘being different’ and ‘making oneself noticeable’ leading to eccentricities, extravagances, caprices and over-exaggeration - Georg Simmel, The Metropolis and Mental Life, 1903 – in: Leach, Rethinking Architecture, pp 69-79.


53 Ibid., p. 50.

54 Ibid., p. 51; and Virginia Woolf, A Room of One’s Own (Penguin Books, 2000 [1928]) .
detailed orchestration of space and the user, architecture formed the ultimate instrument for social change and for installing an entirely new society.\textsuperscript{55} During the Modernist period, any mutual influence of the everyday social space and the built environment was tempered by the clear distinction between the architects’ view of the built environment as an instrument for social change, and the sociologists’ view of the built environment as mere ‘receptor’ of and reflector of social processes.\textsuperscript{56}

Not surprisingly, the criticism against modernist architecture and planning that emerged in the 1950s and 1960s was directed primarily at modernism’s assault on the everyday, and in particular its destruction of collective urban space and of ‘the street’ as a locus of everyday life.\textsuperscript{57} Jane Jacobs’s 1961 \textit{Death and Life of Great American Cities} (against rationalist, modernist planning’s rejection of the user, of life in the city), Kevin Lynch’s 1960 \textit{The Image of the City} (on the influence of the city shape on the dweller), and Paul Davidoff’s 1965 ‘Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning’ (participatory planning), would mark late-modern and post-modern planning and urban renewal with a long-lasting spirit of criticism, user-participation, luttes urbaines, and contreprojets.\textsuperscript{58} Since the agency of the user (or dweller) of architecture and of the city would be reinforced, not surprisingly, sociologists would get involved in what used to be strictly architecture environments: most notably education and city planning (now turning participatory).\textsuperscript{59} In contrast to the more indirect, delayed or local/small-scale influence of the Situationist International, Cobra, and Henri Lefebvre’s canonical everyday critique, in architecture, a preoccupation with the everyday would infiltrate late-modernist architecture primarily through the Independent Group, and its offspring Team X, created in 1959, at the occasion of the tenth and last Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne in Otterlo.\textsuperscript{60} From the Pop movement, and in

\textsuperscript{55} From the Frankfurt Kitchen to new capital cities (Brasilia, Chandigarh).


\textsuperscript{57} Not as much directed against architecture’s failure to install a new society, but against the high price that had been paid for attempting to do so, such as the destruction of the historic city and erasure of popular city life.


\textsuperscript{59} In Brussels: René Schoonbrodt and ARAU’s liaison with the architects of the AAM.

\textsuperscript{60} The (critical, Marxist) line of Lefebvre’s \textit{Critique of Everyday Life} would continue into architecture either directly - Lefebvre was in close contact with French architects – or indirectly, through COBRA and the \textit{Situationist International} into UK’s Brutalism and then back to France (L’Atelier de Montrouge, Maisons Jaoul etcetera: traces of work) – Lecture Lukasz Stanek, 21/02/2008, Delft School of Design, TU Delft. The IG group was connected through the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA London), in the period 1952-1955, and included Nigel Henderson, Rayner Banham, Alison and Peter Smithson. See the ICA exhibitions \textit{This is Tomorrow} (1956) and \textit{Parallel of Life and Art} (1953).
particular the ‘As Found’ movement, a ‘Populist architecture’ would emerge that was less about taste (as the ‘other’ everyday variant: Pop and Camp architecture) and more about social and political issues. 1960’s and 1970’s reactions against a too determinist (and destructive) modernist architecture, would give central attention to the agency of everyday use (of the city, of architecture) and on how such use could become an important agency for political resistance – of lutter – and for the design of the built environment (participatory design, the consideration of the user as a creative agent, even a self-builder as in the vernacular architecture of Rudofsky). Architecture’s determinism would make place for an interest in the way the built environment could receive, reflect upon and learn from the social use of space. In more general terms, post-modern discourse would prove preoccupied with societal issues and with ‘giving voice’ to ‘the Other’ (as in feminist and post-colonial studies). In spatial planning, the tone would not only grow more radically towards empowerment, but also in a way more hegemonic: by the late 1960s, participatory architecture and especially advocacy planning ‘ruled’ in many architecture schools.

And yet, this ‘critical’ architecture and planning that emerged in the 1950s and 1960s proved problematic, and are still today fighting their old – but also some new - demons. Why?

Social planning and architecture (participatory, everyday-based and societal concerned) allocated primarily agency to the user, both in terms of the general public and the ‘excluded’ or ‘oppressed’. Revolutionary theories such as by Lefebvre, would generate a mood of empowerment of the citizen that attempted to create cities ‘for the people’, or better: for all the people. This tendency to give prior agency to the user and citizen, while, consequently, allocating less agency to the architect and planner – in the best case an advocate or enabler - would not last for long; and this for reasons that have maintained many of the tensions between architecture and the everyday until today.

The ‘participatory’ aspect of planning and architecture would suffer a couple of breakdowns. Public money cuts under the economic crisis of the seventies would strip social action from its financial influx while the Cold War would give it a new and unfortunate
‘Bolshevist’ reputation. The architecture profession would gradually replace its social populism with formalism and elitism – what Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre called architectural Narcissism. What was gradually destroyed was the equilibrium of the profession’s ‘populist “bottom-up” [approach] with a public sector “top-down” approach’, of architecture’s aesthetic and social missions, and of its formal invention and political intervention. Apart from the autonomous-elitist turn of large parts of the architecture profession, the evolution of participation itself can also be blamed. Through gradual institutionalisation, citizen participation would not just lose its radicalism; it would also often be abused to legitimise certain spatial solutions. As the Brussels saga also shows, even the most intense participatory processes could not prevent the struggles that were met with when trying to reconcile the demands (and opportunism!) of use with the requirements, constraints and (aesthetic) desires of design practice. The predominance of the user in participatory design would – at times very explicitly – discredit the credibility of the architect, whose agency remained nevertheless, and unavoidably, very central. Due to the difficult insertion of use, citizenship, and activism in design, hardly any genuinely participatory architecture was produced. Through such failures to fully account for the everyday in design, and doubtless also the feeling of frustrated creativity, architects would either turn towards the more established, but less genuine, institutionalised participation and adopt therein a dishonestly humble position, or they would simply throw in the towel, dismiss the participatory (societal) mood altogether, and take refuge in elitist architectural autonomy. Still others would be too cowardly to choose for the glitz, extravaganzas, and arrogance of iconic star architecture, but instead opt to stabilise their ‘good intentions’ and (traditionalist) style preferences as major selling arguments for developer architecture. This latter group has simultaneously failed on several fronts: their arguments for mixed use, sustainability, social cohesion, pedestrian-friendly neighbourhoods and community life have been extensively used on paper but hardly achieved in reality. Also, the architecture produced in such contexts – mostly dominated by private developers’ logic of profit – hardly leaves room for architectural experiment and risk-taking (innovation). And finally, their aesthetic preferences would sabotage their democratic promises. We have seen this with the Reconstruction de la Ville movement in Brussels, and will come back to this in the fourth chapter, when discussing participation in architecture.

66 Ibid.
67 Ibid., p. 284.
69 Kroll’s construction of ruins; L’Atelier de Mont Rouge’s literal expression of traces of labour, of construction.
When in the 1990s an everyday ‘revolution’ re-emerged, this would in fact not only turn on the empowerment of the (oppressed) citizen but also contain a critique against the privatisation, globalisation, and mediatisation that had generated an architecture of excess and which had destroyed architecture’s ‘collective’ (State) client. Thus, the empowerment discourse of the 1960s would be completed with a call for disempowering the architect as a VIP agent in the building of space; while also critique would mount against the fact that much of post-modern theory in architecture had implied a withdrawal from reality, and thus from the everyday. But even then, even the more everyday-based, empirical, and hands-on projects would suffer, if not from a withdrawal from practice (into theory), from an only partial engagement with the real. Rather than appealing to the entanglements and logics of the observed situation, such projects still often start from \textit{a priori} ideological, normative and empirical viewpoints. In other words, architecture’s criticality and reality-check cannot be evaluated that easily according to whether its locus is in theory or practice, software or hardware, interaction or technology, use or the built, intellectualism or empiricism, but according to how serious it takes the \textit{multiple} agencies at work in the fabrication of the real.

I’d like to recall Terry Eagleton’s warning to be quite suspicious about calls for more attention for ‘what’s really out there’, however, \textit{not} as a call for \textit{more} theory, but as an interest in those agencies (including theory) that compose, construct, maintain, destroy or take care of what’s, indeed, \textit{really} out there:

Left conferences in particular have their compulsive rituals and elaborate codes. There is always the man or woman who noisily claims the title of Most Alienated Person in the Conference, as well as the Real-World-Out-there, prolier-than-thou participant who reminds his colleagues that […] there’s a world of real people out there […] and what exactly do they propose to do about \textit{them}? Then there is the man who rises from the audience to inquire at indeterminate length why no woman is speaking, the answer being that they might well if only he would stop hogging the floor.

My interest is not in the real as a ‘given’ state of affairs, but in what and how the real is realised. In other words, rather than looking at the everyday through the (oppositional) lenses of de Certeau, Lefebvre, or Goffman, it makes sense to plunge into the current interest

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70 Manfredo Tafuri’s critical project for architecture; Culot-Krier’s \textit{contreprojets} as project-manifestoes; but also Bekaert’s \textit{gemeenplaats}.


amongst social scientists in the (everyday) social life of objects and in the agency of non-human actors (see further).

Moreover, where the call for humility could still allow for a balanced aesthetic-societal architecture in the 1960s, this was no longer the case in the 1990s. The agency of architecture (and of the architect) was no longer just prioritised by the profession itself, but was now also leveraged by the neo-liberal economy. As either unavoidable destiny or welcome opportunity, neo-liberalism had become the new condition against which architects could seemingly oppose only by dropping their activities altogether. Building against – and building against - the system seemed no longer possible, which would lead to what has been called a ‘post-political condition’ for architecture. What I am trying to do here is to formulate a form of criticism that is neither accepting such a condition as an unavoidable fate nor returns to an oppositional, autonomous and theoretical critique unfit to respond to such condition. Instead I attempt to first identify and then integrate the tensions that are still inherent in the current condition, in a different form of concernedness. With regard to the oppositional aspects of the everyday and of the critical project, these tensions can be defined as, firstly, the simple need of the architect’s design skills, no matter how participatory one works; secondly, the naivety to believe that architects, so eager to be seen and to create, will turn towards the humbleness of the non-builder of the everyday; and third, the fact that reading the everyday critically is never enough for architecture’s prospective project.73

Not surprisingly, in contrast to the preoccupation of two key texts of this period - Rossi’s The Architecture of the City and Venturi’s Complexity and Contradiction - with architecture’s attention for signs and symbols, the ‘critical line’ was more preoccupied with the questioning of the (diminished) role of the architect, considered necessary to understand and enhance the banality of the everyday - most exemplary in Bernard Rudofsky’s Architecture without Architects and De Carlo’s ‘Architecture is too important to be left to the architects’,74 but also present in Learning from Las Vegas’s attention for ordinary, or conventional architecture, forcing architects into ‘a humbler role’.75

By introducing the ‘unfamiliar world of non-pedigreed architecture’ variously called vernacular, anonymous, spontaneous, indigenous, and rural, Rudofsky brought to attention

73 The first tension obviously relates to the fact that inhabitants, who evaluate the built environment primarily through use, are generally not interested in architects’ formal experiments, and the second, that architects design more for high level clients or ‘the press’ than for everyday people. Add to this architects’ withdrawal from politics and it becomes clear that there is a widened gap between everyday needs of ‘the people’ and the desires for aesthetics-formalism and individual recognition amongst architects. See also Tom Avermaete, ‘The Spaces of the Everyday. A Dialogue Between Monique Eleb and Jean-Philippe Vassal’, Oase #69, 2006, pp. 62-77, p. 74; De Gregorio, Alfredo, Architettura povera.


the architecture that has for long been excluded by Western architectural history and education, both in space and time: the vernacular architecture, that ‘does not go through fashion cycles’ and that goes a long way back in history. By comparing the architecture of so-called underdeveloped countries with ‘the architecture blight in industrial countries’, he shifts accent from the individual architect to the communal enterprise of architecture: ‘before it became an expert’s art [...] a communal art, not produced by a few intellectuals or specialists but by the spontaneous and continuing activity of a whole people with a common heritage, acting under community of experience’.

Also for Venturi and Scott Brown, the everyday has to do with that which is ‘not special’, what is quotidian, used every day, much ‘like the daily newspaper’. The tension between the ‘special’ and the everyday goes through the tensions between highbrow and lowbrow tastes, formal and informal, and public and private, and, as they state in *Learning from Las Vegas*, between ‘heroic and original architecture’ and ‘ugly and ordinary architecture’.

### 4.2. Tension two: aesthetics and architectural design

Another source of tension when enhancing the everyday in architecture has to do with the confrontation of the everyday - its banality as well as its critical resistant potential – and architecture’s aesthetic-creative desire. This tension has to do with the fact that the everyday is primarily preoccupied with the *use* of space and, in relation to aesthetics, with the banal, everyday beauty of it. But this tension has also to do with the specificity of architecture. When cultural studies, art theory, political science or ethnography are preoccupied with the everyday - its banality, routine, resistant and other powers - it suffices to read, register and represent the everyday in order to *understand* it. In a prospective practice like architecture, however, *understanding* the everyday is not enough. Architecture needs also to develop a project and design proposal that will at times reinforce and enhance the everyday, while it at other times neutralises or resists. It is this translation of everyday knowledge into design proposals that has often proved problematic. Finally, the confrontation of the everyday’s resistant potential with architecture’s aesthetic desire – whether architecture is ‘to please us or

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77 Ibid.
78 Scott Brown, ‘Everyday’ in *Crucial Words* p. 73.
79 Ibid., p. 74; Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas*, p. 129.
to instruct us - has generated tensions for architecture as a critical project. The fact that architecture’s engagement with the real is often experienced as incompatible with the autonomy it needs to be creative and to design, has generated a set of dichotomies: between an engagement with the real and architecture’s creativity and aesthetics; between resistance to and compliance with the real; between the everyday popular taste and elitist aesthetics; and, consequently, between theory and practice as the ideal locus of critique.

Even if the everyday has been a preoccupation of architecture ever since the rise of the modern metropolis, architecture’s aesthetisation of the everyday can be largely brought back to the 1960s: to the American Pop variant in architecture, and the work of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown in particular, and the European offshoots of New Brutalism. Through Venturi and Scott Brown and the writing of Charles Jencks, architecture (and aesthetics) got linked in a non-oppositional way to capitalism (consumption society).

In Europe, and more particularly in the UK, Pop art’s fascination with popular culture, mass media (TV, publicity, billboards) and the consumption society, would, through the Independent Group, Team X and the New Brutalism – also called the ‘As Found’ Movement - trigger a critical architecture practice revolting against the anti-everyday, high-art attitude of the modernists. Originally influenced by the French Art Brut, this UK-based movement would gradually, and certainly when it returned to the continent, exchange its everyday critique for more stylistic and aesthetic expressions.

Particularly in US architecture, the incorporation of the everyday would occur through signs and meaning rather than physical imprints and everyday traces. The late-modernist self-critique would make place for a more stylistic-aesthetic variant and the ‘lighter’, more ironic critique of Camp, as developed by Susan Sontag and used by Charles Jencks in his 1973 Modern Movements in Architecture. Through Jencks’s notion of Camp, and through Venturi’s Learning from Las Vegas (1977), a different everyday criticality would be introduced in architecture, namely one that emphasises style, artifact and irony rather than oppositional criticism or radical (political or moral) critique. Particularly through Jencks, architecture works would be evaluated according to their ‘effect’, symbolism, and

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82 Lichtenstein and Schregenberger, As Found.

83 Atelier d’Urbanisme et Architecture (AUA), Atelier Montrouge, and Le Corbusier’s Maisons Jaoul – traces of labour and construction would make place for signs that refer to the fabrication process through meaning rather than through real traces of work - Lecture Lukasz Stanek, 21/02/2008, Delft School of Design, TU Delft.

From Penser la Ville to Faire la Ville

operativeness. This is not to say that criticality was abandoned altogether but that it was no longer oppositional.\textsuperscript{85} Camp meant looking at the world ‘as an aesthetic phenomenon’; it was about ‘cheerful openmindedness’, about not trying to change the world, and about form, not content.\textsuperscript{86} Because architecture is all about pragmatics and about making compromises, architecture, according to Jencks, cannot account for the everyday through content, only through the manipulation of form: ‘If it all sounds a little claustrophobic and hermetically sealed from the everyday world, at least styles can be manipulated with integrity. One of the reasons for this is that the everyday world means compromise: it means the tough, commercial world that has to be mastered by speed and pragmatism.’\textsuperscript{87} In a similar, though more critical manner, Venturi and Scott Brown also enhanced symbolism pragmatically in \textit{Learning from Las Vegas}.\textsuperscript{88}

The architect’s engagement with the everyday is then neither by radical rejection nor by mere compliance but through a ‘consistently aesthetic experience of the world’:\textsuperscript{89} an operative participation and symbolic enhancement of the everyday. \textit{Learning from Las Vegas} therefore is critical, not the least against Modern architecture’s disparity of formal and social concerns and its hypocritical embracing of exotic vernacular while rejecting the US Levittown, and thus, for its dismissal of ‘whole sets of dominant social patterns because they do not like the consequences of these patterns’.\textsuperscript{90} But this critique is after all more ironic than oppositional: as a jester, the architect is believed to finally start building for the people rather than for Man.\textsuperscript{91} However, it is this symbolic reworking of the everyday (by the architect) together with the presupposition of a culturally educated, initiated, (and thus elite) audience that is able to read and interpret the symbolism (and the irony of the work), which would

\textsuperscript{85} ‘The Camp attitude is essentially a mental set towards a sort of objects which fail from a serious point of view. Instead of condemning these failures, it partially contemplates them and partially enjoys them […] it accepts monotony, cliché and the habitual gestures of mass-production society as the norm without trying to change them’ - Jencks, \textit{Modern Movements in Architecture}, pp. 186-87.

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., pp. 185-86.

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., pp. 198-200.

\textsuperscript{88} A pragmatically enhanced symbolism: neither abstract (as in semiotics) nor through a priori theorising - Venturi et al. \textit{Learning from Las Vegas}, p. 131.

\textsuperscript{89} ‘It incarnates a victory of “style” over “content,” “aesthetics” over “morality,” of irony over tragedy.’ – Sontag, ‘Notes on “Camp”’.

\textsuperscript{90} Venturi et al. \textit{Learning from Las Vegas}, p. 154. LLV accepts that ‘many people like suburbia’ and counters the two options chosen by the Moderns namely to build either for the upper classes of high culture or for the deprived through imposed social housing schemes (pp. 154-55).

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., p. 154; p. 161. Irony is considered an appropriate ‘tool with which to confront and combine divergent values in architecture for a pluralist society and to accommodate the differences in values that arise between architects and clients’ (p. 161). Venturi’s anti-heroic posture and irony was read as constituting ‘this generation’s answer to grandiose pretensions which have shown themselves in practice to be destructive or overblown’ - Vincent Scully, ‘Introduction’ in \textit{Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture}, by Robert Venturi, The Museum of Modern Art New York, 1992 (originally published in 1966, pp. 9-11, p. 10.)
annihilate a critical aesthetisation of the everyday. Therefore, and especially in today’s image-driven and aesthetically predominant architectural practice, it is crucial to work out the connection between the everyday and aesthetics. But how then to integrate the aesthetic-stylistic and societal concerns of the architect; how to reconcile critique and aesthetics when translating everyday concerns into architectural design?

If we start from the assumption that the everyday is all about use, and architecture is all about design and aesthetics, a logical step would be to work out the relationship between social scientists and planners on the one, and architects on the other hand. This attempt was of course at the very heart of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown’s work. Their defence of a theory of form and meaning – ‘the physical shape, dimensions, location, and appearance of buildings’ and a building’s ‘symbolic, associative qualities, its meaning’ - was intended precisely to overcome the misunderstandings between architects, social planners, and sociologists. Architectural design and formalism were not, therefore, seen as a withdrawal from social concernedness but as the only way to insert such concernedness within the physical workings of architecture. Their argument against architects being too afraid to lose aesthetic control and social planners being scared of aesthetics altogether, is today still a spoiler for successful everyday-based design. Few architects and sociologists manage to work together while mutually acknowledging their specific qualities. Yet, Venturi and Scott Brown’s pragmatism and ‘consciously casual’ approach to the everyday, remains problematic for its being delimited to architectural forms of expression: architects should be ‘concentrating on their own job’ rather than on ‘the relation of architecture to other things’.

Also more contemporary, so-called ‘everyday architecture’ practices including MVRDV, OMA, and FOA, demonstrate the difficulty of re-inserting everyday critique into architectural production, no matter how pragmatist, operational and performative it may be. A remarkable example of such a failure to create architecture beyond its very own working categories, formal languages and preferred aesthetics, is Jean Nouvel’s ‘Nemausus 1’ council

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93 Scott Brown, ‘On Architectural Formalism and Social Concern’.


95 Venturi, Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, p. 14, quoting Sir John Summerson (italics in original).

96 These works express everyday tactics as opposed to the strategy-based work of Eisenman (context-less, purely formal experiments of design process), and a hope to ‘gain relevance for architecture directly from the intervention in concrete, that is [the] everyday situation’ - Frank-Bertholt Raith, ‘Everyday Architecture – In what style should we build?’, Daidalos, issue 75, May 2000, pp. 6-17, p. 12. Raith recognises this in FOA’s ‘activation of the ground’ – a ‘strategic intervention into a force field, while the built object is merely the remaining manifestation of this intervention’ (p. 12) - and MVRDV’s Datascapes.
housing project in Nîmes. In this so-called revolutionary housing scheme, despite being affordable housing, socio-economic aspects are second to architectural concerns after all. Nouvel’s modern ideals of more air and space through duplexes, triplexes and 30-40% interior space gains thanks to cheaper finishing, are useless when social housing tenants pay per m2 and not per unit. Moreover, Nouvel’s use of industrial systems (large industrial sliding doors as entry façades) and absence of decoration (bare concrete walls and unfinished floors) proves a false economy and an architectural preference after all: the industrial sliding doors account for 8% of the construction costs; Nouvel tried to safeguard the absence of decoration through stipulations in the tenants’ lease contracts, for example not allowing them to use wallpaper.

By contrast, much of the critical everyday works, such as Deborah Berke’s *Architecture of the Everyday*, are explicitly opposed to celebrity-architects, signature-buildings, name-brand architecture and thus denies aesthetics. Yet, notwithstanding its aesthetic shortcomings – being generic, anonymous, banal, common, ordinary, even vulgar and visceral - it nevertheless allows for a broader definition of criticality, namely in terms of the ‘consciousness of the act of making architecture’, with which Berke refers to the fact that neither architecture nor the everyday are innocent. How then to achieve a concerned enhancement of the everyday that is neither merely critical, modest, naïve (yet unrealistic for not allowing aesthetics) nor pragmatic (yet suffering the unbearable lightness of ‘dirty realism’)? How can architecture, aesthetically and otherwise, deal with the real, even in its most downward and deprived realness? How can architects deal with rather than (naïvely or even viciously) appropriate the contemporary deprivation of marginalised urban fringes, Roma camps, metropolitan homelessness or megacities to their own benefits and hunger for ever new sensations? Whereas an ethnographic immersion in the real à la Friedrich Engels delivers valuable understandings, it struggles to transform descriptive knowledge into an architectural proposal. By contrast, whereas the ‘picturesque’ manages to make beauty

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97 Jean Nouvel “Nemausus 1” Council Housing 1986, Nîmes, France, see DVD Architectures, Volume 1 (Arte).
100 The architect is not naïve; the everyday flirts with mass culture. This makes Berke define the everyday as ‘that which has not yet been co-opted’ - Berke ‘Thoughts on the Everyday’, p. 226.
emerge from that which disgusts, it hushes up the real so much that a critical intervention no longer seems possible.\textsuperscript{102}

Arie Graafland’s proposal for architecture as mediator can be read as a response to the observation that the populist, seemingly non-elitist architecture so ‘beautifully’ envisioned by Jencks, does not allow us to account for the downright reality of the real, let be its ugliness and misery.\textsuperscript{103} For grasping the real through architecture, Graafland proposes both a cognitive and a tactile relation to buildings (through image and experience) and an architecture of the sublime rather than of beauty.\textsuperscript{104} The great value of the sublime is its distinction from beauty in the sense that it gives no pleasure but ‘a moment of exceeding our self’ (as in the plays of Shakespeare),\textsuperscript{105} and, henceforth, that it is neither a refuge from nor a normalisation of the banal and the ugly in the everyday. Klaus Juergen Bauer recognises ‘aesthetics of the banal’ in the architecture of Herzog & de Meuron, Diener & Diener, and Marques & Zukirchen for in their work the everyday and banality – defined as ‘a thing without properties […] [the] invisible’\textsuperscript{106} - is enhanced ‘as a sophisticated architectural tool’.\textsuperscript{107} For Bauer, such everydayness occurs in architecture as long as it is ‘b architecture’ (without a capital) and as long as it is undiscovered by the press. It is considered popular by the general public but ‘ugly’ by architecture culture.\textsuperscript{108} The everyday and the banal is here explained as being perhaps opposite to ‘beautiful’ but nevertheless making architecture ‘worthwhile’.\textsuperscript{109} It is related to the ‘interpretation’ and appreciation of architecture (as ugly or worthwhile) that is seemingly different for the architect and critic (as specialist) and the man in the street. But the question that remains unaddressed is: worthwhile to whom and according to which criteria? The sublime might shift the question away from high-art beauty, but it risks keeping architecture’s ‘worthwhile’ safely within the realm of architecture rather than mingling with

\textsuperscript{102} The picturesque refers to the difference between disgust when confronted with the real situation (‘animal’ disgust) and when confronted with a representation (painting) of that situation (conceptual disgust). - Macarthur ‘The Butcher’s Shop’, p. 35. The picturesque mimesis (representation) with its capacity to make things ‘more beautiful’ allows us to ‘avoid any suggestion that we find beauty in dankness, poverty, or disease’ (p. 36).


\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., p. 41.

\textsuperscript{105} John Macarthur ‘The Butcher’s Shop’ p. 35.

\textsuperscript{106} Graafland, The Socius of Architecture, p. 60.

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., pp. 57-61, p. 60.

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., pp. 60-61. Bauer refers to Adolf Krischanitz’s Art Hall in Vienna and Pilotengasse Siedlung (with H&dM, and Otto Steidle) – reference to Klaus Juergen Bauer Minima Aesthetica Banalitat als strategische subversion der architektur, Weimar 1996.

\textsuperscript{109} Graafland, The Socius of Architecture, p. 60.
the numerous forces that link architecture to the world. Indeed, the architect remains central to the sublime as the indispensable createur of sublime experience, the (cultivated) audience’s susceptibility to such experience, and the unavoidable reduction of the everyday in order to make the great leap that is necessary if one wants to move from the everyday banality to the altogether different register in which architecture’s sublime gets effectuated. Even if such ‘spatial equivalents of our world’ can indeed be discovered in the work of Koolhaas,110 the problem remains that architectural interventions, such as visually cheap materials (industrial light-fittings, unfinished steel, chipboard) are used primarily for their meaning, their meaning within architecture, and hence don’t allow for moving beyond a ‘selective’ fascination for the everyday - the reason for Liane Lefaivre labelling such architecture as ‘dirty realism’. What is therefore needed, is perhaps not (yet again) another set of new categories to describe buildings, now that ‘left’ and ‘right’ and ‘beautiful’ and ‘ugly’ are no longer suitable,111 and not an equivalent of our world, but a new, more entangled model for exploring architecture’s agency in the world.

Geert Bekaert’s gemeenplaats suffers a similar burden. Despite its translational qualities - dealing with the everyday while accepting architecture’s autonomy and formal qualities; being neither a naïve search for a more sincere architecture of authenticity nor a withdrawal into the non-critical realm of autonomy; capable of shaping, from an individual imagination (of the architect), architecture with a collective meaning, and thus to move beyond the banality of the everyday112 - Bekaert’s gemeenplaats remains a strictly architectural endeavour. Despite its emphasis on architecture’s major tensions ‘between ideal concept and social reality, between autonomy and servitude, between materialism and poetry’, the architecture of the gemeenplaats is in the world as ‘erected poetry’ that casts its shadow over reality.113 Bekaert’s architecture of the gemeenplaats is philosophically, aesthetically, and politically at the very centre of the world, yet pragmatically it proves rather disconnected from the numerous entanglements, messiness and complexities of the real.

But let’s return to the initial aim of finding an approach for architecture that neither strives to incorporate the everyday in a naïve, immaterial, and thus unachievable manner – as

110 Ibid.; reference to Fredric Jameson, ‘Spatial equivalents in the world system’, in: Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (Durham, 1992), p. 101. Koolhaas does not deliver what cannot be achieved in society; he provides a well-functioning building but one that is as imperfect as society is (there are no details in the Kunsthal), (Graafland, The Socius of Architecture, p. 44).

111 Ibid., p. 24. One such new category for Graafland is the ‘sublime’ and the ‘rhizome’.


if registering the everyday suffices; as if *authenticity* can be found and reproduced – nor engages with the real in a mere pragmatic way – dropping *critique* altogether. Consequently, both an architecture that denies and one that overemphasises its specificity, proves inappropriate. Even promising concepts such as the sublime or the *gemeenplaats* prove to be only partially successful in dealing with the issues at stake. Yet, as long as there is no alternative that is *pragmatic* enough in its dealing with the real, the ‘dirty realists’ will not take the bait. And as long as there will be no alternative allowances for dealing with the pragmatics of the real in a *concerned* enough manner, critical practitioners and theorists will do neither.

But why flatter them anyway?! Because the surfers on the waves have the assignments on their side: *they* build, *they* shape and transform the real. Because the ‘resisters’ have a vast part of the real on their side, namely that what remains or has become unrepresented and unsheltered by the built environment (the unformatted). Also because, as long as we don’t find a way through which compliers and resisters can mingle, both sides will continue to fail in shaping architecture’s being-in-the-world. And today, tension mounts, perhaps even faster then ever, now that economic breakdowns are leaving architects behind with nothing *but* the real (stripped bare of many of its ‘qualities’ such as technological innovation, waste-production and profit-making) while the unformatted grows to such an extent that it will soon start formatting itself. This is not to say that a ‘revolution’ is announced, but that, in its downright *pragmatism*, the architects of the real might perhaps more than ever benefit from a smart, but more *concerned* engagement with the everyday. Architecture’s mobilisation of the everyday and its long-standing attempt to ‘act in the here and now, starting with what exists and heading pragmatically towards a vision’, can perhaps be finally effectuated through resistance rather than mere reaction. Hal Foster’s preference for a *resistant* postmodernism - resistant to the status quo and to the ‘false normativity’ of a reactionary postmodernism - over a *reactionary* postmodernism (the return to tradition) still remains valid in order to reconsider the contemporary and unconcerned alliance with the everyday by market-oriented *anything goes* practices. Foster’s definition of resistance is particularly interesting, for it, rather than *negating* the role of representation, opts for a ‘critique which destructures order[s] of representations in order to reinscribe them’, and thus, as a critique *from within*, it questions ‘the very notion of the aesthetic, its network of ideas’.

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116 Ibid., p. xv.
5. Towards a more entangled dealing with the real

The question then is how to come to a more entangled way for architecture’s being ‘in the world’ that allows moving beyond oppositional constructs such as the location of critique in either theory or practice, resistance to or compliance with the real, producing the ordinary or the extraordinary, and resistant versus operative architecture of effect. Yet, finding such a more entangled being-in-the-world is not enough, since another question to be answered is how such being-in-the-world allows architecture to engage with the world in a concerned manner - what kind of engagements does it allow? In other words, the question of engagement (criticality, politics, concern) is to be confronted with the question of governance: how is this being-in-the-world organised and shaped, to such an extent that it allows a concerned engagement and that it takes into account architecture’s prospective nature? And of course, it is precisely the mention of governance that will prove tricky for it is confronted with a prospectiveness that, processed through the design and trial-and-error workings of architecture, is highly unpredictable. Tricky also, because there will always remain the question about architecture’s drive, its goal-orientedness, its ‘to what end?’ Thus the challenge becomes the ability to imagine a more relational engagement of architecture with the world that neither denies its highly unpredictable workings nor makes into an abstraction architecture’s longing for a ‘drive’, for it to be concerned.

One way to allow architectural objects to engage differently with the world than was allowed by avant-garde subversion, critical theory’s autonomy or contemporary practices’ pragmatic but uncritical alliance with the real, is by studying objects as close-knit ‘knots’ composed of multifarious agencies. Research based on the unravelling of the ‘entangled knot’ has, meanwhile, become popular within the social sciences, for it extends the traditional study of human beings as sole inhabitants of (social) reality to the study of non-humans, quasi-objects or hybrids, composed of many (both human and non-human) agencies and traditionally studied by that ‘other’ world called science. Since the study of quasi-objects allows us to account for facts as much as values, technology as much as taste, functionality as much as aesthetics, it is indeed a tempting invitation for architecture. Whereas the study of scientific quasi-objects has, meanwhile, a long history in Science and Technology Studies (STS) and Actor-Network-Theory (ANT), sociologists and anthropologists have recently also discovered an interest in architectural and other design objects. At the same time, architecture theorists have also started to explore ANT-ideas as a possible way out of the impasse of critical theory versus projective practices.

What is interesting about the unravelling of architectural projects or buildings as entangled knots is that it allows us to take into account the many agencies involved in the production of architecture, in the ‘life’ of a project. I could sum up numerous worthwhile
methodological approaches that have emerged from the object as entangled knot. I should mention the work in architecture by Bruno Latour and his disciples including Albena Yaneva and Sophie Houdaert.\textsuperscript{117} In Cultural Studies, one can think of the studies of cultural objects such as Igor Kopytoff’s \textit{biography} of objects, or Scott Lash and Celia Lury’s study of objects that have emerged from the Global Culture Industry.\textsuperscript{118} One could also think of the analysis of the life of buildings by approaching them as ‘building events’, by Jane M. Jacobs and Stephen Cairns.\textsuperscript{119} Of course, a preoccupation with more ‘entangled’ and more ‘genuine’ accounts of the real (the everyday) lay at the very basis of discussions about and ambiguities regarding the ethnographic method of \textit{participatory observation} – how to write an account, how to observe from a proximate distance.\textsuperscript{120} Even if architecture’s concern with the everyday has been primarily preoccupied with Lefebvre’s production of space, de Certeau’s \textit{grammar} for the everyday (in his ‘science of singularity’) or perhaps Goffman’s front and back stage interactions, many other, typically anthropological concerns with the reading, understanding, and empowering of the everyday, such as Georges Pèreč’s work on the \textit{Infra-Ordinary}, or the ‘self-ethnography’ of Mass Observation are perhaps less known in architecture.\textsuperscript{121} Even


\textsuperscript{121} Georges Pèreč, \textit{Species of Spaces and Other Pieces} (Penguin Classics, 2008 [1974, Editions Gallilée: \textit{Espèces d’espaces}]; Mass-Observation, initiated by Charles Madge, Tom Harrison, and Humphrey Jennings in the mid-
without going into detail into the individual achievements or weaknesses of each of these examples, and no matter how diverse and different in nature each of these studies may be, they all give proof of one major incompatibility with architecture, one that they share with ANT: namely, their ethnographic method of unravelling the knot.

The historical-ethnographic study of the present allows us to say something about the complex engagement of architecture in the world, either of realised architecture or of architecture that is in-the-making, but it leaves us somewhat in the dark with regard to architecture’s prospective nature. Whereas ANT’s descriptive approach – no transcendence, keep the social flat – offers a valuable alternative to the too normative and reductive historical studies, its dismissal of such evaluation from the outside, and of critique according to a priori defined criteria, clashes with architecture’s active and creative agency in the world. Because of these creative qualities, architecture contains the unavoidable capacity to act in the world as to change that world: its critique of the real is intertwined with its intentionality or its desire to create a better, or at least, different world. In other words, if ANT formulates instructive responses to the question of the agency of what, how many agencies to take in account, and how to take them in account, it purposely avoids the question that is so important to architecture’s concerned effect in the world: namely that of ‘to what end?’ and ‘what can we hope for?’

This safeguarding of concernedness (the ‘to what end?’) in architecture’s design process in combination with the instalment of a more entangled, more pragmatic involvement of architecture with the real, is particularly important because, to my knowledge, hardly any existing theory or practice has its feet firmly within both camps. Proposals that do keep a strong critical approach and that do account for agencies such as everyday use and the self-organising talents of citizens, often fail in translating such observations into credible design proposals. Everyday Urbanism is based on a doubtlessly critical background informed by the everyday theories of Lefebvre, Nancy Fraser’s ‘counter-publics’ and James Holston’s proposal for ‘Insurgent Citizenship’ as a more ethnographic rather than utopian attitude vis-à-

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1930s, brought anthropological observations traditionally applied to primitive tribes, to the ‘home front’ and as such allowed the ‘working-class and middle-class people […] to speak for themselves about themselves’. (Jennings and Madge, quoted in Highmore, Everyday Life Reader, p. 148).


124 Recent attempts to do precisely that can be found in studies of architecture through the notion of ‘agency’, such as the fifth AHRA (Architectural Humanities Research Association) conference on Agency, 2009, University Sheffield; the resulting Architecture Research Quarterly special issue on ‘Agent Architecture’ (arq, vol.13, nr.2, 2009); Isabelle Doucet and Kenny Cupers, Footprint issue 4 on ‘Agency in Architecture: Reframing Criticality in Theory and Practice’, Spring 2009; and the Spatial Agency Research Project by Nishat Awan, Tatjana Schneider and Jeremy Till; and can also be found in Jeremy Till’s Architecture Depends (Cambridge: the MIT Press, 2009) and the expanded Everyday urbanism edition of 2008.
vis the ‘what can we hope for’.

Nevertheless, even if I believe that Michael Speaks’s evaluation of the Everyday Urbanists as ‘bottom’, and not even ‘bottom-up’, is too harsh, design is a problem: Everyday Urbanism indeed risks being more of an interpreter than a force of transformation. This is perhaps demonstrated not as much by the (from a design point-of-view) not so attractive sketches and proposals of community-based design, than by the dialogic design for the Chatsworth Metrorail Station and Childcare Centre by John Kaliski. Mikhail Bakhtin’s dialogic is here interpreted quite literally: to match the architect’s with the people’s desire, the station is reconstructed – as the people wanted it – in traditional ranch style, while the childcare centre adjacent to it, is realised in the architecture firm’s preferred ‘elegant modernist style’.

For different reasons, the community-based practice of CHORA (Raoul Bunschoten) is as problematic. The ‘game-boards’ method supposedly allocates more space to the actors involved in the process, while the expert (architect, planner, urban designer) steps back as a designer. Yet, the planner remains both the inventor and arbiter of the game: ‘the meta-language is [still] in the hands of the designer, not the public!’.

By contrast, the entangled, time-based design method of Landscape Urbanism (James Corner and Charles Waldheim) seems to come close to an entangled being-in-the-world, even if, due to the lack of application, this is still to be seen. That such a reality check is crucial is demonstrated by the realisations of the so-called more networked, pragmatist and realistic design-approaches of practices such as Crimson (‘Org-ware’), Kaspoori’s Maze Corporation and Maxwan – moreover all examples used by Speaks as ‘better’ alternatives to everyday urbanism for engaging with the real – these are all to a certain extent compliant with the existing situation. Perhaps the Berlin-based Urban Pioneers with their network- and time-based Open Source Urbanism (Zwischennutzung) come closest, that is, at least methodologically, since their success (abuse?) in practice has raised questions about their critical posture.

How then is it possible to think through this difficult fault line? Graafland’s socius of architecture and Hilde Heynen’s proposal for architecture as a ‘stage’, namely as ‘the result of

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126 Michael Speaks in Raoul Mehrotra (ed.), *Everyday Urbanism, Margaret Crawford versus Michael Speaks* (University of Michigan, 2005), p. 36. The 2008 *Everyday Urbanism* expanded edition gives better proof of its potential force of transformation, by incorporating projects such as Crimson’s Hoogvliet in Rotterdam.

127 Crawford in Raoul Mehrotra (ed.), *Everyday Urbanism, Margaret Crawford versus Michael Speaks* (University of Michigan, 2005), p. 27.

social forces [...] as much as modifying and structuring social phenomena', 129 work out the relation between architecture and the social, but they don’t yet approach architecture as a multi-entangled, co-constituting and full-blown actant in the world. Heynen’s ‘stage’ seems to come close to Foucault’s study of architecture as techne, in ‘Space, Knowledge, and Power’. 130 The techne is in fact Foucault’s critique of architectural post-modernism for having given up on rationality, reason and progress rather than accepting ‘how ambiguous things are’. 131 For Foucault it is the very task of critical thought to accept the ambiguity of rationality and irrationality and thus to no longer study architecture either according to ‘the exact sciences or the inexact ones’, 132 which, as we will see, resonates directly with Latour’s notion of the ‘collective’. What we can learn from Foucault’s reading of Godin’s Familistère in Guise and of the work of Le Corbusier, is that such architecture cannot be declared – from an external, theoretical viewpoint – as either oppressive or liberating, because ‘liberty is a practice’: it is ‘what must be exercised’. 133 What is so interesting about Foucault’s approach of architecture as techne, as ‘a practical rationality governed by a conscious goal’, 134 is that it allows combining a degree of pragmatism (‘practical reasoning’) with the imagination of alternative futures – the ‘to what end?’ (‘a conscious goal’). At the end of this chapter we will come back to this question of intentionality (the ‘drive’, goal-orientation, Foucault’s ‘conscious goal’). Likewise, when James Holston proposes ‘insurgent citizenship’ as an alternative to the (modern) utopian model for an alternative future, he argues for accepting rather than denying the paradoxes and multiplicities of reality and to integrate conflict and ambiguity of actual social life as constituent elements; to include the ‘ethnographic present’ in planning. 135 Holston includes within insurgent citizenship the homeless realm, migration networks, and slums, but also Gated Communities and other new strategies of segregation,

129 Heynen, ‘Space as Receptor, Instrument or Stage’. Architecture as ‘stage’ employs a more mutual relationship between architecture and the social than in environmental determinism or architecture as mere background for social action.


131 Ibid., p. 249.

132 Ibid., p. 256.

133 Ibid., p. 245. The Familistère is thought as liberating yet can be oppressive, albeit only if people want to: ’it could only be oppressive if people were prepared to use their own presence in order to watch over others’ (p. 246). Thus, architecture cannot fully direct freedom or oppression: in architecture intended to oppress or liberate, there remains always the possibility (through use) for resistance or restriction respectively.

134 Ibid., p. 255.

135 Holston, ‘Insurgent Citizenship’. Only so one can overcome the ‘utopian paradox’ of the Moderns or the discrepancy between plan and reality: modernist planning aimed at a plan without conflict or contradiction.
privatisation and fortification invented by the elite to deal with the advancing poor.\textsuperscript{136} This is important since insurgent citizenship can only be of interest to the current urban and architecture condition if we accept that not only the very specific insurgent alternatives (homeless etc.) but in fact any practice can at any time disturb the established histories: counter-practices are also to be found where theoretical or other \textit{a priori’s} would not guide us.

Such a negotiating thrusting forward and ‘practical rationality’ can be found in the notion of the ‘collective’ and ‘learning collective’ as defined by Bruno Latour in \textit{Politique de la Nature}, in his definition of architecture as an ‘object in flight’, in Isabelle Stengers’ Ecology of Practice and in Annemarie Mol’s notion of ‘fluid object’.\textsuperscript{137} All these notions allow architecture (including theory!) to thrust forward as a practice, and to include time and progress as constituting factors as yet beyond the modern connotations of these terms (exclusion, distinguishing facts from values). But before going into this, let’s look at how ideas in Art Theory have been developed for just such an approach: because art, as architecture, is both prospective and designerly in nature.

\textbf{6. Relational Aesthetics}

The reintroduction of the social engagement of the audience (user) with the work of art (building) by the everyday-based, participatory art that emerged in the 1990s and that could be traced back to the social art of the 1960s, has been discussed under the term ‘relational aesthetics’ and was discussed by art historians and theorists including Hal Foster (\textit{The Return of the Real}), Claire Bishop (\textit{Participation}) and Nicolas Bourriaud, who coined the term in 1998 (\textit{Esthétique relationelle}, later translated into \textit{Relational Aesthetics}). Their work, together with the work on aesthetics and collectivity by philosophers such as Jacques Rancière are instructive for understanding the possibilities of a critique \textit{from within} for those more pragmatic contemporary art (and by extension) architecture works.

Let’s first explore how such theories contribute to the re-insertion of criticality in art’s (and architecture’s) more direct and pragmatic dealing with the real. Claire Bishop proposes Guy Debord’s ‘constructed situation’ as a way to distinguish those art practices that ‘appropriate social forms as a way to bring art closer to everyday life’ and emphasise the

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., p. 170.

‘collective dimension of social experience’, from TV reality shows, business marketing and the likes who exploit a similar though uncritical direct, physical, and collective participation of the audience with the real. Nicolas Bourriaud has further theorised how the audience (the user) can participate as a more active agent in the construction of the work (building) namely through the simultaneous focus of art on the process of making (and materialisation) and on the integration of the audience within that process. Bourriaud’s interest in the ‘making of’, in the ‘process that leads to objects and meanings’ - thus meaning is not considered as a priori defined – does nevertheless not dismiss the critical preoccupations of the work. For Bourriaud, the art object might not be an end in itself but an event in the process of materialisation, it is, nevertheless, always an event that is concerned with the situation in which it gets materialised. Part of that concernedness resides in the more theatrical, open, and - since the art ‘object’ is in fact a materialised event - the more enacting relationship between the audience and the process of materialisation (the work of art). However, the question remains how Bourriaud’s ‘materialised event’ and Bishop’s ‘constructed situation’ can be instructive for architecture, being, in contrast to participatory art works, enduring.

For Bourriaud, the ‘making of’ an art object is not based on a single moment of production but ‘a series of events’, through which meaning and engagement and aesthetics are produced. Rather than choosing between aesthetics or politics, the former is produced through visual and ethical ‘delicateness’. In other words, rather than separating aesthetics from politics, or the autonomy of a work from its engagement, a work is, as Jacques Rancière has argued, an ‘aesthetical knot’. Herewith Rancière refers to the fact that politics and art ‘are not two separate and permanent realities about which one should ask whether they have to be

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138 Three elements in Guy Debord’s work allow to distinguish art from the uncritical practices: Activation: making the audience into a ‘active subject’ allowing empowerment (Bishop, ‘Introduction’, p. 12); Authorship: sharing authorship is more egalitarian thus democratic (p. 12); and Community: resurrecting the lost community and collectivity under high capitalism (p. 12). Art works such as drinking beer, dancing funk, running a café strive ‘to collapse the distinction between performer and audience, professional and amateur, production and reception’ (p. 10). Their criticality relates less to Benjamin’s consumer-turns-producer or Bertold Brecht’s political yet distant work (based on a thinking audience: supposedly capable of critical thinking), but derives from physical proximity (the audience as viveur) as developed by Antonin Artaud in his Theatre of Cruelty.

139 Nicolas Bourriaud, Relational Aesthetics, 2002 [1998]. He analyses how 1990’s art (he discusses in particular the work of Felix Gonzales-Torres) became more focused on the creation of a collective.

140 Ibid., p. 54, my italics.

141 Ibid., pp. 57-58. The audience is included not just as a spectator completing the work, but theatrically, enacting. Art’s aura hence becomes the ‘temporary collective form it produces by being put on show’ (p. 61).

142 Ibid., p. 54, my italics; 63; 64. Only so one avoids a work’s derailment in emotional blackmailing aesthetics (ref. Boltanski).
connected or not’. Moreover, if, for the ‘relational art’ that emerged in the 1990’s globalised world, meaning was produced, it was also produced collectively.

The critical potential of art works (and architecture) lies precisely in their capacity to allow collectives to gather around them, to enable gatherings as interstices that ‘allow us to define new cultural and political goals’. For Bourriaud, art is political as soon as it problematises the relational sphere. As we will see at the end of this chapter, this (Foucauldian) problematisation is important for the critical: just ‘gathering the collective’ is not enough. The critical aspect of relational art works lies in their focus on interaction and the production of ‘relational space-times’ wherein ‘we can elaborate alternative forms of sociability, critical models and moments of constructed conviviality’.

Their criticality lies in the present, in their proximity and particularly in relationality, not in critical distance or utopia. Rather than through breaks, conflict and clashes, so typical for the modern project of progress, rather than through the dogmatic subversion of the avant-garde, relational art is based on negotiation and co-existence: a project of ‘new assemblages, possible relations between distinct units […] and alliances between different partners’. Nevertheless, as Rancière has also argued, the question remains whether such relational art, based on assemblage and collage, offers a ‘third’ aesthetic politics as it combines the ‘becoming-life of art and the becoming-art of ordinary life’, but has replaced the avant-garde provocative shock with a lighter, even humorous distance; is also able to ‘recompose political spaces, or if they must be content to parody them’.

Now that, as Rancière argues, the traditional form of dissensus is replaced by consensus (and dialectical clashes by symbolism), art indeed occupies the awkward position where it appears as a substitute for of politics (representing traditional, but now lost, political themes), but has to question and recompose precisely those political themes for these have been themselves transformed through the politics of

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145 Ibid., p. 161. Interstices fit more or less harmoniously in the system, but allow nevertheless ‘exchanges other than those that prevail within the system’ (p. 161).

146 Ibid., p. 162.

147 Ibid., p. 166.

148 Ibid., p. 166; ‘Art no longer tries to represent utopias; it is trying to construct concrete spaces’ (p. 167).

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In other words, a so-called critical engagement with the real, from within the real, still poses the problem as to what extent the themes one engages with are not to be dissected themselves first. It is precisely for this reason that Rancière, against the current of after-theory and the post-political mood, does not dismiss the critical project altogether. Even if, in the current consumer society, there is no longer a hidden reality to unveil or guilt feelings to arouse, Rancière believes that the critical dispositif is nevertheless still valid. Denunciations of the critical project such as by Sloterdijk, are, according to Rancière, actually still taking place within the circles of that tradition: the only difference of the criticism of criticism is that, even if they choose to make use of the same tools and procedures (such as denunciation), they exclude any possibility, process or dream for emancipation from reality. According to Rancière, the two current options of ‘left-wing irony’ or ‘right-wing rage’, are in fact two sides of the same coin, connected by their disbelief in any form of emancipation: ‘Leftist melancholy urges us to acknowledge that there is no escape from the power of the beast. Right-wing rage asserts that the more we try to shatter this power, the more we contribute to its triumph’; the disconnection of critique and emancipation is then not ‘new’ but actually a last variation of the ‘original tension confronting two ideas of emancipation’, which makes Rancière suggest we not dismiss the emancipatory project but trace back the genealogy of its procedures. In doing so, it becomes clear that the shift that has taken place ‘from harsh criticism to contemptuous complacency’ is a variation within the critical project. A similar position has been adopted within architecture vis-à-vis the artificiality of the battle between critical theory and projective practice.

Rancière’s alternative form of emancipation – beyond the ‘endless task of unmasking the ghosts or the endless demonstration of the power of the beast’ – is then to look at reality not as one global entity but as a world involving several conflicting worlds, or ‘scenes of dissensus’: emancipation then being ‘the collective capacity implemented in those scenes of dissensus’.

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152 Ibid. These two ideas are the disruption of the ‘harmonious fabric of the community’ (resistance of minorities) on the one, and the collective reappropriation of a collective loss on the other hand.
153 Ibid.
7. Composing the architecture collective

In our search for an architecture that is more entangled, more ‘relational’ to the world, two elements play a role. Firstly, the architectural object is to be considered as relational in both space and time (context and process/fabrication). Here inspiration comes from notions such as ‘quasi-object’, ‘object in flight’, ‘fluid object’ and ‘atmosphere’. Secondly, a model for governance is to be developed that allows approaching architectural objects as relational objects and their design process as prospective. If we want to keep the preoccupation with ‘to what end?’, we cannot delimit architecture’s concern to the ethnographic retracing of the past or ‘mere’ description of the present. Here the notion of ‘collective’ as developed by Michel Serres and Bruno Latour, of ‘Cyborg Society’ (Donna Haraway), and ‘relational aesthetics’ (Bourriaud) are of inspiration. This governance model for the collective will be based on three major elements, which will be further discussed in 7.2.1, 7.2.2 and 7.2.3: time (‘moments’ or ‘series of events’), learning experiment (accepting risk and failure), and negotiation (through conflict rather than consensus). It is in this third element that we will re-introduce the questions regarding architecture’s drive.

I argue that, by looking at architecture’s production process (from everyday knowledge to conception, fabrication and consumption) as a collective, a gathering of numerous agencies and allies, one can overcome the so-called tensions between politics and aesthetics, between everydayness and design, between resistance and compliance, between engagement and autonomy. I also argue that the collective allows a reconsidering of the discussion on the locus of critique. Rather than locating critique either ‘on a distance’ (oppositional, theory) or entirely within and complying with the real, I will argue that the collective allows the agency of theory (and moments of transcendence) as much as it allows an empirical thrusting forward (at times, necessarily, complying with the real in order to move). It allows autonomous moments alongside moments of thorough engagements with the real; and thus it allows everydayness next to orchestration, bottom-up alongside top-down, tactics alongside strategies... and the many variants in-between these oppositions. In other words, Actor-Network-Theory might be keen on keeping the social flat (no external viewpoint, no transcendence), it nevertheless does not – and should not - exclude questions about the ‘drive’. I will argue that the collective still allows us to ask the ‘what can we hope for?’ and ‘to what end?’ questions, but that the criteria and references normally used to a priori inform such questions, have become themselves part of the building of the collective. Therefore, my discussion of the collective applies as much to the architectural design process as to the agency of theory; as much to the architecture profession as to the discipline of architecture. Discussing architecture through the collective is, therefore, not about developing a ‘method’ for practice or a ‘frame’ for theory, but is in fact about a way of looking at reality...
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(in this case the built environment) and a mode of composing it (through ideas and things, through enemies and allies).

7.1. Architecture’s relational being in the world

Architecture’s engagement with the world has been mostly seen in relation to its users and, since the relation between architectural design and use has never been unproblematic, it has also been considered in relation to critique through opposition or resistance. Innovations at this point have been manifested primarily through pluralist arguments fighting for the inclusion of the (colonial, gender, class) ‘other’ and the taking into account of ‘multiple publics’ or ‘counter-publics’. Since the 1990’s pragmatist-realist turn in art, design and philosophy, design got considered as being more entangled with the world, more embedded in the real hence less receptive to oppositional strategies and negation. Design’s engagement with the world occurred through ‘offering a provocative counterpoint to the habitual, the routine and the commonplace’, and as ‘strange-makers’ that no longer ‘shout out their difference or identity’, but are (seemingly) familiar with and part of reality. Such relational being-in-the-world can be defined in terms of ‘affecting’: how do the (architectural) object and its environment ‘affect’ one another? But, as Foucault had argued, when motivating the study of architecture as techne, such ‘affecting’ goes beyond oppression-through-architecture and resistance-through-use.

To ‘affect’ presupposes relationality through atmosphere. For Virginia Woolf, atmosphere was the ‘odour’ that surrounds certain objects or notions, affecting them differently according to the circumstances. Whereas for Foucault, oppression is never simply imposed by architecture for it requires a use and occupation that acts accordingly, Woolf had much less faith in the agency of use. Her atmosphere is a highly oppressive environment that affects without being noticed, and separates ethics from reality, theory from implementation. More recently, in relation to aesthetics, Gernot Böhme has enlarged the

156 See the post-modern critiques of post-colonialism, gender and ‘otherness’ (see also chapter 4) but also late modernist critiques such as Shadrach Woods’ ‘city of hope’ as a living place for all, not just the man in the street but the many men in the street: he who ‘speaks with different tongues and holds many ideals’ - Woods, The man in the street, p. 27.


159 ‘It is true that women civil servants deserve to be paid as much as men; but it is also true that they are not paid as much as men. The discrepancy is due to atmosphere. Atmosphere plainly is a very mighty power. Atmosphere not only changes the sizes and shapes of things; it affects solid bodies, like salaries, which might have been thought impervious to atmosphere.’ Woolf, Three Guineas, pp. 174-75.
definition of atmosphere in relation to the creation and perception of things (such as works of art and architecture): ‘atmospheres fill spaces; they emanate from things, constellations of things, and persons’. Atmosphere is that which, between subject and object, ‘mediates between the aesthetics of reception and the aesthetics of the product or of production’. As such, atmosphere integrates the performance and consumption of architecture, but it also implies the recognition of all those dimensions that are repressed when objects are evaluated through their form and meaning rather than through the atmospheres they create. If we extend Böhme’s call for atmosphere beyond the perception/production relationship then a whole world of agencies could gather around things: use, technology, aesthetics, institutions, materials, moods, education (learning), experience.

We would then come to an even more entangled way for objects to engage with the endless empiricism of the everyday, namely by approaching them as ‘quasi-objects’. The ‘quasi-object’ is in fact a hybrid of many things (such as both facts and values) and a knot composed of numerous connections and allies. Michel Serres theorised the ‘quasi-object’ as that which gathers the collective: ‘when being passed, [it] makes the collective, if it stops, it makes the individual’. By studying a building as a ‘quasi-object’ the role of all things related to that building – the user, production process, the design, the architect, engineer, materials, building permissions, aesthetic preferences – are redefined. No longer is it possible to oppose the agency of the user to that of the architect, or to choose for either aesthetics or politics; instead, the ‘quasi-object’ gathers all these agencies. It is no longer about the building’s being but about how it relates. It is no longer about the architectural object alone but about the different shapes it took throughout fabrication, the alliances it made and the networks it has built. Without these networks, without its allies (the users, the architect, politicians, materials, technological invention, legislation), the building is nothing: the building doesn’t mean anything per se, but becomes meaningful through its alliances, or in the words of Serres: ‘Over there, on the ground, it [example: a ball] is nothing; it is stupid; it has no meaning, no function, and no value. Ball isn’t played alone.’ What distinguishes one ‘quasi-object’ from another to us is its specificity. Humans and things, in their relational

161 Ibid. It is the ‘shared reality of the perceivers and the perceived […] the reality of the perceived as the sphere of its presence and the reality of the perceiver insofar as he, sensing the atmosphere, is physically present in a particular way’ – Gernot Böhme, Atmosphäre: Essays zur Neuen Ästhetik (Frankfurt/ Main: Suhrkamp, 1995), p. 34, quoted in Raith, ‘Everyday Architecture’, p. 16.
164 Ibid. p. 224. ‘Being or relating, that is the whole question.’
165 Ibid., p. 225.
being, ally with ever more specific things, things that fit better within their networks, that form more faithful, stronger allies.\textsuperscript{166} Serres’ circulating ‘quasi-object’ is of course similar to what Latour has called, in relation to critique, a ‘matter of concern’, and, in relation to the production of architecture, an ‘object in flight’.\textsuperscript{167}

What is important about quasi-objects, matters of concern and objects in flight, is that they gather very heterogeneous networks around them, and that they do so not only through space but also over time. The work of the collective, the gathering around a quasi-object, is based on the negotiation of networks over space and time, on their ‘situatedness’ within the real. The question that Latour asks for architecture is therefore ‘What do we show?’ Do we show the finished object disconnected from the numerous assemblages that have not only made it, but that also keep on holding it together? Or do we show these networks of fabrication, the building’s situatedness: that what makes it possible to exist (material, design, technology, use, oppression, legislation, theories)? Do we show the black-boxed object, the ‘matter of fact’ or do we show the ‘matter of concern’, that which becomes visible through breakdowns or controversies? Making this choice is not a matter of architecture theory or ideology but a matter of dealing with reality: ‘a choice of philosophy, of politics, but also of art and of design. Thus it’s a problem of civilization.’\textsuperscript{168}

Whereas modernist architecture was still dealing with ‘bald objects’ we are now increasingly dealing with ‘dishevelled, hairy, networky “things”’, with entangled knots that can only be understood through their networks and assemblages.\textsuperscript{169}

And yet, even if we approach an architectural object as an entangled knot, an assemblage, a quasi-object, matter of concern, or fluid object, that is to be unravelled, we still need an approach that is more prospective in nature than the ethnographic descriptions, biographies or dis- and reassemblages of objects. What we need is a model for governance for studying architectural objects as acteur-reseaux, as relational beings that are not just ‘present’ in the real but are concerned with and contribute to the ‘what can we hope for’. How to re-

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid., p. 232. ‘Words, bread, and wine are between us, beings or relations. We appear to exchange them between us though we are connected at the same table or with the same language. […] Our quasi-objects have increasing specificity. We eat the bread of our mores; we drink the wine of our culture; we speak only the words of our tongue’.


\textsuperscript{168} Latour, ‘Is There a Non-Modern Style?’; see also Paris being composed of ‘multiple Parises’ and the example of the Pont Neuf being ‘held together’ - Latour and Hermant, \textit{Paris Ville Invisible}.

\textsuperscript{169} ‘It’s one thing to offer the functional shape of a modernist skyscraper against the horrible doodles of a disgusting past, but it’s quite another to design a shape that ignores all of the ingredients that make a neighbourhood alive’ - Latour, ‘Is There a Non-Modern Style?’
\end{footnotesize}
insert intentionality into the collective and to make it move forward, if not through a priori defined ideologies or transcendent critique, then at least in a concerned manner?

### 7.2. Governing architectural objects as relational beings, as collectives in the making.

To understand how gatherings take place, assemblages are made and thus objects emerge, we will first have to look more concretely into the specific governance models that come through the approach of objects as quasi-objects or entangled knots. A good place to start is the ‘collective’, as defined by Latour. To understand Latour’s notion of ‘collective’, it is best to start from the distinction between society and collective. A society gathers social, human beings. A ‘collective’ contains both human and non-human actors and thus recognises quasi-objects. In *Politics of Nature*, Bruno Latour distinguishes an old, modern regime from a new, non-modern constitution or political ecology, a distinction that lies at the basis of the distinction between society and collective.

The ‘First Arrow of Time’ is, according to Latour, based on the ‘modern time machine’ and is obsessed with time and progress. Progress means thrusting forward on an ever clearer distinction between facts and values. It does so by both inclusion and exclusion. It creates a reservoir, in which it includes indisputable facts. But it also creates a dumping ground, where it dumps (and thus excludes) disputable values. Therefore, according to Latour, the modern time machine builds on two ‘powers’: the power to take into account (indisputable facts) and the power to organise those facts.

The ‘Second Arrow of Time’, in contrast, mixes facts and values into ‘matters of concern’. It sees progress differently, namely as becoming ‘ever more mixed, attached, and complex’. Progress is seen as ‘collective experimentation’ following a ‘learning curve’. An experiment means passing through a trial and coming out of it with lessons. It offers an intermediary between knowledge and ignorance and is defined by the quality of the learning curve rather than by the knowledge available at the start. Because of the importance of the learning curve and of the continuous process of experimentation, one can speak of an ‘experimenting, learning collective’. Such a collective creates only provisional boundaries: provisional totalities and provisional exclusions from the collective.

In order to allow experiment, learning curve and provisional totalities, one needs to be able to keep track of the quality of the learning curve. This is why the two modern powers

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171 Ibid., pp. 188-90.
172 Ibid., p. 233.
173 Ibid., pp. 191-92; 195.
are completed with a third power: the power to follow up.¹⁷⁴ Only in the ‘Second Arrow of Time’ is the collective introduced. By including both humans and non-humans within one and the same collective, it counters the object/subject and the nature/society distinction.¹⁷⁵ That is why ‘from now on, the word “collective” will take the place of “society”’,¹⁷⁶ which had been the main cause of the subject–object separation. Thinking in terms of collective allows both facts and values in knowledge production. It allows the integration of ‘a world of science […], entirely cold, absolutely inhuman, and a rich lived world […] entirely limited to humans’.¹⁷⁷ It thus allows the everyday and technology, expertise and ignorance. The governance-through-collectives, as proposed by Latour, resonates with Donna Haraway’s proposal for a new practice called ‘experimental ethnography’, which can be interpreted as her governance model for ‘Cyborg Society’.¹⁷⁸

However, to study architecture as an ‘experimenting, learning collective’ that is not just a gathering of facts and values but is also concerned, we will have to link governance models such as the one proposed by Latour or Haraway, to the specificities of architecture. I will do so through the notion of time (‘moments’ or ‘series of events’), learning experiment (accepting risk, failure, the open-endedness of design), and negotiation (through conflict rather than consensus, along a ‘to what end?’).

### 7.2.1. Time

The fact that the collective thrusts forward towards more entangled, stronger networks, opens possibilities for using ‘time’ as a central element for understanding architecture. From Latour’s treatise *Irreductions*, we can learn that time, as Power, is not pre-given, but arrives at the end of the road, namely after a long process of negotiation, translation, and transformation; when forces have become more durable, when actants have ‘generated times for others by allying with or betraying them’.¹⁷⁹ *Irreductions* starts not from Power but force,

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¹⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 205-206.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 232.


and from the assumption that ‘nothing is known, only realised’.\(^{180}\) As such, fixities such as Power, only come in when the game of negotiation is closed and made irreversible: until that moment, ‘everything is still at stake’.\(^{181}\) Time, likewise, is not an \textit{a priori} stabilised entity we can use, but is itself subject to negotiation: ‘times are what are at stake between forces [because overtaking others] can only be local and temporary because permanence costs too much and requires too many allies’.\(^{182}\) In other words, precisely because it costs too much to freeze negotiation, to keep the game irreversible, and to establish and to maintain shapes, permanence and durability, everything remains at stake.

Rather than the linear time of duration we are dealing with a time of intervals, a ‘series of events’ (Bourriaud) and a negotiation of moments of which some might require autonomy (creative design moments) while others involve engagement with the real (stakeholder contacts, use). What’s more, since these moments occur through intervals and negotiation rather than linear succession, the process of fabricating architecture allows an alternation of several, perhaps very heterogeneous or even contradicting viewpoints. There is no longer \textit{an} autonomous design process or \textit{a} critically engaged practice, but fabrications made out of moments of autonomous design, negation, technological engagement, user participation … moments that are at once recognised as isolated (as functioning as micro-laboratories) while always being relational enough to be part of the learning experimentation. There is, henceforth, no longer a logical sequence of an \textit{engaging} stage of user participation, followed by an \textit{autonomous} design phase, followed by a messy construction process, followed by consumption through use. When, following Bourriaud, the architectural object is no longer considered a ‘single moment of production’ but a ‘materialised event’ based on a \textit{series} of events – what Jacobs and Cairns called a ‘building event’ - then architecture’s (design) autonomy might be broken down into \textit{several} autonomous moments, interwoven with moments of (voluntary or forced) engagements and alliances, as such forcing architecture, at \textit{several} instances, to ‘consider what it means to be “thrown into” the world.’\(^{183}\)

As much as space, also time does not frame, but instead, they become ‘frameworks of description for those actants that have submitted, locally and provisionally, to the hegemony of another’,\(^{184}\) what is produced are ‘relational space-times’ (Bourriaud). Time is, then, rather than \textit{a priori} matter, ‘a product of situations, sometimes slow and sometimes fast, sometimes

\(^{180}\) Latour, \textit{The Pasteurization of France}, p. 159.

\(^{181}\) Ibid., pp. 159-60.

\(^{182}\) Ibid., p. 165.


linear and sometimes cyclical’. Precisely because intervals and sequences allow the shifting of viewpoints – and thus the production of meaning and engagement and aesthetics – the learning collective does allow a criticism from within. That is, a criticism that takes place within the experimentation of the collective, but nevertheless appears through shifted perspectives – something that we might call ‘small transcendences’ - at times adopted from more central, at other times from more peripheral locations of the collective and hence looking from within the collective at the collective. Haraway has rightly warned us that subjugated viewpoints (bottom-up, everyday based) are not unproblematic because the ‘standpoints of the subjugated are not “innocent” positions’ and because it is not clear at all how to see from below. However, this does not lead her to dismiss a ‘preferred positioning’ altogether, but to propose a commitment to ‘mobile positioning’ combined with ‘passionate detachment’. In other words, the collective’s criticality may be located in the present and in relationality rather than in critical distance or utopia; within the collective, standpoints are still to be taken, viewpoints to be adopted, but over time these viewpoints shift: they are never adopted according to any a priori idealisation of the subjugated, but are themselves ‘at stake’. It is the problematisation of relationality itself that is the very source of the critical since it allows new assemblages, unexpected relations and alliances between very heterogeneous parts.

The consideration of the object of knowledge as an actant (not a mere resource), and the consideration of the way of approaching that actant (through such tools as method, time, space, scale, context, engagement) as a fabrication process carried out by a collective that adopts different viewpoints, draws different boundaries, allows different degrees of transcendence and a different permeability of its boundaries, is what is on offer in Haraway’s ‘situated and embodied knowledges’. It is precisely with this situatedness of time and space – what Jeremy Till and Sarah Wigglesworth’s called ‘restless movement’, and Iain Borden’s ‘time-situations’ - that critique emerges from the immersion in the everyday; that resistance

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187 For the simple reason that one would otherwise fall into relativism, and by inversed consequence, into totalitarianism. Relativism is in the end ‘the perfect mirror twin of totalisation […] both deny the stakes in location, embodiment and partial perspective; both make it impossible to see well’ - Haraway, ‘Situated Knowledges’, p. 191.

188 Ibid., p. 192.

189 Bourriaud, ‘Relational Aesthetics’, p. 162; 166.

190 Haraway, ‘Situated Knowledges’, p. 191.
emerges – at least potentially - from *within* globalisation and capitalism. Hence, hardly surprisingly, the re-emergence of ‘situationist tactics’ as a form of critique that is ‘situated in relation to the immediate local and world condition [...] immersed in, and working against, and not located outside or separate from [reality]’. The ‘situated’ collective-in-the-making offers perhaps a more realistic option and a more appropriate critical practice than oppositional revolution or the situated but ambiguously critical *flâneur*.

Approaching urbanism and architecture as a ‘collective’ allows us to deal with both the space and time dimensions of such disciplines as well as with the fact that they are forced to deal with ‘a largely unknown state of becoming’. Emphasising ‘time’ is what links amongst others Everyday Urbanism’s preoccupation with flexibility to Urban Pioneers’ temporary use, Landscape Urbanism’s ecology, and Design Research’s *scenario* and practice-based, transdisciplinary research. Time is not just a coincident element of spatial design; it is central to design. For Everyday Urbanism, flexibility (‘designing time’) is what allows the shift between theory and practice, top-down and bottom-up moments, and tactics and strategies. In a similar manner, we can read Till and Wigglesworth’s process of ‘restless movement’ wherein architects move between social and political engagement and the retreat necessary to dream, invent, and create. Time, then, is the ‘opening’ for achieving Adorno’s double embracing of autonomy and social relevance within architecture. Urbanism, as the Urban Pioneers show, is a combination of an on-going process of coordinated change interrupted by temporary ‘voids’ – waiting for building permission, abandonment of a site under economic restructuring – that can be filled with temporary activities. It is in such time niches that Urban Pioneers recognise openings for more experimental occupations that allows a combining of the market’s need for continued occupation (abandoned sites lose value) with

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191 Jeremy Till and Sarah Wigglesworth, ‘The Everyday and Architecture’, *Architectural Design Profile*, nr. 134, Architectural design Volume 68, nr. 7/8, July/August, pp. 6-9, p. 6. In such ‘restless movement’, traditional binary couples such as extraordinary/ordinary, ideal/real are no longer opposed but mutually reinterpreted and reformulated. The design process behind their own house/office is perhaps the best demonstration of such an approach (Straw House at 9, Stock Orchard Street) - see same AD issue, pp. 31-35, where they explain the design process. Borden, ‘New Babylonians’: this resistance is based on ‘the presence of us all, separate yet collective, apart yet together’ (p. 132).

192 Ibid., ‘New Babylonians’, p. 133.

193 Ibid., pp. 132-33.


the users’ need for room to experiment. Such time-based processes allow the incorporation of societal concerns, aesthetic preoccupations, individual expressions and many other agencies. Finally, time is, of course, also the central element in any design approach in terms of ecology (Landscape Urbanism, sustainable design), concerned with the life cycle rather than the life span of products of design.

Designing time in architecture and urbanism means thinking past, present, and future without falling into the trap of nostalgia and fake authenticity (only the past); without being seduced only by utopia or the myth of the new (only the future); and without complying fatally with the real (only the present). The collective is no longer composed through the ‘cleansing march of progress’, but through experiment, learning, and risk: what is at stake when the collective moves forward is relationality and time itself. In Latour’s political ecology, revolutionary time, the great simplifier, has been replaced by cohabitation time, the great Complicator. It is the time of the present, not the time of succession, yet it is the time that allows the collective to move.

7.2.2. Learning experiment as a way of moving forward (on the prospective)
In order to allow the collective to experiment and learn, it needs to negotiate each step forwards and assemble relations between actants. Since, as Haraway argued, (architectural) ‘objects do not pre-exist as such; [but instead] their boundaries materialise in social interaction’, gatherings are not permanent but open to further negotiation. Because, henceforth, objects are ‘boundary projects’, the collective, as a practice of composing, establishes only provisional boundaries, provisional totalities, and provisional exclusions. Negotiation, assemblage, and feedback are made possible by tracking the quality of the learning curve - installing the power to follow up. Thus, rather than striving for consensus, tensions and conflict are accepted as key components of the collective in the making. These tensions and conflicts no longer derive from the uncovering of and resistance to the so-called

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198 Crawford’s analysis of the Mexican house-transformations in East-LA shows that the on-going and enduring transformations of these houses, form a resistance against real estate speculation and gentrification, and that contemporary ‘style’ has little impact on such ‘culture’ already rich in visual imagery - Crawford, ‘mi casa es su casa’. Also, Jacobs and Cairns’ ‘building events’ can cover several decades.


201 Ibid., ‘An entirely new set of questions has now emerged: “Can we cohabitate with you? Is there a way for all of us to survive together while none of our contradictory claims, interests, and passions can be eliminated?”’.


203 Ibid.
hidden powers of oppression and domination or from approaching reality as one global entity, but instead, from looking at reality as a world that involves several conflicting worlds – Rancière’s ‘scenes of dissensus’. The collective’s capacity to move forward, despite the simultaneity of these ‘scenes of dissensus’, is precisely where the very emancipation of the collective resides. In other words, the co-existence of autonomous, engaged, creative, aesthetic, social and critical moments within the architectural production, can only be guaranteed if the collective refuses to cover up contradictions and negotiates instead the tensions over time, or as Hilde Heyen argued: ‘the more a work succeeds in highlighting relations of tension, without reducing their inherent contradictions in a reconciliatory synthesis, the better it will be able to remain on the board of our contradictory relationship with reality’. 204 This is what Haraway meant about leaving room for ‘surprise and irony at the very heart of all knowledge production’. 205 For example, the reconciliation between the Urban Pioneers (occupying sites only temporary and in often highly experimental manners) and real estate developers (waiting for the site to become ready for exploitation), has led to the ambiguous situation whereby Urban Pioneers are no longer seen as conflicting occupiers of time and space but are instead used cannily by developers to ‘warm up’ unattractive sites for development.

The negotiation, experimentation, and translation process allowing the collective to move can be effectuated in many ways. Some agents will pick up the role of negotiator, of ‘vehicle’ for translation or carrier of knowledge throughout the ‘play in progress’, yet all actors are to be responsible. 206 One can imagine the role of ‘enabler’, ‘catalyst’, or ‘curator’ for negotiating the informality and unpredictability of events. 207 One can think of the architect as a ‘detective’, who unravels reality either by building knowledge through observation and description (as in the film noir detective, being ‘disengaged from time and space’); or, as in more contemporary examples, through lived experience. 208 In contrast to the detective, who is primarily obsessed, in any case, by what is hidden from reality, the figure of the ‘diplomat’, as proposed by Latour as a key figure in Political Ecology, and more specifically in the shaping of the power to follow up, deals more directly with the here-and-now reality. 209 The

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204 Heynen, ‘Architecture between modernity and dwelling’, p. 89.

205 Haraway, ‘Situated Knowledge’, p. 199.

206 Bell, ‘Ruins, recycling, smart buildings’, p. 79; p. 76. A focus on time and the life-cycle of design products implies that the designer, user, and manufacturer all share responsibility.

207 Urban Pioneers: the role of the planner-designer shifts to one of ‘curator’ in an ‘Open Source Urbanism’.


need for administrators to keep track of all development – and thus the quality of the learning curve - is completed with the competences of the diplomat who unravels the mechanisms at stake ‘from a distance’ while not claiming objectivity as he accepts ‘himself [to be] part of a collective’. The diplomat thinks in terms of requirements (what cannot be lost, what is essential) and expressions (what can be given up, what is superfluous): for the diplomat, the essential is always still to come.\textsuperscript{210} This uncertainty makes diplomacy a riskier calling than anthropology: the smallest slip of the tongue is enough to trigger stoning from both camps.\textsuperscript{211}

But is this figure of the diplomat – as in Latour’s experimental anthropology – in reality not a mere ambassador defending the interests of the group he represents? Is he not suffering from a lack of neutrality? Could the diplomat function better when negotiating from a more neutral standpoint-in-the-middle, as in the negotiations held by another anthropological ‘figure’ namely the passeur (French for courier or facilitator)? The Passeur or l’homme-nef could be translated as the ‘ferryman’. This figure has to do with the transport, translation and exchange of both messages and humans over time and space. In architecture and planning negotiation, the figure of the passeur would allow a more neutral translation of knowledge between the different expertises, between the different worlds at stake, than the diplomat effectuates (always defending only one of them). And yet, the passeur is also always involved when transporting persons or messages. In trans-border human transport, for example, one could question whether he is ‘involved’ (as co-ethnique) or purely ‘professional’ (only for the money), while one could actually argue that in both cases: ‘this moment of passage is an intense moment between two worlds’, neither pure ‘business’ nor fully ‘involved’.\textsuperscript{212} there is an affectionate binding with what is transported. If a passeur would be appointed in the collective, he would become a central agent, transporting knowledge amongst the several expertises, including that of the architect or planner. In that sense, and in contrast to the ‘enabler’ or ‘catalyst’, the architect and planner cannot act as passeur. The figure of the diplomat, but much more so the passeur, forces them into peripheral agency. In other words, the vehicle of negotiation, that which not only transports but translates knowledge from one level to another - any information is in fact transformation!\textsuperscript{213} - whether as diplomat or passeur, might be at times a human agent – both expert and non-expert – and at other moments a non-human agent. One can think of written

\textsuperscript{210} Ibid., pp. 213-14.
\textsuperscript{211} Ibid., p. 215. Instead of starting from an either/or distinction, he seeks the language of the common house, the ‘oikos-logos’ (p. 213).
\textsuperscript{213} Latour, Reassembling the Social.
accounts, spatial models, 3D-simulations, data analysis software or specific reporting styles and many other (re-)presentational actants that are capable of making knowledge shareable; that are capable to transform information with the aim to make knowledge more intelligible and shared (eco-logos) rather than with the aim of defending, prioritising, or controlling knowledge. In other words, if relationality and time are at stake, so too is representation, as it is the very vehicle for transporting knowledge (see further).

In order to keep track of its learning, the collective also needs to archive in such a manner that it resists interpretation and ‘the politics of closure and finality’. In other words, what it needs is to collect, archive, and make available the processes of negotiation in all their diversity and complexity – a problem that Mass Observation also faced with its ‘systematically unsystematic’ method of archiving, intended to involve both amateur and specialist data, and acting in a manner ‘at once irrational and objective’. Mass Observation, moreover, had trouble in keeping its enormous archives of everyday life intelligible. How, indeed, can the archive of descriptions remain manageable without reducing the complexity of the everyday? How can the ‘polyphonic everyday […] be orchestrated into meaningful themes or readable accounts […] the wildness of the archive […][or] tamed narratives’. Moreover, in order to resist ‘the politics of closure and finality’, in order to resist interpretation, political ecology not just needs administration, archiving and bureaucracy, it also needs ‘better accounts of the world’ and thus better ways to present the information at hand. In the more entangled world of the collective, therefore, common language and master theories are replaced with ‘heteroglossia, deconstruction, local knowledge and webbed accounts’.

The so-called local knowledge that is translated through the collective is no longer necessarily ‘small-scale’. Since webbed accounts might have epistemological value similar to grand theories, accounts of the everyday no longer need to be exaggerating or revolutionary in order to be empowering; designs for the everyday no longer need to be belittling or addressed at minority groups alone. What is needed is to give shape to accounts, and thus to negotiate the everyday in such a way that it allows us to move beyond a mere allocation of

214 Highmore, Everyday Life and Cultural Theory, p. 84; p. 81.
216 Haraway ‘Situated Knowledge’, p. 196.
217 Ibid., p. 194.
218 See the apparent need in everyday debates to use friendly, inclusive or even minuscule words – Schaap, PM., ‘Architectuur als verhaal’, Stedebouw & Ruimtelijke Ordening, 03/2007, pp. 46-47, p. 46.
meaning: as in Haraway’s ‘infidel heteroglossia’.219 If, moreover, such accounts should allow ‘multiple voices’ - not in the sense of ‘giving voice to the oppressed’ but to allow the juxtaposition and merging of reading, registering, description, representation, and performance (to replace a too swift interpretation) - the mode of narration and description (how many voices? how wide?) becomes another way of ‘acting concerned’. Being critical is not ‘jumping to conclusions’ (interpretation) but a matter of describing and negotiating the information at hand.

7.2.3. The negotiation of a – different? better? - future

I have argued for employing the everyday in a less oppositional manner, and as one of many agencies active in the real. I did so because the difficulty of combining oppositional politics with aesthetics and of incorporating theoretical-critical concerns in design proposals, has generated a twofold problem. On the one hand, it has led to truly critical everyday practices that are often limited to a better understanding and description of the everyday but hardly allow for concrete proposals. On the other hand, new types of everyday practices have emerged that deal with the real in a much more pragmatic, but also less critical manner. In order to respond to such situation, I have opted for a proposal that neither reinstalls oppositional critique nor accepts too easily the pragmatics of the real. When I thus introduced the ‘collective’, I have defended its thrusting forward through the negotiation of alliances and through the work of diplomacy and tracing, but I have also expressed my concern to ensure we do not throw away the ‘to what end?’ question. By breaking up the grand idea of transcendental critique (or any form of fixed unifying theory of the real) into smaller parts and by avoiding a priori ideologies or theories, without, however, dismissing the ‘what can we hope for?’, I have attempted to locate our engagement with reality more within than outside the real, but also to re-connect such engagement with a form of concernedness.

How then can we understand and evaluate the real, if not through yet another set of external criteria? The collective’s experimental thrusting forward allows for a form of progress that is ethnographic but also prospective and as such allows a directedness towards the future. The collective might not offer the criteria for a definition of the ‘to what end?’, but at least it offers us a new playground, a new locus for formulating the critical. Rather than continuing the battle between the so-called steamy heat of theory and the much cooler breeze of the real, why not analyse our concernedness in an altogether different location, namely by focusing on the vehicles used by the collective to thrust forward, to transmit, transport, translate and negotiate its concernedness with the real? Those vehicles can be stakeholders

219 Haraway’s Cyborg offers ‘a dream not of a common language but of a powerful infidel heteroglossia’ (‘A Cyborg Manifesto’, p. 181, my italics), and thus reinterprets Bakhtin’s heteroglossia (a constant interaction between meanings).
such as architects, planners, inhabitants, politicians, clients, and users. But in the collective they are no longer opposed as experts and non-experts; they are no longer normatively evaluated as top-down planner, enabler, or catalyst. Vehicles have the capacity to translate information, values and knowledge so that it allows us to take into account as many agencies as possible in the concerned building of the collective. These vehicles are not limited to users or architects; they also appear in the shape of representation techniques or any other format for transmitting knowledge. Document layouts, reporting styles, physical models, hand-made sketches, and textual notes are central to the transmission of knowledge within the collective. Not just their style, but also the choice of one vehicle over the other is crucial for negotiation. The architects and planners I have interviewed, largely confirmed the particular importance of representation techniques, especially when confronted with ‘participatory’ or ‘multi-stakeholder’ meetings. Some, for example, emphasised the difference in discussing around 2D-simulations and physical 3D-models. Even if for non-experts (users, citizens, clients), physical models are often harder to read than images, they nevertheless allow a more complex discussion on concept, volumes, form, even structure, rather than a mere discussion around colour and taste.\textsuperscript{220} Also, when confronted with particularly complex situations and stakeholder constellations, numerous meetings, and thus regular design changes, it is sometimes more efficient to work around 3D working models that can easily and quickly be adapted between the meetings – in contrast to sections and plans, requiring a higher degree of accuracy and precision in order to be kept intelligible.\textsuperscript{221} In other cases, a series of simulations, designed to show possible development scenarios or options, nevertheless risks to circulate and be interpreted as images of the final design.\textsuperscript{222}

Vehicles also play a central role in reformatting the knowledge coming from the everyday so as to make it useful for, say, policy making or the architecture and planning office. They are, moreover, an ideal locus for questioning the gap between what architects claim to do and what they do, and between the discourse of architecture scholars and the profession. They allow for an exploration of the tensions related to (critical) theory’s hermetic closure from practice and practice’s revision of the everyday not as much as a critique but as an aesthetic event - an architecture of effect. Since theory’s vehicles (journals, conferences) are not the same vehicles used by practitioners, they continue to mask the often shameless disparity between what architects claim to be doing and what they build; and they continue to feed the self-fulfilling prophecy that the theorist is insufficiently at the service of practice and practice is too innocently or opportunistically engaging with the real despite theory’s repeated

\textsuperscript{220} Interview with Thierry Decuyper (V+ Architects - Bureau vers plus de bien-être), 24 January 2008.

\textsuperscript{221} Interview with Sara Costa Noel de Araujo (XDGA), 20 December 2007.

\textsuperscript{222} Interview with Benoit Moritz (MSA architects and urbanists), 6 December 2007.
warnings. The only way to break such mutual expectations and scepticism is to allow the different stakeholders in the built environment to enter the collective. And this is possible only by developing shared vehicles - new dispositifs - for knowledge transmission.  

However, as long as scholars will not be credited for contributing to such hybrid formats (outside academia), and as long as practicing architects will be punished (losing clients and their reputations) for talking openly about their work – their achievements and successes, but also their struggles and failures – and thus stick to the promotional talk, such a dispositif has not got much of a chance. Additionally, it will never function as a true dispositif as long as scholars ‘lower’ their standards to come to a contaminated, ‘easy’ theory and practitioners ‘spice up’ their writing with, say, a snip of Deleuze. Moreover, moving towards more hybrid formats will require the questioning of the architectural teaching curricula which still often separates theoretical and critical reflection (theory and history courses) from the pragmatics of practice (the design studio), in such a way that the former is often considered an obligation that, at best, functions as a sauce for the latter (more often, however, as a burden).

8. Architecture and the everyday: what we can hope for.

With this chapter I have undertaken two actions in order to come to a more realistic enhancement of the everyday in architecture. A first action was to assess both the ideological rediscovery of the everyday in 1990’s architecture and urban theory and the more pragmatic-opportunistic engagement with the real that emerged in the same period as the so-called ‘everyday practices’. A second action was to formulate a different engagement with the real (neither naïve nor opportunist) that is both working within the real yet allows concernedness. This combined action of unmasking and re-grounding allowed a studying of the everyday without prioritising beforehand the ‘dirty realism’ of Koolhaas and his ilk or the more humble realism of Spaces of Uncertainty and Everyday Urbanism. Stating that the work on the marginal, the ‘other’, and the oppressed corners of the everyday is not more legitimate per se than the work of the effect-driven post-modern jet-set, is not to deny the important differences between resistant and reactionary post-modernism (Hal Foster) and between a Taste Populi and a more political one, but to argue that they function in altogether different registers, and that what is at stake is first and foremost the understanding of these registers.

223 Journals like Oase, Field Journal and Anarchitektur (and to some extent Harvard Design Magazine) as well as the specific writings of, for example Reinhold Martin, Markus Miessen, Jeremy Till, Crimson, BAVO or Michael Speaks seem – for very diverse reasons - to be moving in that direction.

224 Even if, of course, the design studio is still remote from the pragmatics of practice. It offers at best a simulation of a small part of architectural practice, namely the design process.


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The work of the collective applies not just to the racial, gender-based, social, political ‘other’ (i.e. to what is purposely excluded or oppressed). It also applies to what is not (yet) included, what is invisible in the meaning of ‘not intelligible’, what is yet-to-be-formatted but nevertheless takes part in the machinery of the real. It is what populates the ‘to be continued’ (what might come and knock at our doors any day soon; what may one day be rendered intelligible) rather than the ‘to be rescued’ (what is to be dragged in from beyond the edges of society). To act concerned in the world means to pay attention to these processes of inclusion and exclusion that become visible in particular in controversies or breakdowns. Applied to the everyday we find this in works such as Gordon Matta Clark’s *Splitting* and Diller and Scofidio’s *Withdrawing Room*, where the ‘black box’ of the everyday is opened: the habitual is undone, the everyday’s internal functioning is laid bare along the numerous traces left by its occupants, history, changes, and alterations. As experiments in ‘the real’, Teyssot argues, such works force us to reflect on notions such as homelessness, nomadicism or privacy and what it means to be at ease, to be in comfort or discomfort. They don’t need to make ‘leaps’ of interpretation or ‘jump’ into conclusions to do so.

Also in participatory design processes, critique is often formulated against a not fully transparent design process. However, autonomous moments, such as for creating, and making a design proposal, are not per definition undemocratic as long as design outcomes are reinserted in the collective and kept open for change. In that sense, a building (per definition a ‘frozen’ negotiation) can be considered undemocratic if its shape and functioning exclude any form of further negotiation through use and consumption. Consequently, critical and projective architects alike have emphasised the role of design in activating the everyday from within the real. In quite similar words yet with very different examples, Aaron Betsky defines design as strange-making, not in the sense of the avant-garde idea of disruption, but acting from within reality where it ‘waits, as if in a trap, until the potential shopper, unnoticed but troubled by something about that perfume bottle, turns around and concentrates on that strange piece of almost nothing’.

Likewise, Till and Wigglesworth have argued that architecture, rather than just setting itself apart, should ‘seduce you with the gloss, and slip

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226 For example, as long as we don’t know what makes something ‘strategic’, what it takes to ‘intervene’ and how ‘force fields’ are assembled, negotiated and contested, it makes no sense to classify the ‘strategic interventions into a force field’ such as MVRDV’s research and FOA’s ‘activation of the ground’, as everyday architecture – Raith, ‘Everyday Architecture’, p. 12.

227 Those moments when the voices of the missing masses come to the surface, and are thus rendered visible, for example when a printer breaks down and its technical mechanism is laid bare.

228 Teyssot ‘Boredom and Bedroom’, p. 58.

229 Ibid., p. 58.

230 Betsky, ‘The strangeness of the familiar in design’, p. 54.
the world of the everyday in through the back door’. 231 In other words, even if everyday architecture neither addresses a ‘common denominator’ (a ‘generic user’) nor is too preoccupied with architecture’s longing for uniqueness (‘setting itself apart’), it is nevertheless specific. It is this specificity of design that makes Everyday Urbanism claim to be more than ‘bottom-up’ for it does more than passively translate local community desires into design: the ‘autonomous’ moment of the Everyday Urbanist and Architect is a moment of personal interpretation and individual creativity, which is set ‘in a dialogue’ with the real. 232 This implies the architect’s acceptance or at least recognition of the transformations, appropriations, and possible rejections that accompany the ‘landing’ of any design in everyday life; and it is precisely this acceptance of the everyday as ‘the messy reality where designs are negotiated’, 233 that links the new generation of architects: both the projective and the critical ones. What then distinguishes the everyday architecture of the Dirty Realists from the more humble Everyday Urbanists is the latter’s emphasis on ‘Everyday Politics’ deriving neither from the architect’s overtly enthusiast and abusive fascination with the real (slum self-organisation, megacities, the chic in the marginal, the beauty in the ugly) nor from the architect’s docile, overtly humble bottom-up design, but from the fact that every place is worth attention, for its own intrinsic opportunities.

When concernedness, rather than processed through the concepts and ideologies of theory, is driven by a care for the intrinsic opportunities (and more generally, characteristics) of space, it allows for a working from within the real, without accepting the real as is. 234 This is of course easy to say, and noble to wish, but it still leaves us with a major issue that I have insufficiently addressed so far, namely: what is then the new drive? In which direction is the collective supposed to move? And according to which criteria is such a direction defined?

Likewise, I have recognised a potential for architecture in the work of ‘gathering the collective’, in its thrusting forward in an experimental, designerly manner, and in the genealogical work (of describing, unravelling, and archiving) that allows us to reflect upon (and thus evaluate) the collective’s endeavours. And yet, developing the capacity to ‘gather the collective’ is not enough (not anything goes!); nor is the thrusting forward in a certain direction (which direction? to what end?).

I have indicated earlier in this chapter that the challenge thus becomes imagining a more relational engagement of architecture with the world, in terms of both space and time. Such engagement is complicated by the architecture practice’s paradoxical urge to fully


233 Blauvelt, ‘Strangely Familiar’, p. 25.

234 ‘Transformative force’ is embedded already in the care for the ‘opportunities’ of space, but is less evident in the care for the ‘characteristics’ of space.
control its highly unpredictable workings: namely to control any future performance and consumption of a building (the atmosphere it intends to create) and even to orchestrate that atmosphere itself.\textsuperscript{235} Furthermore, in order to allow such relational engagement of architecture to be \textit{concerned}, we cannot make an abstraction of architecture theory’s longing for a ‘drive’.

In other words, it is not too much of a challenge to acknowledge the alternative, even \textit{concerned}, research approach offered by the collective. The fact that ‘the making of’, through Foucault’s genealogy and Latour’s \textit{Irreductions}, is intertwined with the observation that, with Latour, ‘everything is at stake’, and, with Foucault, that ‘nothing is fundamental’,\textsuperscript{236} actually lifts the ‘making of’ beyond mere deconstruction, into the realm of critique. The new set of questions are no longer about whether something is good or bad, but, with Latour, whether something is ‘\textit{well} or \textit{badly} constructed’, and, with Foucault, whether something (the way solutions to a problem have been formulated) is ‘dangerous’.\textsuperscript{237} Since fixities such as ‘power’ or ‘structure’ are considered only as \textit{possible} outcomes, \textit{Irreductions’} claim to \textit{concernedness} lies in the observation that ‘things \textit{could be different}, or at least \textit{they could still fail’}.\textsuperscript{238} Foucault’s \textit{concernedness} is likewise embedded in his method of \textit{problématiser}, but also, more explicitly, in his work on ethics through the care for the self. In Foucault’s later work on ethics, attention had shifted from processes of liberation towards ‘the conscious practice of freedom’,\textsuperscript{239} wherein he argues for accepting that power relations are everywhere, as part of society, but that ethics through care of the self implies a game of power with as little domination as possible: ‘to manage the space of power that exists in all relationships, but to manage it in a non-authoritarian manner’\textsuperscript{240}.

But once again: what is the drive pulling these ethical subjects forward? It remains ambiguous, really. In the \textit{Ouverture} I promised to take good care of the ‘what can we hope for?’ question albeit without processing it through the channels of distant critique or utopia. I have therefore tried to bend that question towards the more pragmatic concern of the ‘what should I do?’ (Scott Lash’s summarising of Kant’s second critique), a question that may be ‘not yet critique’ but nevertheless presumes a goal-orientedness, a drive, a ‘to what end?’.

One way to move closer to an answer would perhaps be to further analyse the workings of the


\textsuperscript{238} Latour, \textit{Reassembling the Social}, p. 89.


\textsuperscript{240} Ibid., p. 446. Citation from p. 437.
collective (architecture), and the drive that makes it move, in the light of Foucault’s practice of the care for the self, wherein the concerned attitude of ethical subjects resides in their care for the self: a care that is driven by the attention for one’s own well-being and, through this, the well-being of others. It is through ‘care’ that Foucault’s earlier tactical-pragmatic definitions of the ‘drive’ of governance, namely to govern ‘to a convenient end’, and as good as possible, also gain more ethical and critical weight.

Now that we have looked into the potentials and impediments of architecture’s *simultaneously* critical and pragmatic-realistic engagement with the real, it is about time we headed back to Brussels. Already in the first chapter we had seen that the everyday plays a quite specific role in Belgium’s and Brussels’ spatial production. In the following, third, chapter, ‘Brussels Concerned Pragmatism: From *Penser la Ville to Faire la Ville*’, we will discover how, in contemporary Brussels, the specific role played by the everyday allows architecture to be concerned *and* pragmatic, engaging with the real *and* involved in the ‘what can we hope for?’.

This third chapter will further the analysis started in the first chapter, namely of Brussels’ architectural emancipation, triggered by the 1990’s socio-artistic activism. It will unravel the precise impact of this activist mood in greater detail and narrate how architecture culture has responded to these changes. A major moment of transition from a socio-artistic to an architectural emancipation was the *Brussels 2000 European Capital of Culture* event. Ever since, a profusion of events has consolidated Brussels’ architecture emancipation and reinforced its attempts to overcome the ‘fear of the new’. The third chapter will therefore look into the combination of factors that have triggered this emancipation: socio-cultural activism; new architecture events emphasising contemporary and young architects; and the French (socio-urban) emancipation that would complete the more aesthetic-architectural emancipation that had emerged in 1980’s Flanders.

This chapter will also pay attention to the unique role played by the ‘collective’, and the very specific position occupied by the Brussels’ everyday (very different from Bekaert’s *gemeenplaats*). As such, we will look into the agencies that have, sometimes very straightforwardly, sometimes within the finest and most delicate of mazes, revolutionised and transformed Brussels’ urban questioning. It will become clear how Brussels’ architecture emancipation, in contrast to the 1968 oppositional critique, has adopted a much more down-to-earth form of engagement; and how a collective of activists, architects, new legislations, and competitions, has revolutionised the Brussels’ machinery, not by sheer (oppositional) force but by a patient working throughout its finest grains. Additionally, we will question whether Brussels’ alliance with the urban and social quotidian nevertheless allows it to deal with new challenges and ambitions, such as the call for an ambitious, transversal project for Brussels (‘one vision, one future’), the tardy fascination with iconic star-architecture, and the abuse of Brussels’ versatile everyday in city marketing strategies.

By analysing this Brussels-style everyday critique, we will, thus, further the endeavours of both the first and second chapter. We will see how Brussels’ loose-fix collectives are too *concerned* to derail into post-critical pragmatism; too *down to earth* to fall...
into the trap of the beautifying myths of the everyday; and too *entangled* to have any option than to simply thrust forward as a hard-working collective. We should perhaps be reminded that, in contrast to other contexts and cities, where a renewed interest in the everyday allowed for a colouring of the greyness of orchestrated planning, Brussels’ planning has *always* been animated by everyday disruptions and political *bricolage*. Also, in contrast to the Dutch ‘surfers on the wave’, that wave hasn’t even reached Brussels. Surfers enough, though! Whereas in many other contexts, critique had somewhat cooled down throughout the 1980s (or at least withdrawn from that hassle called reality), it never really disappeared from the Brussels’ battlefield. It may even, to a significant extent, have been perverted (the ’68-ideology amongst *architectes-promoteurs*); urban activism would nevertheless survive as the cornerstone of Brussels’ architecture movements. Likewise, when contemporary aesthetics finally started to win ground vis-à-vis traditionalism, it would largely remain a *concerned* aesthetics.

We will henceforth discover how Brussels somehow escaped from falling into the rift between architecture and everyday life, and, more generally, the gap between the coinciding phenomena of an *esthétisation de la vie quotidienne* and a *déesthétisation de l’art*.¹ We will discover that, since, in Brussels, *Faire la Ville* has always been about relationality and immersions in the real, newly emerging ‘flat’ network paradigms did not strike home hard enough to shatter the fragile vase of critique into a thousand pieces.

Chapter Three

Brussels’ Concerned Pragmatism: From Penser la Ville to Faire la Ville

I have chosen the early 2000s as an anchor point for describing the multiple changes that have taken place in the recent Brussels’ architecture debate. Even if the mid-1990s events had been an important trigger of change - Hôtel Central, the architecture debates triggered by Studio Open City – the Brussels’ architecture situation would change even more drastically from 2000 onwards, thanks to a new culture of debate culture and the emergence of innovative architecture projects. From the 2000s, the focus of architecture would finally add a more contemporary dimension to the decades-long hegemony of the Reconstruction de la Ville. Whereas Hôtel Central had made a strong plea for a new way to faire la ville that was closely linked to urban culture, the ‘Brussels 2000, Cultural Capital of Europe’ event would articulate the importance of architects in this process.

In this chapter I will first explore the new mood that has emerged since 2000, by analysing the different levels that constitute this change and the projects and events that are evidence of it. Subsequently, I will identify some of the new tensions that have emerged or are emerging through these changes. Because of its time-frame (2000 until today) this chapter is different in nature from the first chapter. It is more ethnographic in nature in the sense that it struggles with issues of (critical) distance towards its object of research. It is based on a literature study, on interviews with architects, activists, and policy makers, but it is also informed by the everyday experience of the researcher (myself) as user, inhabitant, teacher, and consumer in the city. It is perhaps a good moment to remind the reader of the empirical nature of this dissertation and of its initial intention, namely not to explain notions such as agency, engagement, and everydayness primarily through theoretical analysis, but instead, to explore how such abstracts notions are at work.

The new mood that can be observed since ‘Brussels 2000’ can be brought back, firstly, to a more positive and optimist attitude towards architecture; secondly, to an emancipation process that, in comparison with Flanders, engaged more pragmatically than poetically with the everyday; and, thirdly, to the growing awareness of the need for a holistic, transversal vision for Brussels.

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1 Overview list of interviews: in annex.
1. A more positive and constructive architecture debate for Brussels

1.1. Brussels 2000: sparkles of hope in the land of despair

By the early 2000s, the Brussels that had suffered, for decades, a great fear of innovation and the ‘new’, was falling hopelessly behind in terms of architecture and urbanism. Faithful to its unfortunate tradition, Brussels’ contemporary architecture was remarkably absent in architecture overview works. Most works included in the 1998 *Birkhäuser Architectural Guide of Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg in the 20th Century*, date back to before Expo 58, while the contemporary works that have been included are proof of Brussels’ mediocre architecture production. The Taschen Overview works *Contemporary European Architects* do not include work from Belgian architects at all. In a 1994 overview work on post-war architecture in the Netherlands and Belgium, Brussels occupies, in comparison to Flanders, not only a marginal position but also resembles a genealogy of disaster. Only a few Belgian projects had been nominated for the Mies Van Der Rohe Award. Occasions to create qualitative architectural and urban projects, such as for the development of the EU-infrastructure, mostly ended as missed opportunities.

Despite such disparity, the optimism that had been cautiously introduced by *Hôtel Central* would be reinforced by the events of ‘Brussels 2000, Cultural Capital of Europe’ (further referred to as: Brussels 2000). If, in the mid-1990s, Brussels still seemed ‘malade mais son coeur bats’, Brussels 2000 proved to be the next big step in a no doubt long recovery process. By choosing ‘the city’ as its central theme, Brussels 2000 linked any possible way out of the Brussels impasse (politically, architecturally, socially, economically, culturally), to an attention for Brussels as an urban reality. Consequently, it proposed a transversal reading of the city and an explicitly positive program: it hoped to counter Brussels’ ‘scant public appeal’, and to acknowledge Brussels’ chaos, pluralism and...

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5 Nominations include: in 2001, Stéphane Beel, Roger Raveel Museum (Machelen Aan De Leie); in 2003, Xaveer de Geyter, a project outside Belgium, namely the Chassé Park Apartments (Breda), and Robbrecht and Daem, Concert Hall (Bruges); in 2005, the Brussels architect Julien De Smedt, Maritime Youth Centre (with PLOT office, Copenhagen).


fragmentation as assets rather than mere problems. Being embedded in Brussels’ urban culture, Brussels 2000 would have an important influence on both the architectural, urban and cultural production. Many events organised within Brussels 2000 would manage to achieve structural support and, as such, remain anchor points until today. Its most famous offspring is doubtlessly the Zinnekeparade, a popular artistic parade that, every two years, takes over Brussels’ streets with its colourful performances, music, and costumes. Because the parade is prepared for two years, in workshops involving artists and citizens, and taking place all over the Brussels Region, it is more than just a parade, and more a socio-artistic project based on Brussels’ multi-cultural identity. It is perhaps the only project that manages to unite the 19 municipalities and manages to get actually realised (as we will see, this is, in Brussels, an achievement).

Several other Brussels 2000 offsprings play less visible but as important roles in the architecture debate. For example, the collective BNA/BBOT (Bruxelles Nous Appartient/Brussel Behoort Ons Toe), which collects and archives self-recorded everyday stories about Brussels by its citizens, has become a regular partner for participatory processes within the frame of Neighbourhood Contracts, Brussels’ most important urban renewal instrument. Indeed, many activist collectives would, thanks to Brussels 2000, gain momentum and become references in the Brussels debate.

Already in the wake of Hôtel Central, (socio-) cultural collectives had emerged that participated actively in the Brussels debates on the city. The international art festival Kunsten-festival-des-arts was (and is), even if international, a true Brussels festival: it makes an abstraction of the French-Flemish frontier; it gives a platform to geographically or thematically ‘marginalised’ art; and it combines the concepts ‘bringing together’ and ‘confrontation’. The socio-artistic collective Recyclart was founded by a group of militant urbanists. And in 1997, two Hôtel Central offsprings saw the light: Cinema Nova, an activist cinema that legally squatted the abandoned Studio Arenberg (vacant since 1987); and Citymined, an urban activist collective, concentrating on the reclaiming of public space. These collectives had a few elements in common that would prove important in the formation of the Brussels’ debates of architecture and the city. They would not just be the pioneers of that debate; they would also demonstrate the importance for architecture to act beyond its disciplinary boundaries, and instead, ally with urban culture, activism and socio-economic

8 The workshops are coordinated by the organisation Zinneke but organised through local social and cultural partners. The word Zinneke refers to ‘someone of undefined background serving as the symbol of cosmopolitan and multi-cultural Brussels’ - www.zinneke.org.


10 Cinema Nova emerged from earlier experiences with open-air film screenings at urban vacancies in the Brussels’ historic city centre.
initiatives. Moreover, they would emphasise a pragmatic, realistic dealing with the everyday that starts from a thorough understanding of the ‘Brussels Situation’, rather than from ideological standpoints. Yet, even if, as such, ARAU and the AAM’s intellectual penser la ville, was replaced with a more down-to-earth faire la ville, it would remain a critical, not a compliant engagement with the real. In this chapter, we will explore how this particular form of critique-from-within can be instructive for understanding architecture’s critical agency in the world (as we have studied in the second chapter).

Collectives such as Recyclart, Citymined, and Cinema Nova have significantly contributed to the debate on the Brussels’ urban question. Through open-air film screenings, the PleinOpenAir festival organised by Citymined and Cinema Nova, attempted to generate critical public awareness of buildings threatened by demolition, or abandoned sites in need of development. Recyclart triggered the urban question simply by settling in the abandoned Kappelekerk train station: one of Brussels’ most painful locations, namely where the North-South railway junction had ripped open the popular Marolles.

Citymined can build on a tradition of public space interventions that, at once, placed the finger on the pulse regarding the condition of Brussels’ public spaces, and criticised Brussels’ spatial policies. Moreover, one of the founders of Cinema Nova and Plein-Open-Air, Gwenaël Breës, would become a key figure in the activism against Brussels’ on-going demolition strategies and profit-based urbanism: in particular the development of the international Gare du Midi and the European Quarter.

Apart from becoming central players in the urban debate, collectives such as Recyclart and Citymined would also demonstrate the importance of approaching architectural and urban production in an inter-disciplinary and pragmatic manner. The first refers to the importance of approaching Brussels simultaneously architecturally, socially, economically,

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11 The festival has been organised, each summer, since 1997 until today. Despite its growing popularity as an open-air cinema, it never lost its activist nature. For example, in 2003, it supported the actions around the European Parliament (Gare de Luxembourg): on 5 September 2003, a thousand citizens collectively cried in the de tuinen van maalbeek park (in the EU Quarter, better known as the park van de naamloze vennootschap) at the occasion of the screening of Boris Lehman’s La Dernière (S)Cène, a film shot in only a few hours on a Sunday morning, in a street that was being demolished by promoters. In August 2004, it reinforced the actions organised at the RAC site (the MAPRAC event – see further) by organising a PleinOpenAir event with film screenings and workshops.

12 They settled in the vacant spaces adjacent to the Kappelekerk Station, a small railway station in the Brussels city centre. We will return to the workings of Recyclart later in this chapter.


and culturally. The latter refers to the understanding of the ‘Brussels Situation’, and its complex everyday, as the only way to ‘get things done’. The combination of both suggests working in the form of an urban laboratory: integrating all sorts of inputs, processing them through experimentation, and being pragmatic in creating output. As such, Brussels’ activists indicate a road that is pragmatic, productive, and realistic, but also, and explicitly, concerned. They indicate an avoidance of a too abstract ‘critique from above’, without falling into the trap of naïve, but unproductive opposition, or a too compliant critique-from-within. Instead of inefficient humility, they propose a carefully ambitious production; instead of ‘dirty realism’, they propose a realistic realism. Let’s look at a few projects.

The formation and management of Recyclart can be read as both a transversal and a critical-from-within endeavour. It was created in 1996, by a group of young urban activists who were connected to the Afvaardiging voor de Ontwikkeling van de Vijfhoek / Délégation au développement du Pentagone. This department of the Brussels City administration had been created in the wake of Hôtel Central, with the aim to do something about the vast urban vacancies in Brussels city. This department would, over the years, play a powerful role in the renovation of the city centre, and not always for the best. Meanwhile it is clear that it has also contributed to the gentrification of large parts of the city, and to the spread of the Reconstruction de la Ville idiom as the dominant mindset for urban renovation. Recyclart has nevertheless always maintained a good relationship with the Délégation (some of its administrators are members of Recyclart’s management council), while it, at the same time, criticised urban embellishment. This combination of day-to-day militancy and a structural link with institutional networks has allowed Recyclart to have an impact on both levels. Many of its initiatives were made possible because they were, as militants, taken serious as partners for negotiation. This effect was furthered by Recyclart’s transversal approach: apart from cultural, urban and architectural programming (concerts, exhibitions, reflections as much as projects), Recyclart also runs a socio-professional program, including a metal and wood workshop, and catering services, serving both private clients and public institutions. This negotiation of cultural underground and official art scenes; of artists, citizens, and policy makers; and of clients, the unemployed and socio-professional reinsertion programs, allowed Recyclart to exercise a concrete impact.15

Since 2005, Recyclart has contributed in a more direct manner to debates on architecture and the city. With public space projects such as the Bruegel Square and the Skatepark Ursulines, and with its support for the Parckdesign competition, Recyclart not only

15 Is such collaboration with the establishment not too compliant? In fact, it is not, since, when it comes to financial support, Recyclart has always kept its autonomy by depending as little as possible on Belgian Community budgets (French/Flemish) and instead on, for example, European funding (see interview recyclart – Laurence Jenard). The flip-side of the coin is that Recyclart’s hybridity delimits funding options since sector-specific funding is usually suspicious about ‘culture’ grants being possibly used in the ‘socio-professional’ department and vice versa.
encouraged the organisation of design competitions; it also refreshed the debate on public space design: the *Parckdesign* competition for street furniture, for example, challenged the Brussels *embellissement* tradition.\(^{16}\) Additionally, Recyclart would contribute to the architecture debate by the creation of the *Institut Bruxellois d’Architecture/Brussels Architectuur Instituut* or IBAI. Inspired by the *Vlaams Architectuur Instituut* (VAI), it nevertheless offers a much more interdisciplinary, cultural and urban debate on architecture. Moreover, IBAI is, in terms of its programming, organization, and audience, more informal and everyday-based than the VAI. It is entangled with the Brussels situation and the heritage of *Hôtel Central* and Brussels 2000, while it is equally inspired by international expertise. Exemplary, the inaugural lecture series, titled *Reclaim!*, stressed the link between architecture and activism, in the Brussels and Berlin contexts.\(^{17}\)

The collective City Mine(d), created in 1997, as a the *Hôtel Central* spin-off, based its urban interventions on a critique against ‘the “fuzzy” policy of Brussels’.\(^{18}\) However, with its focus on *networking* - amongst communities, and between users/inhabitants and authorities - and *channelling possibilities* - by bringing the different players together by means of both offering a ‘frame’ and taking the role of ‘negotiator’ and as such allowing ‘the city [to] operate as a common instrument for both groups’\(^{19}\) – Citymine(d) countered traditional divides between bottom-up and top-down, and adopted a more hands-on criticism. Even if more recent projects, such as *Micronomics*, have doubtlessly gained in maturity and professionalism, Citymined’s early projects had influenced architectural and urban mindsets significantly. Citymined had awakened the Brussels debate with the organisation of an ambitious architecture and urbanism workshop, called MAPRAC. In March 2004, a three-day workshop took place on the *Rijks Administratief Centrum* Site (RAC), a gigantic, state-owned, office complex that had been questionably resold to private owners, ‘without any municipal debate [notwithstanding] 2/3 of its surface is registered as public area’.\(^{20}\) The workshop involved a variety of ‘experts’ including architects, urban developers, historians, sociologists, geographers, residents, and artists, and was divided into thematic workshops on architecture, procedures, mobility, urbanism, and sociology. In addition, there were also film

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16 *Parckdesign* is, since 2006, organised on a yearly basis; initiated by the public administration *Institut Bruxellois pour la Gestion de l’Environnement* (IBGE)/ *Brussels Instituut voor Milieubeheer* (BIM), in collaboration with Recyclart. For example, rather than just benches and bins, designs were made for very experimental furniture such as a *bicyclette qui produit de l’électricité*.

17 Organised in 2006, by Iwan Strauven (ISACF *La Cambre* and University of Ghent) and François Thiry (Polaris), and hosting, amongst others, Klaus Overmeyer from the Berlin-based Urban Pioneers. Each lecture was conceived as a confrontation between a Brussels architect and an international one.


19 Ibid., p. 5.

20 Ibid., p. 6.
screenings, art installations, and other activities organised. This hybrid format allowed the fusion of theoretical and practical insights; of academics, practitioners, and inhabitants; and of the analysis of existing problems and the formulation of a vision for the future.

Laboratories such as MAPRAC are instructive in understanding the possible leverage of bottom-up knowledges: from an organisational viewpoint, but also in terms of their output and continuity. Despite MAPRAC’s wide-spread output addressed to specialists, politicians, and inhabitants alike – through the website www.maprac.org and a newspaper-style report of the workshop – only a few residents responded to the open call for projects; while policy makers also seemed to be not too impressed by the collected know-how. Whereas MAPRAC functioned as an heterogeneous collective, only a few spokesmen would claim its achievements and continue the collective work towards more personal ends. However, like many other urban activist initiatives, the real impact of MAPRAC can only be measured by also taking into account its indirect and delayed effects. It may not have had a concrete impact on the development of the site itself but its insistence on an inter-disciplinary urban debate has influenced urban policies. In 2006, after the site had been sold to private developer Breevast NV, it was the first site to be allocated a Schéma Directeur, a new, more integrated and participatory development tool for ‘Sites of Regional Importance’. Also, MAPRAC would set a new standard of ambition for Brussels’ activism: whereas, before, activism had been rather modest in scale and fragmented in nature, MAPRAC showed the potential of collective, large-scale action.

MAPRAC would trigger debates about the opportunities but also the weaknesses of a collective urban action and about the need for, but also the consequences of professionalisation. From MAPRAC to the Citymined Micromics project, an emancipation process took place, not so much with regard to the working method as in the organisation and protection of the City Mine(d) ‘laboratory’ and the steering of its output. Citymined acknowledged the importance of managing one’s ‘learning curve’ as a crucial part of experimental knowledge production. The Generalized Empowerment publication would

21 The analysis of Citymined as a laboratory is taken from Isabelle Doucet, ‘Planning in Search of Ground: Commited Muddling Through or a Critical View from Above?’, in: The Territorial Future of the City, edited by Giovanni Maciocco (Berlin and Heidelberg: Springer Verlag, 2008), pp. 47-70.

22 ‘The results of the [collective] project appeared to be used in an opportunistic manner by [certain] individuals’ Moyersoen and Van Campenhout, ‘City Mine(d)’, p. 8.

23 The Schéma Directeur Botanique was approved by the Brussels Regional Government on 30 November 2006. It is an indicative, not a legally binding planning tool aiming to ‘développer ou redévelopper de grandes portions du territoire bruxellois’ - http://www.bruxelles.irisnet.be/fr/region/region_de_bruxelles-capitale/ministere_de_la_region_de_bruxelles-capitale/competences_et_organisation/amenagement_du_territoire_et_logement/direction_de_la_planification.shtml#schemas.

24 Micromics’ central question is whether urban interventions in ‘krax’ can reshuffle the paradoxical situation in economy – see Citymined, Generalized Empowerment, pp. 60–102; http://www.citymined.org/micromics; Micromics Scanning (City Mined, 2006, DVD).
demonstrate that the *outcome* had gained in weight and seriousness. Moreover, its inclusion of a ‘story board’ that retraces the start-up phase of the *Micronomics* project, together with the *Micronomics Scanning* DVD publication of ‘work-in-progress’, would show the importance allocated to the efforts and struggles, and the ‘making of’ *Micronomics*.25

This search for a balance between naïve activism and downright seriousness; between alternative, oppositional critique and the desire for a more ambitious but realistic impact, can be found within many activist collectives throughout the 2000s, and in particular those that would benefit from more structural support since Brussels 2000. Such balancing was of course a typical outcome of a more general transitioning of activist movements in the 1990s. But what remained typically ‘Brussels’, is that much of the urban activism has confronted a certain degree of ‘compliance’ with the system (financial support, participation in official planning instruments), with a rethinking of its working formats, frameworks, and outputs, precisely in order to safeguard ideological independency as much as possible.26 Due to such continuous balancing – rather than a too enthusiast surrender to financial stability – Brussels activism has remained a fragmented (though internally solidary) landscape of individual initiatives: they prefer to negotiate alliances according to shared (or complementary) interests rather than according to frameworks imposed from the outside.27 Likewise, Brussels’ urban activism has, despite its impact on architecture and the urban, always remained either implicit or, when explicited, rather modest, careful, and slow-paced in nature. For example, Recyclart’s *Institut Bruxellois d’architecture* (IBAI) has not opted to ‘boom’, to become a powerful architecture culture institute such as the VAI, but instead has kept questions of institutionalisation, professionalisation, and growth open to negotiation.28 It weighs its specificities and compatibilities against the typically architectural (rather than urban) activities of the more prestigious architecture programming of BOZAR (Centre for Fine Arts Brussels). Also in its realised projects - Bruegel Square, Skatepark Ursulines, Parkdesign - Recyclart aspires hybrids of contemporary design, urban culture and citizen participation.29

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26 Such questions reoccur regularly within collectives such as Citymined, Recyclart, Constant VZW, or BNA/BBOT, just to mention a few.

27 The inventory of Brussels activism, *The Shadow City*, by Urban Unlimited, has led to a couple of presentations in Brussels, even within policy circles (*Les Midis de Planification*), but has not generated a concrete follow up. The database Polaris (see further) seems closer to the Brussels reality as it is not created by an ‘external’ team but based on input from Brussels actors.

28 Questions about IBAI’s ‘too militant’ nature and thus its limited impact (the audience contains the already convinced), about upscaling without losing integrity - I refer to several (often informal) talks with Laurence Jenard, director of Recyclart and IBAI.

29 Such as the City Salon (*stadssalon*), organised for the design of the Bruegelplein; and the Square Ursulines project (including a skatepark) as a collaboration of young architecture graduates, skaters, and the established architecture office L’Escaut.
1.2. Where there is cultural activism… there is architecture?

The success of the socio-cultural activism, related to Hôtel Central and Brussels 2000 depended largely on its critical but realistic realism and on the creation of hybrid working methods. Whereas ARAU and the AAM’s oppositional criticism of *penser la ville* and counterprojects had paralysed Brussels for more than three decades, the 1990’s and 2000’s urban activism, with its optimistic, hands-on *faire la ville*, would free the way for a more contemporary architecture. Brussels 2000 would also, apart from such urban cultural events, organise specific architecture activities and debates. That the debates, such as the workshops and lectures organised by Studio Open City, had grown more ambitious, is shown by their alliance with the international colloquia ‘Tourism Revisited’ and ‘The Contemporary Urban Condition’. The fact that, precisely in this period, the *Mutations* exhibition of Rem Koolhaas and Stefano Boeri was exhibited in Brussels, including Koolhaas’ statement that, in Brussels, ‘everything that is different, gets dismissed’, of course added to the plea for a ‘new’ ambition for architecture and to Brussels’ international longing. Within Brussels 2000, also a research-by-design workshop was organised for the Brussels’ *Mont des Art*, involving several international teams and resulting in the publication *Vacant City: Brussels’ Mont des Arts reconsidered*. But perhaps the most significant event was the *Supernova* exhibition, showing the work of 44 young Belgian architects. Even if *Supernova*, *Vacant City*, and the likes were received with scepticism for they were considered only a ‘small spark’, and because their real effects on the harsh Brussels reality were questioned, Brussels 2000 did generate a change in the architecture debate. As a mental catalyst it would trigger debate on contemporary architecture, which had been suppressed for decades by the *Reconstruction de la Ville*.

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30 The ‘Tourism’ workshop connected with the ‘Tourism Revisited’ colloquium (organised by Nethca); the ‘New Urban Paradigms’ workshop with the ‘The Contemporary Urban Condition’ colloquium (organised by the Ghent Urban Studies Team), who had just published the influential *The Urban Condition: space, community, and self in the contemporary metropolis* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1999): it brought together Belgian and international authors form architecture, but also from cultural studies, literature etcetera.


34 For example, the *Vacant City* laboratory was believed to confirm the schisms between architecture theory and practice: between an enchanted academic debate focussing on research and attracting international talents, and the Brussels’ reality, deciding about the city behind closed doors and amongst friends - Marc Dubois, ‘De Kunstberg … Stad op de Helling’, *A Plus*, nr. 168, 2001, pp. 58-61.
The *mental* role of Brussels’ architecture emancipation cannot be emphasised enough. Rather than waving it away as a pathetic compensation for the, still below par, architectural *production*, the change in *mood* is to be acknowledged as a truly courageous act, because, as we speak, the *Reconstruction de la Ville* mood remains in full swing. Let me outline once again the Brussels mental landscape to the reader. The European Architecture Prize for the reconstruction of the city, the *Prix Rotthier*, has, since 1982, been awarded at the Brussels CIVA and celebrated, amongst other projects, Poundbury in Dorchester (Prince Charles’ showpiece), and the new town of Val d’Europe near Paris. The Prize is an assault on contemporary design. Who else other than Maurice Culot could formulate more accurately the disgust for ‘prophetic and futuristic visions’ amongst architects and urban designers, and the call for respect for the people’s ‘desire for nostalgic beauty’?\(^{35}\) Within the framework of Brussels 2000, the *Vacant City* workshop on the *Mont des Arts* was paralleled by a much more traditional study by the *Fondation Roi Baudouin* involving several proponents of the *Reconstruction* tradition.\(^ {36}\) Also in 2000, the new building of the CIVA (*Centre International pour la Ville, l’Architecture et le Paysage*) would be inaugurated with splendour (by public sponsor Hervé Hasquin), as much as with disappointment for being a denial of the contemporary city.\(^ {37}\) Let’s also not forget that the great successor to the *Déclaration de Bruxelles*, the *Declaration of Bruges*, was the fruit of congresses held in Bruges and Brussels (in April 2003) and formed, with its ‘12 challenges for European Urbanism’, an important event within the foundation of the *Council for European Urbanism* (CEU, the European counterpart of the American New Urbanism, the Congress of New Urbanism or CNU).\(^ {38}\) And above all, let’s not forget that the fact that Brussels had only one official *Reconstruction de la Ville* project (Lakensestraat), and Belgium only one official New Urbanism project (Heulebrug Knokke by Léon Krier and Duany Plater-Zibek), said nothing about the well-entangled grip the urban embellishment tradition had on urban thinking.\(^ {39}\)

\(^{35}\) ‘Europese Architectuurprijs Philippe Rotthier voor de Reconstructie van de stad 2008. Architectuur voor “nostalgische liefhebbers van de schoonheid uit het verleden”’, *Architectenkrant*, no date, no author, http://www.architectenkrant.be/actualiteit.php#rothtier. In 2005, filmmaker Emir Kusturica received the Prize for his traditional village in Kustendorf Servia (which served as the film set for his film *Life is a Miracle*).

\(^{36}\) F. Burkin and C. Belin, ‘Le Palais des Congrès: étude prospective’, seminar report (Brussels: Fondation Roi Baudouin, 2000). Seminar participants include several *Reconstruction* proponents such as Arcadia and Korei (city tours), Michel Verliefden, the Belgian New Urbanist Christian Lasserre, and Marcel Pesleux.


\(^{38}\) The *Declaration of Bruges* resembled the *Déclaration de Bruxelles* of 25 years earlier (Culot was a key figure in both), which had laid the basis for the New Urbanism Manifestoes (*Ibelings, ‘Unmodern Architecture*, p. 62). Several American New Urbanists attended the Bruges conference; Rob Krier and Christoph Kohl describe their firms as European New Urbanism; Duany and Plater-Zyberk were commissioned in Berlin, and Peter Calthorpe in Arezzo; and plans were raised for a European version of Peter Katz’s *The New Urbanism* (pp. 55-56).

\(^{39}\) The *Afvaardiging voor de Ontwikkeling van de Vijfhoek*, responsible for urban renewal in Brussels’ city centre, is under the spell of conservatism and traditionalism. See also the ‘Brussel Verfraaiing Indrukken’ debate on
chose to locate the new Brussels Info Plein (BIP), created in 2008 as a central meeting, information, and welcome point for Brussels, in an existing (renovated) building at the historically important Place Royale, with the new Magritte Museum next door. Frequented by tourists and business visitors, the Museum Quarter is indeed a perfect location; and it would of course be silly to criticise the fact that such emblematic institutions as the BIP and the Magritte Museum have not received a more eye-catching appearance. However, what is problematic is that it houses precisely those promotional bodies that are strongly linked to the glorification of Brussels’ past.\textsuperscript{40} And of course, similar to Philippe Rotthier and Maurice Culot at CIVA, ARAU had also, after forty years of \textit{lutter}, not lost much of its passion. In other words, a first, but absolutely vital step towards a more contemporary attitude in the city torn between les quartiers de Culot and Jaspersville, was a shift in mentality.\textsuperscript{41}

1.3. A new debate and a new focus on contemporary architecture

Whereas Hôtel Central had placed urban culture and the city back on the agenda, Brussels 2000 would open the way for a revalorisation of contemporary architecture and, consequently, an emancipation of the Reconstruction de la Ville’s fear of the new. This was perhaps most explicitly demonstrated by the new book series, \textit{Jonge architecten in Vlaanderen}, published by A16 and supported by the VAI, and created in the wake of \textit{Supernova}.;\textsuperscript{42} and the introduction of the neologism abruxellisation, to indicate the love-hate relationship a city can have with its inhabitants.\textsuperscript{43} At a time when Flanders was dedicating its contribution to the Venice Biennale to the rising stars of contemporary Flemish architecture; and at a time that even the so-called ‘pragmatic Dutch’ developed a fascination for the Belgitude, and for Flemish architects in particular; it was about time that Brussels started its own architecture emancipation.\textsuperscript{44} This emancipation, also called the deuxième tournant, can

\textit{embellissement}, moderated by Diane Hennebert (director of the \textit{Fondation pour l’Architecture} 1992-1998), in \textit{A Plus} (nr. 164, 2000), and sharply divided between supporters and opponents.

\textsuperscript{40} Voire et Dire Bruxelles (°1994) collects organisations organising thematic cultural tours, such as ARAU, Arkadia, La Fonderie, Le Bus Bavard, Itinéraires, Pro Velo. A Major two-year event is the Art Nouveau Biennale (5\textsuperscript{th} edition in 2009); Vzw Kunstberg is an outcome of the \textit{Fondation Roi Baudouin} events during Brussels 2000.


\textsuperscript{43} Juan d’Oultremont, \textit{Abruxellisation} (Brussels: Éditions Luc Pire, 2000), within the context of Brussels 2000. See also Raymond Balau, ‘Abruxellisation’, \textit{A Plus}, nr. 164, 2000, p. 34.

\textsuperscript{44} Belgian contribution Architecture Biennale 2000 (‘Less Aesthetics More Ethics’), commissioned by Katrien Vandermarliere, founding director of the VAI, under the title \textit{Homeward, Contemporary Architecture in Flanders}. 
be located in a period stretching from the 1995 Hôtel Central occupation, until the Flagey competition of 2002/2003. It was interpreted as a second turn, in response to Jacques Aron, who had identified a first turn in the work of ARAU, during the 1970s. The most important elements of Brussels’ deuxième tournant are the replacement of the method of embellishment and historical references with more experimental, contemporary design; an emphasis on the use of space; and the shift from citizen consultation to genuine participation. Amongst the key events that constituted the deuxième tournant one could count the Flagey competition, the Livre Blanc, the Vade-mecum for architecture competitions, and the new architecture emerging within Neighbourhood Contracts. Along this emancipation, a (careful) optimistic mood would emerge amongst architects, policy makers, and citizens. Though still fragmented, this period had seen the emergence of several interesting contemporary architecture projects, publications on contemporary architecture, and some competitions. One can think of the new book series Belgium New Architecture, by Prisme Éditions. Created in 2001, the series emphasised the importance of considering architecture as part of a public cultural policy, and to expand success stories such as the Flemish Nieuwe eenvoud, to Brussels 2000, and more socially engaged architects. One can also think, as we have seen in the first chapter, of the Municipality of Schaarbeek’s efforts to organise architecture competitions and generate more architectural awareness.

It showed also Xaveer de Geyter’s daring proposal for Carrefour de l’Europe. The Dutch had developed an interest in the ‘Belgian Situation’, and the way in which Belgian architects managed to deal with the banal, the unorganised, and the spontaneous - Jo Crépain in Steven Van Teeseling, ‘Holland-België met commentaar van Jo Crépain’, Archined, 8/3/2005 (www.archined.nl). In 2002, an entire symposium in Tilburg (The Netherlands) was dedicated to ‘Belgian Situations’ – Ronald Sledsens, Symposium Belgische Toestanden (Tilburg: Fontys, 2002).

Aron, Le tournant de l’urbanisme bruxellois; Benoit Moritz, Du ‘premier tournant’ au ‘deuxième tournant’, lecture within the Brussels Architecture Institute lecture series on the theme ‘le deuxième tournant’, 8 May 2008, Recyclart, Brussels. The ‘deuxième tournant’ is seen as a positive hypothesis, and announces a shift from a consultation planning (concertation) to urban participation by means of co-production, and a more hybrid and multi-scalar development.


Jan Bruggemans, ‘New Belgian Architecture on the eve of a European interaction’, in: Belgium New Architecture, edited by Liliane Knopes (Brussels: Prisme Éditions, 2001), pp. 12-13. The series included also architecture culture events such as the Kinshasa contribution to the Venice Biennale (Volume 3, 2005) and public space interventions such as Ursulines Square, street furniture by Lust, and City Scape by Arne Quinze (Volume 4, 2007).

For example, architecture tours such as ‘een hedendaagse kijk op schaarbeek’ (September-October 2008) showed the Municipality’s architecture policy for deprived areas.
1.4. In the mood for change: following the Flemish, a French architecture emancipation

As part of the deuxième tournant, French-speaking Belgian architecture would also contribute to the revival of the Brussels’ architecture scene. Not only would a strong (young) generation of French architects develop an important interest in Brussels; but the Communauté française would also, at a time when its Flemish colleague-governors were making their first evaluations of architecture policies, start implementing new spatial policies and initiatives.

The ascent of a French-Belgian architecture scene and, likewise, the Brussels emancipation of the Deuxième tournant, differed from the Flemish colleagues in two major ways. Firstly, in contrast to the Flemish, poetic, formal-aesthetic revolution of the gemeenplaats, the French-Brussels concerns were more urban and socio-political in nature. Secondly, instead of individual oeuvres, collected into a movement (the Flemish Nieuwe Eenvoud), the French-Brussels emancipation was driven by a heterogeneous, complex entangled collective. That the Brussels emancipation had a complex legacy related to the Flemish architecture culture, the Brussels urban-cultural activism, and the French traditionalism, is perhaps best explained by the simultaneous presence of three, quite diverse, institutes for the promotion of architecture: the contemporary and international architecture programming of BOZAR (Museum of Fine Arts), the more urban culture oriented IBAI (Brussels Architecture Institute), and the CIVA (Centre International pour la Ville, l’Architecture et le Paysage), the French equivalent of the VAI (Vlaams Architectuur Instituut).

1.4.1. French-Brussels: A more ‘concerned’ emancipation?

Since 2000 on, a lot started to change on the French-side of Belgian architecture. Publications, studies, and exhibitions would not only focus on young, contemporary architecture but would also start publishing more ‘positively’ about the post-war architecture period for the public at large. Emblematic for the different situation in the Flemish and French Communities, is the book series on young architects, created by A16, in the aftermath of Brussels 2000, which would first focus on young Flemish architects, and only later on French offices. The emancipation of French-Belgian architects from the Reconstruction de

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49 See the BOZAR exhibition series ‘Niches: Jonge Belgische Architectuur’; the celebrated A Vision for Brussels exhibition by the Berlage Institute, the ‘Image/Construction’ Series wherein architecture is explored through the role of images/representation. CIVA, despite being a veritable Maison Culot, also supported more contemporary initiatives such as the A16 publications Jeunes Architectures.

la Ville demons, and their adoption of more contemporary aesthetics, were reflected in the projects and teaching of these architects, often instructed by a more international regard.\textsuperscript{52}

Nevertheless, through an aesthetic liberation many of these contemporary architects continued to adopt a ‘concerned’ or critical approach. Offices such as V-Plus, L’Escaut, or MSA combine contemporary aesthetics with an explicitly critical (and participatory) approach, which they moreover insert in architecture education.\textsuperscript{53} When Liège-based architect Pierre Hebbelinck edited the second issue of the lifestyle magazine La Libre Essentielle Homme, he combined the poetic and critical aspect of architecture through what he called ‘\textit{un arbre avec deux branches principales}’: critical discussions (\textit{la branchepolitique}), and a glimpse of young trendy architecture offices (\textit{la branche poétique}).\textsuperscript{54} Hebbelinck’s own architectural production also gives proof of such poetic-political dimension. Apart from his design for the Maison des Citoyens in Brussels, his Maison Dejardin (in Comblain-au-Pont) also demonstrated his preoccupation with the characteristics and constraints of the client/user. The Maison Dejardin was controversial and innovative for being entirely made of prefabricated steel components, a choice that derived more from the need to work within a very small budget (the family owned a steel-moulding company) than from pure design intentions.\textsuperscript{55} Also, the architecture projects created within the Brussels’ Neighbourhood Contracts, demonstrated that contemporary aesthetics could go hand in hand with difficult urban contexts and budgetary constraints.\textsuperscript{56}

Even the ‘Bible’ of the French emancipation, \textit{Qui a peur de L’Architecture? Livre Blanc de L’Architecture contemporaine en communauté Française en Belgique}, argued for an architecture not only concerned with experimental contemporary design; but for architecture, ‘as a cultural discipline that has a role to play in democratic life’.\textsuperscript{57} In a ‘lived architectural culture’ not only architects, but also public authorities and other actors have a responsibility,\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{51} The first series of books, Jonge Architecten in Vlaanderen, was published from 2003 in collaboration with the VAI; the following series, Jeunes Architectures, published from 2005, with support from the CIVA and the Communauté française. When the French Community had ‘caught up’, the topic was actually no longer very new.

\textsuperscript{52} Such as the projects and teaching (La Cambre) of Lhoas & Lhoas, Label Architecture, L’Escaut, V-Plus, and MSA.

\textsuperscript{53} Most notably La Cambre teaching in Unité 26: Laboratoire d’architecture située (Thierry Decuyper, V-Plus, and Olivier Bastin, L’Escaut).


\textsuperscript{56} Cohen, Brussels on our doorstep: architecture in neighbourhood contracts.

\textsuperscript{57} Genard and Lhoas (eds.), \textit{Qui a peur de L’Architecture}, p. 18; the ‘right to architecture is linked to multiple dimensions, such as the right for housing, education health care, but also the aesthetics of our environment, and architectural quality as a political stake as much as subject to public debate.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., p. 21.
which is the reason why the Livre Blanc encourages transversal projects and a co-production of space. In contrast to Flanders, where the architect, notwithstanding his relation to the gemeenplaats of dwelling (and hence the user/client), expresses himself largely through individual agency, the Livre Blanc suggests a model of co-production of space wherein the role of the architect is understood in interaction with other actors: as one of many agencies.59

One can conclude that the emerging architecture movement from the French-speaking part of the country, and without a doubt the offices working in Brussels, was more linked to a politico-critical and societal architecture than was the case in Flanders. This is not to say that the Flemish architects were less critical but that their critique was grounded in the critical-poetic gemeenplaats, expressed through individual oeuvres (single-family houses in non-urban settings); whereas the criticality of the French-Brussels architects was, because of their stronger embedding in an urban and political complexity, expressed more in political and socio-cultural terms. Whereas the Flemish architect primarily fought against the banality of the non-urban single-family house, the French-Brussels architect struggled to escape the tentacles of an entire urban movement (the Reconstruction de la Ville).60 And this on a battlefield that was itself covered by political mines and socio-economic traps. The French architecture school La Cambre would not only pick up the challenge to act as a core agent within the new architecture debate; it would also strengthen the link between the architecture debate, and ‘the world out there’: city life, political realities, urban culture, art and activism.61

As such, it would recall its tradition of luttes urbaines and contreprojets. However, for the first time, and thanks to the urban culture that had emerged with Hôtel Central and Brussels 2000, La Cambre (and the Brussels’ architecture scene more generally) could accept a political and societal agency for architecture, albeit without the traditionalism and negativism that had, until then, accompanied activism. Whereas the Flemish, encouraged by the rediscovered urban and public challenges, would ally themselves more smoothly with the neo-liberal spirit of Urban Renaissance projects; the Brussels-French, having experienced the horrors of developer architecture, and the scandals of the European Quarter, would remain faithful to the path freed by the urban cultural movement.62 This path, that had been shaped by a continuous balancing of ideology, critique and pragmatism, delineates something much

59 Ibid., p. 52. Consequently, parallel to the encouragement of architecture quality (as by the VAI), public assignments should concentrate on the innovation of participatory methods, and collaborate with le monde associatif.

60 Brunetta and Patteeuw, Jonge Architecten in België.

61 For example, La Cambre’s leading role in the Flagey competition (see further), the Livre Blanc, and the exhibition (Re)nouveaux plaisirs d’Architecture.

more complex and elaborate than Frampton’s Critical Regionalism and even Tzonis and Lefaivre’s revised ‘globalised’ Critical Regionalism: namely a more complex entangled situatedness, and a true exercise in critique-from-within. 63

1.4.2. The architectural emancipation of Brussels’ empowered ‘collective’.

In contrast to the Flemish movement that had been emancipated from within architecture, and that had been further empowered by the top-down declaration of a movement (Nieuwe Eenvoud); the French-Brussels emancipation, as had been articulated by the Supernova exhibition within Brussels 2000, was effectuated in the form of a ‘collective’, composed of diverse individual practices, events and individuals coming from within as much at from outside architecture. 64 Its emancipation had been shaped, step-by-step, through a series of urban-cultural and urban-architectural activisms (Hôtel Central, Disturb, MAPRAC, Cinema Nova, PleinOpenAir, Platforme Flagey), to then gain force by being gathered into ‘collectives’. Thus, whereas Flanders had made a great leap forward within the safe boundaries of architecture culture itself - instalment of the VAI, a Bouwmeester - Brussels would be re-conquered by a heterogeneous, coloured collective - an army of architects, social workers, artists, schools, squatters, and activists – fighting their way through the dark and muddy Brussels’ jungle. One step at a time, but many steps. No great leap forward but an endless stream of meticulous negotiations, until at least some pieces of the puzzle would fall into the right places; until, at last, a fragment of the Brussels’ noise would be rendered intelligible.

Most of the events that had brought about the French-Brussels’ emancipation took part in the form of a collective endeavour and would emerge from a concern with practice rather than from a predefined ideology or theory. The young architecture practices gathered by the (Re)nouveaux plaisirs d’architecture exhibition (La Cambre/CIVA, 2005 and 2007), and the festival d’architecture (St. Luc, Liège), more resembled a loose collective rather than a well-defined, carefully selected collection. Also the Livre Blanc had been the outcome of a collective reflection and signature. Its title, Qui a peur de l’architecture (Who is afraid of architecture?), indicates the signatories’ shared desire to reconstitute architecture as a public


64 Supernova countered the unifying idea of a so-called ‘New Simplicity’, and, instead, showed the diversity of discourses and ethics in Belgian architecture – see Vincent Brunetta, ‘De waarschijnlijke noodzakelijkheid van een vroegtijdig podium’, in: Supernova TXT Jonge Belgische Architectuur, pp. 11-13, p. 12.
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question. The Livre Blanc was neither a manifesto nor an academic research document, but aimed at formulating policy recommendations for a more qualitative architecture production. To do so, it counted on a collective of actors from a variety of backgrounds and engagements within architecture. Within the same framework, the Pratic database was created, as an inventory of the heterogeneous events, organisations, and practices (architectural, cultural, and social) that had become allies in the French-speaking emancipation, and constituted the Brussels collective. In line with the logic of the multi-disciplinary, multi-professional, and transdisciplinary collective, architecture quality was associated with experiment and innovation, and consequently, with architecture-as-laboratory: an ‘enterprise of bricolage under constraints’. Such ‘laboratory’ at work, could also be found in the actions, debates, publications, and competitions related to the design for Place Flagey (see below). An emphasis on the ‘collective in the making’ is doubtless present in a number of recent exhibitions and publications. One can think, amongst others, of the 2007-2008 Collection d’Architectures; the 2009 Dialogic Park I exhibition, at the Centre Wallonie-Bruxelles de Paris and Beton Salon in Paris; and of the use of architecture in plural for titling the A16 book series: Jeunes Architectures. These events all articulated fragmentation, diversity, and productive tension as constituting elements of the Belgian architecture laboratory.

Moreover, many of these events were made possible thanks to the architecture activities within the department of cultural infrastructure of the French Community, directed by Chantal Dassonville: if the Brussels’ EU-quarter could have its very own Madame Europe (to refer to the hard work done by Marie-Laure Roggemans), then why should the French Community not have a Madame Architecture? It is indeed under the impetus of Dassonville

65 Seminars were organised around three themes: the transformation of the conditions of architectural production, the role of the profession as cultural politics, and the required dispositifs in order to install, in Francophone Belgium, a true architectural politics (here inspirations came from abroad).


67 With architectural quality, the Livre Blanc referred to the experimental character of the architecture practice, but without referring to a division between the architect ‘creator/artist’ and the ‘mere professionals’ - Genard and Lhoas, Qui a peur de l’architecture, p. 25.

68 Ibid., pp. 27-28.


that the dramatic architecture policy-making of the French Community would start to change.\textsuperscript{71} Even if budgets were limited and actions fragmented and hardly visible, Dassonville would manage, within her architecture \textit{portefeuille} – since 2007 known as the \textit{Direction de l'Architecture} - to generate a series of important events, book series, and architecture competitions for promoting French architecture. These would particularly aim at attracting young architects to participate in architecture competitions, to curate exhibitions, edit publications, or organise debates. One can point to the regular exhibition and lecture series at the \textit{Centre Wallonie-Bruxelles de Paris},\textsuperscript{72} the ‘Festival du Film d’Architecture’,\textsuperscript{73} the book series \textit{Visions. Architectures Publiques}, published with \textit{La Lettre Volée},\textsuperscript{74} and of course \textit{Le Livre Blanc}. Several architecture competitions and projects would be effectuated by the \textit{Direction de l’Architecture}.\textsuperscript{75} And one can also think of the French Community’s recent contributions to the Venice architecture Biennale: \textit{Les îles flottantes}, curated by Maurizio Cohen in 2002, and \textit{La beauté de l’ordinaire}, by Label Architecture, in 2006.\textsuperscript{76} These Biennale contributions were exemplary for the ‘typical’ Brussels (and Walloon) emancipation, based on a rather self-organised, spontaneous, and loose-fix network of enthusiasts,\textsuperscript{77} \textit{Les îles flottantes} (floating islands) expressed the presence of, at least some, extraordinary contemporary architecture in the midst of an overall dramatic Brussels and Walloon situation;\textsuperscript{78} an observation that Cohen would confirm in his study of architecture within the frame of Neighbourhood Contracts, and that had also been insinuated implicitly by the \textit{Bruxelles Ville Nouvelle} publication and \textit{Supernova}. As for the cause of such situation,

\textsuperscript{71} After federalisation, when the department of cultural heritage was regionalised, the therein-allocated budget for architecture disappeared. Only from 1996 was a new architecture portefeuille created by Dassonville within the cultural infrastructure department. A \textit{Cellule architecture} was created within the \textit{Direction générale de l’Infrastructure} – \url{http://www.cfwb.be/index.php?id=472} [accessed 8 June 2009].


\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Festival du Film d’Architecture}, second edition, 24-29 March 2008, by, amongst others, DUB 40, CIVA and Brussels cinemas; supported by the French Community.

\textsuperscript{74} Series dedicated to contemporary, public architecture, curated by Chantal Dassonville and Maurizio Cohen, published by the \textit{Ministère de la Communauté Française} and \textit{La lettre Volée}, since 2002.

\textsuperscript{75} Amongst others: \textit{Cinéma Les Grignoux}, Liège, won by V-Plus & Bas Smets; cultural centre \textit{Soignies}, won by L’Escaut and BE Weinand. Within the frame of its application for European Capital of Culture, ‘Mons 2015’, the city of Mons is currently investing extensively in contemporary, prestigious architecture.

\textsuperscript{76} The 2004 and 2008 contributions were curated by the Flemish Community. See the exhibition catalogues: Maurizio Cohen, \textit{Les îles flottantes} (Brussels: La Lettre Volée and Communauté Française de Belgique, 2002); Label Architecture, \textit{La beauté de l’ordinaire} (Brussels: A16 Publishers and Label Architecture, 2006), and the film by Stefan Liberski, \textit{La beauté de l’ordinaire}, made for the Biennale.

\textsuperscript{77} Aglaée Degros and Lotte Haagsma, ‘Wallonie is niet bang voor architectuur!’, \textit{Archined}, 18/3/2005, \url{www.archined.nl}.

\textsuperscript{78} Cohen, \textit{Les îles flottantes}. In the winning, but never realised, entry by V-Plus for the French Parliament, Cohen recognises a ‘symbolic project’ for a ‘radical break with the suffocating historicism and limited discourse of the “reconstruction de la ville”, Brussels and Wallony have been bowed by for more than twenty years’ - Koen Van Synghel, ‘Venetie – les îles flottantes’, \textit{A plus}, nr. 177, 2002, pp. 52-53, p. 52.
Cohen argues to stop blaming turnkey and developer architecture, and to finally face the Brussels’ *mentality*, namely its aversion to contemporary architecture, and its tendency to picture the architect as a problem: ‘disconnected from the “real problems” of “real people”’.  

2. The Brussels emancipation: from the poetics of the *gemeenplaats* to the urban *quotidien*

The relation of the architect with ‘real problems’, and ‘real people’, raises the question of how the specificity of Brussels’ relation with the everyday can tell us something about the more general concerns regarding the architect’s engagement with the real.

2.1. Brussels’ multifarious agencies and the hegemony of the urban quotidien

When emphasising the role of urban culture in the Brussels’ architecture emancipation, I do not necessarily refer to urban subcultures, of skaters, squatters, urban pioneers, or other inventive space-occupiers, but to *anything* that relates to the urban reality, to urbanity, and to city-making. This is not to underestimate the importance of subcultures. They are crucial for urban research, and particularly so under current tendencies towards privatisation, surveillance, and homogenisation, because they, by occupying interstitial positions, facilitate resistance to or at least the questioning of established, normalised urban fabrics. Urban culture in the meaning of subcultures hence stands for the questioning of the status quo, the disruption of the seemingly smooth and normal, the opening of urban black boxes, in short: the problematisation of space and its governance, by means of resistance and opposition.

In Brussels, however, there is not such thing as a ‘normalised space’ to which one should resist. Even so-called normalised space, or dominant governance, itself often contains a plethora of everyday tactics. In Brussels, the everyday tactics and resistance to dominant strategies are present throughout the different strata of urban space, and its governance. If the Brussels urban reality appears at once vibrant *and* utterly chaotic, decadent *and* precarious, over-regulated *and* self-organising; this has to do with its heterogeneous and multi-layered shape, governance structure, and everyday life. Brussels is socio-economically and geographically a sharply segregated city. And yet, in the Brussels historic centre (the Pentagon), self-organising, illegal, and marginalised urbanities intertwine with highly normalised urbanities: normalised, either in terms of cosmopolitan lifestyles (due to Brussels’ international role) or according to typically Belgian provincial criteria. This dense urban core can be read as a multiplication of extremes: loft-inhabitants have ‘mattress-tenants’ as their

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79 Cohen, *Brussels on our doorstep*, p. 73. He argues to finally build ‘the road linking citizenship, civilised living and architectural awareness’ (p. 75).
neighbours; prestigious hotels such as *The Plaza* and *Le Metropole*, are surrounded by sex shops, peep-show bars, and street prostitution; terraces of trendy bars are occasionally entertained by street fights and hold-ups; the *Gare du Midi* is, as Brussels’ major HST-hub, the gateway to Paris, London and Frankfurt; but also a major location for the homeless, and a place where ‘always, something happens’; activist festivals and improvised street performances take place alongside major city-marketing events, such as jazz festivals and Christmas markets. With its overlap of extreme devastation and yuppie extravaganza; controlled space and space appropriation; narrow-minded provincialism (the cozy Flemishness of the Dansaert quarter) and metropolitan ailments (dirt, stank, feelings of insecurity); local shops and international infrastructures; Brussels’ urban culture of the *multitude* forms a fertile laboratory for artists, sociologists, activists, and explorers alike.

Because Brussels is a gathering place of minorities, and a dense, fragmented, and heterogeneous web of agencies, the logic of the quotidian, the day-to-day everydayness, plays a role on many levels: from everyday life, over administrations and daily survival, to planning and politics. In Brussels, survival at *each* level of the stratum depends on one’s capacity to understand and enhance the urban everyday.

### 2.2. The everyday as an empowering asset or disturbing precondition?

Brussels’ thorough everyday negotiation can be an empowering asset as much as a burden. The continuous negotiation of alliances, and the balance between resistance or giving way, means that the everyday allows, at times, a resistance to a given state of affairs but also acts as a hinderance to ‘get things done’. For urban space itself, as much as for spatial planning and governance, the appropriation of a given situation is central. This ‘appropriation of a given situation’ in Brussels is typically encouraged by its structural malfunctioning and complex governance, by individual rather than collective concerns - a lack of ‘civility’ (or: *burgerschap*) - and by the ‘anything goes’ mentality that generates the strong impression that Brussels is somehow *une ville autogérée*. A public post office may, from one day to the next, become inaccessible to its surrounding neighbourhood due to the fortification of a EU-

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80 Audi Jazz, *Maïs* Art Festival, the light & sound spectacles at the *Grand Place* during the tourist season; the *Winterpret / Plaisirs d’hiver* Christmas-market.


82 This appeared in several interviews with architects, e.g. interview Eloisa Astudillo Fernandez, *L’Escaut* architects, 1 December 2007; André Longin, City of Brussels, 21 December 2007; Sara Noel Costa de Araujo, XDGA, 20 December 2007.
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building. Of course, Brussels’ wealth of urban experiments, its appeal to foreign artists, and its ‘ideal’ role as a seat for the trial-and-error European Community, also demonstrate that Brussels’ everydayness – and particularly its density, multiplicity and heterogeneity - can also be considered an asset: something that allows Brussels to function as a laboratory for urban experiments.

As a consequence, everyday negotiation does not act only as a precondition, but is also further shaped by the responses to this precondition - as both an asset and a burden. The Brussels quotidian has developed a true dictionary of de Certeau-like tactics as a way of dealing with the incoherent and malfunctioning strategies. For example, all too literal responses have generated Kafkaesque situations such as the Rue Defacqz and the Avenue Louize. The Rue Defacqz, notwithstanding its limited length, crosses three different municipalities (Brussels City, Ixelles, and St. Gilles); a situation that has resulted in three different pavement treatments, street furniture, and street-lighting, all neatly respecting the municipal boundaries. Likewise, the short, narrow stretch connecting the grand Avenue Louize with the Brussels Pentagon – also called the goulot de Louize (the Louize bottleneck) – belongs to three different municipal territories (Ixelles, Brussels City, and St. Gilles) and to two police zones (Brussels City/Ixelles and Anderlecht/St. Gilles/Vorst). The story goes that pickpockets take advantage of the fact that the police force of Brussels/Ixelles is not allowed to intervene on the pavement belonging to St. Gilles and vice versa.

Architecture and urbanism have also often responded tactically to the ‘Brussels Situation’. In the absence of coherent planning, an egocentric urbanism could flourish. In order to obtain building permissions, architect-developer collectives have cleverly enhanced neo-traditionalist façadism, with the hope of assuaging pressure groups. And yet, Brussels has begun to also produce a more contemporary architecture promotore. The Théâtre National, for example, was the result of a typical Brussels way of ‘doing architecture’: a building commissioned by La Communauté Française, but built by a private enterprise, who located the theatre building on a (cheap) lot that was actually intended for offices. Nevertheless, its forced realism (satisfying the client; utility-based and service-oriented) led to interesting

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83 When the post office and other private and public services of the Luxemburg Station, were incorporated in the EU Parliament building, access was restricted to EU functionaries - interview Françoise Deville, Renovas, 7 December 2007; and, Association du Quartier Léopold (AQL), ‘Segregatiepolitiek’, A Plus, nr. 184, 2003, p. 68.

84 For some, Brussels can therefore be considered ‘in itself not a problem but a solution […] even if policy comes short (no cleaning, no maintenance and means to certain areas) […]’ I) urbanism would fall away, Brussels would not have any more problems. It would just have more extreme situations – Interview Guido Steegen, ARSIS, 5 December 2007; Paolo Vigano interprets Brussels’ traumatic history, also as an asset: ‘Brussels is a porous city [...] you always discover one place hidden behind another [...] In the Brussels’) geography of permeability […] porosity is Brussels’ strength’, PaolaVigano, ‘Interview Paola Vigano’, in: Parchkdesign 2008, ed. by Dominique Junne and Serge Kempeneers (Brussels: Ministere Leefmilieu en Energie, 2008), pp. 38-40, pp. 39-40, interview by Rafaella Houlstan-Hasaerts.

85 In the meaning of: disconnected from its surrounding context – interview Christian Lasserre, CLI, 11 January 2008.
architecture and innovation: not in terms of fancy or extravagant architectural design, but in terms of the building’s hyperrealism. This hyperrealism is expressed in the architects’ capacity to work within programmatic, financial, and managerial constraints; their ‘to the letter’ respect for the program; and an extreme service-orientatedness towards the users of the building. In such hyperrealism resides also the concernedness of this building: its internal arrangements are not just functional for the employees and artists, but also opens up to the users of the city - non-theatre audiences – as it allows for meetings, conferences, receptions, brunches.86

The Maison des Citoyens by Pierre Hebbelinck is also, by its very program (a house for the citizens), an everyday-based building. With its contemporary design, it challenges the Brussels ‘decorative shallowness’; but its symbolic representation of openness and accessibility has also failed to be appreciated by the local communities.87 As one of the local social workers has claimed, in a neighbourhood where activities avoid daylight, the transparency of the building functions as ‘l’œil the moscou’, as a panopticon, which resulted in stones being thrown into it.88

On a different order, when Xaveer De Geyter Architects (XDGA) started to work out their winning competition entry for the Rogier Square (further details follow), they saw themselves confronted with yet another example of how the Brussels governance complexity is, sometimes literally, reflected in the everyday. The underground infrastructure (gas, electricity, water) of the Boulevard Botanique, where XDGA had foreseen double lines of trees, proved so chaotically organised that planting trees on a straight line was impossible. Rather than a burden, such unexpected complexity was appropriated, and even magnified by the architects, who turned it into an asset: by doubling the number of trees the initially planned ‘boulevard for strolls’, has been reconceptualised into a ‘landscape of trees’.89 Long lives the productive force of the Brussels quotidien!

Likewise, the bus shelter designed by MSA, with Ney and Partners Engineering (in 2006), at the Canal/Dansaert Street crossing, was an outcome of a creative use of legislation. Because the standard bus shelters by JC Decaux (in vieux-neuf Art Nouveau), didn’t fit into such a stringent space; and in order to avoid the long waiting time for planning permission,


89 Interview Sara Noel Costa de Araujo, XDGA.
the architects designed a removable shelter: structurally attached to the balustrade of the canal, which allowed its registration as a temporary ‘art work’, and thus it could circumvent the long procedures required for permanent constructions. More generally, Belgian architects have adopted methods of incorporating the typical Belgian bricolage (such as of the koterij - backroom) and the absurdity of the allotment regulations into their designs.\textsuperscript{90}

Citizens have also, often out of necessity, developed everyday survival techniques in the absence of appropriate socio-economic measures: informal (illegal) income, alternative (ethnic) support networks, and all sorts of devastating housing practices such as mattress-letting, car-residences, and slum landlords. The urban activist collective Citymined has insisted on precisely working throughout the different layers, and in turning the tensions and conflicts – the stalemate or what they have called ‘Krax’ – into productive communications.\textsuperscript{91}

2.3. Architecture’s ‘rediscovery’ of the everyday: what about Brussels?

As we have seen in the second chapter, the 1990s saw a re-emergence of everyday discourses and practices, both in a critical-oppositional and in a pragmatic manner. In Brussels, by contrast, the everyday has always been a constituting aspect of its urban condition, and, more generally, of the Belgitude. Whereas Geert Bekaert, with the gemeenplaats, depicted the importance of the everyday for understanding the Flemish architecture emancipation of the 1980s; the Brussels’ everydayness would be less ‘poetic’ in nature, and more linked to the urban question and to Brussels’ socio-cultural, economic and political situation. Due to Brussels’ historical adoption of everyday survival tactics under foreign governors, and due to the tangled impact of the everyday - in the ‘everyday life’ of the city, its inhabitants, governance and planning – the overall presence and continuous negotiation of everyday tactics is precisely what distinguishes Brussels form more general everyday tendencies. But does this specificity allow Brussels to also act as a possible alternative for either oppositional critique or a compliance with the real?

Activist collectives such as Citymined, Recyclart, and Disturb would, indeed, gradually enter into the more established urban debates.\textsuperscript{92} Likewise, the everyday would gain

\textsuperscript{90} For example: BARAK, house near Bouillon; Anorak, back house in Ukkel; V-Plus, house Cortier-De Lat Temat; 51N4E, Allotment Athletica - ‘Belgitude. Uit liefde voor het binnengebied’, A Plus, nr. 204, 2007, pp. 56-70.

\textsuperscript{91} ‘Krax’, in reference to Erik Swyngedouw’s ‘institutional voids’, are spatial and institutional voids. Within ‘krax’, one can affect other actors while still respecting one’s own agenda. The major problem is funding, since that forces one to enter again into someone else’s agenda - interview Jim Segers, Citymined, London, 6 February 2008.

\textsuperscript{92} E.g. Iwan Strauven, co-founder of Disturb, is responsible for the architecture program at BOZAR; David Crahay (Disturb) meanwhile occupies a position within a Ministerial Cabinet; Disturb has organised debates involving key politicians on urban questions; the ‘Bruxel Glocal. Cities, urbanity & urban interventions’ conference, organised
importance within the official architecture debate. Public architecture events would increasingly focus on the everyday, with two subsequent Belgian Biennale contributions being no doubt seen as climaxes: *Kinshasa, The Imaginary City* (Koen Van Synghel, Filip De Boeck, Marie-Françoise Plissart, 2004) emphasised the importance of occupation and imagination over the architectural/built space; and, *La beauté de l’ordinaire. Ou comment je me suis disputé avec mon voisin* (Label Architecture, 2006), took the Belgian everyday reality as a source of inspiration. Several architecture projects would develop more attention for the quotidian conditions of the Brussels context, while architecture critique would also grow more tuned to the Brussels everyday reality.

Moreover, architecture research and education would hook up with the everyday. *La Cambre* would pick up its tradition of societal engagement by actively participating in the debates around the refurbishment of *Place Flagey*, and by becoming an important player in the French architecture emancipation. Together with Cosmopolis, an urban research centre at the Free University, *La Cambre* would support activist initiatives, such as the occupation of Hotel Tagawama and the Leopold Station. Several colloquia, discussion platforms and events would see the light, involving scholars, citizens, governors, and activists. Also in art, the everyday has remained an inspiration, which is expressed in the work of, amongst others, Nathalie Mertens and Peter Downsborough.

Through such ‘invasion’ of the everyday, policy makers would also welcome the everyday as a handy compensation for Brussels’ persistent everyday problems. With the permanent exhibition, *Experience Brussels. Une (re)découverte de Bruxelles*, at Brussels Info Plein (BIP), Minister-President Charles Picqué proved, once more, his eagerness to use the...

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by Citymined and Bureau de Micro-Urbanisme (BOZAR, 21 February 2003), was attended by architects and geographers.

93 E.g. *Maison des Citoyen* (Hebbelinck); plans to use the unused spaces of the Brussels metro system for parties and exhibitions (Joeri De Bruyn, ‘Brussels Gewest ontsluit vergeten metrozalen’, *A Plus*, nr. 193, April/May 2005, pp. 20-23); ‘Vitrine Project’ Ravenstein (occupation by art galleries during renovation works, May 2005); and the renovation of the Beursschouwburg.

94 E.g. *La Cambre’s* participation in the *Livre Blanc*, Pratic database, *Renouveaux Plaisirs d’architecture*; and the *Vade-Mecum*, including the colloquium at the basis of it. See also the debates generated by the book series *Les Cahiers de La Cambre – Architecture*, and the new journal *Hortence*.


97 *Museum van de Straatlantaarn* by Christophe Terlinden and Nathalie Mertens; *and/maar, op – and/pour, et by Peter Downsborough* (with architect Christian Kieckens); *art in the metro.*
everyday as part of Brussels’ attractiveness. Through the history of Brussels, the visitor gets to know the ‘indigenous’ Brussels inhabitants - called the Homobruxellensis (!) – through wall-size photographs, and témoignages of Brussels inhabitants.98

Everyday culture turned spectacle? The role of urban culture has long been emphasised by activists (Citymined, Cinema Nova), established cultural institutes (Koninklijke Vlaamse Schouwburg, Théâtre National), and academics; so why shouldn’t politicians follow the trend? What is problematic is that, despite promoting the image of Brussels’ cultural mixture and the everyday, politicians have barely responded structurally to everyday culture’s emancipatory effects: Brussels, as a Region, has never taken the effort to develop a regional cultural policy. The only exception, namely the new centralised cultural ambitions of the Plan International de Développement (PDI, see further), is in fact just city marketing.99 The use of the everyday within the Brussels Info Plein, which is part of the PDI, prolongs Charles Picqué’s long-standing fascination with the everyday, and for Brussels’ popular culture.

Since it took up office, the regional government, under the presidency of Picqué, has regularly published books, and organised exhibitions, with the aim of making the Bruxellois prouder of their city. It is interesting to see how many of these books emphasise the ‘popular’ world of local life and folk legends. For example, the Bruxelles-Capitale series, created by Picqué in 1994, collected popular Brussels fiction about the multiple faces of everyday life - ‘Bruxelles passion, Bruxelles dérision, Bruxelles littéraire, historique, anecdotique, ironique, Bruxelles désigné du doit, Bruxelles dans tous ses états’.100 But, as Picqué said, it was especially close to the citizens from the most popular but deprived neighbourhoods, in order to express ‘une part de notre âme profonde’.101 Chosing Les Fables de Pitje Schramouille as the first book in the series is significant, because the figure of Pitje Schramouille symbolises a call for democracy, and a defence against all sorts of imperialisms of the post-industrial
society: ‘pour faire rire les honnêtes gens ou afin d’attirer la sympathie des grands de ce monde’.102

A decade later, in 2006, Picqué would come up with an updated version. Whereas the Bruxelles-Capitale series highlighted canonical historical works of fiction, the volume Je me souviens de Bruxelles brings in more contemporary Brussels fiction, while it also broadcasts some everyday voices of ‘popular Brussels’.103 Here also, a political agenda speaks through the voices of the everyday, namely, the attempt to evoke feelings of tenderness for a city that has been so often ‘despised and disapproved by those who don’t know what it has to offer’.104 By presenting Brussels through snapshots of its cosmopolitan, Babylonian melting pot; written from an intimate, subjective, and experiential point-of-view, the message seems clear: in order to make Brussels liveable, one has to learn how to love and appreciate it. How? By developing an eye for the surprises, charm, and hidden beauty of the everyday, and by looking beyond its scars and horrors. One could read this as an unmistakable entrepreneurial encouragement: to live well in Brussels, it suffices to learn how to love this city; a capacity that is entirely in one’s own hands! But is the capacity to see and to get access to the beauty and charm of the everyday not an achievement of a particular cultural class? What about the inhabitants living in those populous quarters, with their humid, low-comfort housing, and their loud, polluted, violent, and dirty streets, having, moreover, nothing at their disposal but low incomes, unqualified education, and informal, insecure socio-economic support? Can we pretend, also from them, to learn to love Brussels, and pardon its structural mistakes?105

In the architectural realm, the Brussels authorities have supported several guides for discovering Brussels architectural and urban heritage. The Modern Architecture in Brussels Guide, which existed already since 1968, would get a ‘Picqué stamp’ in its 1996 edition, wherein he emphasised the importance of architectural quality, democratic decision processes with citizens, and the protection of patrimony.106 Since 1993, the Brussels Capital Region’s Department of Monuments and Landscapes, has also published the Brussel, Stad van Kunst en Geschiedenis book series, aiming at sensitising citizens about the cultural heritage of their

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105 E.g. what about the promise to create 5,000 new social housing units, admittedly a far less charming plan? One seemingly has to remember from Je me souviens de Bruxelles that ‘Brussels is in the first place, a European City’ - Picqué, ‘Preface’, p. 8).

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city, in terms of architecture, urbanism, and the arts. By addressing the ‘reader and walker who aims to get to know Brussels better’, it aims at professionals as much as citizens and visitors.107 And finally, Picqué’s publications and events on urban renewal give proof of his interest in the ‘human’ side of the urban question. One can think of the exhibition ‘Brussel Dicht Bij Ons’ (June-July 2008, St Géry), and the related publication, *Brussels on our doorstep: architecture in neighbourhood contracts* (Maurizio Cohen, 2007), which focuses on the small-scale, socially concerned, but nevertheless qualitative and contemporary architecture, produced within Neighbourhood Contracts. One can also think of *Brussel Getoetst op Inspraak, De Wijkcontracten als oefeningen* (Mathieu Berger and Pauline Beugnies, 2008), on citizen participation within Neighbourhood Contracts; and the exhibition and publication, *Brussel een Hoofdstad en haar inwoners/Bruxelles Une Capitale et ses habitants*, on the shaping of Brussels history by economic and political actors, as well as by its citizens.108 If we now return to the PDI and *Brussels Info Plein*, it becomes clear that, under Picqué, the everyday has gradually ‘emancipated’ from a naïve populism into a constituting aspect of Brussels that could charm and legitimise much of Brussels’ structural failures (and thus could indeed be a tool for city marketing).

In addition, many of Brussels’ everyday explorations resonate with a more general preference for the poetic rather than the truly ugly/problematic of the everyday banality (e.g. *La beauté de l’ordinaire*, books Charles Picqué); with the delimitations of everyday studies to a mere *reading* and *understanding* of space (e.g. *Kinhasa*), and with the use of the everyday qualities to also legitimise more structural malfunctioning (e.g. books by Picqué). And yet, for several reasons, Brussels also allows, to a certain extent, a countering of or at least a questioning of such tendencies.

Because of Brussels’ longstanding alliance with the real, the empowering, oppositional and transformative qualities of the everyday, are not delimited to the use and occupation of space, but also appear in the pragmatics of urban practice. This is what Xaveer de Geyter and Elia Zenghelis called the unswerving feeling of being *in* a project (rather than just creating one).109 Self-organisation, ‘getting things done’ within the administrative and political *mille-feuille* that one cannot get through’,110 *se debrouiller*... these are all essentials

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107 Guido Jan Bral, *Het Rijksadministratief Centrum* (Brussels: Ministerie van het Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest, Monumenten en Landschappen, 2007), back cover. Part of the ‘Brussel, Stad van Kunst en Geschiedenis’ series, directed by Patrick Crahay. Aim is to sensitise the public. Meanwhile about 46 volumes have been published.


110 De Geyter, ‘Intervening with the Big Needle’, p. 36.
in the Brussels survival kit: for activists, citizens, architects and governors alike. Whereas the architecture debate tends to locate the everyday either on the side of oppositional, critical practices or in the camp of ‘projective’ practices; in Brussels, the everyday travels smoothly across such boundaries. Brussels’ architects can hardly be split by such camps. Many combine contemporary architectural aesthetics with urban or societal concerns (e.g. V-plus, Escaut, MSA), and even the more ‘projective’ or star-sensitive ones, remain faithful to the Brussels laboratory function (e.g. Anorak, Label Architecture). Likewise, truly fancy events, such as the installations by Arne Quinze (Cityscape), or the Berlage A Vision for Brussels events at BOZAR, are not received with downright hatred or naïve adoration but with a rather reticent appreciation. Such events are welcomed for breaking with Brussels’ ‘fear of the new’, but are toned down for being too remote from Brussels’ everyday reality. In other words, whereas Brussels welcomes architecture innovation with eager; it is also reluctant to surf too easily on the waves of architecture stardom and neo-liberal practice. Due to Brussels’ workings as a collective, concernedness is never fully a bottom-up affair, while, by contrast, ambitious innovation and governance are never entirely top-down. Brussels’ activist initiatives always aspire more than mere events on-the-ground. New structures and organisations that, elsewhere, are implemented in a rather top-down manner (e.g. VAI, Vlaams Bouwmeester, Nieuwe Eenvoud), are, in Brussels, considered a collective endeavour that can only succeed when processed through all urban laboratories (e.g. Livre Blanc, discussions around a Brussels Bouwmeester, IBAI, MAPRAC). As such, Brussels’ par nature concerned pragmatism challenges those experimental, network-like architecture laboratories of the 1990s; to safeguard the critical along their interest in the ‘real’, and in lived space. Indeed, these practices may be called ‘pragmatic idealist’, ‘critical realist’, ‘critical pragmatist’, or even ‘pragmatopian’; and they may reconcile theoretical reflection and

111 Arne Quinze’s Cityscape, inaugurated September 2007, proves that one can realise things in Brussels (only two months for building permission). It may be ‘critical’ for occupying a vacant lot, but it is also part of a whole set of city marketing events (Bacardi event tent, sponsored by Mini etc.); has no lasting effect (temporary installation); and lacks originality (copy of Kawamata) - Audrey Contesse, ‘Agnologie’, A Plus, 2007, nr. 207, pp. 18-19; Benoît Moritz, ‘Het Jaar 2007, interview’, Knack, 26 December 2007, pp. 178-79. A Vision for Brussels. Imagining the Capital of Europe, 2007 exhibition BOZAR (see further).

112 Involved in building, but also publishing, researching, teaching and curating e.g. OMA/AMO, MVRDV, Périphériques, NL Architects, njiric & njiric, abalos & herreros, FOA, the ‘Brussels’ offices XDGA and 51N4E. New criticism of offices such as 51N4E, FLC and Wim Cuypers challenge traditional notions such as ‘context’, ‘allotment’, and ‘problem’; V-Plus and Escaut, are more explicitly ‘politically engaged’, than, say, 51N4E, whose mixing of high and low culture, of top-down and bottom-up, and pragmatism of ‘space producers’, is refreshing, but also cynical. Thierry Decuyper (V-Plus) criticised the ‘Flemish revival’ for its cynicism and zealous adoration of the Flemish landscape, its chaotic urbanisation and banality, as a source for new cultural references (Decuyper, ‘Lezersbrief’, A Plus, nr. 173, 2001, pp. 30-31)

113 ‘Critical realist’, Gausa and Cros, Opp! Operative Optimism in Architecture, p. 11; 12; ‘critical pragmatist’, Aaron Betsky, ‘Landscape and the architecture of the self’, Quadermen, nr. 220, 1998; Andreas Ruby, ‘Pragmatopia’, in Manuel Gausa et al., The metapolis dictionary of advanced architecture: city, technology and society in the information age (Barcelona: Actar, 2003), p. 488. Projects such as MVRDV’s ‘hageneiland ypenburg’, even FOA’s Yokohama international port terminal, were even included in Tzonis and Lefaivre’s ‘globalised’ critical regionalism, namely for rethinking a traditional type (MVRDV’s pitch roof and rethought
practical involvement, vision and action; however, no matter how innovative, experimental, open-ended, networked, or hybrid they may be; these practices’ concerns with the real, remain largely restricted to the architectural viewpoint.

By contrast, in Flanders the debate on reconstruction or new development had lost much of its ideological appeal and had instead turned into a pragmatic and economic concern (is reconstruction financially feasible? Can it attain the required living standards and comfort?). Brussels, however, would, despite the pragmatism of the younger generation, still suffer a strong ideological straitjacket. On the other hand, Brussels’ practices and theories that work from interstitial viewpoints are, in contrast to the explicitly underground status of subcultures, keen to affect precisely the more established structures. Rather than claiming the margin, by enforcing respect for its otherness and thus its boundaries; Brussels activist practices approach interstices as part of the collective, namely, as those actants that allow to question processes of normalisation, and to reconsider some of the collective’s modes de travail. When, for example, Citymined questions the economic segregation in Brussels, it does not do so by debunking the dominant capitalist system altogether or by idealising alternative economies too naïvely. Instead, much of its work lies in the identification of ‘Krax’ or niches within the system, and shows how another economic logic is possible therein.

Finally, it was beyond dispute that the more everyday-based and pragmatic architecture of the younger Belgian generation also requires a new architecture theory. In response to such a need, the French-Brussels variant would be more socio-urban and down-to-earth in nature (e.g. Maurizio Cohen, François Thiry) than the literary-artistic and typically architectural everyday theories in Flanders (e.g. Van Gerrewey, Delbeke, Bekaert).


114 Gausa and Cros, OPOP!, p. 10.

115 The younger generation would radicalise the old/new debate by fundamentally re-questioning the balance between old and new, for pragmatic rather than ideological motivations; the neo-liberal condition was considered a ‘normal if not essential precondition’ – Pieter Uyttenhove, ‘Jonge Europese Architecten’, A Plus, nr. 176, 2002, pp. 42-43, in ref. to the European Seminar for young architects, organised in Antwerp, 2002, under impulse of the Vlaams Bouwmeester.

116 E.g. the Geert Bekaert Award for architectural research and reflection, created in 1999; NETHCA (Network for Theory, History and Criticism of Architecture), created by Hilde Heynen and David Vanderburgh in 1998; NETHCA Colloquia including Inside Density (1999), Tourism Revisited (2001), Critical Tools (2003), and The Unthinkable Doctorate (2005).

3. Gathering forces at last: towards one vision, and towards a more ambitious (architecture) future

3.1. Brussels’ absence of central governance and an integrated urban vision

If Brussels’ behaviour as a laboratory and collective can be brought back to its liaison with the quotidian, it has also been a response to the persistent absence of an overall architectural and urban ambition, and, related to it, Brussels’ complex governance structure. It is a sheer understatement to say that this *mal bruxellois* deeply affects Brussels’ incapability to deal with its structural problems. Brussels’ governance structure is based on the regional delegation of responsibility to 19 municipalities. In contrast to the Flemish and Walloon region, where a provincial level mediates between both, Brussels allocates responsibilities directly to municipalities, who have a strong decision-making power. Also, in contrast to most metropolitan cities, Brussels does not have one Mayor but nineteen burgomasters, and a regional Minister-President. In reality, the power of the Minister-President is limited: plans, projects, or regulations that are developed by the Region often get compromised when landing at the local municipal level. Here, decision-making is often complicated by issues related to the (language) communities (Flemish/French loyalties), and by the dual role played by political representatives. A municipal burgomaster or alderman is often simultaneously a minister of the Region, a member of the French or Flemish Communitarian Commission, or a chairman of para-regional institutions such as the STIB or GOMB, and hence serves different interests. In Brussels this phenomenon is also called the *multiples casquettes* syndrome.

Additionally, in Belgium responsibilities are divided throughout the regions (Flemish, Walloon and Brussels Region) and communities (French, Flemish, German). Whereas, for example, external affairs and defence are responsibility of the Federal State, housing and spatial planning belong to the regions, while culture and education belong to the communities. In Flanders, where the Flemish Region and Community overlap, this situation is relatively straightforward. In the Walloon Region, the addition of a small German community to the dominant French one does not pose too many problems. In Brussels, however, a geographical island within the Flemish Region, governance is a challenge: its airport and large parts of its ring road are located on Flemish soil; it is suffering an overwhelming stream of national and international commuters; and, on its territory, the French and Flemish communities overlap. This unique governance complexity has had far-reaching consequences, on several levels.

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118 This is largely confirmed by the interviews with bureaux d’études, architects, civil society, and public administrators – see interview overview list in annex.
Firstly, Brussels’ policymaking has difficulties in developing a proper overall vision, and a truly transversal projet de ville that integrates economics, employment, education, spatial planning, and sustainability. Rather than suffering from a shortage of good ideas, the problem is caused by a missing anchor, and the absence of a moment of integration. As a result, Brussels has, even after two decades of projet de ville, still no clear project or vision for the future.

Secondly, due to Brussels’ complex governance and its resulting long and slow procedures, strong visions or projects hardly make it well into practice. An initially strong proposal often loses its strength, radicalism, or innovativeness on its way to implementation. This conception/implementation disparity is particularly disastrous for Brussels, because it needs effective spatial and socio-economic measures in order to overcome its structural problems - its socio-economic paradoxes and segregations; its housing crisis and its structural failure to cope with these problems: for example, Brussels plans 5,000 new social-housing units but does not develop a project for it. As a consequence of Brussels’ complex decision-making and lack of ‘one vision’, private developers take over where policy making gets stuck, and, as such, place politics in a constant situation of rattrapage. Also, as a consequence, the formulation of appropriate responses to real needs often has to make place for a compromis à la Belge or a ‘best possible’ outcome of lengthy and tiring negotiations. In fact, the available planning instruments are fine in theory, but are not always fully realised in practice.

Thirdly, a precondition for innovative architecture and urban planning requires risk-taking. Not only do Brussels’ authorities clearly lack the courage to take bold decisions, they also fail to commission representative experimental architecture. Amidst a situation of slow procedures, complex governance and too many stakeholders around the table – who moreover wear multiple casquettes - risk-taking becomes too much of a tricky business. As a result, the architects who manage to realise large projects, and ‘get things done’, are those who, in order

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119 As we have seen already in the Ouverture, Brussels is, in terms of BNP, one of the richest regions in Europe; yet it has amongst the highest poverty and unemployment rates, and thus suffers a poor trickle down effect. In addition, Brussels suffers significant tax-losses: apart from the Belgian commuters, also many EU-expatriats, who work in Brussels, live outside the Brussels Region (in Flanders or Wallony). See also Verbindingsbureau Brussel-Europe (www.vbbe.be).


121 These two levels of complexity (lack of a projet de ville and the theory/practice disparity) were brought to the fore in most interviews, and discussed in greater depth in the following interviews (for details see list in annex): Christian Lasserre, CLI; Matt Paryski and Mr. Frisique, Coop-Arch; Livia De Bethune, SUM; Jens Aerts, Ministerial Cabinet Pascal Smet; André Longin, City of Brussels; Françoise Allaert and Stijn Thomas, Maison de la Rénovation Urbaine St. Josse; Françoise Deville, Renovas; Thierry Decuytere, V-Plus; Sara Noel Costa de Araujo, XDGA; Marc Gods, FLC; Jean-Luc Quoistiaux, AGORA; Guido Steegen, ARSIS; Olivier Bastin, Escaut.

to minimise risk and speed up procedures, have allied themselves with developers: the latter being more than happy to copy/paste over and over the same well-known and risk-free architectural and urban solutions. It is therefore hardly surprising that Brussels’ architects are celebrated more in developers’ circles, such as the yearly MIPIM event in Cannes, than in architecture culture.\textsuperscript{123} In Brussels, these architectes-promoteurs constellations are additionally supported by the phenomenon of copinage: namely, their solid embedding in the ‘local political culture’ and selective lobbies.\textsuperscript{124} As a result, important commissions are divided among only a few powerful firms, while offices entering the Brussels scene from the outside soon give up as they see themselves confronted with impenetrable lobbies and immensely complex and incomprehensible rules, policies, and constellations.\textsuperscript{125} Michel Jaspers, one of Brussels’ ü ber architecte-promoteurs could not have stated it more beautifully: ‘It always boils down to the obtaining of building permissions, that’s what the work of an architect is all about.’\textsuperscript{126} And what’s worse: he is right. To find your way in the Brussels tangle is believed to be a job in itself, and thus, for many, a mere waste of time. By contrast, the leverage projects (kantelprojecten) that Brussels needs in order to finally break with its architectural negativism, don’t get to see the light. For architects and urbanists, muddling through the ‘Brussels Situation’ implies working amidst vague visions and principles, such as mixité, intégration, or environnementalité; frustratingly long and loss-incurring procedures; and the absence of concrete occasions (projects) for exercising their skills and ideas.\textsuperscript{127}

Even if on policy-making level, no radical changes have taken place as yet \textit{in reality}; several initiatives and projects, by non-governmental bodies but also by public authorities, seem to prove that the climate is slowly starting to change. These signs can be observed on the level of an integrated urban vision, and with regard to a more ambitious, contemporary architecture.

\textsuperscript{123} Marché International des professionnels de l’immobilier (MIPIM) is a yearly meeting for real estate actors, public authorities, and architects in Cannes. The Brussels offices Atelier d’Art Urbain and ASSAR won MIPIM Awards in 2000 (11\textsuperscript{th} Edition).


\textsuperscript{125} Christian Kieckens, Paul Lievevrouw, and Xaveer de Geyter, interviewed in the series ‘Brussel en architectuur’, \textit{Brussel Deze Week}, 2006. Even Luc Deleuze from Art & Build, one of those major firms, admits that Brussels’ architecture is dominated by only four-five large firms, but he does not see this as a threat to smaller offices: the large offices just do the more visible projects; and, in the end ‘everyone can find his place’ - Luc Deleuze, ‘Zoals een indianenstam. Op de Rooster: Luc Deleuze’, \textit{De Architectenkrant}, July 2008.


\textsuperscript{127} Interview Thierry Decuyper, V-Plus; and interview Livia De Bethune, SUM.
3.2. Concrete signs of change: towards a projet de ville

In the wake of the transversal work of urban activist collectives (e.g. Citymined, Recyclart), numerous research groups, civil society organisations, and other collectives have, through publications, events and debates, contributed to the discussion on Brussels’ need for a true transversal projet de ville. One can think of the efforts of centralising knowledge on Brussels by, amongst others, Brio Brussel, the scientific journal Brussels Studies, the recently founded Brussels Studies Institute, and the publication *Het Geval Brussel – een inventaris/Le Cas de Bruxelles – un inventaire*. One can also cite think-tanks like Cosmopolis and the Mort-Subite Group, Bruxcel Bravo, the debates organised by Aula Magna (see below); and the workshops organised for the development of a long-term urban vision for Flanders and Brussels, which resulted in a White Paper known as Witboek Stedenbeleid.

No matter how diverse their background, aims, and scopes, these groups share a defence of a contemporary and ambitious approach to the city, and, as such, a critique of Brussels’ ad hoc urbanism. At times, this means replacing the assault on progress and modern doom scenarios (*Reconstruction de la Ville*) with a more optimist and ambitious vision. It also means the preference for a realistic attitude towards Brussels’ reality, rather than glorifying the return to a long-gone past of small-scale, cohesive quarters, which in reality came down to the white, middle-class city. In other words, whereas *La Reconstruction de la Ville* projected the past into the future and aimed at re-conquering the ideal pre-modern city, the new urban movement would argue for a grand and daring vision for Brussels, while at the same time, turning to its downright reality for inspiration.

3.2.1. Re-entangling Brussels’ agencies: a reconfigured imbroglio and, finally, a veritable collective in the making!

How then, apart from architecture culture, did Brussels’ governance initiatives respond to these new tendencies? How did they balance ambition and realism, innovation and modesty, grand gestures and careful insertions into the quotidian?

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130 Initiated by Wim Embrechts, it organises a large-scale city event, every year, involving cultural partners from all over the Region. Embrechts is also involved in Recyclart and currently triggers actions for regenerating the Brussels Canal area (the Belle-Vue artist residences and Platforme Kanal).

Two major events have allowed, albeit for very different reasons, the reshuffling and recomposition of Brussels’ complex set of agencies, including urban visions, architectural emancipation, everydayness, ghosts from the past, activism, cultural and societal preoccupations, governance, and architectural ambition. Firstly, the research project, exhibition and publication, *A Vision for Brussels*, would, despite its shortcomings, blow a fresh breeze through the Brussels’ architecture debate. Secondly, the États Généraux, or Citizens’ Forum, conceived as a truly interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary event, succeeded in reassembling debates that were formerly disparate.

The 2007 exhibition, *A Vision for Brussels: Imagining the Capital of Europe*, and the accompanying publication, *Brussels – a Manifesto. Towards the Capital of Europe*, formed an apotheosis of earlier events and publications on the relation between Brussels and Europe. The impressive European presence in Brussels – 40,000 functionaries, 15,000 lobbyists, 1,400 journalists, 4,000 NATO employees, 5,000 diplomats – had finally triggered a concrete plan or project for integrating Europe in Brussels. Brussels had always been the perfect laboratory for Europe-in-the-making, or as Roel Jacobs stated: ‘Le “compromis à la belge” n’est-il pas la règle non écrite qui régit le fonctionnement de l’Union européenne?’ What was new about *A Vision for Brussels* was not its attention on the European role of Brussels; but its architectural and project dimension; and its prestigious, widely acclaimed character, and, consequently, its significant impact on many levels of the Brussels debate. In other words, its major merit had been to place architecture prominently on the agenda again, and to defend an ambitious vision for Brussels. The more the project is now becoming a reference for Brussels’ new ambition, the more a critical evaluation of the project’s means is relevant, as those might as well be taken over within the package of ‘best practice’. One might question whether the project’s radical cynicism – its proposal for a ‘last heroic act’,
namely to demolish the European Parliament, ‘a horrible, ugly building’\(^{137}\) - allows something more than a mere provocation; even if it is, of course, true that the Parliament is the ultimate showcase of Brussels’ failing architecture production. One might question both the realism and the *concernedness* of a project that is based on catharsis, and on the dogmatic revision of monumental, architectural solutions for Brussels’ complex set of urban problems. In other words, *A Vision for Brussels* may have taught us to think big again, and to think of Brussels as *a whole*; the tools it proposes nevertheless create an illusion of an all-solving architectural answer to our urban *problématiques*\(^{138}\). This illusion is reinforced by the project’s dubious status of a radical manifesto rather than a detailed, nuanced plan; while its stylistic detailing and monumentality evoke precisely the opposite.

The *États Généraux* (Citizens’ Forum or *Staten-Generaal*), organised in the form of 16 debates within the period November 2008 – April 2009, was unique for its consolidation of the urban debate of the last couple of years. It brought together a variety of Brussels’ actors - academics, experts, civil society organisations, and the general public - which was reflected by its organisational team: ten Brussels civil society organisations, three Brussels universities, and coordinator Alain Deneef (Aula Magna).\(^{139}\) Aula Magna, a collective of Brussels citizens (mainly scholars) created in 2007 with its aim of ‘debating Brussels’ future’, is in itself a plea for a more integrated and transversal vision. Being ‘dedicated to an innovative and transversal thinking approach to the future of Brussels [by gathering] university teachers, managers of the associative, the social and economical sectors, as well as cultural actors [and by organising] hearings and seminars, produce research papers, push the debate forward on a palette of issues crucial to the well being of our city and residents’, Aula Magna had a tradition in organising Brussels-colloquia.\(^{140}\) The 2009 Citizens’ Forum discussed Brussels’ multifarious agenda items, including architecture and urban planning, through 16 debates centred on

\(^{137}\) Aureli in the *A Vision for Brussels*, exhibition video by Robin Ramaekers. The demolition of the parliament is meant as a ‘last heroic action’ to free the *Bruxellois* finally from their urban traumas, Iwan Strauven, interview by TV Brussel, 22/3/2007.


\(^{139}\) Also including urban pressure groups Bral and IEB; artistic associations *Brussels Kunstenoverleg* (BKO) and *Réseau des Arts à Bruxelles* (RAB); and citizen groups BruxselForum and Manifesto. The three universities are ULB, VUB, and FUSL - http://www.etatsgenerauxdebruxelles.be/.

\(^{140}\) The Challenges and ambitions of a Capital Region colloquium (March 2007), and the What Borders for Brussels’ colloquium (December 2007); coordinated by Alain Deneef - http://www.aula-magna.eu/.
specific Brussels-topics; an Internet forum in three languages (French, Flemish, English); and, more indirectly, by the debates triggered in major Belgian newspapers.\textsuperscript{141}

In particular for its plea for an integrated vision, and for its intellectual impact, the Citizens’ Forum can be considered an important dispositif. It is one of the first events that, on such scale, managed to discuss Brussels, in all its complexity and myriad of agencies (only think of the 16 thematic debate sessions!).\textsuperscript{142} Moreover, it managed to produce a concrete outcome in the form of a shared statement for Brussels (five missions) that are both visionary and concrete: cinq ‘chantiers’ urgent (five urgent building sites).\textsuperscript{143} Architecture and urbanism play an important role: the third mission, not coincidently called ‘A Vision for Brussels: Become the Capital Europe’, is a call to ‘express Brussels’ cosmopolitan character through art, culture, architecture and urbanism, in a truly innovative way’, and to promote the image of Brussels (as a multi-cultural city, as the Capital of Europe): through ‘high-quality projects, in architecture and urban planning, in artistic, cultural and event programmes, in the media and among those that shape public opinion’\textsuperscript{144}. File rouge of the debate was the plea for a centralised, transversal vision – ‘one future’ - for Brussels, and the need for a participatory democracy: La ville doit être co-produit par tous.\textsuperscript{145}

That the Citizens’ Forum will probably not be another of Brussels’ mayflies, is proved not only by its scope, but also by the creation of a new Brussels research institute, the Brussels Studies Institute: by the three universities involved, and by aiming to become a scholarly knowledge centre, offering knowledge, not only for academics, but also for Brussels’ actors and governors – as such demonstrating that ‘universities, rather than ivory towers, place knowledge at the disposal of Brussels’\textsuperscript{146}. Additionally, by openly dismissing neighbourhood-scale actions by means of lutter, and a return to the so-called ideal city of the


\textsuperscript{142}It balanced a highly ‘professional’ organisation – broad distribution of information, large audiences, multi-lingual (French-Dutch-English), organised in prestigious locations with the right sérieux – with qualitative discussions. This is important; in Brussels, where the best debates are usually held in more alternative, smaller circles. The closing event of 25 April 2009 included a debate with eight major Brussels politicians, moderated by UCL Professor Philippe van Parijs.

\textsuperscript{143}As a ‘roadmap and a way for the city to be managed’ – see Sharing our Passion for the City. Conclusions, report distributed at the États Généraux closing event 25 April 2009; available on-line: http://www.bruxsel.org/files/CFB_Conclusions_EN-1.pdf [accessed 22 April 2009].

\textsuperscript{144}Closing event 25 April 2009; and, Sharing our Passion for the City. Conclusions, p. 13.

\textsuperscript{145}Pascal Smet: ‘one city, one region; one city, one mayor, like everywhere else; one city, one future’, États Généraux, closing event, 25 april 2008 (and in Disturb debate, 24 April 2009). The need for a centralised vision, and more power to the Region, was confirmed by most of the interviews I conducted.

19th century; the États Généraux is probably the first opposition of such a scale and impact since its famous 1968 predecessor at La Cambre. Alain Deneef closed the États Généraux with the – I would say, historical – words:

[D]o we argue for less ideology perhaps? Yes, if that [ideology] means to develop ideas alone. Less cynicism too […] [A]nd if you now think that you haven’t heard anything new today, that might be so. But then I wonder: why then has nothing been undertaken yet?147

If we add to A Vision for Brussels’ ‘shock therapy’, and to the États Généraux’s ‘democratic governance proposal’, also the debates organised by Disturb in the same period;148 it becomes clear that the last couple of years can indeed be considered an important emancipatory step for Brussels. These events moreover demonstrate that effectuating an integrated vision for Brussels’ complex, fragmented governance structure, requires not just one strong actor or movement, but a collective effort that is composed of a variety of actors, with backgrounds in activism, the academic world and the architecture and urban planning professions.

3.2.2. A new set of urban and architectural policies

Urban policy has developed, over two decades, tools and visions for a projet de ville. However, these policies have only recently opened up concrete possibilities for ambitious architecture and for a more integrated vision. Brussels’ projet de ville, developed under the Brussels Minister-President Charles Picqué (GewOP I and II), had, from the beginning, been based on urban renovation in Brussels’ most deprived, central quarters. Through Neighbourhood Contracts, central quarters were renovated both in physical and social terms. Typical interventions were housing renovations and public space projects, always discussed and conceived on the local neighbourhood level. Projects in Neighbourhood Contracts hence hardly ever adopted an ambition larger than the immediate surroundings. This is not to say that no interesting architecture was produced within neighbourhood contracts, but that such interventions were hardly framed within a wider urban vision. As a consequence, architecture production appeared in terms of single-family or medium-scale collective housing projects,

147 Alain Deneef, concluding words, États Généraux, 25 April 2009; my translation from French. A call for faire la ville in contrast to the call for penser la ville as in the États Généraux of forty years earlier.

148 On the plans for a Bouwmeester for Brussels (26/2/2009); the recently created Agence d’Urbanisme (26/3/2009); ‘elections special’ on the status of architecture and urbanism on political agendas (23/4/2009); and on a new projet de ville, claimed as a central agenda point by most political parties (28/05/2009) - http://disturb.be/.
community parks and neighbourhood squares; a tendency that confirmed to the more general observations of Brussels’ highly fragmented architecture landscape.\textsuperscript{149}

Gradually the regional government would start to develop tools and instruments to centralise its neighbourhood renewal, and to deal with its more ambitious locations. A Moniteur de Quartier was created, in order to monitor the changes, needs, and developments in neighbourhoods, no longer from a local but from a regional perspective. To deal with supra-local locations, ZIR’s or Zones d’Intérêt Régional were identified, for which a Director Scheme (Schéma Directeur) was to be developed. Such a Director Scheme, despite its potential, proved inefficient: not being legally binding, it would soon fall victim to the Brussels’ political carrousel, and to the power of developers and their architects.

In other words, at a time when in many other cities, including those in Flanders, transversal and ambitious City Projects emerged, Brussels’ projet de ville was a combination of fragmented, localised interventions (in Neighbourhood Contracts), a series of brainstorms and colloquia; and shamefully missed opportunities. By the time that Flanders was fully concentrating on the conception, implementation, and even the evaluation of City Projects, through the Witboek Stedenbeleid and other initiatives of Thuis in de Stad; such projects, not even, as an idea, took root in Brussels.\textsuperscript{150}

Brussels’ first integrated plan with architectural ambition is the Plan de Développement International de Bruxelles, or the PDI (Plan voor de Internationale Ontwikkeling van Brussel - PIO).\textsuperscript{151} The PDI focuses on Brussels’ assets as an international city, on the development of strategic territories, and the implementation of important infrastructures. Considering the size and location of most of PDI’s strategic territories, it is clear that the PDI has shifted attention away from the localised and social interventions in the inner-city quarters (Neighbourhood Contracts’ playground), to more prestigious interventions on peripheral, large-scale vacant sites. The planned projects and infrastructures for these sites – including a congress centre, event hall, stadium, large shopping centre, tourist infrastructure – combined with the desire to create international allure; express the need for prestigious architecture, and the hope for architecture competitions.

The PDI has been received with mixed reactions. On the one hand it is encouraged, for it finally enhances Brussels’ international role productively, and for its ambition.\textsuperscript{152} From

\textsuperscript{149} Cohen, Les îles flottantes; Loze et al., Bruxelles Ville Nouvelle.


\textsuperscript{151} http://www.demainbruxelles.be.

\textsuperscript{152} E.g. The city of tomorrow - la ville de demain - de stad van morgen, international colloquium, organised by Picqué, November 2007.
the architectural point of view, the architecture competitions envisaged within the PDI, do indeed open opportunities for contemporary and innovative architecture. In a city where the largest commissions tend to be distributed amongst a small circle of large architecture firms, this can be considered an achievement, and a new start for contemporary architecture. However, by shifting focus away from the historical core, the PDI leaves the Reconstruction de la Ville unchallenged, and takes refuge in projets phares: prestigious architecture on more peripheral locations.

On the other hand, there is serious scepticism towards the PDI’s promises to redistribute the wealth that will be generated by the new international infrastructures. There is scepticism vis-à-vis its promise to create better living and working conditions for each Bruxellois; and its promise to create employment and generate profit that can then be reinvested in projects for the Bruxellois. In other words, there is scepticism vis-à-vis its trickle-down effect: its redistribution of wealth. According to some Brussels-based geographers, the PDI hides a full-blown State-organised gentrification – a sort of upscaling of the ad hoc, private-led, inner-city gentrification. This concern seems legitimate: to the question of whether the PDI is not a mere attempt to place Brussels on the market, it responds: ‘[A]s much as goods and services, contemporary cities also obey the rules of the market and competition’[…][O]ne should comply with these international standards and protect its position in the ranking’.

Additionally, whereas policy makers already enhanced the everyday as a way to charmingly compensate for Brussels shortcomings; it has now been openly absorbed by city marketing. The specificity of Brussels’ everyday and urban culture (fragmented, hybrid, collective), is seemingly being increasingly replaced by a more generic one.

Another planning instrument that supports an integrated and transversal territorial planning, and which is linked to the PDI, is the Agence de développement du territoire ADT/ATO: also called the Agence d’urbanisme. The Agence d’urbanisme serves the double mission of neighbourhood monitoring (Moniteur des Quartier) and of centralising responsibilities in the form of coordinating the Schémas Directeurs, and other large urban projects. The Agence d’urbanisme in that sense aims to move away from the decades-long cas par cas and privé par privé urbanism. The Moniteur des Quartier was set-up as a tool to have a more direct, and real-time follow-up and evaluation of tendencies and of the needs in

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153 www.demainbruxelles.be. In the ‘PIO in een notedop’ animation, this is called ‘terugverdieneffecten in economie en tewerkstelling’.

154 Van Criekingen, in Doucet, ‘Brussels Dansaert Quarter. The Soft Generation’; and Van Criekingen, ‘What is Happening to Brussels’ Inner-City Neighbourhoods?’.

155 www.demainbruxelles.be.

156 As the PDI, also this is a Picqué-initiative. It has grown out of the GSSO/SRDU. See: http://www.adt-ato.be/.
Brussels’ neighbourhoods. Next to the Atlas des Quartiers, the Agence d’urbanisme will coordinate the large-scale developments within the PDI and coordinate the ZIR’s (Zones d’Intérêt Régional). These tasks, as well as the important conceptual, analytic, and transversal expectation of the Agence. In theory, the Agence d’urbanisme offers the ultimate ‘integrating cell’ that Brussels needs so desperately. In reality, that is still to be seen.

After Flanders, having had a Bouwmeester since 1998, the French Community also launched the idea of, with the absence of a proper French translation: Le Bouwmeester. In Brussels, the debates would reach a climax only in 2009 when recruitment started for a Brussels Bouwmeester, right before the June elections. These plans, for installing a Bouwmeester, are a proof of Brussels’ changing ambition, as it will allow, together with the Agence d’urbanisme, the development of standards for the creation of public space projects, large-scale development, and architectural competitions. As such it can finally counter Brussels’ ad hoc urbanism and solidify the timely successes of recent years – Flagey, Rogier competitions (see below). Amongst architects and planners, the idea for a Brussels Bouwmeester has, in a typical Brussels’ manner, been received with careful enthusiasm, and optimistic pragmatism. Rather than reflecting too much on whether the Bouwmeester is a good idea, it is argued that one should just try and do it: ‘il ne faut pas réfléchir mais l’installer et voir comment il fait son boulot!’ The real issue seems to be to find the right profile: someone at once visionary, artistic, and pragmatic; someone strong but charismatic; politically neutral but credible; yet someone who can also find his or her way in the Brussels labyrinth.

In other words, in contrast with Flanders, a ‘Brussels’ Bouwmeester cannot just run a prestigious cultural institute that promotes architecture but has to courageously accept a triple task: to render visible the few existing examples of good architecture; to integrate Brussels’ strong civil society and its urban culture legacy; and to affect a whole array of issues that have nothing whatsoever to do with architecture. Since, what needs to be

157 Proposed already in 2004, in the Livre blanc.

158 Mixed reactions in the interviews: generally positive, but also a fear for architectural ‘despotism’ when one person or team will be able to impose taste and style. See also the mixed responses in the Disturb debates: with Antwerp Bouwmeester Kristiaan Borret (26/2/2009), and the debate with Brussels politicians (23/04/2009).


160 Major concern for most interviewees was to find a person with enough impact and force, yet who can guarantee ‘political neutrality’.

161 How to make the city inhabited again, but without gentrification (interview Françoise Deville, Renovas); how to save the city without turning it into a theme park (De Cauter, ‘Opportunity or catastrophe?’, p. 27).
safeguarded is not just the quality of Brussels’ bottom-up collective, but also the need for an integrative, top-down function, the use of Flanders as the ideal model is inadequate.\textsuperscript{162}

Apart from such new tools and institutional bodies, Brussels has also started to innovate in its existing regional bodies, for they lack the capacity and freshness needed to run a new, ambitious projet de ville. Within certain cabinets – most notably the AATL, and the Cabinet of Pascal Smet and Françoise Dupuis - a change of mentality is experienced with a nouvelle génération de fonctionnaires, being more motivated, proactive, and open to change; and with the creation of new tools, such as the Vade-mecum for architecture competitions. One can also think of the creation of Pyblik, a training program for regional and municipal administrators, initiated by Pascal Smet, in collaboration with the Flemish architecture school Sint-Lucas and the French La Cambre. The aim of this program is to train functionaries in project and process design, and to extend experiences in practice, also for more conceptual preoccupations.\textsuperscript{163}

Moreover, following a decade of urban activism, the Brussels’ authorities have also gradually acknowledged the importance of the everyday and of urban culture for Brussels. This, as we have seen, is demonstrated by the publications under Charles Picqué, as Minister-President of the Brussels Region who is also responsible for urban renewal. The regional planning administration (AATL) also created the promising architecture and planning journal, BrU – Planning a Capital, which, unfortunately, died a silent death after only a few issues had been published. As such, it suffered the typical Brussels’ fate of being welcomed with enthusiasm and hooplah, yet was doomed to wither on the vine in the Brussels administrative and political jungle.

In conclusion, the new urban policies seem to share an attempt to link the need for centralisation with architectural policies that, through such centralisation (Bouwmeester, Agence d’urbanisme), are hoped to generate more ambitious architecture. However, through this new policy mood, new concerns also emerge, such as whether Brussels, hungry as it is for prestigious architecture, will either shun or accept the confrontation with the increasingly recognised side-effects of large-scale urban renewal and une architecture phare?

\textsuperscript{162} Peter Swinnen (51N4E) argued that the first aberrations are already visible as they start to split-up the job even before it exists: Minister Grouwels has ideas for a bouwmeester for the Port of Brussels; Minister Smet for a bouwmeester for infrastructure. Swinnen as such feared for a Brussels’ “nichebouwmeester”, a contradictio in terminis’ - Peter Swinnen, ‘Memo’s voor een “Brussels Bouwmeester”’, A Plus, nr. 206, 2007, p. 116.

\textsuperscript{163} Pyblik was partly a response to the disappointments of the Gouden Bevers competitions, organised between 1998 and 2005, by the Fondation Roi Baudouin and the Brussels Capital Region, as an architecture student competition for public space design. It failed to achieve its aim and come up with realised projects, not so much due to a lack of good ideas, but to ‘a lack of appropriate follow-up and accompaniment by the administrations’ - Pascal Smet, in: Bulletin van de interpellaties en mondelinge vragen, Commissie voor de infrastructuur, belast met openbare werken en verkeerswezen, Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Parlement, vergadering van woensdag 29 Juni 2005, pp. 7-8; http://www.weblex.irisnet.be/ [accessed on-line on 27 May 2009].
3.3. Concrete signs of change: new, ambitious architecture projects

Even if a series of individual projects and competitions would announce the careful arrival of more contemporary architecture in Brussels; the public space competitions for the Place Flagey and Place Rogier would indicate a real breakthrough. Flagey and Rogier revolutionised Brussels’ architecture and urban thinking, because they radically broke with the Brussels tradition of embellissement, and because they elevated public space design beyond the ‘design for a square’. Instead, public space was considered a generator for the surrounding fabric, even the entire city.\(^{164}\)

3.3.1. Flagey

In July 2008, after several years of negotiation and struggle, the refurbished Place Flagey was inaugurated. This large public square is located in the Brussels municipality of Ixelles, and somehow occupies the middle between the bourgeois Avenue Louise, the European Quarter, and a neighbourhood that mixes students with more popular local life. The square houses the Architecture School La Cambre, and the Flagey Studios: famous for their excellent acoustic qualities. The refurbishing of Place Flagey is not necessarily important for its realised design,\(^{165}\) but for its role as a catalyst for the urban debate. This role has been twofold. On the one hand, the design and negotiation process (the ‘making of’), is instructive for understanding how new-style ambitious projects can ‘get done’ in Brussels. On the other hand, the design proposals formulated throughout this process tell us something about the shift in mentality that Brussels was undergoing.

The entire Flagey process had been triggered by the critique of a collective called Platforme Flagey, against the existing (officially commissioned) design proposal that was, in fact, a mere ‘footnote to the contract for the underground infrastructure works’;\(^{166}\) and that thus risked ending up as, yet another, missed opportunity for creating qualitative space. In response, Platforme Flagey - a collective including, amongst others, the local citizen group Parcours Citoyen, and action groups such as Disturb and La Cambre - organised an unofficial idea competition in July 2003, which proved, with its almost one hundred entries, to be an

\(^{164}\) For example, XDGA’s competition entry for Flagey was not based on benches, street lanterns, and fountains (as in the embellissement tradition); but instead proposed having no street furniture whatsoever; several entries for the Rogier-competition aspired to international, metropolitan ambitions for the square.

\(^{165}\) By the German/Belgian team Latz & Partner / D+A.

\(^{166}\) Joeri De Bruyn, ‘Eindelijk een wedstrijd voor de openbare ruimte in Brussel’, A Plus, nr. 196, October/November 2005, pp. 36-40, p. 36. The company in charge of the underground parking and water storage reservoir, for which works had started in 2002, had commissioned the office Agora to design the public space.
overwhelming success.\(^{167}\) Despite its unofficial character, and despite the Minister of Public Works’s refusal to organise an official architecture competition, Platforme Flagey could, thanks to continuous pressure, press attention, and actions, convince the new government (installed in 2004) to organise an international competition.\(^{168}\) However, Platforme Flagey’s efforts would not only be rewarded with a competition; it would also generate a larger debate on the role of architecture competitions: Flagey’s catalytic role was reinforced by the publication of a ‘manual’ reporting on Flagey’s activism, participation, and design competition: *De la participation urbaine. La Place Flagey*.\(^{169}\) Additionally, the Flagey adventures would encourage Brussels’ Minister of Mobility and Public Works, Pascal Smet, to launch a *pleinenbeleid* or public space policy.\(^{170}\) Such a policy, together with the drastic reorganisation of his ministerial cabinet (a younger, more proactive and multi-disciplinary team of administrators),\(^{171}\) would create the right conditions for the ambitious Rogier Project to emerge (see below).

The process behind Flagey also tells us something about the workings of the collective, about its negotiations and governance. Attention for the *fabrication* of a project is what made Flagey innovative in the first place. Throwing light on the process of making showed how the decision-making, development, and definition of a project could be rendered transparent; inclusive yet heterogeneous. More than formulating a critique against the existing project proposals (as in the Culot-Krier tradition of *contreprojets*), the Flagey critique focussed on the process towards such proposals: who is involved in the making of, and the selection of such proposals? And what kinds of gatherings take place around such proposals? In other word: how is the collective assembled and negotiated?

What the ‘making of’ Flagey shows is that such gatherings and assemblages can be ‘democratic’ in the sense of Isabelle Stengers’s *proposition cosmopolitique*: a proposition that is not about stating what *is*, or what *ought to* be, but about making one think (*faire penser*); about slowing down reasoning and creating the occasion for different sensitivities towards the

\(^{167}\) Platforme Flagey included: IEB, *Parcours Citoyens, Habitat et Rénovation*, Disturb, and La Cambre. The 2002 competition (and exhibition) was coordinated by the *Centre de Recherche Architecturale de La Cambre* (CRAC). 96 competition entries were received: from architecture offices (from Belgium, but also from France, the US, Germany, and Israel), and a few by local inhabitants. Inhabitants were also included in the Jury - Judith le Maire and Dominique Nalpas, ‘Kiezen voor Inspraak’, in: *Brussel over 20 jaar*, pp. 128-30.

\(^{168}\) Ministers Huytebroeck, Dupuis, and Smet were more supportive than Minister Chabert had been. Smet, who followed up Chabert as Minister of Public Works, organised an international competition in 2004-2005. Laureates: Latz & Partner / D+A, L’Escaut, 51N4E-MDA, West 8 / Bob361, Secchi Vigano / LBL / SwK, V-Plus / BAS / Jaspar, and XDGA / Desvigne.

\(^{169}\) Jean-Didier Bergilez, T. Bouhassoun, Geoffrey Grufois, Irène Lund (eds.), *De la participation urbaine. La Place Flagey, Les Cahiers de La Cambre Architecture* nr. 3 (Brussels: La Lettre Volée, 2005).


\(^{171}\) Interview Jens Aerts, Cabinet Pascal Smet; announcement job ads for the Smet Cabinet, email Jens Aerts, 5/11/2005.
situation at hand.\footnote{\textit{[U]}ne proposition dont l’\enjue n’est pas de dire ce qui est, pas non plus de dire ce qui doit être, mais de faire penser, et qui ne demande pas d’autre vérification que cela: la manière dont elle aura “ralentit” les raisonnements, créé l’occasion d’une sensibilité un peu différente par rapport aux problèmes et aux situations qui nous mobilisent’, Isabelle Stengers, ‘The “Cosmopolitics” proposition’.
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Moreover, since approaching design, as a \textit{process}, implies the study of those ‘complex assemblies of contradictory issues’\footnote{Bruno Latour, ‘A Cautious Prometheus? A Few Steps Toward a Philosophy of Design (with Special Attention to Peter Sloterdijk)’, keynote lecture for the \textit{Networks of Design} meeting of the Design History Society Falmouth, Cornwall, 3 September 2008, p. 4, my italics.} that make up design; Stengers’s democratic proposition does not throw away heterogeneity and conflict. It no longer implies approaching design in terms of its \textit{meaning}, but in terms of its ‘re-transformation with care’ (care for other people, for technology, for aesthetics).\footnote{Ibid. This notion of ‘retransformation with care’ disappeared in the published notes of the Cornwall lecture, but was present in the draft notes (untitled document, sent to me by Bruno Latour on 2 September 2008, p. 3).} It is no longer about ideal mastery, but about the conflicts, discussions, and disagreements that are at the basis of each design.\footnote{Ibid., draft notes. Latour used the idea of ‘contested design’ as an alternative for design as a ‘città ideale’ (p. 7).}

The Flagey case indeed demonstrates the importance of shared interests within the collective – namely the urge to \textit{lutter} (struggle) against the existing way of ‘getting things done’ – as much as it demonstrates the conflicts and opportunism that are intrinsic to such shared interests. Even if architects and citizen share their frustration with Brussels’ mode to \textit{faire la ville}; they enter the collective out of opportunism, too: architects for wanting more architecture competitions, and more contemporary design; citizens for wanting more involvement in, and transparency of decision-making. Flagey not only demonstrated the importance of opportunism and conflict in the building of the collective; it also showed that opportunism or individual drives are \textit{essential} to allow the collective to move forward. It shows that the opportunism of stakeholders should not be trivialised, denied, or wrapped in consensus; but activated as a constructive component of design. Conflict, exclusion, and opportunism take part in the formation and the thrusting forward of the collective, yet under the condition that they are themselves subject to open and frequent negotiation (hence ‘diplomacy’; hence only ‘temporary’ fixations). Whereas the \textit{meaning} of design is traditionally judged through fixed or unifying theoretical frameworks; the evaluation of design in terms of its \textit{making}, includes questions such as: ‘is it \textit{well} designed?’, and ‘who is designing the goal?’.\footnote{Ibid., p. 3; p. 4.} Daily business for the collective!

The Flagey case is a clear example of the importance of difference within the collective. The presence of architects and urban experts added to the credibility of the collective. The citizen movements involved can be traced back to an architectural-urban background, on the one hand (Disturb), with a more local, social activism on the other
 Whereas the architects involved were primarily interested in achieving more ambitious and qualitative architecture, *Parcours Citoyen* aimed at involving the (local) citizens in urban design. The organisation of a design competition therefore formed a common meeting ground. Credits for the success of Flagey, *as a process*, go to the architecture and urban discourses as much as to the local activism of *Parcours Citoyen*. Without local initiatives, such as the *Toile de quartier en chantier* (in 2003; streets decorated with three kilometres of *toile de chantier*), and *le grand banquet*; the local population would never have been as receptive and supportive of an event so ‘far-from-their-bed’, such as an international architecture competition. Indeed, the working of the collective depends on care taking, all the way through to its thrusting forward: from the preparing of the ground (intellectually, politically, practically) up to after-care. It is a mistake to consider after-care as something that comes *after* the work of the collective has been done, on a par with use, occupation or performance. Instead, these processes of care-taking are to be considered as part of the collective endeavour.

The work of the *Flagey* collective will never be finished. After the square had been designed, constructed, and inaugurated; the negotiations about the use, occupation, and maintenance of the square would continue, *within* the collective, though under a different form. The *Conférence Permanente* was created, as a ‘reassembled’ *Plateforme Flagey*. It included new actors, who were more involved in the management and maintenance of the square; and reorganised the rules for negotiation, and for defining the collective’s goals. This new assembly allowed the collective care-taking to also continue ‘after the show’: not as an extension or addition to a finished project, but for the simple fact that there is no longer such a thing as ‘after the show’. In *le monde cosmopolitique*, in a world governed through political ecology, the show always goes on. The cosmopolitical project is never finished. What enlivens its work, is the on and off switching of the spotlights, and the reshuffling of the collective between performances.

Apart from its procedures and ‘making of’, *Flagey* played yet another role, which came about by announcing a careful yet radical break with Brussels’ embellishment tradition. One may not have been ready as yet for the radical competition entry by XDGA; the winning project by Latz & Partners / D+A International, despite its propriety, nevertheless announced a change. Even if it was still rather classically based on benches, trees, a fountain, and *pierre bleue belge*; it differs from the typical Brussels *embellissement* projects. Moreover, by
allowing the vast ‘voids’ to be appropriated, rather than creating fully detailed pre-established spatial harmonies; it allows the square to host large events as well as allowing daily appropriations by students, the homeless, branché middle-classes, Euro-businessmen, and local families alike. Latz’s design may have been insufficiently ambitious and too righteous to announce a true Brussels revolution; once realised, it appears to have been consumed with relish, and diversely appropriated. It did what any realistic Brussels revolution can only dream of: adopting a carefully radical approach by completing the revolutionary Flagey process with a nevertheless acceptable design. In a very Brussels manner it thus contributed to the pragmatics of change: rather than a great leap forward, only step-by-step changes. As such it made possible what was really at stake: the reassembling of an entire world.

3.3.2. Rogier

As much as Brussels 2000 had been a mental catalyst for reformulating the urban question, so too has Flagey been an important predecessor of Rogier. Its final design might still have been quite modest; as a process, it had generated an energy that freed the way for a true breakthrough: Rogier. With the selection of Xaveer de Geyter Architects (XDGA) for the design of the Rogier Square, and the adjacent boulevard strip, Brussels seemed to be ‘finally getting serious about urban design’.

The Brussels Place Rogier is a busy crossing that connects the historic city centre, with the popular shopping infrastructure of La Rue Neuve and City II, with the North Railway Station and, through an inner-city highway, the Botanique with the Canal area. Place Rogier is bordered by two municipalities, Brussels City and St. Josse. The highway-like Boulevard Botanique, as a regional route (weg van gewestelijk belang), is subject to regional governance. The architecture competition that was organised in 2006 was, in contrast to Flagey, not a result of citizen activism, but of political wrestling, and the stubbornness of Pascal Smet, at the time minister of public works and mobility. The motive for the competition was the fact that the municipality of St. Josse had commissioned the office Clerbaux-Pinon to make a proposal for the square, which had resulted in a not very ambitious proposal: a mere surface treatment. Pascal Smet, alternatively, proposed refurbishing the square and including its horizontal and vertical surroundings (underground parking, metro hub). He also proposed turning it into a truly metropolitan project: not just a local, municipal square, but a place with international allure. Since the square was not inscribed in a ZIR (Zones d’Intérêt Régional), and a Director Scheme (Schéma Directeur) was hence not required; the only tool left to generate debate was the organisation of an architecture competition.

**Blauwe Steen** (Blue Stone): a sustainable, strong natural stone (resistant to skateboards too!), used for finishings of the Brussels (and Belgian) public space. It even has its own webpage [http://www.pierrebleuebelge.be/](http://www.pierrebleuebelge.be/).

competition.\textsuperscript{180} Even if the Rogier competition could benefit from the trials and errors of the Flagey ‘pilot’, it would still suffer from a difficult start.\textsuperscript{181} The competition was in that sense both a political-organisational and architectural challenge.

The final project was not limited to the square but included a large section of the Boulevard Botanique, running from Albert II to Botanique. Moreover, an atrium was to be designed on the square itself, to link the square to the underground spaces. The choice of XDGA/Laurent Ney/Michel Desvigne, out of six laureates, was quite revolutionary in two ways.

Firstly, their design furthered the still hesitant emancipation from the embellishment tradition, as initiated by Flagey. Remarkably, the two final laureates of the Rogier competition were explicitly not returning to the ‘small scale’ of Brussels, but, instead, emphasised Rogier’s metropolitan character.\textsuperscript{182} XDGA’s proposal included, moreover, a very prominent transparent ‘mushroom’ that will doubtlessly add to the square’s metropolitan appearance.

Secondly, the winning entry by XDGA proved well prepared to muddle through the Brussels chaos, without suffering any serious damage. Its open-ended design and flexibility allowed the project to adapt to (the complex and unexpected) circumstances, without the risk of it losing its core identity.\textsuperscript{183} By being several things at the same time - a regional place, a public space that is part of a network of other public spaces, and a local place for the citizens – XDGA’s project anticipated the doubtless complex negotiations required across numerous levels of stakeholders (municipal, regional, pararegional).\textsuperscript{184}

The realisation of the project (currently still in the preparatory phase) indeed proves to be a challenge, not just because of Brussels’ complex decision-making process but also due to its territorial complexity. The project involves two municipalities (Brussels-City and St. Josse), several regional cabinets (Smet, Dupuis…), and action committees.\textsuperscript{185} Moreover, it is

\textsuperscript{180} Interview Jens Aerts, Cabinet Smet.

\textsuperscript{181} Vague description of the work to be tendered; much was already defined due to the underground structure (for example the tram tracks were already defined and ordered); and the jury of an international competition was, due to time pressure, still a national one – De Bruyn, ‘Interview with Pascal Smet’.

\textsuperscript{182} Two remaining laureates: SUM and XDGA. The jury included, amongst others, Jean Demannez (Mayor St. Josse), Jens Aerts (Cabinet Smet), Chantal Dassonville (Communauté Française), Stefan Devoldere (A Plus), and Benoit Moritz (MSA – La Cambre) - Veronique Boone and Lars Kwakkenbos, ‘Inrichting Rogierplein-Brussel: Strippen of oversteken’, A Plus, October/November 2006 pp. 28-32, p. 29.

\textsuperscript{183} Ibid., p. 32.

\textsuperscript{184} As such, the project formed also a combination of two typical XDGA projects: polemical projects and concrete proposals - interview Sara Noel Costa de Araujo, XDGA.

\textsuperscript{185} A participatory process was organised by Bral and Periferia; much resistance came from ARAU: e.g. ARAU, ‘Place Rogier. Commentaires de l’ARAU sur l’avis de la commission de concertation du 13 Juillet 2007. Communiqué de Presse de l’ARAU du mardi 9 Octobre 2007’, pp. 1-12.
quite a challenge to come to a coherent design if two pavements of the same boulevard belong to different municipalities (the boulevard is located right on the municipal border); while the road itself belongs to the region! In addition, as we have seen earlier, the complexity continues underground (the chaotic electricity and gas networks).

Following the ‘positive malaise’ of Flagey, the Rogier project taught us that, much more than cursing its burdensome procedures, what one needs, in order to ‘get things done’, is to accept the challenge of Brussels’ everyday complexity. To realise ambitious and transversal architectural projects, it takes the willingness to let go of the mastery of one’s own design, and the willingness to invest time and energy, not just in getting the right people around the table, but to try and get as much as possible noses towards the same direction. In other words, once again, what’s at stake is not a brilliant design, not appropriately estimated ambitions, but the wavering, tiring and risky work of composing the collective.

Both the Flagey and Rogier project proposed to deal with, rather than ‘solve’, the Brussels’ everyday, spatial, and political complexity. However, whereas the Flagey project had emerged from a shared activism (of citizens and architects), and had been based on the idea of a ‘square for the people’; Rogier introduced a full-blown ‘fancy’ architecture. Whereas Flagey’s alliance with the everyday was still quite oppositional and resistant; XDGA’s approach to Rogier proved more pragmatic. A project’s embedding in the ‘Brussels situation’, and its engagement with the real, was no longer associated with citizen participation or the quotidian of ‘the street’, but with its degree of fluidity (adaptability of design, flexibility) that is required to survive Brussels’ day-to-day governance.

3.3.3. Skate Park Ursulines

At a time when the Rogier project announced a soon-to-be ‘star’ architecture, Arne Quinze had built his first monumental ‘urban sculpture’ Cityscape. As we have seen earlier, its everydayness or ‘criticism’ is delimited to its implementation on a vacant lot subject to speculation. All the rest is marketing and stardom after all. It shows the possible risks connected to Brussels’ architecture emancipation, namely a too compliant engagement with the (Brussels) real. Whereas XDGA still decently walks the tightrope that separates uncritical compliance from critique-from-within; Cityscape pretends to be doing just that, while being anywhere but near that rope. The fact that it shows the opportunities of communicating with

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186 All with their own procedures, standards and preferences for street furniture, materials etcetera - interview Sara Noel Costa de Araujo, XDGA.

187 Interview Jens Aerts, Cabinet Smet.

188 It is no coincidence that the vacant lot is near the fancy area of Louize, and linked to events organised at the adjacent event hall. His second urban sculpture in Brussels, ‘The Sequence’, shows perhaps more clearly the true nature of Quinze-criticism: it is believed to be a ‘political act’, because it links (literally) the Flemish Parliament with the Huis Vlaamse Volksvertegenwoordigers - see leaflet.
space itself - it defines participation not in terms of co-production or shared decision-making but in terms of the public use and attraction of private space – seems too weak a compensation.

It is therefore important to complete the Flagey-Rogier learning curve with yet another public space project, namely the Skate Park Ursulines: smaller in scale and ambition than Flagey and Rogier; but just as sensitive to the workings of the Brussels’ collective. Including this project is perhaps a covert attempt to avoid Brussels’ decade of architectural emancipation from being recorded in history as a period of prestigious iconic projects alone - even if, obviously, one is still miles away from that. It may be a reminder of the very roots of this Brussels emancipation: the urban culture of the 1990s, and Brussels’ liaison with the everyday.

In contrast to Arne Quinze’s temporary spectacles, the Skate Park Ursulines is linked to the Brussels’ everyday in a more genuine and sustainable way. It has become a best practice of a participatory project that is ‘alternative’ (a skate park), urban, and close to the quotidian; that is participatory but also designed and realised with great care. The project innovated both the design of public space and the production process. Indeed, the Park Ursulines managed to integrate a skatepark with other public space functions, addressed to a mixture of people: youngsters, families, elderly, and skaters. Moreover, the project was initiated by the skaters’ collective BRUSK who, together with Recyclart and BIM/IBGE, organised an architecture student competition. The winning students then implemented the project in collaboration with a more established office (L’Escaut). As such, a well-functioning ‘collective’ was installed, composed of ‘expert’ architects, ‘ignorant’ architects, Ministers, IBGE, skaters, inhabitants, all coordinated by Recyclart.

A ‘best (everyday) practice’? Not really. Similar to MAPRAC and Platforme Flagey, its unique formation of a successful ‘collective’ does not allow for a distilling of ‘rules of practice’. What it does allow is simply, but importantly, keeping the collective alive.

4. New tensions in the land of hope

After decades of struggle, the road seems finally free for contemporary, ambitious architecture, for a more transversal and democratic vision, and for a more productive and optimistic enhancement of Brussels’ everyday chaos. And yet, now that such fresh

189 A competition was organised in 2003 for young student-designers. The winning entry by Bjorn Gielen and Floris Steyaert, was implemented in collaboration with the office Escaut. Interview Laurence Jenard, Recyclart.

190 E.g. architects were taken seriously at the administration, but had a certain urban sensitivity too; there was time for urban reflection, making links with the elderly house nearby; wooden products were made by Recyclart’s socio-professional workshops - interview Laurence Jenard, Recyclart.
architecture and urban mood has started to settle in, some new tensions are already on the way.

Ambitious architecture, and a transversal, central vision, are likely to meet obstacles when landing on Brussels’ soil. Architecture’s resurrection from the dark, and the fulfilment of its desire to finally rise and shine in bright daylight, might trigger a (tremendously delayed!) spectacle-architecture, with its meanwhile well-documented side-effects.\(^{191}\) Or, in a much worse scenario, it might simply trigger more aesthetically legitimate developer architecture, and thus reinforce the position of architectes-promoteurs. Whereas star-architecture risks diverting attention from Brussels’ deeply rooted structural problems; the developer architecture scenario is, unfortunately, ominously cut out for Brussels day-to-day architectural business. Brussels’ new fascination for des bâtiments phares (the Bilbaos of this world) and city marketing is hence not just worrisome for its disconnection from societal concerns. Since this fascination is currently limited to discourse, it risks being, when materialised, overthrown by solid alliances between architects, promoters, contractors, and governors, who are not too eager to open up their collectives to the disruptions, radicalism, and risks of the new. In Brussels, great ambitions, grand ideas, and brilliant discourses mean nothing, unless they prove successful in se débrouiller (standing firm) within the Brussels quotidien.

Moreover, since in Brussels, architecture optimism has been linked to representative and prestigious public space design (Flagey, Rogier), public authorities seem to fully enhance one of their last playgrounds in a thoroughly entrepreneurial manner.\(^{192}\) Consequently, competitiveness and prestige risk becoming more important criteria than the development of qualitative spaces for housing the collective.\(^{193}\) In comparison to other cities, Brussels benefits from a strong, and well-integrated urban culture and activism heritage, suitable for safeguarding the attention on non-representative urban spaces and the development of interstices. Keeping that part of the collective alive is hence central to Brussels’ survival as a complex, heterogeneous city. Likewise, maintaining the urban everyday as a constituting component of Brussels’ collective, and of the ‘making of’ its architecture and urban emancipation; might safeguard the twin ambition of Brussels’ ‘one vision’: a grand project and a project supported by the Brussels’ citizens.

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\(^{191}\) E.g. Calatrava’s TGV-station in Liège (inaugurated in 2009), was received with mixed feelings: compare the enthusiasm by Jonathan Glancey, ‘Liège-Guillemin train station, a ticket to tomorrow’, The Guardian, 16 September 2009; and the sharp criticism, not the least vis-à-vis its exuberant cost, by Filip Canfyn, ‘Luik-Guillemin, genant materialisme’, De Morgen, 19/9/2009.

\(^{192}\) Authorities seem to opt for iconic architecture e.g. examples shown in Disturb panel debate (23 April 2009), when politicians were asked to bring an example of their favourite architecture for Brussels.

\(^{193}\) Public space attention could get delimited to ‘central’ places of the city such as the Grand Place, railways stations, squares and urban parks - Jens Aerts, ‘Ruimte voor het publiek’, in: Jaarboek Stedenbouw en ruimtelijke planning 2002-2005, edited by Saskia Kloosterboer (Brussels: VRP, 2006), pp. 50-55, p. 53.
Once again, when implemented within Brussels’ reality, such twin ambitions prove more often than not contradictory rather than compatible. The ambitious side of the project risks the accepting and integrating of all of Brussels’ multiple everyday realities, albeit in a rather selective manner: ‘yes, please’ to multi-cultural festivals and markets; ‘rather not’ to complex structural issues of deprivation and inequality. Likewise, as a citizen project, it bumps into a glorified, sometimes even abusive, citizen participation, and into an idealised attitude towards the everyday. One may well wonder whether ‘one vision’, ‘one project’, or ‘one image’, is the appropriate response to this multi-layered, heterogeneous city? If a rencontre dans la diversité and an openness to experiment is the very key to Brussels, should one not then explore how its numerous collectives (and individualisms) can co-exist, and how Brussels’ fragmentation and chaos can become a realistic (not ideological) asset?194

Tensions between grand ambitions and everyday realities, between diversity and centrality, between everyday poetics and downright necessity, and between discourse and implementation, may not be exclusive to Brussels; it nevertheless forms an instructive context for studying such tensions. For example, the enthusiastic embracing of new architecture stardom (after decades of frustrations), is also tempered by the pragmatic response of Brussels architects to such new opportunities. Rather than striving for stardom, they somehow remain loyal to their urban activist roots and thus to the ‘Brussels situation’. Also, rather than joining rediscovered ideologies of the everyday too naïvely, the real remains, as it has always been, simply their field of activity. In contrast to the hooplah surrounding the rediscovery of the everyday in recent architecture discourse and practice (see previous chapter); Brussels’ architects and urban thinkers could somehow skip the cheering and immediately set about questioning the possible corruption of the everyday.

In a context where the complexity of the real is entangled with many layers of the urban question, dealing with the quotidian is always intrinsically connected to questions about one’s concernedness with the real, and thus with criticality. However, since architects had always worked in an everyday-based and concerned way, and since they hadn’t been confronted with a new generation of self-centred, projective star-architects, artificial divides such as between critical and projective seemed of little relevance. In Brussels, the so-called new pragmatism and new realism reside at both sides of the line dividing critical from projective practices. The 1990’s urban activists and architects were as pragmatic in their concernedness as their Reconstruction de la Ville predecessors had been in getting their ideologies realised.

194 E.g. the importance of Brussels as a laboratory and, in comparison to, for example the return-on-investment-driven London, a better test ground for new ideas - interview Jim Segers, Citymined. In Brussels, quality is often found more in the by-product than in the project intentions themselves – interview Marc Godts, FLC.
Therefore, if Brussels seems to suggest a pragmatic rather than ideological form of criticism – by focusing on the fabrication and materialisation of solutions – this implies an understanding of criticality in terms of the multiple agencies that, together, define whether an intervention is ‘successful’ or ‘appropriate’ (and thus: not a rejection of criticality). By defining criticality in terms of agency and ‘alliance’, the everyday - that complex and entangled engagement with the real - can be freed from its ideological connotations.

When studying the agencies that constitute faire la ville rather than the thoughts behind penser la ville, the discrepancy between ideal images of Brussels (as they live in the mind of governors and citizens alike) and Brussels’ reality, becomes most apparent. Without a true army of allies, without a proper embedding in the real, solutions remain ineffective, in Brussels even more so than in other contexts. A Red Cross doctor in the jungle, during the rainy season, is nothing without his driver, his jeep, automobile innovations in waterproof and anti-rust parts, GoodYear or Dunlop’s latest model in non-skid tyres, diplomatic support to get past superstitious tribe leaders, and a mechanic repairing his jeep in the jungle. Likewise, architectural and urban solutions simply don’t move without a proper understanding of the everyday (governance, space, neighbourhoods, users, contractors); the goodwill and proactiveness of bureaucrats; representation skills that allow to gather politicians, action committees, technicians, administrators and investors around a project; sensitising work that allows freeing the way for contemporary architecture; the situated knowledge of local associations and citizens; books, events, and other efforts that help to weaken the Reconstruction de la Ville; symbolic swords duelling with Bruxellisation; perhaps a madman assassinating the curse of the Architek on a passionate whim; or a daredevil who dares to cloud the bright sky of star-architecture.

If anything, Brussels forms a very down-to-earth warning not to choose but to make things co-exist; and to study (new) alliances so as to avoid fresh ambitions from ending up being pursued with old remedies.
From Penser la Ville to Faire la Ville

Third Entr’acte

In the third chapter, we have seen how, in Brussels, many of the young, contemporary architecture practices have, somehow against the prevailing zeitgeist, remained faithful to a modest realism, and have remained, despite their mounting ambition, entangled with the Brussels everyday. Such practices proved neither ‘dirty realist’ nor ‘steamy critical’, but more pragmatically concerned. We have also seen how new, ambitious projects (e.g. Rogier) struggle to survive the Brussels’ quotidian; while other large-scale projects (e.g. the European Institutions), clearly have the everyday on their side. Either way, both the concerned pragmatist and the architecte-promoteur collectives survive through an engagement with the workings of the real. More than grand, visionary ideas, it is care for the real (19 ‘barons’ and their accomplices, selective lobbies, loyal networks) that allows ideas to make it into practice.

Brussels has taught us something about the importance of negotiating conflicts rather than dismissing them through denial or cynicism vis-à-vis Brussels’ lack of architectural and urban ambition, its governance fiasco, and the Reconstruction de la Ville prophets. Cynicism would be nothing but an unsustainable shortcut. In Brussels, architectural ambition cannot be achieved overnight; its governance fiasco can only be overcome through patient care-taking, not by imposing ever-stronger ideas; and, likewise, the Reconstruction de la Ville proves too well entangled with the everyday to be overthrown by mere cynicism. The white knights of contemporary architecture fight alongside the ancient warriors of ARAU and the AAM: partly fighting the same cause, partly fighting each other, but always sharing the battlefields.1 Cynicism cannot resolve such tensions, only the building of a common world can. Only by slowing down the collective can it deal with its internal conflicts. Only by slowing down – and not by speeding up – will the collective be able to move.

Brussels also taught us that the work of the collective is never finished: that boundaries might be fixed, emancipations accomplished, but that this can only be temporary. The current emancipatory movement, itself a milieu populated by a variety of actors, should therefore avoid closing its work from the past, and, as such, silencing the agencies (e.g. Hôtel Central, Brussels 2000) that have constituted its ‘victory’. What was once a nervous, populated, engaged interstice, would then soon become static, normalised. In order to continue functioning as an interstice, the collective (interstice, milieu), needs proceedings (Isabelle Stengers’ also called this ‘recettes’);2 and reminders: traces of its memories, its experimentations. Such traces allow the collective to stay complex, crowded, and

1 Within Brussels 2000, the Fondation Roi Baudouin organised, parallel to the experimental Vacant City workshop, a rather conventional workshop on the Mont des Arts; at a time when Supernova introduced a new architecture generation, also the CIVA (Culot, the AAM) was festively inaugurated.

2 Isabelle Stengers in a debate organised by the Brussels Architecture Institute (IBAI), 10/6/2009, Recyclart.
experimental. At the same time it also allows for the intelligible rendering of interstices, not just in the realm of subversion, but also within the system itself.\(^3\) Since Stengers’s *interstice* allows us to *fragiliser le système*, it is crucial to *cultiver l’interstice*, perhaps especially during processes of emancipation.

What relief then can there be for a collective that is not granted any rest even at the peak of its learning curve, the zenith of its experimentation? If, following Stengers’ *l’expérimentation, c’est jamais exemplaire et rarement réussite*,\(^4\) then Brussels can neither take a break nor serve as an example. Rather than showing us *successful* emancipation (assuming that this is happening), it instead reminds us of the importance of keeping moving, and that, in all modesty, the fact that the collective *moves, is* the achievement.

By unravelling the Brussels’ architecture and urban situation (in the first and third chapter), I have attempted to produce a more complex, coloured, and entangled account than the one usually delivered by architectural anthologies on Brussels. Consequently, I had to give voice not so much to realised, built project as to the agencies that accompany - sometimes as supporters, sometimes as saboteurs - projects on their way to implementation. But this work of tracing, of creating ‘reminders’, is not innocent. Giving voice to the Brussels’ circus of agencies perhaps hides a desire to also keep this circus ‘at work’, safeguard its complexity, and above all, to keep it ‘at stake’. In the first chapter, I have attempted to unmask the ‘fear of the new’; whereas in the second and third chapters, I have also unravelled the new lure of the spectacular. Does this casting of the beguiling land of plenty (and star architecture), not also conceal an attempt to keep such temptation ‘at stake’? Perhaps it is an obscured attempt to keep the Brussels’ collective away from a mere revenge on the past, or derailment into an architecture aloof from its unique pact with the real.

Whereas the first three chapters were primarily interested in questions regarding the complex workings of the real, and the *concerned* engagement with the real, the remaining two chapters of this Thesis will focus on the tools and instruments that assist in effectuating such engagement.

In the following, fourth chapter, ‘Architecture and Participation’, we will look at how spatial disciplines have attempted to incorporate the real (the everyday) into their projects, methods, and theories, notably through participatory methods. With this chapter I will *problematise* the umbrella-term ‘participation’. Consistent with my approach to architecture’s engagement with the real (in the first three chapters), I will also, in this second part of the Thesis, look at the ‘participation knot’, namely through the workings of both the discipline

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\(^3\) Ibid. Projects such as the *Théâtre National*, or the Flagey competition demonstrate that the interstice is not necessarily ‘special’ but can be found within the logics of the system itself.

\(^4\) Ibid.
(theories, methods and tools) and participation *in action* (for which we will return to Brussels).

The fourth chapter will first look into the disciplinary struggles of architecture, planning, and urban design with regard to participation, and the democratic and design deficit that characterised these struggles. As we will see, these deficits partly resonate with the two tensions explored in the second chapter, namely the limitations of an oppositional critique on the one hand, and the aesthetic and creative frustrations of everyday-based design, on the other. Then we will return to Brussels to look at participatory methods as they are developed within official urban renewal instruments (Neighbourhood Contracts). To analyse the agencies that participate in the development ‘in common thought’ of these renewal plans, I have approached Neighbourhood Contracts as ‘fluid objects’, namely as bodies with multiple, permeable, and changeable boundaries - rather than as clearly delineated tools.⁵

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⁵ Following Annemarie Mol, Marianne de Laet, and John Law, which, as we will see, allows us to look beyond the role of communication, dialogue, or psychological power games in participation.
Third Entr'acte
Chapter Four

Architecture and Participation

1. The problem with participation

In spatial disciplines and professions such as architecture, urban design, and planning, an engagement with the real, with the everyday, has been effectuated primarily in the form of (citizen) participation. Over the past decades, participation has grown into a truly nasty term. Not only is it an umbrella term covering many variations in method, style, and ideology, and therefore hard to define straightforwardly; for dragging with it a history of political, social and cultural activism, it has also become an ideological heavyweight that is too eagerly used as an indication of ‘good’ or ‘bad’ planning and architecture, and of ‘rightist’ or ‘leftist’ urban politics. Moreover, despite the courageous efforts, democratic intentions, and countless hours of good-hearted volunteering work, that come along with the term ‘participation’, it remains hard to evaluate its success. Is participation successful when it has mobilised a significant number of people, even if that sample is not fully representative? Is it successful when achieving democratic, collaborative decision-making processes, even if it fails to materialise the community-based plans and projects?\(^1\) Additionally, participation repeatedly turns out to be an ideal tool for public policy making, and (increasingly) private development, to legitimise and ‘smoothen’ the acceptance of hard-to-swallow projects. As a consequence, participation as we know it, is mostly a matter of ‘pseudo-participation’.\(^2\) Moreover, it helps certain architects and urban designers to push through their stylistic and ideological preferences (as in the UK Community Architecture under Rod Hackney and in the American New Urbanism). In other words, if something can be said about the historical ups and downs of participation, it is the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of adopting an either pro or con position. Opposing participation, even if this means just being sceptical about its numerous corruptions and abuses, is easily associated with ‘political incorrectness’, ‘undemocratic behaviour’ and, particularly for architects, with ‘arrogance’. Indeed, how could one be against a democratic, inclusive, and ‘good’ project, such as one delivered through

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\(^1\) Of course, participation has been successful when it comes to the resistance to building plans, and in mobilising even the weakest population groups (as by the well-established US Community Design Centres).

participation? On the other hand, when one sympathises with participation, this is received either with a you-are-one-of-us hurray! (by the Leftists/Activists), or with the accusation (by the architectural avant-gardes) of being sadly naïve, or with even being an assault on aesthetics and innovation. And yet, participation has become popular again within architectural-intellectual circles.

My aim with this chapter is not to unravel in detail the history of such tensions in order to then come to a definitive conclusion on whether participation is after all ‘good’ or ‘bad’. I have no intention whatsoever of either dismissing or embracing the container called participation, even less seen its debatable load. Nor is it my aim to claim yet another ‘new’ interpretation or variation of participatory design. Instead, my interest in participation has to do with the triangle it draws between the real (everyday space, the people, community, the user), the project (a gathering of design, plans, implementation, architect, expert), and critique (vis-à-vis politics and/or ‘the market’, resistance/compliance, ideology). I am particularly fascinated by this triangular relation because, in theory, it may appear as an important correction of the power-versus-the-people dualism; and thus, by explicitly adding the agency of design and materialisation (the project), it may suggest a move beyond passé dichotomies. But what interests me even more, is to confront such ‘clean’ conceptual triangles, with the messiness of participatory design at work, and by doing so, to refuse to accept the term participation uncritically. Does the triangle then still hold? I suspect not. I suspect we’ll be dealing with a much more complex figure than the triangle. This chapter does not intend to discover the ultimate abstract model and ‘fix’ it (and thereby generalise): the tangle of agencies and connections is always specific. What I will do in this chapter is show this specificity and analyse participation as a tangle rather than as a container.

Why do I want, with this and the following chapter, to overwhelm the reader with yet another disentanglement, another complex web of the real? I am afraid I have no choice, for two reasons.

Firstly, it will render intelligible still more of the messiness of Brussels’ architecture and urban practice. To the workings of architecture and urban culture (as discussed in previous chapters), it will add the very concrete meeting of such culture with the real: through participatory urban renewal programs. It will show the heterogeneity of actors involved in participatory dispositifs: architects, urban planners, and their designs; citizens (the people)...

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3 E.g. Peter Blundell Jones, Doina Petrescu, Jeremy Till (eds.), Architecture and Participation (Abingdon, Oxon: Spon Press, 2005); the work of practices such as Crimson (Provoost and Vanstiphout, Wimby!), Artengineer, Mueller-Kneer, Fluid Office, muf, ... Miessen and Basar, Did Someone Say Participate?; architecture teaching at Sheffield University under Tatjana Schneider, Jeremy Till and others.

4 This was also the aim of Blundell Jones, Petrescu, and Till’s Architecture and participation, namely, to look for the conditions and aspects that constitute ‘genuine’ (uncorrupted, not populist, not stylistic) participation, and to try and get those theories that have been resistant to such corruption, out of the margins of the discipline, were they had been expelled to – Blundell Jones, et al., ‘Introduction’, in: Architecture and Participation, pp. xiii-xvii.
and their ‘reality’ (everyday space, problems, and stakes); political stakeholders and their ‘power’ and ‘oppression’. The next chapter will also show that the relationships between these actors - that which travels across the networks drawn between them (designs, power, the real) - points to anything but stable relationships. We will see that what seems to be travelling as a ‘simple problem’ and ‘straightforward solution’, is in fact actualised as a ‘harsh issue’ and a ‘complex intervention’. Likewise, we will see how expertise, technical knowledge, ignorance, and experience, travel in bizarre ways across the participatory dispositifs. And to add complexity to the case, we will have to accept that the participatory dispositif is even more crowded than we thought. In the fifth and final chapter, we will finally get to meet that obscure figure Architek!, who will, in spite of his name, reveal himself as a saboteur rather than an ally of Brussels’ architects.

Secondly, throughout this analysis of Brussels’ participatory dispositif, I am hoping to further my explorations of the second chapter, namely to come still closer to the workings of theory and critique. In contrast to the second chapter’s more abstract and conceptual (even if ‘situated’) reasoning, I will, this time, search for a perspective that allows me to give a better account of the real and its specificity.

I will proceed as follows: I will start with a brief exposé of the tensions that accompany participation in architecture and planning. I will bundle those tensions around two nodes: the ‘democratic deficit’ node and the ‘design’ node (design seen as the work of shaping, materialising, performing, and presenting). We will see that the first node is dominated by governance issues, and suffers, more specifically, from the vigorous fight between oppressive politics and citizen empowerment. We will see that the second node suffers not necessarily from a neglect of design (sometimes even an over-emphasis!), but from the absence of a link between the two nodes, or, between governance and materialisation. Therefore, from there onwards, I will start looking at the Brussels’ ‘official’ participatory dispositif for urban renewal (Neighbourhood Contracts), from a perspective that allows us to link design and governance. I will explore the agencies at work within that dispositif, and introduce some of the worlds where such agencies might lead us. The next, final chapter will then look into these worlds.

2. A brief introduction to the struggles of participation

2.1. The democratic deficit

The roots of participation, as we know it in urban renewal programs and in architecture and planning theory, can be traced back to the reactions against modernist planning and architecture that have emerged since the 1950s. In architecture, participation was first of all
associated with the inclusion of the user and the citizen in architecture debates, and thus questioned the authority of the architect, and in particular his inevitable relationship with Power: namely as an advocate of the economic and political elite. Because the discourse on participation ran through a more general shift from structure to agency, participation (in architecture) could be defined - following the editors of the 2002 volume *Architecture and Participation* - as, ‘the involvement of the user at some stage in the design process’. However, it will soon become clear that, even today, this definition needs to be completed with the fact that, ‘participation is not just a catalyst for transformation of the role (and eventual life) of the users but also for the transformation of architectural practice.’ It thus implies transformation of *all* actors involved, not just the user.

Amidst the early key figures in architecture participation, one can count of course the projects and theories of Giancarlo De Carlo and Lucien Kroll. De Carlo’s problematisation of architecture’s public, and critique of the disparity between architecture and ‘the real’, would lead him to propose a method of planning *with* rather than *for* the user; which would resonate with Kroll’s co-productive counter-project La Mémè. That same period would see the emergence of Philippe Boudon’s analysis of the (users’) ‘dirtied architecture’ of Pessac, and several realisations based on self-building and user-participation. And yet, most methods and models for citizen participation would be developed within planning rather than architecture literature. This had to do with the fact that architects responded much more ambiguously to the new ‘social awareness’ than planners did. Having seen how so-called democratisation through mass production and standardisation (think of the Levitt housing), had threatened the elite-status of architecture, and thus the architect’s *raison d’être*; architects would be reluctant to combine societal concerns with a protection of their own status. More ‘social’ manifestations of architecture would hence occur at the edges of

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5 Ibid., p. xiii.
6 Ibid., p. xvi.
7 Think also of, amongst others, the user-driven experiments of Cedric Price and Archigram; the *As Found* movement with Team X; the *Reconstruction de la Ville Européenne* architects; or Venturi and Scott Brown.
8 Whereas De Carlo’s ‘Architecture’s Public’ doubtlessly counts as a key text, Kroll’s *La Mémè* was a key project in the post-1968 participatory movement – originally published as ‘il pubblico dell’architettura/Legitimizing architecture’, *Parametro*, nr. 5, 1970, pp. 4-11; based on a 1969 conference talk, in Liège.
9 Such as Walter Segal’s work with ‘self-builders’ (UK), Eilfried Huth and Guenther Domenig and the New Graz Architecture (Enschensiedlung Deutschlandsberg), and Peter Sulzer and Peter Huebner (Bauhausle in Stuttgart) – all examples given by Peter Blundell Jones, ‘Sixty-eight and after’, in: *Architecture and Participation*, pp. 127-139.
the profession, namely where it intersects with planning in the form of Urban Design (Anglo-American) or Urbanisme (French-Italian tradition).\(^\text{11}\)

Particularly in the US context, Community Design, with its firm roots in grassroots democracy (Civil Rights Movement, Women’s Liberation…), would develop methods to resist the all-encompassing expertise of the State planner and the dominance of the singular master plan.\(^\text{12}\) The shift from, what Clara Greed has called a positivist to a post-positivist period in planning, was centred on Paul Davidoff’s 1965 article ‘Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning’.\(^\text{13}\) Not only was Davidoff’s call one for more attention for the user, and for the software (use) of space; it was also in particular a call for pluralism, and for abandoning the so-called value-free planning. Whereas pluralism referred to the development of more than one plan, preferably in collaboration with local communities, and in contrast to the unitary, comprehensive plan made by the State planners;\(^\text{14}\) the call for normative planning referred to the ethical-political position of the planner; and, through it, to a call for the planner to talk also on behalf (as an advocate) of the most marginalised and excluded.\(^\text{15}\) In other words, Davidoff problematised the abstract container of the User (as did De Carlo), by including also the weaker, unrepresented user groups, as much as he problematised the value-neutral, rationalist planning.

In the wake of Davidoff’s article, and through the flourishing of Community Design Centers, numerous variations and ‘corrections’ of the Advocacy model were formulated. All sorts of techniques would be developed: on the one hand, for optimising communication, recruitment and (mutual) learning; while on the other hand, ‘design methods’ would also be developed, in order to render the design process more transparent.\(^\text{16}\) In both scenarios, the aim

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\(^\text{13}\) Published in the *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 1965. Clara Greed, following Guba and Lincoln (1992), identifies a shift from a positivist paradigm, that was dominant until the late 1950s, and was based on hard facts, science, true or false, Grand Theory; to a post-positivist, pluralist planning, with more attention for reality and inclusiveness - Clara Greed, ‘Planning Theory in Retrospect’, in: *Introducing Planning* (London: Athlone, 2000), pp. 235-256.


\(^\text{15}\) The planner was not just seen as an advocate of marginalised groups, but also ‘an advocate for what he deems proper’, as such bringing in his own values too – Davidoff, ‘Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning’, p. 425.

\(^\text{16}\) For the former, most notably Henry Sanoff’s *Design Games* (Los Altos CA, 1979), and numerous fragmented initiatives within CDC’s. Related to the latter, one can think of the design methods of Christopher Alexander; the 1970 *Design Participation* conference organised by, amongst others, Nigel Cross (see Till, ‘The negotiation of
was to render participatory design processes as democratic and inclusive as possible. In both scenarios, Sherry Arnstein’s 1969 ‘A Ladder of Citizen Participation’ would be the touchstone. Arnstein’ ladder was in fact a methodological response to Davidoff’s call for pluralist planning, and for the involvement of local communities in planning. The image of the ‘ladder’ suggested not just degrees of participation, but also a set of goals related to a community’s degree of emancipation from, and opposition to the establishment. The highest achievable goal was Citizen Control and Empowerment. Most theories, models, and evaluation criteria for participation, would, in line with ‘the ladder’, be expressed in terms of degrees of emancipation, and in terms of the extent to which a community managed to resist to official planning.

In response to the fact that most variations on the Advocacy model were nevertheless still centred on the position of the planner (as advocate, enabler, ‘on behalf of’), and on a black-boxing of categories such as ‘the user’ and ‘community’; more radical theorists would argue that only a radical empowerment model can bring genuine emancipation from rationalist planning. Inspired by gender, anti-racist, and queer studies, such thinkers emphasised the differences within ‘the User’, ‘the Other’, or ‘the Community’. They argued that only by radically rethinking what it means to ‘give voice’ (voice to whom, in order to say what, and how to say it), structural inequalities could be overcome. The Marxist political-economy critique that had emerged throughout the 1970s, through David Harvey’s Social Justice and the City and Manuel Castell’s The Urban Question, had of course already shown that structural change can only occur when the position of the planner is radically re-thought. Marxist scholars criticised that, even if the planner may have given up his heroic status, he remains, unavoidably, at the service of the capitalist system: through zoning and other

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17 Sherry Arnstein, ‘A Ladder of Citizen Participation’, in: The City Reader, pp. 240-252 (originally published in 1969). Since she associates citizen participation with citizen power, participation allows, in particular, the excluded to be involved in planning (p. 242). The ladder describes the gradation of participation from non-participation to full empowerment. It goes from manipulation and therapy (‘nonparticipation’: phoney and arrogant); over informing, consultation and placation (‘tokenism’: input of citizens reactions to plans as through surveys and the taking in account of these inputs); to partnership, delegated power and citizen control (‘Citizen power’). Whereas Davidoff opts for advocates to talk for the poor, Arnstein argues for direct empowerment of those groups.

18 E.g. Leonie Sandercock, Towards Cosmopolis. Planning for Multicultural Cities (Chichester, England: John Wiley & Sons ltd., 1998), identified six forms of planning of which several are corrections of the Advocacy model; and express degrees of participation of the citizen, and the role of the planner. Also in Sanoff’s Community Participation, the gradation re-appears in the distinction between genuine and pseudo-participation, which corresponds with a gradation from informing and manipulation up to empowerment (now re-named as domestication, assistencialism, cooperation and citizen control). Linked to the Belgian context, Eric Corijn identified four degrees of participation: from ‘closed planning’, over co-production, up to conflict-based planning and participation ‘from the margins’ – Eric Corijn, ‘Deelnemen is belangrijker dan winnen’ in: Inzet / Opzet / Voorzet. Stadsprojecten in Vlaanderen, ed. by Boudry, et al. (Antwerp and Apeldoorn: Garant, 2006), pp. 164-181.

19 Sandercock, Towards Cosmopolis, pp. 96-98, reference to Leavitt and Heskin and many other authors from feminism, race studies, focussing to empower the disempowered, no longer seen as a ‘mass’ of oppressed (p. 98).
‘regulative tools’, he continues to ‘oil the wheels of capitalism’. Radical empowerment models, by contrast, would, rather than hook up with radical Marxism, reveal Marxism’s limitations, namely its tendency to bring all inequalities back to class-analysis, and thus turning other ‘differences’ induced by gender or race into an abstraction. Radical models not only argued for differentiating the generic community into more specific communities; they also encouraged paying particular attention to the different modes of representation, knowledge building, and epistemologies suggested by such communities: the who, what, and how aspects of ‘giving voice’.

Today, one should be wary of such ‘epistemology of multiplicity’ for two reasons. Firstly, its oppositional agenda can be questioned. In order to find an appropriate mode of action, now that the role of the market has become predominant in spatial practices, and now that ‘good intentions’ can no longer be trusted; it no longer suffices to articulate interstices, and to ‘choose the margin’ as a way of giving voice to the culturally, socially, and racially oppressed. Rather than looking (only) for the ‘other’, located outside or at the margins of the system, ‘choosing the margin’ seems to lead us just as much to those interstices within the system, those folds that are invisible, but therefore not necessarily (purposively) hidden or oppressed. It would allow us to identify and accentuate those interstices and folds within the system that still allow experiment, creativity, and alternative viewpoints. Leonie Sandercock’s ‘politics of difference’, involving contextualised embodied knowledge as much

20 Greed, Introducing Planning, p. 249. The ‘Hard Left’ of Marxist academia would as such take distance from the softer ‘New Left’ enthusiasm for community and advocacy planning (pp. 249-50).

21 Sandercock argues for a planning theory that takes into account ‘the multiple forms of oppression and domination and exploitation that exist in any society and not privilege any one form of counter-analysis, such as class-analysis’ - in: Towards Cosmopolis, p. 86.

22 Gender, feminist, queer, race studies, proposed different styles of knowledge, such as, through narratives and stories (blues, rap, poetry, songs), and emphasised ‘difference’ as a category of analysis –Sandercock, ‘Chapter 5. Voices from the borderlands: the theory that difference makes’, Towards Cosmopolis, pp. 107-125.


as abstract reasoning,\textsuperscript{26} could then become a ‘politics of specificity’, allowing us to also explore niches \textit{within} the system, and not just the ‘multiplicity of struggles around multiple axes of oppression’.\textsuperscript{27} A ‘politics of specificity’ would allow us to listen to the ‘voices of the borderland’, not only in terms of the voices of ‘the multicultural city, of those who have been marginalised, displaced, oppressed, or dominated’;\textsuperscript{28} but also in terms of voices that are specific because they point to altogether different registers - registers that differ in the sense that they are not (yet) formatted according to established/standardised frames and epistemologies. ‘Politics of specificity’ would equally imply a view from the margin, from ‘sites of resistance’ and ‘spaces of counter-hegemonic cultural practice’;\textsuperscript{29} but ‘choosing the margin’ would no longer serve ‘the task of overall change, that of reorganising social relations of inequality as a whole’;\textsuperscript{30} not because it no longer wants to, but because a thorough understanding of the \textit{specificity} of the interstice does not allow such a grand, totalising gesture.

This brings me to the second reason. Rather than overthrowing ‘inequality as a whole’, by processing counter-practices through the registers of unifying theory; the moment of \textit{generalisation} (the so-called placing within a broader picture; contextualisation if you like), should be elsewhere. In other words, no, endless fragmentation and specification is not enough; and yes: there would still be a moment of integration, namely embedded in the \textit{governance} of the whole. Sandercock’s recognition of the margin’s capacity to allow for certain groups ‘to be different \textit{within an inclusive society}’;\textsuperscript{31} comes close to what I have worked out, in the second chapter, following Latour’s collective: society is composed of different collectives, that are not just having different interests, but are entirely different in their being in the world.\textsuperscript{32} A world composed of collectives (at times margins, at times established centres), as I have proposed, seems just much less peaceful, much messier and more insecure than Sandercock’s heterogeneous yet inclusive society - can society be

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{26}Sandercock, \textit{Towards Cosmopolis}, p. 121. See also the contributions in the issue ‘Insurgent Planning Practices’, \textit{Plurimondi}, July-December 1999, guest-edited by Sandercock.
  \item \textsuperscript{28}Sandercock, \textit{Towards Cosmopolis}, p. 110.
  \item \textsuperscript{29}Ibid., p. 113.
  \item \textsuperscript{30}Ibid., p. 122.
  \item \textsuperscript{31}Ibid., pp. 124-25, italics in original.
  \item \textsuperscript{32}Ibid., p. 125.
\end{itemize}
inclusive to start with? Moreover, I am not so confident that the individual actors that compose each collective (such as the voices from the borderland) will indeed ‘speak not only as individuals but also as, and for collectives’. Also, if the moment of integration resides in the governance of the collectives, so does criticality. Is attention for the margins, not as excluded ‘other’, but as folds embedded in, but nevertheless challenging the system, not a political act in itself? Why should it be less political to not emancipate the margin, but (at least potentially) the entire collective, namely, by ‘showing’ and thus ‘making possible’, the collective’s proper interstices? This is what Eric Corijn, in relation to Brussels’ urban governance has suggested: to look at those urban productions that are taking place in altogether different registers, that are more self-organised, and happen alongside official bodies.

The question then is how to confront such registers with established planning and urban politics? How can we get all those not-yet-allies entering the collective without one being absorbed by the other? How can the informal urban actor become an ally of official planning? But more importantly: how to allow radical planning but also a true Realpolitik (requiring several, sometimes ideologically conflicting allies) and politics of hope?\(^{35}\) Such a combinatory task is what in fact (and perhaps surprisingly) links Nancy Fraser’s call to give shape (also theoretically) to the ‘contestatory interaction of different publics and identifying the mechanisms that render some of them subordinate to others’, to Bruno Latour’s call to unmask and unravel Power into a heterogeneous set of forces.\(^{36}\) Only ‘perhaps’ surprisingly, for they share a strong ally: Donna Haraway and her identification of the problem ‘how to simultaneously have an account of radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects, a critical practice for recognizing our own “semiotic technologies”’ for

33 Ibid., p. 124; an argument Sandercock uses in order to move beyond liberalism. Eric Corijn warned of the persistent problem of individual engagement: ‘let’s not be naïve. Nobody is born as a citizen.’ He refers to the fact that most individuals act like opportunistic clients rather than responsible citizens – Corijn, ‘Deelnemen is belangrijker dan winnen’, p. 166, my italics.

34 Ibid., p. 169. He refers to, amongst others, the freezones mapped by Urban Unlimited, De schaduwstad. See also Urban Pioneers and the Dutch kraakwacht, and their respective critiques (institutionalisation, unfaithful to initial goals etc.).

35 Sandercock makes a distinction between insurgent and radical planning, the latter seen as ‘not always necessarily oppositional’ – Leonie Sandercock, ‘Introduction. Translations: From Insurgent Planning Practices to radical Planning Discourses’, Plurimondi, July-December 1999, pp. 37-46, p. 41. Here, also an openness is created (even if still quite abstract) to move beyond the oppressed and have-nots, namely by paying attention to the planners’ realpolitik – Marcus Lane, ‘Indigenous Peoples and Resource planning in Northern Australia: Re-Shaping or Reproducing Existing Practice?’, Plurimondi, July-December 1999, pp. 181-192.

36 It seems that Fraser still starts from ‘multiple but unequal publics’, but her attempts to make these publics participate in democracy as it ‘actually exists’, can be read as an interest in how democracy has come into being and is maintained. Fraser, ‘Rethinking the public sphere’, p. 530; Latour, ‘Irreductions’, in: The Pasteurization of France, pp. 151-236.
making meanings, and a no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of the “real” world.\(^37\) So there we have a very instructive opening for a less oppositional agenda for critical theory and a (more) critical enhancement of Latour’s irreductive pragmatism: residing in the shared concern of these authors to centre on accountability, rather than on oppositional resistance per se. For Fraser, accountability means asking what kind of institutional arrangements can ‘ensure the accountability of democratic decision-making bodies (strong publics) to their external, weak, or, given the possibility of hybrid cases, weaker publics?’\(^38\) Not only does this come close to what Latour called the unmasking of ‘entelechies turned crowd’; Fraser moreover links the possibility of ‘more hybrid forms’ – what Latour called ‘gradations of force’ - with a new critical agenda, namely to explore these hybrid forms; to explore weak and strong publics; and to explore ‘the range of possible relations among such publics’.\(^39\) This reflects Haraway’s proposal for a critical agenda through situated knowledges, because such a proposal includes ‘the ability partially to translate knowledges among very different – and power-differentiated – communities’.\(^40\) And of course, accountability is at the very heart of Haraway’s proposal to adopt only partial perspectives (see below).

Rather than continuing to encourage ‘the people’ to climb the ladder towards the heights of empowerment, and by doing so, creating the hope that structural inequality and opposition can be overthrown; it makes perhaps more sense to put down the ladder, and wonder whether climbing a ladder is really the best way to meet our neighbours. In the past half-century, Lindblom’s call for a science of ‘muddling through’ has been read as a call for a ‘more incremental, less absolutist approach to decision-making’,\(^41\) and, in fact, as a call to politicise theory by interpreting the countless grassroots, insurgent, and resistant practices this period has produced. The ‘clean job’ of theory would complete (by means of interpretation and allocating meaning) the ‘dirty hands’ job on the ground. Even the so hands-on action-researchers depended on Marxism or other theoretical weaponry, in order to make it safely through the jungle of the real. While perhaps all along, the work of ‘muddling through’ in itself is what it was all about: for both theory and the real. In Siri Hustvedt’s The Sorrows of an American, one of the characters refers to himself as a plodder: ‘clarity about things came

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\(^{38}\) Fraser, ‘Rethinking the public sphere’, p. 535.

\(^{39}\) Ibid., p. 536.

\(^{40}\) Haraway, ‘Situated Knowledges’, p. 187. It is all about decoding, transcoding, and translation, but also about criticism: ‘all are necessary’ (p. 196). And yet, partial perspectives, better accounts, and ‘seeing better’ (as we find also in Latour’s Paris Ville Invisible), leave open the question as to how to act upon the situation that we now ‘see better’.

\(^{41}\) Greed, Introducing Planning, p. 249; Lindblom, 1959, quoted in Greed.
only after much effort and even then I had little sense of arrival.’ 42 Plodding ‘evokes a man trudging forward in heavy boots. Earthbound.’ 43 Is it the open-endedness of ‘muddling through’ (or ‘plodding’) that kept us away from it, since there is no guarantee that, when taking ‘muddling through’ seriously, it will lead us to emancipation or empowerment? 44 Or is it our longing for a guide or framework that, especially during those dark, cold lonely nights in the jungle, was a welcome reminder of our cause: why we were doing what we were doing, and towards what end.

2.2. The design deficit

In 1965, Paul Davidoff argued that ‘high density, low density, green belts, mixed uses, cluster developments, centralized or decentralized business centres are per se neither good nor bad. They describe physical relations or conditions, but take on value only when seen in terms of their social, economic, psychological, physiological, or aesthetic effects upon different users.’ 45 More than four decades later his argument still (almost literally!) applies to many of the Urban Renaissance development schemes that, bizarrely enough, seem to refer back to, but in fact have shamelessly corrupted, the Advocacy tradition. 46 What we can learn from this is that community participation in spatial production has not only suffered from democratic and empowerment struggles, but also from a significant gap between ideas, citizen involvement, and ‘good intentions’ on the one hand, and project design and materialisation on the other. By the 1990s, it had become apparent that participatory design suffered derailment, and this on several levels simultaneously.

Firstly, the initial ‘idealistic phase’ had been replaced with a ‘entrepreneurial phase’. 47 The political had become more practical and pragmatic in nature; the initial process approaches had turned product centred again; and the conflict model had turned into a consensus model. Rather than climbing Arnstein’s ladder, one was more concerned with

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43 Ibid., p. 151.

44 In relation to urban renewal strategies, Arnold Reijndorp argued that we have problems with allowing conflict, because it is unpredictable about where it will lead us; hence we compensate with social cohesion measures - Arnold Reijndorp, ‘Afscheid van de Consensuscultuur’, in: *Stad in Conflict*, ed. by Arnold Reijndorp, Edzard Mik, et al. (Groningen: Platform GRAS, 2005), pp. 14-29, p. 24. Likewise, in relation to architecture, the editors of *Architecture and Participation* have argued that our fear for conflict and contestation has to do with the risk and uncertainty of the outcome of such processes - Blundell Jones, et al., ‘Introduction’, p. xiv.


46 London UDP’s such as Paddington Basin or Kings-Cross St. Pancras, sell similar arguments of mixed use, community cohesion, density…

47 The emphasis had become the do-able, realistic, definable and manageable - Comerio, ‘Community Design: Idealism and Entrepreneurship’, p. 45.
pragmatic results. Rather than developing tactics, so that ‘the Have-nots can take power away from the Haves’, it seemed less obvious than it had been for Saul Alinsky, to point fingers at ‘the enemy’. 48

Secondly, some theories had focussed so strongly on communication, social learning, and negotiation (governance studies, stakeholder analysis), that design and materialisation became only a peripheral concern. 49

Thirdly, and by contrast, when design was given appropriate attention, this was anything but problem free. On the one hand, it has led to suspicious alliances between reactive-traditionalist designers and private development. Design, and particularly architectural style, formed the central drive for traditionalist community architects – or is it really so that each community prefers vernacular, traditionalist styles? In Brussels, we have seen very clearly how the anti-construction mentality of the 1970s (with their counter-proposals intended as drawing-manifesto) led to major corruptions as soon as the activist ideology infiltrated practice. On the other hand, the ‘design method’ movement would over-emphasise the technical, mathematical, and formal aspects of design so dramatically that, against its aim of rendering the design process more transparent and thus democratic, it would make an abstraction of its critical engagements. 50

In other words, through the abuse of participation – as the ultimate selling point; rendered too stylistic or technical; and being separated from the design process - both its political and its design/materialisation aspect had become highly problematic.

Moreover, with ‘the market’ having entered the planning scene as full-blown actor, the power-relations, so constituting a factor for citizen participation, would be reshuffled. Whereas in the ‘State versus the People’ constellation, citizens needed protection against the dominance of the all-encompassing State planning, they were now to be ‘rescued’ from the exclusions and entrepreneurialism of market liberalism. 51 For example, in ‘Six styles of planning in practice’ T. Brindley, Y. Rydin and G. Stoker (from the Regulation School) diversified planning styles according to this new institutional arrangement of state regulation, communities, and the market. At the opposite end of Regulative (State) Planning, one did no

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49 In line with Patsy Healy, Bent Flyvbjerg and others who approached planning as a communicative practice, and the role of the planner as communicator and negotiator between the different stakeholders.

50 From Christopher Jones, Christopher Alexander, Tom Markus, and Ray Studer (Comerio, ‘Community Design’, p. 39), over Nigel Cross, Bill Mitchell, and Nicholas Negroponte (Till, ‘the negotiation of hope’, pp. 28-29), to Space Syntax. Aim was, through all sorts or systematisations, to make design processes accessible for laypersons.

51 The excluded were now those without access to commercial (residential) development, namely low-income, non-owner groups - T. Brindley, Y. Rydin and G. Stoker, *Remaking Planning* (Routledge, 1996), second edition, pp. 170-72.
longer find Citizen Empowerment and Control, but Private-management Planning.\textsuperscript{52} Degrees of planning no longer trickled down from the State-control to Citizen-empowerment, but from State-control to Market-control; with Popular Planning (what used to be the pluralist and radical Community Planning) somewhere halfway. Alongside the introduction of quasi-governmental organisations, all sorts of neighbourhood-based initiatives, and what we could call a fragmentation and institutionalisation of the local, it would become clear how the old ideas of empowerment had been both fragmented and ‘corrupted’.\textsuperscript{53} In this scheme, Popular Planning was considered the only remaining genuine scheme for empowerment, even if it had partly lost its oppositional character - it was now, literally, positioned in the middle – and even if it suffered numerous violations, having to do, once more, with a democratic deficit and design and implementation issues.\textsuperscript{54} The democratic deficit had largely to do with the fact that the neighbourhood was re-emphasised as a new ‘scalar niche’ or ‘forcefield for post-Keynesian regulatory experiments’, wherein social inclusion was a priority primarily for its positive effects on competitiveness;\textsuperscript{55} hence the introduction of the term ‘glocal’. An impressive body of work has been dedicated to the changed urban conditions under globalisation and liberalism:\textsuperscript{56} to the shifts in spatial governance and the new relations

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{53} One could observe a re-emergence of bottom-up and participatory approaches, however, only accessible for a select group of professionals such as, amongst others, architects, planners, and economists, while the non-professional sector and the less-powerful social groups are largely excluded: decision-making thus being based on a reinforced role of the expert: ‘the mystique of an inclusive non-hierarchical, and participatory network approach towards planning is undermined by the realities of a network based on the primacy of the expert’ – Arantxa Rodriguez, Erik Swyngedouw, Frank Moulaert, ‘Urban Restructuring, Social-Political Polarization, and New Urban Policies’, in: The Globalised City – Economic Restructuring and Social Polarisation in European Cities (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 29-45, pp. 41-42.

\textsuperscript{54} Despite being ‘impure pluralist’ (Brindley, et al., Remaking Planning, p. 166), and anti-corporatist, there were still losers in Popular Planning (pp. 170-72); an inclusive plan might, in practice, not remain very inclusive (p. 172). See also Jeremy Till, ‘Architecture of the impure community’, in: Occupying Architecture, Between the Architect and the User, ed. by Jonathan Hill (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 61-75, pp. 68-69.

\textsuperscript{55} E.g. Quangos (Quasi nongovernmental organisations), Contrats de Ville (in France), and the European Commission’s URBAN Programme - Neil Brenner, New State Spaces, Urban Governance and the Rescaling of Statehood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 272; 269.

between State and Market, both from governance studies, and critical Geography perspectives; and to the new emphasis on space and place.

Through such developments, architectural design and project implementation would be revalorised and as such counter decades of having been pushed into the background of community development. However, such revalorisation was intrinsically connected to the new emphasis on space and place under neo-liberalism and globalisation, now considered the ultimate motor for competition (regional competition, generic signature architecture, local gentrification), and according to a logic wherein the (economic) development of spaces was prioritised over the well being of its inhabitants – who would then ‘gain’ their share anyway thanks to the so-called (and largely overestimated) ‘trickle-down effect’. Faced with such ‘doomed victory’, architectural avant-gardes (consciously or not) contributed to such a scheme; while it also gave the reactionary Community Architects the perfect alibi to exercise their own architectural styles. In other words, both the new avant-gardes and the traditionalists were compliant with the capitalist system, the former were simply more open and presumptuous than the latter. Community Architecture, despite its hostility to the new avant-gardes and their surfing on the waves of capitalism, just as much prioritised the moralist and stylistic preferences of the architect over community-interests. As much as the ‘Bilbao’ avant-gardes, Community Architecture formed no challenge whatsoever to market-led development: not only was it very popular amongst public and private development bodies, its idea of the ‘pure community’ (white, middle-class, suburban values rather than mixed, dazzling, urban) affirmed the phoney ideology of inclusiveness.

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57 E.g. Patsy Healey (2006); in relation to new forms of criticism and activism under such conditions, see Margit Mayer (2000); and Marisol García (2006); in relation to the European context, see Willem Salet, et al. (2003); Patrick Le Galès (2002; and, with Armando Bagnasco, 2000); Kazepov, Y. (2005); Robert Boyer (1988); Neil Brenner (1999); Rob Atkinson (2002); guest editorial by Enrico Gualini in European Plannings Studies, Volume 14, nr. 7, 2006 on ‘The Rescaling of Governance in Europe: New Spatial and Institutional Rationales’. For more detailed references see bibliography.

58 Critical geographers have studied the new exclusions and inequalities inherent to the new condition. E.g. the work of amongst others Neil Brenner, Erik Swyngedouw, Neil Smith, Frank Moelaert, Bob Jessop, and the publications in Antipode, the Radical Journal of Geography, at Blackwell.


60 See the fights at the RIBA between the Prince Charles proponents and the ‘avant-gardes’.

61 Community Architecture is the flagship of a new ‘moral movement in planning’ led by Rod Hackney (when he became RIBA president in 1987), and supported by the Prince of Wales and the Church of England. Brindley, et al. argued that, because these branches were based on self-help and charity, it forms no competition to grand neo-liberal development for they focus on altogether different areas (Poundbury etc.) – Brindley, et al., Remaking Planning, p. 180. Also see Till, ‘Architecture of the impure community’.

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3. A way out of the democratic and design deficit?

What position can architecture adopt when confronted with fictitious participation used to legitimise development and style preferences, with a deceptive attention for ‘space and place’, and with false democracy (consensus-oriented and so-called inclusive)? Is an oppositional critique desirable now that State politics, the Market, and civil society have been connected through complex webs of collaboration? Is theoretical distance still appropriate now that urban development has become a pragmatic, on-the-ground matter? And how to avoid that a greater attention for design and materialisation ends in mere style discussions, or overtly abstract, design methods? Isn’t the only realistic response one that takes into account all these tensions at once; one that is as entangled as the reality in which it is inscribed? By looking at architecture’s relation with the real through the lenses of participation, we can further elaborate the possibilities of a multifarious engagement of architecture with the world, as started in the two previous chapters (in chapter two, architecture’s relation to the discourse on the everyday; and, in chapter three, the particularly instructive Brussels’ situation). In this fourth chapter, I have further emphasised conflict (over consensus); a more entangled (rather than oppositional) critique; and the importance of entangling design with participation.

Recognition of conflict, friction, and impurity over consensus-driven and purifying practices also requires the avoidance of a ‘mythology of conflict’, as we have known it in the post-’68 culture, and of compensating the desire for heterogeneity with (social) cohesion. It requires what Jeremy Till has called ‘architecture of the impure community’. Such architecture would imply not only a more ‘messy participation’ - because genuine participation always brings ‘uncertainty in place of purity’ - but it would also expect architects to accept such ‘messiness’ and insecurity as part of their work. It, in other words, requires a mode of governance that allows ‘messy’ meetings between collectives (users, architects, policy makers): through diplomacy (following Latour) or through, what Gillian Rose has called, the ‘Broken Middle’: a place where users and architects alike, ‘confront

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62 Michael Hirsch, ‘The space of community: between culture and politics’, in: Did Someone Say Participate? An Atlas of Spatial Practice, edited by Markus Miessen and Shuman Basar, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006), pp. 290-304, p. 295. He refers to the fact that the 1968 heritage was a ‘cultural success, and a political failure’ (p. 293) and has generated a ‘mythology of conflict’ that is quite far away from a true ‘articulation with the formal and legal means of political domination’ (p. 295).

63 Arnold Reijndorp argued for the use of conflict and heterogeneity in urban planning, but also to ask: ‘How to give shape to heterogeneity?’ – Reijndorp, ‘Afscheid van de Consensuscultuur’, p. 21.

64 Till, ‘Architecture of the impure community’, p. 68.

themselves and each other as particular and as universal’, and where architecture behaves like a ‘semi-autonomous discipline’. But it also requires architects to accept the challenge to spatialise such democracies beyond mere symbolism or analogy. Architects should not be obsessed with their ‘right to design’, but accept their ‘duty to design’: their responsibility to give shape to the world inhabited by the collective. This implies equally criticising a too individualistic and narcissistic agency by the architect, as adding his design skills to the planner’s and architect’s role of being an empowering agent (once even called ‘soft cop’). His design skills. Instead of endlessly optimising communication and bargaining techniques, one should explore how ‘democracy’ and ‘critique’ are materialised through design. Instead of separating the participatory process from the creative/design process, those processes should be seen as part of the same endeavour. By proposing (in the second chapter) a governance model based on ‘learning collectives’, I have already implicitly argued against the obsession with a single-perspective ‘maximised learning’, ‘capacity building’, and ‘people becoming more expert’. This is not to say that I argue against the empowerment of ‘the people’ but, on the contrary, that such emphasis, despite its claims to bring user and expert closer to one another, in fact widens the gap between user and designer. Users do not necessarily need to become experts, and, by contrast, experts do not need to become less expert (let be more ignorant). What is needed is to allow both to enter the collective, each with their own specific skills. When planners and architects accept a design process based on messiness over purity, ‘muddling through’ over abstraction; when similarly, users have confidence (!) in the expert’s skills; thus, when there is a mutual respect and recognition of one another’s skills and ignorance; then the ‘learning city’ becomes finally a common concern and a shared project. In the Brabant Quarter, a Brussels neighbourhood that will appear in the final chapter, experts were ‘ignorant’ about the changes between day and night in this quarter. Only inhabitants could fully grasp how this neighbourhood changes 180° at nightfall (when criminality, shootings, hold ups, and street fights come in). By contrast, inhabitants were not aware of the difficult engineering of seemingly easy solutions.

When accepting the project as a shared challenge, ‘learning’ gets actualised through a

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66 Ibid.
68 Till, ‘The architect and the Other’.
69 Interview Bastin (Escaut) and Decuyper (V-Plus); which resonates with Till: ‘It is irresponsible for architects not to use their knowledge’ (Till, ‘Architecture of the impure community’, p. 72).
71 E.g. Sanoff’s maximised learning and Corijn’s ‘lerende stad’ (learning city).
72 Capacity building is often still focussed on the citizens and less on the ‘experts’.
‘series of events’, composed of both autonomous moments and confrontations. It would allow us to ‘give different accounts of different levels of problems’, rather than to ‘construct simple and exclusive alternatives’. This of course resonates with Haraway’s conviction that ‘only partial perspective promises objective vision’. Only situated, embodied, partial perspectives – in contrast to the unlocatable ones – are responsible, for they ‘can be held accountable for both its promising and its destructive monsters.’ This is at once Haraway’s critique against a too great attention for the subjugated, because also the subjugated positions, no matter how weak, oppressed or underground, are not innocent. The question for Haraway is then how to see from below, and thus to keep precisely positioning, location, and perspective at stake. In short, ‘politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating,’ and a matter of aiming at ‘better accounts of the world’: ‘better’ for ‘the world neither speaks itself nor disappears in favour of a master decoder’. Only then can we add the second part to Gillian Rose’s definition of the ‘Broken Middle’, namely a place that ‘yields the dynamics always at stake in any comprehension of diremption’, and thus a place that is fundamentally different from the ‘middle ground of muddy compromises’, and the false ‘holy’ middle of Community Architecture.

My proposal for a more entangled engagement with the real through a governance based on a ‘series of events’ (with ‘moments of autonomy’ and ‘temporary transcendences’), has seeming and genuine affinities with the cyclical process planning proposed by De Carlo; and the ‘transformative participation’ proposed by Till. De Carlo’s reference to the user is particularly interesting for it emphasises the specificity, and with it, the potential of the user: he refers to the user not in terms of ‘average man’ but as a ‘particular type of user’, thus allowing for a recognition of ‘bearers of new values which already exist potentially,

74 Haraway, ‘Situated Knowledges’, p. 190.
75 Ibid., p. 191.
76 Ibid., p. 191.
77 ‘[W]here partiality and universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims.’ Ibid., p. 195.
78 Ibid., p. 196; 198.
80 De Carlo proposes a process in three steps: the discovery of the needs of the users, the formulation of an hypothesis (‘the project’, which becomes a way for ‘asking the question better’), and use (being not an outcome but a further test ground) – De Carlo, ‘Architecture’s public’, in: Architecture and Participation, pp. 16-22.
81 Ibid., p. 17.
manifested sporadically in the margins not already controlled by institutional power’.\textsuperscript{82} If we leave out De Carlo’s unmistakable association of the more ‘interesting’ user with the oppressed and marginalised - ‘for example, those belonging to a social underclass’.\textsuperscript{83} – and the assumption that such registers cannot escape the ‘control by power’; it would indeed offer us the potential to discover \textit{all kinds of} different registers and ‘manifestations of “disorder”’ – also disorder not necessarily being a mode of resistance but a gradation of being.\textsuperscript{84} In other words, process planning based on ‘a continuous alternation of controls and reformulations’, and on asking the question ‘better’;\textsuperscript{85} is very inviting if, artificial and unfair as it may be, we could get rid of the association of emancipation with the oppressed, and open it up to the collective as a whole. But then we bump into the same question that bothered us all along, namely, if we drop a pre-established goal-directedness (such as: emancipation), but want nevertheless to keep in the ‘what can we hope for’ (‘to what end’), then what will be the new drive? Then what makes us move? Is it about moving in itself? Is it about offering better descriptions – or: ‘\textit{recettes}’ - of the many different registers? How can we define whether we move successfully?

Jeremy Till’s ‘transformative participation’ is of assistance here. Not only does it present a more encompassing approach that no longer aims at making it better ‘for the people’, but also at transforming, and thus potentially ‘making better’, the architect’s practice.\textsuperscript{86} Since, for Till, participation is always ‘a signal of the reality to come’, it has to do, unavoidably, with imperfection and impurity.\textsuperscript{87} Since architects tend to postpone that cold shower of reality as long as possible the forecasting (participation) is sabotaged. By taking away the drive (perfection, ‘pure’ design, affirmation of expertise, certainty about outcome), room is made for imperfection, impurity, ignorance, risk, and learning. The new drive may not be impurity or imperfection in itself, but the possibility for it to occur and to be acknowledged as a valuable, even if temporary, outcome. What I read in Till’s proposal, in relation to my search for a new drive, is an opening towards temporary certainties, flexible boundaries around facts; risk on all fronts; the acknowledgement of ignorance and amateurism \textit{without} the urge to emancipate into expertise; and the recognition of a shifting, partial and temporary drive, or what we would like to call ‘instable intentionality’. The only

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{82} Ibid., p. 18.
\item \textsuperscript{83} Ibid., p. 17.
\item \textsuperscript{84} Ibid., p. 18.
\item \textsuperscript{85} Ibid., pp. 16-17.
\item \textsuperscript{86} Till, ‘The negotiation of hope’, p. 25.
\item \textsuperscript{87} Ibid., p. 30.
\end{itemize}
overall drive of design would then be ‘sense-making’ rather than problem solving; which it would achieve through ‘knowledge from within’, new models of communication, and an outcome as a ‘partial best’. With these three conditions in mind, it is a good moment to start looking at Brussels again.

4. Participatory dispositifs in Brussels

The previous chapters have demonstrated the particular role of the everyday in a city like Brussels: initially in terms of citizen activism in the wake of 1968 (ARAU/AAM); and from the 1990s onwards, more in the form of a cultural urban activism. Through such developments, official participatory measures have gradually been installed in order to account for citizen needs and anticipate the reception of new plans and projects. Such participatory measures were developed within the framework of the emerging urban renewal strategies of the 1970s (first participatory wave, Plan Secteur of 1979), and would be intensified from the mid-1990s, along the rediscovery of the local, re-territorialisation, and proximity, as indispensable preconditions for successful urban practices (second participatory wave, Neighbourhood Contracts).

4.1. Participation and urban renewal in Brussels before 1989

Citizen Participation in ‘orchestrated space’ (official planning processes) can be brought back to the urban renewal arguments of post-’68 urban activism. Urban renewal was first and foremost a response to the Brussels Situation of the 1960s: destruction of the city in the name of modern progress, the urban exodus of middle classes, and deindustrialisation resulting in the deprivation and pauperisation of Brussels’ inner city quarters. If such phenomena could be observed in many cities throughout the 1970s; Brussels was a unique case, due to its severe demolitions and its particular housing market. Whereas Belgian authorities had compensated the absence of public housing provision by making available land for single-family housing; the private residential market of the impoverished Brussels inner city would start to take over the role of social housing, and as such attract mainly poor and immigrant populations.

To some degree, public control already existed as part of the 1962 Urban Planning Act, which subjected newly developed sectoral, regional, or municipal plans to a public survey (openbaar onderzoek/enquête publique). Belgium may have lacked central State

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88 Ibid., p. 36.
89 Ibid., pp. 36-37.
90 7.7% social housing only. This has been discussed also in the first chapter, and brought up in the Ouverture.
planning, as one could find at the time in France or the Netherlands; it nevertheless exercised a strong central control system. In reality, however, central control was deviated by lower planning bodies, by refusing to make the plans they were being forced to make, and by deviating the central control on building permission with the helping hand of the multiples casquettes.\(^91\)

In the wake of the activist actions of 1968 (ARAU, AAM), and in particular the ‘battle of the Marolles’ (1969), urban renewal would be typically associated with the ‘city of the people’ and the participatory mood of the Soixante-huitards. This city was to be realised through the reconstruction of small-scale, cohesive neighbourhoods, and in partnership with the citizens. Participation was therefore a precondition for urban renewal. Particularly in the Agglomération (also called L’Agglo), created in 1972, which would adopt the Reconstruction de la Ville ideas. Together with the press, the Agglo would also be prepared to listen to the voice of the people, and the Reconstruction call of the action committees.\(^92\) Since most of the measures emerging from the 1970s, and in particular the Plan Secteur/Gewestplan of 1979, would be influenced by the participatory and preservationist attitude of the Reconstruction movement; Evert Lagrou has called this period the populist or ‘The People’s Voice’ period of Brussels planning.\(^93\)

The draft Plan Secteur of 1976 had proposed, in line with the action committees, a public control procedure based on a public survey (openbaar onderzoek/enquête publique) for each building permission; as such giving citizens the right to consult the proposals, and formulate comments and advice. It obliged municipalities to hear the advice (written or oral) and install a consultation commission (overlegcomité/commission de concertation). The 1979 Plan Secteur would legally effectuate these proposals and, as such, set the standard for citizen participation in urban planning until today.

However, whereas the preparations for the 1979 Plan Secteur laid the fundaments for participatory urban policies, the very first Brussels urban renewal program was the Residential Core Renovation Program (Woonkernvernieuwing) of the Brusselse Executieve, created in 1978. The basis for urban renewal would be created in 1978 with the Housing Block Renovation Policy (Renovatie van Huizenblokken), also created by the Brusselse

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91 Local and national bodies simply didn’t make these plans, with Gewestplannen / Plans Secteur as the exception - René Schoonbrodt, ‘Brussel wereldhoofdstad van de inspraak?’, in Brussel over 20 Jaar, p. 118. For overviews on urban renewal policies: Françoise Noel, ‘Het stadsvernieuwingsbeleid in de wijken: op de kruising van stedenbouwkundige en sociale actie’, in Brussel over 20 Jaar, pp. 213-33; Françoise Noel, La ville Rapécée; and Annabelle Guérin, Luc Maufroy, Frédéric Raynaud (eds.), Brussele verandert! 10 jaar stedelijk beleid in het Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest, Cahier van het GSSO nr. 4 (Brussels: GSSO, 2007).

92 The Agglo existed between 1972 and 1988. Its activities included, amongst others, the Les Marolles (national) pilot for urban renewal program, and the Botanique quarter, in collaboration with the Regie Foncière.

Executieve, as a funding program for renovating public housing.\footnote{KB 28 March 1977, ‘houdende de organisatie van de woonkernvernieuwing in het Brussels Gewest’, published in the Belgisch Staatsblad, 22 June 1977. It existed from 1978 till 1998. The aim was to renovate all the public residential properties that had been declared unhealthy by the National Housing Institute (Nationaal Instituut voor de Huisvesting).} When in 1985, the intervention zone would be narrowed down to only the most deprived areas, an urban renewal territory would be demarcated for the first time.\footnote{Through the ‘Te Beschermen en te Renoveren Gebied’ (BRG) – besluit 7 September 1984. From 1988, renewal efforts would be prioritised within this area, where also higher grants were allocated.} Despite the aims and scope of these renovation plans (aiming to renovate 20,000 housing units, initially applicable to all Brussels municipalities), and despite additional measures extending the program even to private renovation, the program did not prove successful.\footnote{The Residential Core Renovation Program applied to deprived ‘cores’ in the central quarters, and to older, peripheral quarters in need of renovation. To encourage the program and extend its applicability, two policies were added: in 1980, the Renovatie van Afzonderlijke Roerende Goederen, allowing municipalities to reconver their vacant properties into housing; and, from 1983, renovation grants were also allocated to private owners.} Of the 20,000 planned units, public bodies would realise only 2,850; while private grants were, in reality, used primarily by the middle classes.\footnote{Balance made in 1989 – Guérin, et al., Brussel verandert!, p. 11. The renovation efforts were, moreover, not very visual because they were distributed all over the Region - Noel, ‘Het stadsvernieuwbingsbeleid in de wijken’, pp. 216-17. See also Stefan De Corte, ‘Wijkontwikkeling met wijkcontracten? Stadsvernieuwing in Brussel’, in: In de ban van stad en wijk, ed. by Pascal De Decker, B. Hubeau, S. Nieuwinckel (Antwerpen: EPO, 1996), pp. 209–17.}

4.2. Urban renewal for the new Brussels Capital Region (1989)

After 1989, a lot of changes would occur in Brussels’ urban renewal. Apart from a few new decrees (in Brussels called ordinance), the new Brussels Capital Region would almost immediately make work of a City Project that could address the variety of Brussels’ problems simultaneously.\footnote{E.g. the Ordinance of 29 August 1991, houdende de organisatie van de planning en de stedebouw (OOPS); the Ordinance of 7 October 1993 houdende de organisatie van de herwaardering van de wijken. The City Project: Gewestelijk Ontwikkelingsplan or GewOP, Besluit 3 March 1995.} Since much of Brussels’ problems were linked to the housing crisis (little social housing, impoverished quarters), and the continuing exodus of the middle class (losses in tax income); the City Project focused primarily on housing and neighbourhood renovation. Building on the BRG (Te Beschermen en te Renoveren Gebied) of 1984, and field research, a new territory for urban renewal actions was drawn, the Ruimte voor Versterkte Ontwikkeling van de Huisvesting (RVOH).\footnote{Field Research by the Fondation Roi Baudouin, 1989-1990, and the Regional Housing Department 1994.} Herein, all sorts of housing related actions took place, of
which, in particular the Neighbourhood Contracts would become a strong instrument (see below).\textsuperscript{100}

From now on, citizen participation would become standard procedure within urban renewal (Neighbourhood Contracts);\textsuperscript{101} while the path was also freed for public-private investments (within the Neighbourhood Contracts, but also through the Gewestelijke Ontwikkelingsmaatschappij Brussel - GOMB).\textsuperscript{102} As such, Brussels combined a desire to renovate its residential quarters, in order to re-attract tax payers, with a socio-spatial urban policy directed to its most vulnerable citizens. Whereas the first was realised with the help of both public funding and private investment (the middle-class housing projects through the PPP formula of the GOMB); the latter was effectuated through the more ‘socially concerned’, and in fact ‘correcting’ measures, of the regional City Project, and in particular the Neighbourhood Contracts (NC).\textsuperscript{103}

Gradually one can see that the combination of hardware and software solutions (neighbourhood renovation and socio-economic programs), and of liberal aims (urban competition, middle-class city) and ‘correcting measures’ (to keep the side-effects of these aims to a minimum), take a clear neo-liberal turn.\textsuperscript{104} Most explicitly with the creation of the Plan de Développement International (PDI), the distinction between socio-economic measures, as an aim in itself, and as an indispensable condition to upgrade Brussels’ (international) image and attractiveness, becomes increasingly blurred. Brussels’ promotion as an international, mixed, and intercultural city becomes in that sense dubious (as we have also seen in the previous chapter), while the corrective measures (redistribution of generated tax income) are not very convincing either.\textsuperscript{105} The last two decades have seen the

\textsuperscript{100} Ordinance 7 October 1993, houdende de organisatie van de herwaardering van de wijken.

\textsuperscript{101} The citizen consultation of the 1970s was effectuated as a form of co-production, applied first within the framework of Neighbourhood Contracts (Contrat de Quartier / Wijkcontract, created within the GewOP I of 1995), and later through Director Schemes (Schéma Directeur / Richtschema, created within GewOP II 2002 for the development of Leverage Areas – Hefboomgebied / Zone Levier - and Sites of regional Interest (Zone van Gewestelijk belang / Zone d’Intéret Regional). In reality, these formats did not fully allow co-production – see below.

\textsuperscript{102} Created in 1974 as a regional institute promoting economic expansion. Since 1987, it has also had important urban renewal tasks e.g. ownership housing projects within or close to the RVOHR perimeter, mostly in partnership with private investors, focused on medium income classes.

\textsuperscript{103} NCs aimed to simultaneously renovate the city as to make it more attractive and to address the socio-economic situation - Charles Picqué, ‘De stad, maatschappelijke uitdaging…’, in: Brussel verandert…!, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{104} Lagrou called the period since 1985 the PPP-period, with a ‘Left version of PPP’ between 1985 and 1998 (when authorities invited the private sector, creation of the GOMB, HST Midi), and a ‘Right version of PPP’ after 1998 (private invites public authorities, 1998 liberal election success) - Lagrou, ‘Brussels: a superimposition of social, cultural and spatial layers’.

\textsuperscript{105} The PDI has been presented as ambitious, image-based, international (city marketing) while at the same time not giving up on Brussels’ structural social needs (see also third chapter): e.g. the The City of Tomorrow international colloquium, organised during the preparation of the PDI, intended to deal also with the possible dangers of revitalisation (exclusion, gentrification).
reinforcement of a transversal approach to the city (integrating Brussels many needs on many policy domains, as the only way to get the city renovated), which is effectuated primarily in terms of proximity (close to the people), and as neighbourhood-based urban renewal programs (most notably the NCs). All sorts of regional institutes were installed to coordinate such local measures, and centralise analyses on their effectiveness.

Why is all of this important for architecture and the urban? Urban renewal has been influenced very strongly by the Reconstruction de la Ville movement. This was not just limited to the work of the Agglo and the 1979 Plan Secteur. The Reconstruction de la Ville ideas of reconstruction, small-scale neighbourhood approach, and citizen-participation would resonate, without exception, in virtually all the Brussels urban renewal tools. This is not to say that contemporary architecture was not possible at all; but that the opportunities were minimal. For the larger housing schemes developed by the GOMB, in collaboration with private developers, often architectes-promoteurs with, moreover, roots in the Reconstruction movement, have been engaged. Within the context of Neighbourhood Contracts, qualitative contemporary architecture has been produced, but architecture was nevertheless constrained by the modesty of the framework (‘social’ projects), bureaucratic burdens, budgetary means, time frames, and a lack of communication, prestige, and image: in other words, not the usual playground for ambitious contemporary architects. If the PDI might be the very first instrument that allows really ambitious architecture, even a contemporary one, then the question is how architects (and policy makers alike) will respond to such new opportunities: straight into star-architecture and hoping for a Bilbao-effect? Will, in other words, architects prefer to work within the PDI and drop the more ‘social’ work within the Neighbourhood Contracts? Or have Brussels’ architects and planners become too acquainted to the city’s complex urban condition, and their own pragmatism and down-to-earthiness, to lose themselves in stardom? Will there remain a certain loyalty to the everyday city and its

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106 By extending the RVOH to the RVOHR (Ruimte voor Verstrekte Ontwikkeling van Huisvesting en Renovatie), the GewOp II (2002) allowed a more intense integration of housing and urban renovation solutions, such as social work and public space renewal. Moreover, the GBP identified 14 Leverage Areas (Hefboomgebied / Zone Levier) – with a large regional potential and often linked to a Site of Regional Interest (Gebied van Gewestelijk belang / Zone d’Intérêt Régional) – which are to be developed through a Director Scheme (Schéma Directeur / Richtschema).

107 E.g. in 1992, the Gewestelijke Interministriele Afspraak van Stedelijke Solidariteit GIASS, a transversal body for socio-economic measures but also urban renewal; in 2000, Gewestelijk Secretariaat voor Stedelijke Ontwikkeling GSSO, a more general coordinative body; since 2006 involved in neighbourhood monitoring (Wijkenatlas / Atlas des Quartiers), and since 2008, transformed into the ATO Agentschap Territoriale Ontwikkeling as the ultimate centralising body for urban development, primarily involved in the PDI.

108 As we have seen in the first chapter, this influence was not only reflected in policy instruments but also indirectly encouraged by the publications of design manuals for public space; the work of institutes such as ARAU and the Fondation Roi Baudouin.

109 Maurizio Cohen showed that qualitative architecture projects have been realised within the framework of NCs but that this architecture has often remained invisible, poorly advertised and published, and thus unknown -Cohen, Brussels on our Doorstep.
inhabitants after so many years of participation citoyenne? Following our analysis of the previous chapter, the answer seems to direct towards a careful ‘yes’; the more now that Olivier Bastin, known for his architecture approach that is very close to citizen needs, and the everyday workings of space (e.g. Skate Park Ursulines, Neighbourhood Contracts, teaching at La Cambre...), has been appointed as the first Brussels Bouwmeester.

5. The collective in action: Brussels’ Neighbourhood Contracts

Let’s zoom in to Brussels’ most exercised instrument for urban renewal: the Neighbourhood Contracts. Through Neighbourhood Contracts (NC), the Brussels Capital Region aims to upgrade its most difficult neighbourhoods. This instrument is regionally allocated but locally applied, i.e. coordinated by the municipality. It is worth about 10,000,000 euros over four years and is funded by regional, community, federal, municipal, and European resources. NCs are particular for their integrative approach (housing, public space, social activities), and because participation of local inhabitants and associations is standard procedure within their development. Their success therefore depends on both the proper integration of the different needs and a proper diagnosis by letting the different stakeholders participate.

What I wanted to explore is the different agencies at work in this program: agency not understood as stakeholders within a governance structure, but as an ‘instrument (person or thing) used to secure some effect’;\(^\text{110}\) thus the agency of the architect/planner, the user of the building/city, public stakeholders, real estate developers; but also the agency of architecture projects, master plans, and regulations. One way to grasp the multifarious agencies at work, is by looking at the development of NCs in terms of experimenting, learning collectives, and by allocating agency to human as much as non-human actors, or things. However, my interest in non-human actors is not limited to the (rather convenient) allocation of agency to the products of architecture and urbanism - ‘Look, my building acts!’ – but also to that army of agencies involved in the production process.

Therefore, I was particularly interested in connecting the agency of things with the notion of ‘fluidity’. Bruno Latour does so when defining the social as ‘a momentary association, characterised by the way it gathers together forming new shapes’.\(^\text{111}\) A social world is then understood as ‘an entanglement of interactions, as in “associations” rather than “social ties”’.\(^\text{112}\) Making objects participant in action is possible only when an actor is defined as ‘any thing that modifies a state of affairs by making a difference [...] in the course of some


\(^{111}\) Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, p. 65.

\(^{112}\) Ibid., pp. 64–65.
other agent’s action'. In the social sciences, objects might have been long considered ‘humble servants, living on the margins of the social, doing most of the work, but never allowed to be represented as such […] because action was delimited a priori to what ‘intentional’, ‘meaningful’ humans do’. In spatial disciplines, by contrast, it does not seem too strange (as it might seem for sociologists) that objects, too, have agency, and that one is to accept them as full-blown actors. Such objects-with-agency can be found, very simply, in the design mode of benches. Benches act differently when they have a traditional, stereotypical form, a form that discourages one from sleeping on them (anti-homeless benches), or a form encouraging flexible usage.

Since, as I will soon explain, both human and non-human elements clearly play a role in ‘building the collective’, one has to drop the distinction between material and social. This is why Latour replaces ‘society’ by ‘collective’ and defines the social as ‘a fluid visible only when new associations are being made’. In order to understand objects properly, one has to drop the disciplinary polemics about distinguishing one part of the object as developed by scientists and engineers, from another side – the ‘human dimension’ – as explored by sociologists. This is demonstrated by the fact that sociologists often address the problems in NC negotiation as a participation problem, or as a problem of political governance and democracy. This focus on mismatched participation, at ‘the human dimension’, hides – as I will try to show here - the real problems underneath that are related to project ‘engineering’, or (common) knowledge production. It hides the fact that the very object of participation is increasingly reduced to trivial aspects, such as the colour of benches or type of trees, while essential issues are discussed between experts and engineers. It conceals that the real problem in participation is that it does not allow full integration of agencies across knowledge levels, and that what appears as a democratic deficit, is in fact often an engineering constraint.

In a still more explicit manner, the connection between the agency of things and fluidity has been worked out by Annemarie Mol and Marianne de Laet, in their description of the behaviour of the Zimbabwe ‘B’ type Bush Pump as a ‘fluid object’. Why their interest

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113 Ibid., p. 71.
114 Ibid., p. 73; p. 71.
115 A good example is Xaveer de Geyter Architects’ design for benches for the Pont du Gard site in Nîmes (France), as large concrete surfaces on which one can sit, lie down, picnic, etc. See Geert Bekert (ed.) Xaveer De Geyter Architects – 12 Projects, pp. 54–61.
116 Bruno Latour, Reassembling the Social, p. 79.
117 Ibid., p. 83.
in the Bush Pump? By analysing the pump, de Laet and Mol added to the Social Studies of Science debate a demonstration of what it means to be an *actor*. Instead of the classical actor – a well-bounded, sane, and centred human figure, *Rational Man* – de Laet and Mol introduce the Bush Pump. They explore how the pump *acts* as an actor and demonstrate how the pump, rather than being well bounded, is entangled in a variety of worlds – both in its performance and in its nature. But, so they state, to be able to *act* in its entanglements, the Bush Pump has to be ‘fluid’: adaptable, flexible, and responsive. Thus, de Laet and Mol conclude that if they can demonstrate that the Bush Pump is an ‘actor’, despite its fluidity, then ‘actors’ no longer *need* clear-cut boundaries. Instead, actors can be non-rational, non-human and they can be fluid without losing their agency. Or, in the words of Donna Haraway: ’objects are boundary projects.’ Their analysis of the pump as a ‘fluid object’ allows several characteristics of an *acting* object to unravel: from its design and conception, up to its implementation, performance, and maintenance. Then what can we learn about the acting of Brussels’ Neighbourhood Contracts?

5.1. When objects (Neighbourhood Contracts) act

To describe the Bush Pump, de Laet and Mol state, means to describe its *model*, its *looks*, and its *technical mechanisms*.

As the pump *model* is variable over time - the current model results from restyling and improving an older manually operated water pump - so Neighbourhood Contracts (NC), as we have seen, did not just ‘pop up’ in the Brussels planning context, but were the outcome of older urban renewal try outs. What makes them *different* is not so much that

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earlier within the frame of the article Isabelle Doucet, ‘[Centrality] and/or Cent[rality’.


121 Ibid.

122 Ibid., p. 227.


124 Therefore, the structure of my analysis of Neighbourhood Contracts will follow carefully the criteria according to which de Laet and Mol have unravelled their Bush Pump.


126 Brussels’ attempts towards more integrative planning were crystallised by the approval of the Regional Development Plan (GewOP 1995 and 2001), as a more visionary plan compared to the existing statutory planning of the Regional Area Destination (GBP). In this Regional Development Plan, a *city project* was developed for integrative urban renewal. NCs can be seen since 1994, together with municipal development plans (GemOP), as local applications of this *city project*. But in fact, their roots go further back in time, as they replace and extend Residential Core Renewal program.
they are to be developed in common thought but that the instrument officially foresees a negotiation structure involving the different stakeholders.

The pump can also be described according to its visible characteristics, its looks. The current model is cheerfully blue, attractive, and appealing, and this will prove to be crucial to its success. NCs, too, are made increasingly appealing. The current generation of NCs, those of the last couple of years, has introduced a ‘logo’ for each individual NC. This logo allows immediate recognition of the NC when represented in the local press, in mail correspondence, etc. Its ‘looks’ are mainly used for communication purposes. In some cases, special local newspapers were set up. In other cases, the installation of a local (information) office proved fruitful. In the very latest model, this set-up of a local office has become obligatory, in order to add to its visibility in the quarter.

But the pump is more than its looks. The mechanics of the pump are largely related to its invisible parts: the underground hydraulic system. However, so de Laet and Mol state, this hydraulic system does not necessarily make the pump unique, since the pump is part of a family of pumps with a similar hydraulic system. What makes it unique is its capacity and durability. If one wants to describe the pump in terms of its difference from other pumps, one needs to recognise that it always has similarities with some others. ‘Being itself’ means that it is also in line with a number of others. Likewise, the functioning of a NC (its mechanics) is for a large part to be defined by its ‘orchestrated’ character. NCs are predefined or orchestrated in detail on the regional level, by means of an official ‘Cahier des Charges’ or ‘specifications sheet’, but they are locally applied. As such, they, too, are always ‘specific’ but ‘similar’. As we will soon come to discover, it is precisely this ‘orchestrated’ character of the mechanism of NCs that influences their (perceived) success or failure.

5.2. What makes objects (Neighbourhood Contracts) act?

When the Bush Pump is delivered to site, it is not yet a pump. To be able to deliver water, de Laet and Mol argue, it has to be assembled and installed. But to be able to deliver clean water, it has to be assembled and installed properly. What determines the successful delivery of clean water is not so much the hydraulic principle of the pump, but the fact that health is generated. It is hence health indicators rather than the pump’s mechanics or looks that will measure its success. And to generate health, clean water thus, it is crucial to install properly (on site) in particular the headworks of the pump. An improper installation can

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128 Ibid., p. 231.

129 Ibid, pp. 231–33.
result, for example, in wastewater flowing into the system. But what is required first of all is to find the right spot for drilling the hole. And this activity is community based. Without community participation it is impossible to find and drill the hole. Not only because the drilling requires more than one person but also because the local ‘spiritual powers’ of the village leader play a crucial role in identifying the place to drill.

Even if the structure (and mechanism) of NCs is ‘orchestrated’ by the Brussels’ Regional Government, they are installed and assembled in the concrete local context of a neighbourhood. Based on observations of NCs and interviews with involved actors, I could conclude that it is precisely this local installation that is often problematic. NCs foresee a negotiation structure during the set-up phase, in which the different stakeholders are involved: planners, local and regional public stakeholders, local associations, and inhabitants. By observing these negotiation processes, a recurring phenomenon could be identified, namely that debates often tend to polarise between planners and politicians versus inhabitants. It could also be observed that the needs, as indicated by the users of the neighbourhood, are not always fully integrated into the common diagnosis, and are hence not adequately addressed.

The ‘orchestrated’ character of the negotiation structures and in particular their formation and functioning seemed to be an important factor in the problematic implementation of NCs. This is the case because the formation of NCs is regionally predefined, while locally applied. The way this application is carried out determines for a large part the quality of the negotiation, and hence of the learning curve of common knowledge construction. Therefore, the formation, functioning, and implementation of NCs bear closer observation.

Only 25% of the total project time of four years is dedicated to the negotiation and setting-up of the programme. This allows little time for a thorough diagnosis and for ‘hands-on’ debates around concrete possibilities. As a result, debates remain vague and abstract and are mainly based on oral speeches rather than discussions of concrete material. Due to time pressure, discussions address generic, stereotypic themes, rather than experiments with specific solutions for specific neighbourhoods.

Who and how many are involved in the debates is predefined, too. Negotiation takes place in a ‘General Assembly’, open to the public, and in a ‘Local Commission for Integrated Development’, in which a restricted number of actors take part in the negotiation. Several public stakeholders take part in the debate, as well as a private planning office, selected by the municipality, established to set up the programme. According to predefined rules, a minimum number of inhabitants, associations, and entrepreneurs can take part. In reality, and for feasibility reasons, these numbers are often taken as a maximum, too. In the case of NC Kaaien/Les Quais, there were nine candidate associations for only a few seats.\textsuperscript{130} The

\textsuperscript{130} NC Kaaien/Les Quais is located in Brussels’ historical centre. All observations have been made possible,
selection was based on the geographical distribution of those associations, rather than on their thematic focus or target audience. As a consequence, organisations with a similar activity were selected. The fact that this specific central quarter is characterised by a more than average presence of cultural and socio-artistic organisations, could not be taken into account due to the generic, rigid ‘orchestrated’ frame. For the same reason, place-specific actors were excluded. A large refugee centre, le Petit Château, is located in this quarter, housing around 300 ‘inhabitants’. Though an important actor in this quarter, the ‘orchestrated model’ did not define such an actor-type. Being neither inhabitant nor association, and being neither local nor regional but a federal stakeholder, such an actor could not be officially included in debates.\footnote{131}

The content for discussion is also regionally defined, in the form of five thematic groups or – in French – ‘volets’. Three ‘volets’ invest in housing projects (social, public, private/public); another in public space; while the fifth ‘volet’ invests in socio-economic and socio-cultural initiatives.

The planning context is also delimited by a geographical perimeter, defined before the start-up of the NC. When, during the debates, a need is expressed to enlarge or adapt the perimeter, this is impossible: one cannot deviate from the ‘orchestrated’ space. Its boundaries are once again fixed! The extent to which the content is allowed to deviate from the ‘orchestrated’ frame depends on the flexibility of local and regional authorities. For example, in another NC, Aerschot-Progrès, which was trying to reconcile a red light district with residential streets, an urgent need was expressed to install urinoirs.\footnote{132} Since this type of ‘building’ did not fit into any of the five thematic frames, nor into standard urbanism procedures, it was a challenge to achieve their installation within the available time frame.

Though the legal, orchestrated framework is rigid on paper, it is nevertheless flexible in reality. Regional powers steer the process according to their own mindsets and beliefs. This can be directly, by changing the Cahier des Charges, or indirectly, by expressing their wishes during follow-up meetings with the municipalities.\footnote{133}

What becomes clear now is that the good functioning of a NC, just like the Bush...
Pump, depends on its *proper* application and assemblage in the local reality. Often this implementation sticks very literally to the generic model. But as the Bush Pump showed us, successful implementation has nothing to do with the correctness of implementation according to the predefined model, nor with the delivery of an ‘urban renewal plan’ (water) or even the ‘best urban renewal plan’ (*clean* water). What it is about is reaching the intended goals, namely a better, more liveable urban environment (health), *by means of* urban renewal (a pump giving clean water). One can conclude that NCs, despite all efforts, do not always manage to attain that goal. One of the reasons is that community participation is not considered crucial, in contrast with the Bush Pump, for which community integration is indeed crucial for drilling the hole. Although inhabitants and organisations are involved in the development of NCs, they are not *really* participating: a *common* diagnosis is not achieved. In the Brabant Quarter (NC *Aerschot-Progrès*), for example, the many socio-cultural projects that were financed by ‘volet 5’ of the NC made interesting achievements. Through socio-artistic initiatives with local inhabitants remarkable insights were gained into the specific needs and problems of that quarter. Nevertheless, the urban renewal programme did not fully enhance these insights and showed more interest in activity and financial reports than in the content produced. In other words, community participation is constantly ‘present’ in the development of NCs, but it is hardly ‘taken into account’. Even though participation would be considered successful, it does not guarantee knowledge being generated from it.

To describe the Bush Pump, one had to acknowledge that finding the right spot, drilling the hole, assembling the pump, and constructing the headworks are all ‘collective’ actions. The pump is nothing without the community! Consequently, one should accept that the pump’s boundaries *include* the villagers who install it.134 In contrast with the Bush Pump, the boundaries of a NC do not include the community but, instead, provide constant *exchange* with it. This difference between *inclusion* and *exchange* is important for understanding the meaning of ‘common thought’ for neighbourhood development. The very *definition* of negotiation by the Brussels government means ‘to bring the different actors involved around the negotiation table from the very start of the planning process.’ It acknowledges the importance of also ‘foreseeing a participative phase in the planning process in which the population is involved’, but it does so by ‘offering citizens the opportunity to get insight into the project and contribute to its development process’.135 This emphasis on informing (rather than negotiating) and on the distinction between the informed (inhabitants) and the informers (policy makers and experts), demonstrates once more the non-inclusive boundary of the

In the case of Zimbabwe, de Laet and Mol continue, the Bush Pump does not only build the community: clean water helps to build the nation too. In Zimbabwe, water distribution forms a social boundary: between those who have plumbing, those with water in their yards, and those who have to walk to get it. Providing a national water infrastructure can help dissolve those boundaries. The pump has become a national standard, which results in the fact that more and more villages replace the existing pumps with this ‘B’ type. When villages buy the pump, they hence not only help to provide clean water but also link up to the nation. The pump is designed, built, and assembled in Zimbabwe, and is tailored to local circumstances (for example, spare parts are available locally). So de Laet and Mol are dealing with a pump that is nation-building while at the same time remaining local. This is what makes the pump unique! The pump has ‘a number of possible boundaries: from a small device to an entire State’, while the fluidity of its boundaries ‘does not mean it is random or vague: they each enact a different Bush Pump’. NCs, by contrast, do not have fluid boundaries. Their boundaries are rigid and fixed. Who and what is included is clearly predefined by the regional powers. Only in rare cases are the boundaries of NCs adaptive, and then mainly from the point of view of its makers (the regional power), rather than as a response to application needs. The implementation of a NC could be more accurate if its boundaries were allocated more flexibility; the inclusion of non-standard actors and themes could be guaranteed; the local community could be genuinely integrated; and neighbourhood-specific needs could be accounted for.

5.3. What makes objects (Neighbourhood Contracts) act successfully?

If one concludes that the pump is indeed an actor, one may wonder: does it also work? The importance of delivering ‘health’ over ‘clean water’ over ‘water’, has been emphasised already. But how can one judge whether ‘health’ is delivered successfully? First of all, maintenance of the pump is crucial for guaranteeing health. In the case of the Bush Pump, therefore, one can take it to pieces and repair it locally, without harming crucial parts and without the need for a highly specialised and skilled team. New models of the pump have

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136 One step towards more appropriate urban renewal programmes is to enlarge their boundaries, and to include the community as a crucial partner. Without the community, proper urban renewal can be delivered, though a better urban environment is not necessarily achieved.


138 Ibid., p. 235.

139 Ibid., p. 237.

140 Ibid., p. 238.
brought in innovations, precisely in the sphere of maintenance. Secondly, to question whether the pump works is to question whether it provides health. Following the official health standards is hard in the Zimbabwean context, where the pump’s functioning alters over time (rain/dry season), and where questions of health are relative, not absolute. Since standards not only create but also require uniformity, and since such uniformity is lacking in the Zimbabwe context, standards hardly apply. Therefore, the important question is, how meaningful are standards in practice. As de Laet and Mol clearly indicate, criteria for success and failure judgement are not clear-cut but depend on whether one prioritises providing water or health to build communities or a nation.

In the same way, one may wonder what defines the success or failure of a Neighbourhood Contract? A NC aims at both physical renewal of a quarter (housing, public space) and social development. These aims are very different in approach, and cannot therefore be judged by the same standards. If a NC is to be evaluated, many different criteria must be accounted for. A neighbourhood can be physically improved, thanks to a NC, while at the same time socially twisted. Rather than solutions-with-stones, other types of intervention might be as important for developing problematic neighbourhoods. Local inhabitants often suggest such alternative interventions during the negotiation process of a NC. Then, when is a NC successful? Is it successful when it contributes to the neighbourhood’s ‘looks’? When social and cultural initiatives manage to collect knowledge about the quarter or carry out successful interventions, even if this knowledge is not used further? Is an NC successful when employment is created during its development phase, even if it drops down again after the 4-year programme is finished? If negotiation amongst stakeholders ends up in frustrated debates, is the NC then still a success? Is a NC successful if its four-year work is not continued?

Answering whether NCs are successful is difficult since it depends not only on their legal framework but also on a whole series of specific neighbourhood conditions. As with the Bush Pump, it is sometimes the ‘identity of the users that is most important in determining whether the pump works or not’: rather than a binary boundary between success and failure there are only ‘fluid transitions’. But if fluidity does not seem to help us in judging success or failure, what then is the point of investigating it? What is the role of fluidity? Why is it important that objects are fluid?

De Laet and Mol observed that the Bush Pump both requires and constitutes a

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141 Ibid., p. 243.
142 Ibid., p. 243.
143 For example, when real estate prices increase and quarters gentrify.
It is when it fails that the pump especially needs the community for its survival. If the pump does not manage to constitute a community, it might fall into disrepair. Still, the pump can survive: through private ownership, though not part of the government’s intentions, the pump could be saved. Thus, the pump can survive precisely thanks to its own fluidity, its adaptability. When ‘fluidity’ allows objects to survive in changing circumstances should planning instruments also become more ‘fluid’, more adaptive, and flexible to changing circumstances?

‘Fluidity’ adds another value related to its maker, its designer. The Bush Pump’s designer never claimed authorship. According to de Laet and Mol, this has not only to do with modesty, but with the fact that ‘by granting it to “the people”, this contributed to the pump’s success. The Pump has no name attached to it: it is in the public domain’. And not paying for a name means offering ‘affordable’ technology. What the designer dropped is any aim at ‘controlling’ the lifetime of his product. He abandons the status of ‘master-mind’ and accepts a lack of ‘control’ in implementation. He allows for surprises and accepts that things can go wrong. In the example of the Bush Pump, the decision where to drill the hole is supported by GIS systems and engineers; but the real central importance is dedicated to the village: the well-to-be-made, the future users, and the advice of the village ‘Nganga’. It is the Nganga (the spiritual leader of the village) who decides when drilling can start, after the engineers have done their work. Engineers have become mere ‘facilitators’ or ‘peripheral agents, no longer “central” to the activity’. The designer of the pump can work the pump precisely because he is not central to it. If in urban planning, too, some agents were made more ‘peripheral’, more centrality could be allocated to common diagnosis and collective action, in which different types of knowledge coincide. What the analysis of the Bush Pump ultimately teaches us is the importance of a shift in centrality (as a state-of-mind) for the success of the actions we take. By making certain agents and agencies more ‘peripheral’ – in some stages of a planning process, for example – centrality can be allocated to what is really at stake.

145 Ibid., p. 245.
146 Ibid., p. 246.
147 Ibid., p. 247.
148 Ibid., p. 250.
149 Ibid., p. 249.
150 Ibid., p. 250.
151 Ibid., p. 250-51.
152 Ibid., p. 251.
6. From participatory to fluid design

In this chapter we have seen how a shift from participatory to fluid design processes allows for the integration of a much broader set of agencies in the design process than either the people or the experts; either democracy or design. ‘Fluidity’ allowed us to look beyond the classical participation of the Neighbourhood Contracts. And yet, the issue still remains more complex. In the next chapter, we will discover how this broader set of agencies contains yet more surprises.
Fourth Entr’acte

The fourth chapter attempted to challenge our traditional definitions of participation, by looking at participatory tools in terms of ‘fluid objects’. By so doing, it questioned the boundaries of what is and what is not considered as part of the ‘participatory project’ - and thus, of what is and what is not incorporated in architecture’s engagement with the real. The fifth and last chapter of this dissertation, ‘Beyond Participation: Following the Traces Left Behind by Fluid Boundaries’, pushes this one step further, namely by allocating agency to seemingly straightforward, hardly significant, even banal actors, such as language, or abbreviations.

It will also look into the building process of a modest building project, a public urinoir, which is often positioned, at best, only at the margins of official urban planning processes. By analysing how, and to what extent, such a banal building is allocated agency within official, participatory planning, this chapter will call into question some of the traditional (disciplinary) assumptions regarding top-down versus bottom-up architecture and planning; software versus hardware of space; and democratic versus technological deficits.

Finally, this chapter will, by means of the analysis of everyday, popular literature, complete the analysis of Brussels’ ‘fear of the new’. Whereas the first and third chapter have explained the complex workings of the ‘fear of the new’ within Brussels’ architecture culture; we will now look into its agency from the point of view of Brussels’ everyday. In order to understand why, for example in participatory meetings, Brussels’ citizens often bring an unspoken but remarkably real hatred of architects, planners and (seemingly) everything they produce; this chapter will retrace two of Brussels’ major agents of the ‘fear of the new’: the curse word Architek, and Bruxellisation, the phenomenon that pinpoints Brussels’ modernisation and demolition traumas.

Rather than retracing the origins of such fears, this chapter shows a principal interest in the maintenance, the survival, and the consolidation of that fear, via popular literature, over large periods of time. It is in this chapter that we will discover that actors such as architek are, more than a century after its creation, still ‘alive and kicking’.
Fourth Entr'acte
Chapter Five

Beyond Participation: Following the Traces Left Behind by Fluid Boundaries

In the previous chapter we have seen that both de Laet and Mol’s Zimbabwe Bush Pump and Latour’s acknowledgement that ‘objects too have agency’, allow us to understand that we are dealing with something more than the mere allocation of agency to objects, things, or non-humans. The fluidity of things (such as Neighbourhood Contracts), and the flexibility of their boundaries, allows us to learn something about an object’s interaction and engagement with the worlds that surround it. It tells us something about the kind of actorship technologies may have. By following the many traces that are left within the orchestrated space of Neighbourhood Contract negotiation, we can learn something about the exchange with the outside world, and about the laboratories at work outside but affective within the framework of Neighbourhood Contracts. Indeed, as in the case of the Bush Pump, the ‘mechanics of fluid technology’ imply that ‘the boundaries of the Bush Pump are not solid or definite but “fluid”’.¹ What is therefore needed, are good images for boundaries, because the traditional link between ‘far away’ and ‘different’, and between ‘proximate’ and ‘same’ no longer holds; and because boundaries, in terms of geography (here and there) and identity (me and you), no longer map onto one another.² According to Annemarie Mol and John Law, a boundary is not only both inclusive and exclusive,³ but the social world, as much as the biological one, is filled with semi-permeable boundaries (social clubs, castes, shopping malls, etc.). What Mol and Law demonstrate is that the complexity of boundaries and the work of making gradients are crucial both to biological cells and to social beings.

When extending such confrontations between the notion of ‘fluidity’ and the traces left through shifting boundaries to urban renewal, one can start exploring a few additional lines of inquiry that are often excluded from research on urban governance or participation. The aim of this fifth and final chapter is to explore some of these lines, which I have organised according to the traces that I have come across during my empirical work on Brussels in general, and Neighbourhood Contracts, in particular. A first line points to the impact of legislative and technological constraints on the ‘failure of participation’. A second line deals with the insertion of everyday knowledge into orchestrated space and the impact of (unexpected) everyday actors (Architek, Bruxellisation). A third line refers to the stubborn presence of traditionalism and Reconstruction de la Ville ideas in both the minds and instruments of policy makers; a line that has been followed into detail in the first chapter, and

³ Ibid., p. 640.
will thus not be addressed here.

1. Software or hardware, bottom-up or top-down, democratic or technological deficit?

Frustrations in orchestrated space often typically relate to the fact that experts are seemingly preoccupied with all sorts of technical problems, with the ‘hardware’ of space – *les briques* – while they seemingly ignore the needs identified by inhabitants. Particularly in deprived neighbourhoods, needs are often more ‘software’ in nature and related to liveability issues: security issues, dirty streets, lack of green or public spaces. Since, in certain contexts, software solutions are not only perceived as more urgent, but also as easier to implement than hardware problems, it has a doubly frustrating effect when they fail to get implemented. However, such hardware-versus-software presumptions hardly correspond with the far more complex set of agencies at stake in their implementation. Therefore, I would like to have a look at the development of the Neighbourhood Contract *Aerschot-Progrès*, and in particular the interventions in the *Rue d’Aerschot*, a major prostitution street in Brussels. Let me first introduce the neighbourhood we are dealing with: the *Quartier Brabant*.

The *Rue d’Aerschot* forms, together with the *Rue de Brabant*, the major street in the Brabant Quarter. Whereas the *Rue d’Aerschot* is known as the Brussels Red Light District (sixty prostitution bars along one street); the *Rue de Brabant* is frequented as a major ethnic shopping street (Turkish and Moroccan food, interior, furniture, fashion, and music). Since the area has for a long time been morphologically, economically, and politically isolated, the *Rue de Brabant* could occupy a core position within trans-national ethnic networks; while the window prostitution of the *Rue d’Aerschot* grew entangled with criminal and human-trade networks. The quarter is located to the rear of the North Station, and has gradually been isolated from its surrounding context: for historical reasons - loss of several visual and functional links with the city centre, and as the rear of the North Railway station – but also for

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4 The *Rue de Brabant* is particularly frequented during the weekends when people come from all over the country (also ‘white’ clients like to benefit from good prices, fake products, and exotic food) while Moroccan and Turkish clients travel from France or the Netherlands to buy wedding dresses, household (the street forms an important node in an international network of ethnic trading). See also Tim Cassiers, *Transnationale banden en etnisch ondernemerschap*, thesis Social Geography KUL; Tim cassiers, Christian Kesteloot, and Henk Meert, ‘Enkele ideeën voor de toekomst van de Brabantstraat, op basis van bezoeken aan Parijs, Londen en Amsterdam’, in: *Toekomstvisie Brabantstraat*, Onderzoeksrapport ISEG – KUL; Tim Cassiers, ‘Overlegplatform KBS Brabantwijk: Syntheserapport n.a.v. uitstappen Parijs, Londen, en Amsterdam’, in: *Overlegplatform Brabantwijk*: Koning Boudewijn Stichting, report.

5 An absence of policy interest, investment, and control generated a political ‘gap’, which created a breeding ground for self-organising, ethnic entrepreneurship, functioning independently from the established distribution, financial, and fiscal flows. Cassiers, *Transnationale banden en etnisch ondernemerschap*.

6 The sixty bars in the *Rue d’Aerschot* are mainly exploited by pimps (‘forced prostitution’), whereas prostitutes in the smaller back streets of the neighbourhood work independently in so-called *carrés* (150 in total – numbers taken from: Procès-verbal (PV) of the PCGO (Plaatselijke Commissie voor Geïntegreerde Ontwikkeling) / CLDI (Commission Locale de Développement Intégré) of 28/02/2002, Neighbourhood Contract *Aerschot-Progrès*.
having been abandoned for a long time by policy makers and investors. Due to such negligence, its infrastructure is old and badly maintained, but nevertheless intensely used: by Rue d’Aerschot and Rue de Brabant clients, and by significant fluxes of students and commuters who cross the quarter on a daily basis to and from the station and the office/school. Moreover, despite its 24/7 and supra-local functioning, the quarter has a strong residential function too. As one of the most densely populated quarters of Brussels, it is home to a mainly immigrant population (52%), housed in poorly maintained housing. The ‘locally’ isolated character of the quarter, in contrast with its transit-character and supra-local embedding, is perhaps best demonstrated by the proximate/distant relationship of the Rue de Brabant with the Rue Neuve, another major shopping street, located within walking distance of the Rue de Brabant, planned as its prolongation, but nevertheless mentally and visually cut off by Lazarus Square and the railway tracks. Even if the Rue de Brabant is also called the ‘Turkish Rue Neuve’, typical Rue Neuve customers, even when arriving at the North Station, have trouble finding the Rue de Brabant. By contrast, ethnic communities from far beyond national borders find the Rue de Brabant easily. Additionally, the Rue d’Aerschot and the Rue de Brabant have been associated with crime, primarily because of the trading of imitation brand products, and goods that had ‘fallen off the back of a truck’ (a way to name dubious, often illegal imports).

In other words, ‘living’ is a challenge in such a neighbourhood, and particularly so in the streets perpendicular to, and connecting the Rue d’Aerschot and Rue de Brabant, for they receive the overload of both: waste is dumped (empty boxes of purchased goods, litter) by Rue de Brabant clients; and drugs- and sex-industry-related litter, criminality, and overload, such as public urination. One of the major challenges of the Neighbourhood Contract Aerschot-Progrès (2001-2005) was therefore to restore the residential character and living quality of these perpendicular streets. Two elements in this Neighbourhood Contract are of

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7 The Brabant quarter is bordered by the Brussels’ city centre (the Pentagon’s inner ring road), the Gare du Nord, the Rue Royale and the Rue des Palais, and is, administratively, located on both Schaarbeek and Sint-Joost-ten-Node municipal soil. Most transformations took place between 1919 and 1952, when the North Station was moved 300 metres backwards from the Place Rogier due to the creation of the North-South railway junction, where it had been located since 1844; and when the Lazarus Boulevard was created. These works contributed to the morphological isolation of the quarter because they disrupted the visual and functional link of the Rue de Brabant with the city centre. In addition, due to the Manhattan Plan, from 1967, on the other side of the railway station, a visual, hierarchical discrepancy arose between the station’s front and rear. Those developments, initially causing the Brabant Quarters’ physical isolation from the city centre, have also indirectly led to the quarter’s marginalisation in mental, social, and economic terms. Sources used, include Lagrou and Dubois, Stationssteden; De Corte, Wijkfiche 1: Brabantwijk and Wijkfiche 7: Noordwijk; De Corte and De Lannoy, Brusselse Woontypologie - Inventaris September 1999; Naegels, Onderzoek naar de leefbaarheid in de Transitwijk Schaarbeek; Lagrou and Willemyns, Brabantwijk: leven in de schaduw van de grootstad; Kesteloot, Valorisatie Brabantwijk. For complete references: see bibliography.

8 The Rue Neuve is a more mainstream shopping street. An example from Brussel.blogt.be, 10/9/2005, ‘Since long I want to go there [Rue de Brabant], is it far from City 2 [shopping centre at Rue Neuve]? Can I get there when getting of the train at the North Station? [Response:] It’s closer to the North Station than City 2! But you have to leave the station at the “back side” which leads you first to the Rue Aerschot, on itself worthwhile a visit :-).”
particular interest with regard to the software-hardware question: the proposal to safeguard the residential character of the side streets of the Rue d’Aerschot, by treating the corner buildings, and the requests for a quite particular ‘building’, namely a public urinoir (urinal).  

The major intervention within the Rue d’Aerschot consisted of the treatment of the corner buildings with its side streets, as a way of avoiding prostitution creeping into these residential streets. Since legal urbanism instruments such as a BPA/PPAS were not available, the municipality opted for spatial solutions, including the prohibition of new bars (commerces de charme) in the side-streets (by not allocating building and exploitation permissions), and the prohibition of vitrines in the corner buildings (at the side of the side-streets). The idea was to convert the corner buildings as much as possible into residential buildings, either by buying the building, or by forcing the owner to renovate the façade, close the vitrine in the side-street, and create housing. If no agreements could be made, the municipality would start expropriation. New constructions, built on these corners by the municipality, introduced architectural solutions that allowed the creation of housing on the ground floors, such as by elevating the windows (to avoid being able to view in from the street and thus the vitrine-effect). After several years of Neighbourhood Contract, this ‘trick’ with the corner buildings was perceived as less than successful: one inhabitant observed that the windows on the side streets were still for the most part occupied by ‘des filles en petites tenues’; while other inhabitants regretted that much of the planned expropriations had not been effectuated.

In particular Grégoire Kirreef (Projet Rousseau) and Françoise Deville (Renovas) have made this analysis possible, by making all documents and meeting reports related to Neighbourhood Contract Aerschot-Progrès at my disposal, and by readily answering my numerous questions.

10 ‘Afin de faciliter la poursuite des objectifs du Contrat de Quartier (évincer les bars des rues adjacentes) en permettant la relocalisation des bars évices des angles vers le linéaire-même de la rue d’Aerschot, afin également de permettre la réhabilitation de certains immeubles quasi abandonnés de la rue d’Aerschot, il est proposé de...’, decision of 13/01/2004 by the municipality of Schaarbeek – ‘Ajout’ au Procès-verbal (PV) of the CLDI 19/01/2004 (Neighbourhood Contract Aerschot-Progrès), p. 5.

11 Ibid.

12 E.g. in relation to the two corner buildings at the corner Aerschot-Liedts: ‘Le niveau du rez-de-chaussée est surélevé par rapport au niveau de la rue et la visibilité directe est réduite de manière à dissocier quelque peu l’habitat de l’activité de la Rue d’Aerschot.’ – PV CLDI 21/10/2004, p. 4.

13 ‘[Mr. X] a constaté lors d’une de ses promenades que les vitrines situées dans les rues perpendiculaires à la rue d’Aerschot accueillaient pour la plupart des filles en petites tenues.’ – PV, CLDI 21/04/2004, p. 3.

14 ‘Depuis l’étude de base, de la Cooparch avant le lancement du Cq A-P, on parlait déjà de cette volonté aux niveaux des batiments d’angles. Or, certains membres de la CLDI à l’heure actuelle, ont le sentiment que: premièrement, la plupart des expropriations programmées ne pourront être réalisées et deuxièmement que ces mesures présentent une part d’injustice du fait qu’elles ne concernent plus que certains tenanciers de bars.’ – Procès-verbal, CLDI 21/04/2004, p. 3.
Image 16: The Aarschot Street (along the Railway tracks), the Brabant Street (diagonal) and the perpendicular streets connecting them.

2. The incredible adventures of an infamous building: the public urinoir

In addition to the corner renovations, public space interventions were also planned for the Rue d’Aerschot and its side-streets - enlarged pavements, two urinoirs, trashcans, new street lighting – partly intended to emphasise the boundary between the prostitution and residential area - for example by means of different pavement and street surface treatments.\(^\text{16}\) The difference in status between the housing renovations (les briques) and the public space interventions (more software), is not only embedded within the organisation of Neighbourhood Contract’s – volet 1, 2, and 3 being dedicated to housing projects, volet 4 to public space, and volet 5 to social and cultural interventions - but also in the formatting of the meeting accounts (called Procès-verbal or PV) of the different CLDI’s/PCGO’s: the participatory meetings within the Neighbourhood Contract.\(^\text{17}\)

From 27 February 2003, the first CLDI after the Avis de la Commission de Concertation, overview lists appear on the meeting reports and offer, for each CLDI, an updated status of each of the planned renovations: purchasing ideas communicated to the owner, proposals for renovation by the owner, expropriation procedure, started construction… The Avis de la Commission de Concertation had largely confirmed the ‘software’ requests that had been around since the very start of the NC. During the enquête publique, treated by the Commission de Concertation, requests had been formulated for a more frequent cleaning of the streets – ‘cette impression permanente de saleté’ – for more trashcans, street lights, urinoirs; and complaints were made about noise annoyances, and waste dumps.\(^\text{18}\) Such ‘software’ requests had been formulated on several occasions, and in several ways: from ‘ce mur sert déjà d’urinoir spontané’ (Procès-verbal CLDI 26/3/2002, p. 3), to ‘le quartier est très sale (sauf lorsque le roi passé)’ (PV CLDI 9/10/2002, p. 4).\(^\text{19}\) It was argued that all the ‘nice proposals’ formulated by the Neighbourhood Contract (the planned building renovations), would make no sense without also more frequent street cleaning, and without addressing the many other software problems the quarter suffers from.\(^\text{20}\)

Throughout the meeting reports, systematic updates are kept about all the ‘hardware’

\(^{16}\) ‘Cet aménagement est prévu […] de créer une separation perceptible entre la rue d’Aerschot et ses perpendiculaires’ – Procès-verbal, CLDI 10/12/2002, p. 3.

\(^{17}\) Plaatselijke Commissie voor Geïntegreerde Ontwikkeling/Commission Locale de Développement Intégré.

\(^{18}\) An Enquête publique was organised between 24/11/2002 and 23/12/2002; the Avis de Commission de Concertation was formulated on 10/1/2003 and included in the Procès-verbal of the CLDI of 23/01/2003.

\(^{19}\) In this meeting, the problem of the ‘dépôt clandestin entre le tunnel du tram et le chemin de fer’ was also mentioned, as well as the problem that ‘les poubelles sont beaucoup trop peu nombreuses et ne sont pas vidées très souvent’. A request was formulated to invite Bruxelles-Propreté to the meetings and create an action ‘pour sensibiliser les personnes à ne plus uriner sur le coin Hoogvorst-Aerschot’ (Procès-verbal, CLDI 9/10/2002, p. 4).

\(^{20}\) ‘Il ne sert à rien de faire ces superbes aménagements si l’on ne prévoit pas un nettoyage quotidien’, Avis de la Commission de Concertation, 10 January 2003.
From Penser la Ville to Faire la Ville

interventions (building renovations), even if these hardly change over time: expropriation procedures are slow and difficult; owners are in the process of making amendments to their buildings (renovation of façades, closing of vitrines). Remarkably, a similar ‘rational’ updating has not been applied to the ‘software’ interventions. Reports on interventions within the volets 4 and 5, including many of the very core requests of the inhabitants, somehow trail after the tables in a less systematic manner [image 18]. And yet, such seemingly simple suggestions proved to be not so simple to realise after all. Let’s follow, for example, what seemed like a quite straightforward intervention: the installation of public urinoirs. The plan to install two public urinoirs in the Rue d’Aerschot, was connected to questions regarding their location, maintenance, and design.

A first question was: where to install them in order that they would also be used?21 For example, one urinoir was planned at the crossing of the Rue d’Aerschot with the Philippe Thomas Tunnel that goes under the railway tracks. Considered an ideal location by the designers - for being one of the few places where the pavement is large enough to allow the installation of an urinoir – inhabitants declared that the worst possible location: it was considered unlikely that anyone would use a urinoir in such a dark and unsafe spot.22

Another intricacy that recurred repeatedly had to do with the maintenance of the urinoirs: maintained by whom? Can the Municipality do it? How?23 That such questions were not easy to resolve was demonstrated by the long ‘building process’ of the urinoirs. The urinoirs, and in particular their maintenance, would recur regularly in meetings, and evoke mounting frustration vis-à-vis their protracted development.24 Whereas the public works in the Rue d’Aerschot developed quite well, the urinoirs remained the major spoiler, because the municipality was both technically and budget-wise not able to secure their maintenance. Because public services no longer provide for the cleaning of public toilets (because public toilets have long since disappeared), expensive outsourcing solutions had to be explored.25

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21 The location of trashcans along the talus of the railway tracks was also questioned by inhabitants: nobody uses that side of the street because the vitrines are on the opposite side – Procès-verbal, CLDI 10/12/2002, p. 4.


24 E.g. the ‘manque d’urinoirs’ is classified under ‘problèmes structurels’ (Procès-verbal, CLDI 27/02/2003, p. 5); ‘la nécessité de construire rapidement des urinoirs en nombre suffisant et localizations diverses est à nouveau rappelée par les participants de la CLDI’ (PV, CLDI 19/02/2004, p. 6); ‘les urinoirs attendus de longue date ne sont toujours pas installés. Il a été fait mention de ce problème plusieurs fois en CLDI’ (PV, CLDI 27/01/2005, p. 6).

25 ‘A l’heure actuelle, la commune n’a pas les moyens financiers de garantir son entretien. Néanmoins, un accord est en passe d’etre conclu avec la Société de mobilier urbain qui se chargerait de cette aspect en contrepartie de
plusieurs encarts publicitaires sur cet espace.’ (Procès-verbal, CLDI 19/01/2004, pp. 5-6). One month later:
‘Problème: les urinoirs publics ont aujourd’hui totalement disparu, aussi se pose la question de leur entretien et la Commune ne dispose pas de services prévus pour cette tâche.’ (PV, CLDI 19/02/2004, p. 6). Ten months later the problem is still not solved, but meanwhile the municipality had launched a price tender for maintenance: ‘Le chantier est finalisé [...] seule reste la question des urinoirs publics [...] Un cahier des charges a été remis par la commune à trois entreprises publicitaires qui assurait l’entretien de ces latrines en échange d’espaces publicitaires.’ (PV, CLDI 21/10/2004, p. 7). After all, a solution was not found: ‘la commune ne parvient pas à une solution satisfaisante pour l’entretien de ces installations.’ (PV, CLDI 27/01/2005, p. 6).
Moreover, time pressure would mount because the Service public fédéral de la mobilité et des transports (SPFMT), which was responsible for the public works at the Rue d’Aerschot, lost patience and made an ultimatum for finalising the building site: ‘with or without the urinoirs’. If until then, for more than two years, debates had taken place on the maintenance, and in relation to that, the design of the urinoirs, there only remained time for ‘urgent measures’, the ‘immediate installation’, and thus for compromises – a ‘provisional solution’.

Such compromise was found in the form of daily cleaning ‘au Kärcher’, provided by the Agence Bruxelles-Propreté, the regional cleaning service. The given deadline of March 2005 was nevertheless further postponed to May 2005, then to the autumn of 2005, and finally to late 2005 – early 2006. These delays were explained by ‘several difficulties’ having to do with maintenance, and with the constructor’s request to make a flat rather than sloping roof (!).

In November 2005, even if the roof had still to be installed, the urinoirs were finally operational. It took all of this to realise a modest building, of seemingly modest complexity and scale, and of a very modest aesthetic ambition. It took all this to solve a seemingly simple software problem. In other words: an impressive building process for a not too impressive

26 SPFMT accepted the works provisionally on 22/12/2004, and allowed a final deadline extension for March 2005, when ‘le chantier sera refermé, que les urinoirs soient installés ou pas.’ – Procès-verbal, CLDI 27/01/2005, p. 6.

27 E.g. proposals to remove their roof, reduce the height of their walls to 1.5 meter, and add appropriate lighting - Avis de la Commission de Concertation, 10/1/2003; and all sorts of cleaning-issues that influenced design.

28 ‘La commune doit prendre des mesures d’urgence pour ne pas en compromettre définitivement la réalisation. Il faudrait ainsi procéder à l’installation immédiate des urinoirs et à une solution d’entretien provisoire, le temps d’arriver à une solution durable selon le mode envisagé au départ.’ – PV, CLDI 27/01/2005, p. 6, bold in original.


33 A similarly long and difficult process took place regarding other software problems, such as better street cleaning strategies; the installation of more trashcans and the fight against waste dumps. At a certain point, a new chapter ‘propreté dans le quartier’, was created in the meeting reports (from Procès-verbal, CLDI 27/02/2003); work groups were created around the theme ‘propreté’ (PV, PCGO 19/02/2004).
building [image 19]. But the story doesn’t finish there. Actually, and astonishingly enough, considering the long building process, the story only begins once the urinals were operational.

What happened? The installed urinals soon proved to be problematic in terms of both their use and maintenance. Even if local social organisations had installed signalisation boards, and had organised all sorts of actions to guide appropriate use,34 [image 19 and 20] ‘wildlassen’ (public urination) remained a problem. Moreover, the swift decaying of the urinals resulted in underuse. Due to mounting time pressure at the closure of the Neighbourhood Contract, the urinals had been installed by an ordinary constructor (who had been in charge of the public works in the Rue d’Aerschot), rather than by a specialist. Consequently, for example, the use of normal tiling work (not resistant to urine), had contributed to the urinals’ rapid decay.35 In addition, the urinals’ maintenance, originally provided by the Agence Bruxelles-Propreté, had grown into a serious problem. Not only was cleaning carried out with deficient thoroughness, at a certain moment, Agence Bruxelles-Propreté simply refused further cleaning, for it was considered ‘too dirty a job’.36 In consequence, the municipality was forced to hire a private cleaning service at a monthly cost of 3,500 euro.37

As such, after four years of (problematic) operationality, the urinals would become a central topic of discussion again. In November 2009, local social worker Géraldine Bruyneel presented the report Plan hygiénique 2010 rue d’Aerschot Schaarbeek to the municipality, including a proposal for more appropriate urinals. Note that we are four years after the closing of the Neighbourhood Contract! Bruyneel’s initiative was in fact an indirect outcome of the Gezondheidsportret Brabantwijk beweegt (Health Portrait), to which I myself contributed intensively.38 Published in September 2008, and the result of surveys and participatory meetings with both local professionals and inhabitants, this Health Portrait provided a

34 This had been mentioned in earlier meetings: ‘L’implantation d’urinoirs ne garandit cependant pas que le comportement des usagers de la rue changera. Une signalétique appropriée doit absolument accompagner l’installation des urinoirs’ – Procès-verbal, CLDI 19/02/2004, p. 6, bold in original. See also PV, CLDI 29/11/2005, pp. 6-7 and PV, CLDI 28/02/2006, p. 7, when a promotion campaign was proposed (installing pictograms in the street) ‘sur le bon usage de la pissotière de la rue d’Aerschot’, coordinated by local social organisations such as Soleil du Nord, Espace P, and Projet Rousseau.


36 Interview with Géraldine Bruyneel, 27 November 2009.

37 For cleaning the urinals twice a day. Each urinal is used more than 5,000 times per week – Bruyneel, Plan Hygiénique 2010, p. 8 (ref. to Geert Pierre, adjunct director Schaarbeek Propreté et espaces verts).

snapshot of the living conditions and problems within the Quartier de Brabant. In the wake of which, local organisations would set up a new series of actions in the neighbourhood. One of them was a new door-to-door survey in the streets perpendicular to the Rue d’Aerschot, where problems were most persistent. This survey confirmed that problems that had been identified earlier, namely within the Neighbourhood Contract and the Health Portrait, were unsolved; in spite of the measures undertaken (such as the urinals). Rather than signalling these problems once again at the public administrations, local actors, and in particular Bruyneel, would themselves take action. Fliers about the existence of the urinals were distributed in night shops and prostitution bars. Inspired by cases from abroad, spetterplaten (spatter boards) were installed in July 2009, accompanied by the message ‘Ceci n’est pas un urinoir’, while the urinals were provided with the sign ‘Ceci est un urinoir’. Pavement markings were to guide men from public urination hotspots to the urinals. At the same time, Bruyneel had started a personal survey on alternative solutions for the urinals. She analysed the existing situation, did some research on the different maintenance, use, and technical problems, and contacted specialised firms for quotations. With the Plan hygiénique 2010, a result of this research, she managed to sensitise the municipality into creating a task force on the topic.

What we can learn from this particular example of the urinals is twofold. It shows us that what are presented as ‘simple’ software problems in official participatory frameworks, are not necessarily easy to solve. But it also shows that participatory work is only useful when its time-span and scope are not limited to official frameworks, but are adapted to the problems they intend to address. Participation became more successful, not less, the longer the urinal problem remained; and the more it became clear that the organisations dealing with the problem doggedly continued their work towards a solution. Significant press attention, ongoing local efforts (Health Portrait, several neighbourhood actions, Plan hygiénique), and an eventual collaboration with public bodies proved to be the key to a successful project; as

39 Karin Van Zele, Hugo Henneman, Isabelle Doucet, Géraldine Bruyneel, Gezondheidsportret Brabantwijk beweegt! (Brussels: Samenlevingsopbouw, 2008). The Gezondheidsportret was the result of a collaboration (September 2006 - September 2008) between the local and community organisations Samenlevingsopbouw Brussel, LOGO Brussel, Pléïade Nord, Maison Medicale, Espace P, and scientific collaborators Julien Piérart (UCL) and Isabelle Doucet (TU Delft). It was based on 122 interviews (47 with professionals and 75 with inhabitants).

40 Door-to-door interviews held in September 2008 - 75 respondents. Amongst other actions, also a new series of participatory meetings were organised throughout 2008 and 2009; and the Health Portrait was presented to professionals, the burgomaster and aldermen, and the inhabitants – Bruyneel, Plan Hygiénique 2010, pp. 3-4; interview with Bruyneel 27/11/2009.

41 Bruyneel, Plan Hygiénique 2010, pp. 10-11. It includes five examples of prefabricated public toilets (mainly from the Netherlands) and a tailor-made proposal for the Rue d’Aerschot, including a detailed plan and budgeting for installation, maintenance, and use.
much as it also proved to be a precondition for participatory efficiency. Remarkably, the urinal issue would only be treated seriously many years after the official work of the Neighbourhood Contract was finished; and not by technical experts, but by local social workers. These social workers, such as Bruyneel, would in fact turn into autodidact acoustic and hygiene experts, and take on the role of consultant to the official bodies. Rather than empowering the people, social workers would form the technical, communicative, and managerial link between the citizens and politics. They would do something entirely different from talking ‘on behalf of’ the people. By coming with their own sense-making and concrete proposals, these social workers could force politicians to think outside the box and convince them to opt for seemingly complex, non-standard, but appropriate solutions; while they could also render citizen participation more credible.

As such, a form of concernedness occurred that was more pragmatic and concrete than ideological or oppositional: a concernedness that emerged entirely from the real, criticised the conditions of the real, but also accepted the collaboration with both the everyday (citizens) and power (political bodies) as the only way to achieve realistic solutions. By persistently muddling through the problems of the real, being attentive to the frustrations of citizens after the Neighbourhood Contract, and to the ignorance (voluntary or not) of official bodies; a person like Géraldine Bruyneel, turned into a true negotiator between expertise and ignorance, force and frustration, engineering and intuition, experts and laypersons, values and facts, knowledge and experience. Only by accepting this role as an agent who travels across numerous networks and boundaries – a work of true diplomacy - a solution could be found that accommodated the entire collective.

3. Agencies in negotiation: a true dispositif

The example of the urinals is not to trivialise participatory frustrations but to simply to break the distinction between software and hardware, use and production, human agency and engineering. The question is therefore not whether such frustrations in participation are legitimate or not, but, which other agencies are at work in adding to such frustrations? Classical agencies include timing and communication problems; unkept promises and unrealistic expectations; as well as the perceived gap between the ‘knowing’ experts and

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42 The instalment of spetterplaten in July 2009 generated significant press attention. The Health Portrait was relatively widely distributed; its blog has grown in popularity; and its task force still meets on a regular basis.

43 When, according to acoustic experts of the official body BIM, measurement was impossible (because the noise was not standard, as with traffic noise or railway tracks), Bruyneel turned towards acoustic experts at the Free University, who informed her about non-standard techniques. With this information she could, firstly, convince the BIM to do the measures; and secondly, with the ‘objective’ readings at hand (very high values caused by car-music, screaming, etcetera), she could put pressure on those politicians who had previously allocated the problem to ‘people who were too sensitive’.
‘concerned’ citizens. But, as we have seen, agencies also include complex engineering issues for seemingly simple solutions (the story of the urinoirs). Moreover, within Neighbourhood Contracts (and participatory processes more generally), some objects or things have unexpected agency. Not only do they, as things, act as social actors (and redistribute speech); as traces, they also allow us to unravel a whole set of agencies that is only implicitly involved in participation.

In an official French/Dutch bilingual context like Brussels, language as such is an actor: documents are not always available in Dutch; French often remains dominant in discussions; French and Dutch versions are not always identical. Even if the poor translation of French into Dutch has meanwhile become a commonplace, it is nevertheless still a source of irritation, fatalism, annoyance, or irony. When the French suggestions is translated into voorstellingen, instead of voorstellen, this seems a minor mistake; but it shifts the meaning from ‘proposals’ or ‘suggestions’ into ‘imaginations’ or ‘representations’. Also, even if Brussels’ unwritten rule for negotiation is that everybody speaks his or her own language - tout le monde parle sa propre langue / iedereen spreekt zijn eigen taal – this is hardly applied. French largely dominates the discussions, which is not to say that the French are to be blamed: the Flemish, pragmatic as they are, switch easily to French for it allows them to ‘get things done’ more efficiently. Additionally, it is quite difficult to follow bilingual negotiations where it is habitual to talk in abbreviations. How to follow coded phrases such as the following:

Are questions about housing and citizen participation within the CLDI [cé-el-dé-ie], within the new PDI [Pé-dé-ie] and the City Project of the PRD [pé-er-dé], to be addressed by the CPAS [cé-pé-aa-es] or the SRDU [es-er-dé-uu; not to be confused with the SRDB (es-er-dé-bé)!]?

In Dutch the same phrase would be:

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44 E.g. in Neighbourhood Contract Aerschot-Progrès, local organisations (and thus inhabitants) were informed very late about the organisation of an enquête publique (Procès-verbal, PCGO 10/12/2002). Also, inhabitants were frustrated when they were promised training in technical urbanism issues (PV, CLDI 22/05/2002) but when appeared that ‘les personnes spécialistes de ce domaine n’ont malheureusement pas pu se libérer ce soir-là’ (PV, CLDI 20/06/2002). Moreover, inhabitants tend to feel treated with disrespect by certain experts: ‘certains intervenants extérieurs (ex: architectes) n’ont pas une attitude suffisamment respectueuse quant à la prise en compte de l’avis des habitants’; or see their problems trivialised: ‘les problèmes essentiels pour les habitants se retrouvent souvent “hors sujet”’ – PV, CLDI 3/5/2005, p. 6.


46 CLDI 30/3/2006, Neighbourhood Contract Kaaien-Les Quais, PowerPoint presentation by the (public) project leader, observation notes. Also, some articles were missing in the French version of the huisreglement (observation notes).
Are questions about housing and citizen participation within the PCGO [pé-cé-gé-oo], within the new PIO [Pie-oo] and the City Project of the GewOP [gewop], to be addressed by the OCMW [oo-cé-ém-wê] or the GSSO [Ges-soo; in Dutch not too difficult to distinguish from the GOMB (gomb)]?

Additionally, the French abbreviations are often used in Dutch phrases: one seems to be talking more about the PDI than the PIO, and the petit château than the klein kasteeltje.

Also the (physical) room for negotiation plays a role in the debate. In some cases, a speaker–audience position is formed, involving microphones and impressive projection screens on the side of the officials and experts; while inhabitants, organisations, and other local actors are positioned as an ‘informed’ audience. This construction seems to add more to the polarisation of debates than when negotiations take place as round-table discussions. In addition, the quality of the planner’s PowerPoint presentations, maps, and charts have the power to accentuate, hide, or manipulate knowledge.

If the urinoirs could tell us something about the problematic distinction between ‘harsh hardware’ and ‘easy software’, they also, in fact, pointed to a more general problem, namely, that knowledge extracted from the everyday, no matter how pertinent, does not always translate well. Likewise, the agency of things – PowerPoint, language, legislation, and rules – seen as traces, lead us to a number of worlds or laboratories, such as the architecture and urban planning practice, grassroots initiatives, and political governance: laboratories whose own logics, functioning, and fabrication processes are hardly accounted for in negotiation. When, for example a bureau d’études appears to trivialise certain problems brought up by the inhabitants, or comes up with ‘hasty’ solutions, this is, rather than stubbornness or laziness, often due to extremely limited time frames, insufficient financial means, and little marge de manoeuvre. Especially in the Brussels context of lived-through urban traumas (‘urbanism of the bulldozer’) and democratic deficit (‘urbanism of de fait accompli’), an unremitting distrust in architects and urban planners is reinforced by such superficial judgments.

Likewise, what seems at first glance to be a problem of participation or a sign of political unwillingness – aggravated by attitudes adopted by authorities in orchestrated space –

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47 The first CLDI of Neighbourhood Contract Kaaien-Les Quais (30/3/2006, 7 pm), took place in the prestigious event space of cultural centre La Bellone. It expressed a certain sérieux: location, large projection screens, microphones, and protocols. The two representatives of the bureau d’études Coop-Arch, were positioned together with the politicians and their representatives in front of the audience (panel-like, with microphones and name labels). A following meeting took place in a much more modest and darker room upstairs in the same building, though still with the planner/politicians versus audience/civil society positioning. In the municipality of Jette, by contrast, the CLDI meetings were held around a large round table.

48 PowerPoints too, act in negotiation: they may include little visual material and are sometimes of poor graphic quality, so people can hardly read it.
is in fact often an outcome of legal constraints and rigid rules. For example, when, right after a local politician opens a participatory meeting with the words ‘c’est pas la politique qui décide qui peut participer’, another politician enters the room, takes over the debate, and smoothens discussions with the truism ‘C’est pas facile hein la démocratie!’; this is of course a downright participatory mishap. A similar ‘undemocratic’ approach appeared, within the same meeting, when a maximum of eight inhabitants was to be selected out of 16 candidate-participants. The suggestion of excluding those who didn’t attend the meeting was received both with protest - ‘that is not fair […] it punishes people who had to go working’ (the meeting started at 15h) - and bitter support - ‘I also had to take a half-day off for this, so that also shows an engagement, doesn’t it?’.

But in other situations such ‘undemocratic’ attitudes are confused with technical or legal motivations. The example of the exclusion of the refugee centre Le Petit Château / Het Klein Kasteeltje from the negotiations for neighbourhood contract Kaaien / Les Quais, shows the discrepancy between the reasons and motivations for exclusion. When the subject is brought to the table, it goes like this:

Inhabitant: Shouldn’t we include Het Klein Kasteeltje in the PCGO?
Local politician: The CLDI is for inhabitants of the neighbourhood, shopkeepers, and the likes, hence not for Le Petit Château.
I 2: But they nevertheless live here, they use the neighbourhood, and its public space, isn’t it so? They are more than 800 after all!
LP: Well, they have been advised to participate in the meetings but they are simply not allowed to vote.
LP 2: The Neighbourhood Contract is primarily made to renovate the streets and the living environment for the inhabitants of a neighbourhood […] Le Petit Château fits in the category ‘hotel’, doesn’t it?
I: Oh listen! It is not as if it’s a four-star hotel either. Please!
LP 2: I apologise, that just slipped out.
LP: Look, the Region pays, and tells us that we cannot include Le Petit Château, so…
Regional administrator: That’s right, we cannot because it [Le Petit Château] is a public stakeholder, and moreover a federal one [not regional or municipal] […] and

49 Both quoted from officials of Brussels City, in the preparatory pre-meeting for Neighbourhood Contract Kaaien-Les Quais, 6/3/2006, Anspach Centre (Administration of the City of Brussels) - observation notes.

50 Ibid. A second plan came up after the meeting was finished and people had already left, regarding the vote, those who already left, well, they were gone, pity. Some started phoning people to come back. In the end, all candidates were withheld, since, throughout the process, some would fall out anyway.

the possibilities of including public stakeholders are already very limited […] thus it is not even legally possible to include *Le Petit Château* […] But as observer, yes, that’s OK.

LP: By the way, a similar rule applies to *VZW Bravo* as it belongs to the city of Brussels, and already participates in other CLDIs, so it cannot be included here.

A similar example within the same Neighbourhood Contract occurs when local associations complain that their proposals have not been integrated in the program:32

Representative local association: We have been calling the Region non-stop, but without response.

Local administrator: I see, but this is also about a project *outside* the frame of the neighbourhood contract!

RLA: I know, but how then will participation take place for this project?

LA: We will contact everybody who shows an interest.

RLA: But how will you even know who’s interested?

LA: Leave your e-mail address or something.

RLA: But we have pointed to this problem [intense truck delivery in residential street] repeatedly here. We are present at every single CLDI but nothing has been included, that’s frustrating! […] For ten years now, there has been action about this problem and only now that the politicians had told us to address this issue within the Neighbourhood Contract […] The inhabitants are getting really frustrated!

Inhabitant: By the way, I was wondering […] *Monsieur le Président* [an alderman, acting as president of the CLDIs] *ne vient plus!* *Il est où alors*?! (Translated: doesn’t come any more. Where is he then?)

Urban Planner [of the *bureau d’études*]: You have to understand that the Neighbourhood Contract is based on an ordinance that is very, very strict. We are aware, we know that there are many things that could contribute to the well-being of a neighbourhood, but these initiatives *cannot* be integrated within the frame of a Neighbourhood Contract […] Within the procedure, other *bureau d’études* will also make sub-projects, and all these works have to get started by the end of 2008 at the latest. That’s also when the negotiations will be finished.

These examples demonstrate that it is tempting to analyse participatory processes according to their democratic failures and frustrations alone. But they also demonstrate that platitudes

such as \textit{à la fin, c'est toujours une question de politique} (in the end it’s all politics) cover only part of the story. Authorities foiling people with phrases such as \textit{mais l'ordonnance ne nous permet pas de…} are not just looking for excuses but do refer to genuine constraints. No matter how poorly respectful they may, at time, be; it simply doesn’t suffice to blame negotiation or \textit{les politiques}. Poor negotiations, a supposedly super-power called \textit{les politiques}, and a nervously framed urban planner, easily deviate attention away from quite powerful agencies such as the rigidity of legal frameworks, the ‘internal affairs’ of the expert – his struggles to ‘get things done’ - or the haunting of \textit{Bruxellisation}.

What appears as a predominantly democratic deficit is actually only one aspect of a much larger \textit{dispositif} composed of a broader set of agencies (or lines) influencing negotiation: ‘lines of visibility and enunciation, lines of force, lines of subjectification, lines of splitting, breakage, fracture, all of which criss-cross and mingle together, some lines reproducing, or giving rise to others’.\footnote{Gilles Deleuze, ‘What is a \textit{dispositif}?’, in: Michel Foucault Philosopher, ed. by Timothy J. Armstrong (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp. 159-168, p. 162.} With the \textit{dispositif}, Michel Foucault refers to ‘a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid […] what I am trying to identify in this apparatus is precisely the nature of the connection that can exist between these heterogeneous elements’.\footnote{Michel Foucault, ‘The Confession of the Flesh’, in: Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), pp. 194-228.} The \textit{dispositif} is thus not simply the \textit{collection} of elements \textit{per se} but also the ‘system of relations that can be established between these elements’.\footnote{Ibid.} Approaching orchestrated space as a \textit{dispositif} means unavoidably opening a black box: that unproblematic set of instruments on which science daily builds and of which only input and output counts.\footnote{Bruno Latour, \textit{Science in Action} (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 3.} It means to \textit{problematise} the assignment/task as mere input and the urban planning solution as mere output of negotiations. When opening the black boxes of orchestrated space, the outcome (urban renewal proposal) is understood as the factual, visible output of a complex, moved, controversial production process: the ‘[u]ncertainty, people at work, decisions, competition, controversies’ come to light; the black boxes of the Ready Made Science then show the controversies of Science in the Making.\footnote{Ibid., p 4.}
4. Unravelling the agencies composing Brussels’ ‘fear of the new’.

We have seen how, in comparison to many other European cities, Brussels has been, for decades, under the spell of a ‘fear of the new’. The multi-entangled consolidation of the Reconstruction de la Ville movement proved an important agency for enduring this ‘fear of the new’ within architecture and urban culture, amongst public authorities, and private stakeholders. The vast demolition of popular neighbourhoods and the expulsion of their inhabitants, all for the sake of architectural and urban modernisation, had generated intense aversion towards new, modern architecture. The late-19th-century destruction of parts of the Marolles, for the creation of the Palais de Justice, had generated a new curse word in the Brussels dialect: architek. Likewise, the urbanism-with-the-bulldozer of the golden decades - the destruction of the traditional urban fabric for the sake of modernisation works (office towers, housing estates, subways, highways) – gave rise to the internationally renowned phenomenon Brussellisation. More than the existence and meaning of these architect-unfriendly terms, I am interested in how ‘alive’ these notions still are today: how have they travelled over time; how well have they been maintained and taken care of; and thus, can we, today, decades, or even a century after their invention, consider them as true actors within the Brussels architecture debate?

In other words, when we follow Donna Haraway’s advice of no longer approaching the real as a mere ‘resource’, and start looking at things as agents, then we can ‘make room for some unsettling possibilities, including a sense of the world’s independent sense of humour’. 58 Actors such as Brussellisation and Architek will not just show us the ‘surprises and ironies at the heart of all knowledge production,’ but also that, indeed, ‘we are not in charge of the world’. 59 Does Brussels, where the ‘Bruxellois tend to use the verb savoir (to know) instead of pouvoir (to be able), thus giving inanimate objects the power to know things’, not have additional good reasons to treat ‘resources’ like full-blown actors? 60

Three major observations can be made. Firstly, much of the literature of the past decades has expressed a negativism vis-à-vis Brussels’ everyday life in general and architecture and urbanism in particular. Secondly, whereas the particularities of Brussels’ everyday life – chaos, absurdities, Kafkaesque governance - are often pardoned, for they are believed to also contribute to Brussels’ charm, one seems merciless when it comes to architecture and urbanism. Whereas architecture and urbanism seemingly evoke unanimous consensus about their horrific effects on the city; the evaluation of Brussels’ everyday life

59 Ibid., p. 199.
stretches from a pure adoration for Brussels’ self-organised, spontaneous nature over nostalgia for better times, to repugnance at the numerous effects of its *auto-gestion*. Thirdly, since the architectural criticism that is embedded in *Architek* and *Bruxellisation* appears to have met little with resistance in travelling through time, it has preserved a strong agency in the contemporary Brussels debate.

I will unravel these observations in the following manner. Firstly, and primarily, I will look specifically into the treatment of architecture and urbanism by everyday literature;\(^{61}\) and explore the agency of actors such as *architek* and *Bruxellisation* within the ‘fear of the new’. Secondly, I will zoom in on the more positive evaluation of Brussels everyday life in general.

### 4.1. Once upon a time we *did* like architecture in Brussels

Whereas the literature of the past four decades – a period we could call the *Bruxellisation* era – has been remarkably hostile to architecture and urbanism, older accounts were often more hostile to Brussels and Belgian everyday life in general than they were towards architecture.

Many of the French writers, including Voltaire, Victor Hugo, and Charles Baudelaire, who had stayed in Brussels (often in exile) during the early days of European modernisation; may have been quite harsh about the Belgian and Brussels’ everyday; when it comes to architecture, they were much more merciful. Voltaire had disliked mid-18th-century Brussels for its ignorance and retardation.\(^{62}\) But Victor Hugo, travelling through Belgium in the summer of 1837, was overwhelmed by the Brussels’ architecture of the town hall, the *Grand Place*, and the Sint-Goedele Cathedral. His aesthetic negativism seemed limited to the Belgian obsession with *Pierre Bleu*: ‘they have this quite ugly blue granite, that they use for everything’.\(^{63}\) Even Baudelaire, who maligned almost everything in Brussels, surprisingly spares its architecture and urbanism. Baudelaire deeply despised the habits, behaviour, and unmannerliness of the Belgian and Brussels’ population, whom he evaluates as ugly, dirty,

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\(^{61}\) I refer to popular literature, fiction, travel guides, documentaries, films, exhibitions, and catalogues on Brussels, and especially those works that have been relatively broadly distributed such as through public libraries. Brussels may not have had a James Joyce (for Dublin) or Sartre (for Paris), but it has a variety of authors who have, as residents as much as travellers or immigrants, written about their Brussels’ experience. One can think of Dutch writers Jeroen Brouwers, Frederik Willem Hermans, or Benno Barnard; of true Brussels writers such as Geert Van Istendael, Josse De Pauw, Paul De Ridder, Eric De Kuyper, and Staf Nimmeegeers, even Hugo Claus. Multatuli (Eduard Douwes Dekker) wrote *Max Havelaar* in Brussels, in 1859, in a bar surrounded by ‘good-hearted but fairly anaesthetic faro drinkers’ (Multatuli quoted by Jeroen Brouwers, *Groetjes uit Brussel*, p. 75); Karl Marx wrote his *Communist Manifesto* here in 1847-48.


impolite, uneducated, and ignorant: ‘all Belgians without exception are empty-headed […] a mouth not made for smiling […] a general hatred of beauty’. He decries the status of its streets and pavements; the city’s taste and smell; and the slums, oh the slums: ‘you should see the slums and how children wallow naked in excrement […] even old women […] those sexless creatures […] stimulate neither politeness, nor respect or tenderness’. Baudelaire’s *Pauvre Belgique* is such an overwhelming and continuous stream of negativism towards Belgium and Brussels that any selection would fail to grasp its intensity. Perhaps his infamous description of the river Zenne would do: ‘Brussels’ beer is distilled from this large urinal, the river Zenne; it is a spirit made by straining the city’s excrements through a sieve. As such, for centuries, the city drinks its own urine’.66

Of course, in addition to being a frustrated, syphilis sufferer and homesick exile – he fled from his creditors in France – Baudelaire’s tirade against Brussels and Belgium should be situated against a background of an unstable country and a rapidly industrialising city. Baudelaire stayed in Brussels (from 1864 until 1866) when urban and infrastructural modernisation works had been delimited to Brussels’ upper town. Downtown Brussels, where he lived, was marked by industrial excess: overcrowded slums, poverty, stench, and diseases, particularly concentrated around the river Zenne. In other words, Baudelaire’s stay in Brussels preceded the great modernisation works that would attempt to turn Brussels into a *Petit Paris*, and could have filled this homesick writer with joy. The ‘open gutter’ of the Zenne would be covered up (1867-1871), and allow for the creation of prestigious boulevards. Ironically, the finale of Baudelaire’s *Pauvre Belgique* describes precisely the event that would provoke those major changes, namely the major 1865 cholera outbreak:

Today, Monday 28 August 1865 […] I have noticed everywhere, with intense pleasure, the symptoms of cholera in the air […] how I will be overjoyed – now that I imagine the death grimace of this ghastly people, kissed by the banks of its imitation-

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65 Ibid., p. 60.


67 Declared independent in 1830, the country Baudelaire described was one in full search of identity, one that nevertheless did not win his merciless: ‘divided, overwhelmed, conquered, beaten and robbed, but still vegetating like a curious mollusc […] who would want to touch a turd with his fingers? […][C]ut to pieces but still alive; a worm that one forgot to trample to death’ – Translated from Dutch edition: Baudelaire, *Arm België*, pp. 143-44.

68 The Leopold Quarter was created from 1838, when also plans for the *Palais de Justice* had started, and for the *Tracé Royale*, which would connect the *Palais de Justice* with the Royal Chapel of Laken. Baudelaire stayed at the *Hôtel du Grand Miroir* between 1864-1866.

69 It was the Brussels equivalent of Manchester’s River Irk, so expressively described by Friedrich Engels.
From Penser la Ville to Faire la Ville

Styx [...].

Compared to such scathing criticism of Brussels’ everyday life, Baudelaire refers to architecture with, what was for him an unusual, almost friendly, even if somewhat compassionate tone. He refers to Brussels’ ‘curious architectural taste’, and ‘lack of classical proportions’; its slowness in adopting new styles, and its combination of the most paradoxical architectonic or decorative elements. And yet, in line with Victor Hugo, even Baudelaire actually paid the Grand Place a compliment, as he considered it ‘even after Villeroi’s bombing, still a wonderful architectonic whole’.

With Art Nouveau around the corner, the Brussels era of architectural prouiness and positivism would soon reach its zenith - and then soon come to an end. Even if annoyances had of course existed, citizens had nevertheless been impressed by the splendour of urban and architectural works; a prouiness that was at times genuine, at time exaggerated, and even misplaced, as with Antoine Wiertz’ 1840 manifest Bruxelles capitale, Paris province.

4.2. May I present to you our new leading lady of the show: Bruxellisation

Ever since the Second World War, the balance between a quite harsh critique of everyday life and a more generous architectural judgement would be gradually and totally inversed. Faced with persistent urban destruction and morphological distortions, urban traumas would move to the foreground in descriptions of the Brussels’ everyday. The glorious days of Belle Epoque and early modern architecture were soon overshadowed by ruthless speculation and sinister urban demolition.

This is not to say that, in earlier days, destruction and speculation had never been part of urban renewal. In fact, Brussels’ history had had its share of urban destruction, but this had

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70 Baudelaire, Arm België, pp. 147-48.
71 Ibid., pp. 129-30.
72 Ibid., p. 129.
73 Ibid., p. 130. He rarely speaks directly about Brussels’ architecture or architects, and when he does so, this is often as part of a broader description, such as the one on Belgian ignorance, vanity, and filth and ‘the extraordinary things’ he had seen in Brussels: ‘architects who have no clue about the history of architecture, painters who have never seen a reproduction of Raphael, women who insult you when you offer them flowers.’ (p. 42).
74 That annoyances, caused by building sites, are not only from our times, was demonstrated by the complaints of 15th-century entrepreneurs and administrators about the dirty Grand Place, due to the construction of the Brussels Town Hall. However, back then, such annoyances were easily forgotten when the citizens were confronted with the splendid result. Paul De Ridder, Het Andere Brussel. Pleidooi voor een positieve benadering (Antwerpen: Soethoudt & Co, 1984).
75 Painter Wiertz saw Brussels’ splendour partly for what it was, but was also driven by his hatred towards Paris, where his work had been destroyed by critics. Also Louis Couperus’ Eline Vere (1889) showed, for the parts taking place in Brussels, the good life of the Brussels upper class at the Avenue Louize.
also shown that disaster could also generate new opportunities and splendour. Think of the magnificent reconstruction of the Brussels’ Grand Place after the 1695 bombing by De Villeroi, under Louis XIV; and the first ‘planned’ development, after the destruction of the Coudenberg Palace by fire in 1731.76 In other words, at the dawn of modernisation Brussels had already experimented with, by force and fate, typically ‘modern’ urbanisation techniques including tabula rasa, façadism, speculation, and urban wasteland redevelopment. If we add the large infrastructure works of the latter half of the 19th century, transforming Brussels into a Petit Paris (covering of the Zenne, speculative housing along Parisian-style boulevards, slum clearance, Palais de Justice), and the more recent implementation of a ‘Small New York’ (post-war urban sanitation of the Marolles and the Northern Quarter with its WTC towers and Manhattan Plan); Brussels’ quite dubious relation with modernisation becomes even more obvious.

The construction of the Palais de Justice and the covering of the Zenne had of course been accompanied by social dramas, with injustice being done to the poorest layers of the population; but this was an all-together different society wherein revolts from the working classes had a very different impact than they would have in post-war Belgium (if only already because of differences in electoral statute of these classes).77 What would change along Brussels’ modernisation trajectory is the accountability of resistance. Whereas one could still smother the protests of 19th-century working classes, these classes had grown into a powerful electorate after the Second World War.78 Additionally, whereas hygienist renewal works of the late-19th century, could still be seen as a combination of health measures and real estate operations; the 1960’s-1970’s urban clearances may have been pursued ‘in the name of progress’, but they still nevertheless served primarily to fill the personal wallets of developers. Urban destruction was no longer seen as an unfortunate gateway to or an unavoidable side-effect of modernisation (De Villeroi and the Hygienists respectively), but it became perceived by the population as the new conditio sine qua non for (profit-based) urbanism.

76 Geert Van Istendael describes Theodoor van Heil’s 1692 painting, Panorama van Brussel, as the last moment of spontaneus urban beauty. From 1695, after Villeroy’s bombing, the Grand Place was (re)constructed, for the first time in a legally orchestrated manner: front width, ridge and gutter height, building alignment… the very first urbanism regulations were born! Geert Van Istendael, Arm Brussel (Antwerpen and Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Atlas, 2002 [1992]), p. 30. See also Roel Jacobs, ‘De Lofzang van het compromis’. Likewise, the Coudenberg redevelopment, with its French-style architecture and layout, contrasted with the, what was until then, more organic growth of the city centre.


78 There had been voting right for men since 1893, but this was still ‘meervoudig’ (more votes for the wealthy). Only since 1918 were votes equally allocated (‘enkelvoudig’) to all men; from 1948 this was extended to women. Since voting was, moreover, compulsory after 1948, the working classes could have a major voice in elections.
Major post-war interventions such as the North-South Junction, the large infrastructure works for Expo 58 (tunnels, viaducts, urban highways), and the Manhattan Plan for the Northern Quarter are among the usual suspects within literature’s referencing to Brussels’ modern self-destruction. Such projects all involved a serious distortion of inner-city life, and the demolition of entire neighbourhoods. If we add to this the infamous overnight demolitions of valuable patrimony, it should come as no surprise that literature refers repeatedly to the emerging consensus that Brussels, despite being largely untouched by the war bombings, had decided to simply destroy itself.\(^{79}\) The term used to describe the phenomenon of a city being destroyed at the hands of architects and developers, is *Bruxellisation*.

Several origins and meanings have been allocated to the term *Bruxellisation* (*Brusseliseren* in Dutch and *Brusselisation* in English). According to the 2008 book *Espaces partagés, espaces disputés. Bruxelles, une capitale et ses habitants*, the term relates to the period between 1955 and 1979, and refers to a very diverse set of phenomena,\(^{80}\) and above all, to ‘l’expression d’un mal urbain, d’une sensation d’impuissance des habitants face au bouleversement don’t ils sont les témoins ou les victims.’\(^{81}\) In *The Art of Being Belgian*, an introductory book for expats moving to Belgium, Richard Hill believes the term was coined by Germany’s *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, in reference to ‘the haphazard destruction and redevelopment of a city’ and the infamous ‘chantage au cancre (dereliction blackmail) phenomenon meaning that buildings are deliberately left to rot.’\(^{82}\) Whereas the Belgian writer and film critic Eric de Kuyper depicts *Brusseliseren* slightly more poetically:

The photographer captured something, but the moment right before and right after it was entirely different. That is of course the case with each photograph, but not with each city.\(^{83}\)

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\(^{81}\) Ibid., p. 114. Well-known references include: North and Leopold Quarter, the demolition of the Maison du Peuple, the RAC.


… Michel Robert prosaically impersonated its corrupted variant, façadism:

Brusselisation. To Destroy. In order to Reconstruct. Nothing. Everything. Two more. Keeping. Still a bit more … careful with the scale. Don’t touch …. At the corner, the façade. Something has to be kept. And then placed inside. According to our appetite … Have mercy for the roof. We’ll keep it. A new life. It will be good.84

Yet, Hugo Claus, one of the most celebrated contemporary Belgian writers, would finally and disappointedly turn his back on Brussels:

I loved Brussels and I regret it has been destroyed. I am not going there anymore.85

But, as the Frankenstein monster was confused with its creator, so Brusselisation would travel through literature as the personification of its ‘master creator’, namely the mysterious, ‘devilish duo’,86 known as VDB and CDP (pronounced: Vé-dé-bé and Cé-dé-pé); also known as ‘the Crocodile’ and ‘King of the Car Park’;87 also known as Polle Pansj or the ‘Meat Emperor’ and the ‘Parking Emperor’; in real life, known as Paul Van den Boeynants and Charlie De Pauw. Forming the ultimate combination of political power / business (VDB), and development (CDP), this illustrious team would be held responsible for much of the destruction of Brussels’ city centre, and most notably the disastrous Manhattan operation.88

Whereas VDB had the political power, and a good nose for business and corruption; CDP had the ‘vision’, which can be summarised as follows:


86 Van Istendael, Arm Brussels, and see Martens, et al., De grote stad: een geplande chaos?

87 De Vries, Brussels, a cultural and literary history, pp. 234-35.

There has to be a revival of the city centre. I have found that car parks and administrative buildings are the best solution for this rescue operation. And last but not least, the major warriors against Bruxellisation, the ARAU, define it as the set of phenomena that was particularly devastating throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and that includes: ‘Propriétaires spéculateurs ou négligents laissant pourrir leurs biens, démolition du patrimoine, effacement des traces historiques de la ville.’ If for ARAU, Bruxellisation is still very much alive today as a phenomenon – ‘Contrairement à ce que prétendent certains, la bruxellisation, bien que moins flagrante aujourd’hui, est toujours à l’œuvre’ – it is as alive as a true agent of the ‘fear of the new’. Indeed, Bruxellisation has travelled pretty well as an agent of urban doom scenarios, condemning the urbanism of progress; but also as a stubborn preacher of hatred against modern and innovative architecture.

Despite being literally depicted in only a few cases, Bruxellisation has travelled through everyday literature in a plethora of disguises: ‘urbanism of the bulldozer’, ‘urbanism of the fait accompli’, ‘massacre urbanism’, ‘the glory of decay’, ‘non-stop urbanism’, ‘developer-ordered dilapidation politics’; ‘béton désertique, nue et disproportionnée’ [barren, naked and disproportionate concrete]; ‘ville écartelée’ [torn apart city], ‘frenzied destruction party’, or ‘un enfer de béton. Vide et froid, sale et puant’ [An inferno of concrete. Empty and cold, dirty and stinking]. It has been ‘shipped’ with the Dictionnaire de Bruxelles: définition d’une ville par les gens qui y vivent, y passent, ou y travaillent, where Brussels is compared to a bonsai: ‘taillée, mutilée et maltraitée’. It co-piloted Richard Hill’s fascination for the fact
that ‘Belgium’s biggest demolition contractor was actually called Froidcoeur (“cold heart”).’

In 1980’s and 1990’s works, Bruxellisation often appeared as a combination of urban ‘snapshots’ of the so-called real Brussels, and a critique of the city’s functioning: e.g. Bruxelles Autrement, Les Tramways de Bruxelles, the by Angèle Manteau collected anthology Brusselse Verhalen, Jeroen Brouwers’ Groetjes uit Brussel, and Bruxelles: Fragments.

In the Marolles it became a true urban personae, sitting on a plaque engraved with ‘Bataille de La Marolle. 13-9-1969. Here lies the Developer with his faithful spouse Bureaucracy. This tomb is permanent.’ Moreover, Bruxellisation got well-distributed by hitchhiking with popular works such as, for example, Geert Van Istendael’s Arm Brussel, which formed a crucial agent in keeping Bruxellisation alive. The more so when such works place a particular emphasis on architecture and the urban, and include chapters such as ‘Constructing and Demolishing’. Even if Van Istendael refuses to derail into mere negativism and a call for a return to the past, he nevertheless does create a moody image when he starts talking about the God-equals-Automobile, God-equals-Market and the God-equals-Europe attitude. Even though he refuses to play the back-to-nature and back-to-the-small-city melancholic, he is annoyed by the never-ending presence of cranes on the Brussels skyline.

In other words, countless authors included, and continue to include, in one way or another, Bruxellisation in their writing. In fact, they do so almost without exception: when reading through Brussels’ literature, one comes constantly across references to the urban traumas.


96 Claude Diouri and Jacques De Decker, Bruxelles Autrement. Quatrain inspiré d’un poème d’Omer Khayam (Gent: Imschoot, 1998); Ortlieb, Les Tramways de Bruxelles, e.g. ‘La Gare du Nord […] et ses immeubles-icebergs’ (p. 32), and ‘un chantier mal reconstruit’ (p. 55); Angèle Manteau, Brusselse Verhalen (Schoten: Hadewijch, 1984). On Brussels’ architecture and urbanism experience e.g Jan Walravens, ‘Mensen van Brussel’, a psychological exploration of the Brusselians, written for Expo 58; Karel Van de Woestijne; and Louis-Paul Boon (on Brussels as a jungle); Jeroen Brouwers, Groetjes uit Brussel (Amsterdam: De Arbeiderspers, 1989 [1969]); Annick Blavier, Bruxelles: fragments (Brussels: La Trame, 2001). A photograph of the European Quarter is accompanied by the text ‘Rien ne va plus’; a demolished housing block, Av. Fonsny, with ‘Je n’ai qu’un regret’.

97 De Vries, Brussels, a cultural and literary history, p. 191.

98 It is a popular, well-known book, intertwined with critiques of Brussels’ architecture and urbanism; the city library has five copies.

99 Van Istendael, Arm Brussel, p. 157. The Manhattan Project is the shame of all Brussels as it is only here that Brussels’ ‘frenzied destruction party’ was initiated (p. 171): no longer in the name of Deity Automobile or Progress, but in the name of Deity Market and Profit.

repeatedly emphasised their astonishment with the mass demolition and ‘criminal’ mismanagement of 1960s’ and 1970’s Brussels, erasing all traces of a ‘turbulent, rich Brussels history’. Also, popular works such as the *Dictionnaire de Bruxelles* dedicate extensive attention to *Bruxellisation*. Brussels’ ‘massacre urbanism’ is even so infamous that it is considered part of Brussels’ tourist offer: along *Manneke Pis*, the Atomium, the European Institutions, the *Grand Place*, and Sporting Anderlecht (the city’s football team).

4.3. Who then to blame: the Crocodile, Deity Automobile, or the Architek?

For most Brusselians, it is common knowledge that *architek* – often used as *architek!* (with an exclamation mark) - has something to do with the *Palais de Justice*, built by Joseph Poelaert; and the popular quarter *Les Marolles*. Indeed, between 1866 and 1883, Poelaert’s masterpiece of 26,000 m2, was constructed on the Brussels *Galgenberg* (Gallows Mountain), at the border between the *Marolles* and Brussels’ prestigious upper town. For this gigantic building – the largest building site at that time in the whole of Europe - a part of the *Marolles* had to be mercilessly torn down. It is said that Poelaert himself, sometimes with the help of the police, dispelled the *Marolliens* from their houses. In this context of large-scale urban embellishment works, such as the *Palais de Justice*, *architek* would become a curse word for the *Marolliens*, often used as ‘skieven architek’. ‘Skieven architek’ was both a corrupted word of English origin, namely Chief Architect, referring to Poelaert’s position; as much as it was a way to refer to Poelaert’s unjust and incorrect (‘crooked’ or ‘twisted’) attitude towards the *Marolliens*, as used in the expressions ‘vuile architek’ or ‘smeergen architect’ (dirty or filthy belle, pp. 10-13; Pierre Mertens (p. 61) and Oscar Van Den Boogaard (p. 17) in Danemark, et al., *Je me souviens de Bruxelles*; De Ridder, *Het andere Brussels*, p. 25, p.37, p. 183; Van Istendael, *Arm Brussels*; Colaux, et al., *Errances Bruxelloises*; Baron d’Huart ‘Preface: Over-leven in Brussels’, in: Piet Swinnenhe and Jan Verlinde, *Wonen en Leven in Brussel* (Tielt: Lannoo, 1997), pp. 6-7; Patrick Burniat, Jacques Aron, Pierre Puttemans, *L’Architecture Moderne à Bruxelles – Guide* (Brussels: Éditions de l’Octogone 1996); Patrick Burniat, Pierre Puttemans, Jos Vandenbreeden, *L’Architecture Moderne à Bruxelles – Moderne Architectuur in Brussel - Modern Architecture in Brussels – Guide* (Brussels: Éditions de l’Octogone, 2000).

Hermans quoted in Brouwers, *Het aardigste volk ter wereld*, p 105. Brouwers and Hermans refer to the fact that the city reinvents itself over and over again; always busy to become something and to ‘continuously renew its appearance’ (Brouwers, *Groetjes uit Brussel*, p. 96). This resonates with Karel Van de Woestijne’s reference to the typically Brussels building and demolition practices: ‘always directed to the creation of something new, something much more beautiful and greater, necessary and unavoidable, of such vital importance that one wonders how preceding generations could do without’ - Karel Van de Woestijne, ‘Taveeren’, in: *Brusselse Verhalen*, pp. 63-67, p. 63, freely translated from Dutch.

Labor, et al., *Dictionnaire de Bruxelles*. The index displays 19 links to architecture and five to urbanism; one to *Architek*, one to *Bruxellisation*, and two to façadism. Even if only one link is made to modernism, it gives three to Manhattan and three to WTC; 11 to order, and five to progress; five links to ruins, 11 to terrains vagues, and 15 to chantier (building site). Over forty references to Europe.

Vandorselaer and Van Hamme, *Bruxelles dans la BD*, pp. 4-5. *Bruxellisation* is also well represented in the numerous thematic guided tours organised in Brussels.
architect). As such, adding the adjective ‘skief’ was as much a derivative from ‘schief’ (from the English ‘chief’) as it was a way to reinforce the insult *architek*.\(^{104}\)

And just as much as *Bruxellisation* does, *architek* also proves a courageous and versatile traveller. We see *architek* appear in Jean d’Osta’s *Dictionnaire du dialecte bruxellois* where this Brussels writer highlights a quite remarkable story on the origins of the curse word *architek*.\(^{105}\) To explain the fact that ever since the building of the *Palais de Justice* the word ‘architect’ has become an insult (‘*architecte: insulte*’) d’Osta refers to Thyl in ‘Les injures marolliennes’ (in: *National Bruxellois*, 3/8/1926), stating that ‘ever since [the building of the *Palais de Justice*], “architect” and “enemy” have become execrable synonyms’.\(^{106}\) But he goes even further back in time to explain the origin of the insult *architek*, namely by bringing to life an 1883 lawsuit. In this lawsuit, a young female Flemish suspect – ‘*belle enfant du beau quartier des Marolles*’ - had to justify, in front of the Judge, why she had hit a commissionaire on her way back from buying petrol. Her defence goes like this:\(^{107}\)

The suspect: We are good people, we don’t have an architect in the family … I had bought petrol when the commissionaire, who dislikes my family already, screamed to me: “You are a disgrace and your brother is an architect”. Well, that made me so furious that I gave him, right in his face, a punch with my petrol jar.

The Judge: Because he called you a disgrace?

Defendant: No! That I can prove that I am not; but he said my brother is an architect (bursts into tears). My brother is a good boy, member of the boy scouts!

*The good petroleuse got out of it with only a fine of 10 franc, but voilà the jurisdiction that goes with the word ‘architect’.*

The original version in French:

*La prévenue: Nous sommes de braves gens, il n’y a pas d’architecte dans la famille. […] J’avais été acheter du pétrole […] Le commissaire qui a “une pique” sur


\(^{105}\) Jean d’Osta, Louis Quiévreux, *Dictionnaire du dialecte bruxellois* (Brussels: Éditions Libro-Sciences, 1985 [1951]), fifth, revised edition. Originally published by Jean d’Osta. As variations, Osta includes ‘*Smeergen architect*’ and ‘*Schieven architect*’ (p. 20)

\(^{106}\) Translated from French: d’Osta and Quiévreux, *Dictionnaire du dialecte bruxellois*, pp. 19-20.

\(^{107}\) Ibid., p. 20. Ref. to the *Journal des Tribunaux*, 1883.
ma famille a crié: “Tu es une scandale, et ton frère est un architecte”. Alors ça m’a mis en colère et je lui et donné, sur sa figure, une “clache” avec ma cruche à pétrole.

M. le Président: Parce qu’il vous avait appelée scandale?

La prévenue: Non! Ça, je sais prouver que je le suis pas. Mais il a dit que mon frère est architecte; (éclatant en pleurs) mon frère est un brave garçon, soldat dans les guides!

(La belle pétroleuse en est quitte pour dix francs d’amende. Mais voilà la jurisprudence fixée sur le sens du mot ‘architecte’.)

So, if the origin of the curse word architek can be traced back to the Marolles of 1883, it would reappear in 1910 in the work of George Garnir, who also published under the pseudonym Curtio. In 1910 Garnir published the third volume in the series Baedeker de Physiologie Bruxelloise à l’usage des étrangers: a kind of mixture between a travel guide (as those by German publisher Karl Baedeker) and a physiologie, a popular genre in France in the 1840s consisting out of small volumes dedicated to a humorous study of professions, such as the doctor, the lawyer, the journalist [image 21].

The third volume, called Architek!, followed the earlier volumes Zievereer (driveller; 1906) and Krott et Cie (Slum & Co; 1907).

With Architek!, Garnir humorously reports on how the rédacteurs du Compte rendu analytique flamand had trouble to translate the French word fripouille, with which M. Hubert, ministre de l’industrie et du travail, had been insulted by M. Napoléon Smeets in the Belgian Chamber of Deputies. With the introduction of this word, a special réunion plénière et extraordinaire des traducteurs jurés was held in order to find a proper translation into Flemish. Fripouille stands for a scoundrel or villain, someone without scruples, involved in fraudulent practices; a wily fellow one should be careful with and definitely not do business with. After several suggestions had been made, the word architek was considered the most appropriate translation:

It is the irreparable, unique, unbeatable, definitive wound. It is the elite of the elite. It is the empyrean […] It is the cry of agony […] it is, on top of the tumultuous,
smirking, swarming, antagonised, infernal and blasphemous mass of injures of down town Brussels, the horrible head of Medusa!\(^{110}\)

Original in French:

*C’est l’injure irréparable, unique, inimitable, définitive. C’est l’élite de l’élite. C’est l’empyrée! [...] C’est la clameur d’épouvante [...] C’est, par dessus la cohue tumultueuse, grimaçante, grondante, grouillante, cauchemarante, infernale et blasphématrice des injures du bas de la ville, la tête horrible de la Méduse!*

Garnir’s *architek!* would continue his journey in the Brussels’ collective memory through Cypriaan Verhavert’s *Brusselse Typen* of 1923, and through several reprints of the *Baedeker* (e.g. in 1975, 1994).\(^{111}\) Verhavert highly estimated Garnir for he had, of all French writers, best grasped the dialect and thus the spirit of the people.\(^{112}\) When referring to Brussels’ urban renewal works, ‘delightful as much as unpleasant, with many useful works but also many errors’, Verhavert reaffirms that, as much as *loorik* and *opvrettet van ’t goevernement*, also *vuilen architect* was a curse word for a well-dressed man.\(^ {113}\)

And so it goes that the insult *architek, architek!, architect, or arsjitek*, hardly meets any trouble in travelling smoothly throughout Brussels’ everyday literature, even until very recently. From *Vlaamse Volksverhalen uit Brussel*; over Van Istendael’s *Arm Brussel*, Josse De Pauw’s ‘Untitled…’, and Benoît Peeters’ ‘The Palais de Justice in Brussels – a Heraldic Accident’; up to Charles Picqué’s initiatives *Je me souviens de Bruxelles*, and the reprint of Garnir’s *Baedeker de Physiologie Bruxelloise à l’usage des étrangers*.\(^ {114}\) Benno Barnard included a story on ‘Scheve architect’ in his autobiographical work *Uitgesteld Paradijs*.\(^ {115}\) Eric de Kuyper would, in *Een passie voor Brussel*, recognise in the *Palais de justice* the start

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\(^{110}\) Curtio, Zieverveer, Krott & Cie, *Architek!* p. 6. In a quarrel between two marolliens, after having thrown numerous curse words to one another, only the word *architek!* had a serious effect.


\(^{113}\) Ibid., p. 16 (quote); p. 24.


\(^{115}\) Benno Barnard, *Uitgesteld Paradijs* (Amsterdam: De arbeiderspers, 1987).
of Brussels’ tendency towards excessive architecture. Also on the occasion of Brussels 2000, architek appears in the Dictionnaire de Bruxelles, referring to Brussels’ building attitude:


Likewise, it appears (even if only in a footnote) in Bloem in Brussel. Literaire wandelingen, in reference to Benno Barnard’s ‘scheve architecten’ (in: Uitgesteld Paradijs, 1987):

And remember: when Joseph Poelaert, in the 1860s, had erased half a popular quarter for the construction of that sugar cake of justice, the expelled citizens invented the insult that is as much typically Brussels as is het Manneke [Manneke Pis]: schieven architèk!

And after 2000? The architek’s journey continues. ‘Skieven architek’ appears in De Schrijver’s Et Brussels Brussels nog in Brussel!, and in the publication on the Espace Jacqmotte loft project in the Marolles. The walking tour guide Brusselse Toeren dedicates extensive attention to the ‘Skieven architek’, and more generally to the fiasco’s of Brussels’ architecture and urbanism: the chapter ‘Sollen met de Marollen’ (drag about the Marollen), includes illustrious titles such as ‘people or stones’, ‘crooked or straight’, and ‘away with the stone desert’. Being granted a chapter in Espaces partagés, espaces disputés. Bruxelles, une capitale et ses habitants, and a mentioning in the historical documentary Moi, Belgique,
‘schieven architect’ entered even more explicitly the Brussels and Belgian history.\footnote{Dessouroux, \textit{Espaces partagés}: chapter "’Schieven architekt’ les grands travaux d’embellissement et d’assainissement’, pp. 58-60. Olivier Appart, et al., \textit{Moi, Belgique raconté par Annie Cordy} (RTBF, DVD, 2006) - ‘Episode 2: La démocratie en marche (1848-1894)’.}

And then just when we might no longer expect it: a new addition to the story. In \textit{Brussels, a cultural and literary history}, André de Vries shares with us that on 18 October 1883, the day after its inauguration, the \textit{Palais de Justice} was opened to the public. Result: the \textit{marolliens} urinated on the carpets, destroyed the seats and columns…\footnote{De Vries, \textit{Brussels, a cultural and literary history}, pp. 200-201.} And Richard Hill, when talking about the \textit{Palais de Justice}, very gentleman-like reminds his readers that ‘(NB: its architect did not commit suicide after seeing what he had done)’.\footnote{Hill, \textit{The Art of Being Belgian}, p. 144.} But there’s \textit{another} surprise. For probably the first time, a ‘correction’ appears (even if a small one) to the negativism that surrounds the \textit{Palais de justice} and \textit{architek}. Despite being the very ‘symbol of urbanistic megalomania’, it is also mentioned that Victor Horta, and even more so Sigmund Freud, were quite positive in their evaluations.\footnote{Dannemark, \textit{Brussels Mengelwerk}, p. 82 and p. 65.} Even if there may have been good reason to use ‘\textit{stuk architect’} or ‘\textit{espèce d’architecte’} as insults, \textit{Brussels Mengelwerk} reminds the reader that Brussels has nevertheless also produced very beautiful architecture treasures.\footnote{Ibid., rubrique ‘Architek!’ p. 37: however, all classical examples such as Saint-Gudule and Art Nouveau!}

However, apart from such small positive sparks, the \textit{Skieven Architek} has continued to primarily adopt the role of the ‘bad guy’: in the film \textit{Marolles 66}, and at Cinema Nova, where a recent mini-series called \textit{Schieven Architek!} was dedicated to films about the \textit{Marolles}.\footnote{Daniel Storz, \textit{Marolles 66... du bucht ou du brol} (DVD 2006 [film fragments from 1966]); Cinema Nova 27/01 and 3/2/2008. Films included amongst others the neorealist ‘\textit{Chanter des gosses}’ by Jean Harlez (1956-1970) and ‘\textit{La bataille des marolles}’ (1969), by Pierre Manuel & Jean-Jacques Péché, at the time made by the RTBF, about the revolt against the plans to demolish yet another part of the Marollen for the extension of \textit{Palais de Justice}. The film was creened on 27/1/2008 in the presence of some members of the Marolles Action Committee.} And finally, there is the daily reminder of \textit{Skieven Architek}, being the name of a popular bar at the \textit{Vossenplein}, right in the middle of the \textit{Marolles}. But also Poelaert’s \textit{Palais de Justice} remains, until today, a symbol of a failing Belgian justice system and of the megalomania of the past. Top criminals have managed to escape the \textit{Palais de Justice} on more than one occasion thanks to its serious security problems. Additionally, the \textit{Palais de Justice}’s breathtaking scale was once more confirmed by the recent announcement of yet another series of renovation works: this time… of the scaffoldings that had been installed in
1989 for the restoration of its dome.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ They had to be renovated rather than replaced because they have been tailor-made and are fixed at several points. -‘Stellingen rond Brussels Justitiepaleis aan renovatie toe’, De Morgen, 4 June 2009; ‘Il faut rénover les échafaudages’, La Capitale, 4 Juin 2009.
4.4. *Brüsel*: one last laugh in a place of dying,\(^{128}\) or where *architek* and *Bruxellisation* meet

The most prophetic and pessimistic depiction of Brussels’ modernisation fever is perhaps the 1992 comic *Brüsel* by François Schuiten & Benoît Peeters [image 22]. *Brüsel* is the fifth in the *Les cités obscures* series, a well-known series of graphic novels about a parallel world of city-states, one where architecture plays a central role. With a graphic affinity with Art Nouveau and Jules Verne, the books create an image of that long-gone past, before *Bruxellisation* destroyed the cities.\(^{129}\) The *Brüsel* story takes place in the second half of the 19\(^{th}\) century, the era of great urban and infrastructural modernisation work (e.g. Brussels’ covering of the river Zenne, *Palais de Justice*). The story confronts the dream of a new, modern city, as imagined by the city authorities and constructors (the Bruxelisation-adept modernisors), with the suffering of the everyday under those changes (symbolised by *Brüsel* citizen Constant Abeels). By combining a late-19\(^{th}\)-century setting (with a prominent presence of the *Palais de Justice*) with a post-war modernisation style (the main contractor is called *De Vrouw* as in Charlie *De Pauw*), it offers the ultimate hybridisation of the curse of the *architek* and the haunting of *bruxellisation*.

The story starts, in line with the 19\(^{th}\)-century *hygienists*, with a modernisation process that is associated with the curing of an illness: not only is the city to be cured of its diseases, but Abeels is also to be cured of his lung troubles: ‘*Votre toux [...] passera avec la Senne [...] ce cloaque*’.\(^{130}\) The more the everyday gains ground, so too does the ‘morality’ of the story, and with it the link with *Bruxellisation* and the 1968 resistance ideology comes to the surface. A first ‘lesson’ is that the everyday, no matter how small its actions may be, can always be powerful enough to win. Abeels’ initial enthusiasm for the modern dream drastically fades away the more he suffers the side-effects of modernisation, and the more he gets involved with his *companion* Madame Tonero (Tina), who sabotages the modern system by means of small-scale interventions with large-scale knock-on effects.\(^{131}\) A second ‘lesson’ is that, even when faced with total failure and disaster, against all odds, the modernisers refuse to change, or question their ideas. When the four main characters manage to escape from the apocalyptically floating *Brüsel* (caused by the modernisers’ megalomania), Abeels and Tina acknowledge their mistakes:


\(^{131}\) E.g. throwing coffee over the central administration server; cutting a few crucial cables in the power plant.
Nous avons tous été malades [...] Oui malades du progrès!  

By contrast, the modernisers continue to believe in a better, modern world, or in the words of über-moderniser De Vrouw:

\[ \text{Je vais me refaire [...] j’en ai vu d’autres [cities] vous savez? Ce n’est pas vraiment qu’on a vu trop grand. C’est surtout que la population n’a pas été à la hauteur.} \]

A final ‘lesson’ is that the modernisors will never be able to ‘cure’ either Abeels’ coughing nor the city, and in fact only create more suffering. Abeels’ coughing only stops from the moment he has left Brüsel and its modernisers behind and has thrown away his modern books: Abeels is not cured by but by being away from the modernisers.

And Brüsel? The city has been left behind with open wounds, unoccupied voids, and vast scars, still in the hands of modernisors who seem not to have learnt anything. Brüsel’s destiny seems one of loss and despair, and of a continuing defence of modernisation:

\[ [V]ous représentez le poids mort du passé! Nous n’avons eu que trop de faiblesses envers vous et votre pittoresque. \]

A genuine story of Bruxellisation. A real ‘coup d’architek’. Brüsel is, as such, another agent in the Brussels architecture and urban debate that has travelled well: a popular book, translated into several languages, cited in numerous works on Brussels, and entrenched in collective memory in the form of a mural, it is even the subject of a guided tour.

And so it goes that, through the time-travelling of Architek, Bruxellisation, and the Palais de Justice, Brussels architects always seem to pull the short straw. Even if one can observe a more recent, constructive, positive attitude; this is either still limited to the architecture debate itself, or, when it comes to everyday literature, still quite moderate, compared to the overall negativism. From 1976, when Jean d’Osta despised the architect –

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132 Schuiten en Peeters, Brüsel, p. 111.
133 Ibid., p. 109.
134 Ibid., p. 38.
135 E.g. mentioned in Van Istendael, Arm Brussel, p. 175; Dannemark, Brussels Mengelwerk, p. 97; Vandorselaer and Van Hamme’s Bruxelles dans la BD includes thirty murals, including ‘Le Passage’ by François Schuiten; and ‘Ordre Nouveau?’ by Buequey-Tito, and ‘Atomium 58’ by Baudouin de Ville, where architects and surgeons watch at the Expo 58 site in construction, saying: ‘Fantastique!’ (p. 105). Brussels’ tour guide Babbelbus includes a tour on François Schuiten.
136 See chapter three, and the introduction of the term ‘A-Bruxellisation’; De Kuyper, Een passie voor Brussel: ‘Nostalgie is geen emotie waarmee je hier kunt leven’ (p. 48), and critique vis-à-vis AAM and ARAU (p. 32; 47),
‘Nous ignorons le nom de l’architecte’ - who had built ‘le colossal container de béton brut’ where once shined Victor Horta’s Innovation; up to more recent times, when Dieter Lesage calls for a countering of the ‘biopolitical interfering of architects and real estate agents [...]’[while] there is no need to be biopolitically intimidated and certainly not by architects or real estate agents’; it has been reaffirmed that architects are the kind of species one should avoid.137 What’s more, in a country were the use of an architect is compulsory, they are the kind of species one cannot avoid.138 And the architect, so we are to believe, can always, but always avoid you. He might be tempted to ‘committing egocide’, but he will, in the end, change his mind, make another design and push it through; or in the words of a popular song by Belgian rock band Deus:139

Now if these aspirations bother you
Well you are just you, you don’t have a clue
I’m sticking to the plan I will see it through
Let there be no confusion
Cause I’m the architect.

for having resulted in ‘braaf, kneuterig en saai [...] netjes, maar steriel’ (p. 134); Gatz, Bastaard: the chapter ‘slagers en stenen / een nieuwe stad bouwen. Over architectuur en stedenbouw als ambitiecheck’ (pp. 107-22) includes a call for more architectural ambition despite the urban traumas and a critique of Brussels’ fear of the new and especially of large projects (p. 115; note that Gatz is a liberal politician); De Vries, Brussels, a cultural and literary history criticised the ‘whole disgraceful spectacle’ of fake-medieval hotels on the scars of the North-South Railway Junction (p. 168, referring to Carrefour de l’Europe); Kurt Deruyter, Marolllengids (Gent: Borgerhoff and Lamberigts, 2008), is one of the few guides with an explicit interest in historic as much as contemporary architecture, and in more ‘urban’ projects as Recyclart and the Skate Park Ursulines; Georges De Kinder, Brussels Paysages Urbains. Brussel Stadslandschappen. Brussels Urban landscapes (Brussels: Éditions de l’Octogone, 2007), with projects by amongst others Jaspers-Eyers & Partners, Montois & Partners, Ph. Samyn & Partners; Labor, et al., Dictionnaire de Bruxelles, decries the absence of architecture and architectural goodwill, and warns that Brussels will not live ‘grâce à ses princes du conservatisme et aux pleureuses qui l’entourent’ (P. Delaby, pp. 107-108).


138 E.g. Hill, The Art of Being Belgian: ‘there is no better evidence of the essentially anarchic nature of Belgium than the country’s architecture’ (p. 63); ‘architect-designed by order [while a] lack of planning control’ (p. 64).

5. The Brussels’ everyday in literature

Brussels always had a quite ambiguous relationship with the emancipatory and resistant aspects of the everyday. On the one hand, Brussels has always been a place of great creativity, experiment, resistance (a ‘laboratory’), and a place where cultures and identities can meet: a place of tolerance, of living together in difference. And yet, it is as much a place where structural changes have trouble getting a foot on the ground; where nothing really gets finished, but always somehow remains temporary: as in the French expression ne pas avoir de suite dans les idées. In short: if Brussels’ everyday is characterised by a strong survival instinct and emancipatory force, it also tends to resist real change just as strongly. Brussels writer Staf Nimmegeers offered a perfect illustration of this phenomenon with his story of a bucket placed to catch water leaking from the ceiling in a tube station. Standing there for months, Nimmegeers was astonished that the leak hadn’t been repaired, while someone must have emptied the bucket regularly. It makes him conclude that this must be ‘where Brussels Technology ends’.

It is commonly acknowledged that in the Brussels’ ‘mosaic of minorities’, which refers to the absence of a predominant identity or culture, no single person or grouping can be right: a phenomenon perhaps most notably expressed by the multiple casquettes syndrome; by the recognition of both ketjes (true Brussels identity) and zinnekes (a bastard Brusselian; a mongrel identity); and summarised by the term Belgitude. Belgitude refers particularly to the Belgian (everyday) survival instinct, or in the words of Hugo Claus: ‘Belgian corruption, a pleonasm’. It refers to the Belgians and even more so the Brusselians being ‘anarchists at heart’, their fondness for the surreal, and their typical zwanze. Zwanze is a form of resistance through surrealist mockery, a tour de force of reality that expresses Brussels’ self-

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140 A ‘place for everyone’, Dannemark, et al., *Je me souviens de Bruxelles*, p. 21.
141 De Kuyper, *Een passie voor Brussel*, p. 43.
143 ‘Mosaic of minorities’, Van Istendael, in *Je me souviens de Bruxelles*, p. 96.
144 De Kuyper, *Een passie voor Brussel*, chapter on ‘Belgitude’, pp. 140-41. Term comes from Belgian sociologist Pierre Javeau and is exemplified by Brussels as the capital of this phenomenon. Hugo Claus: ‘'je kunt het bestaan van een Belg op zichzelf al een identiteitscrisis noemen’ - Claus, *Groepsportret*, p. 35, originally in *Avenue*, Sept. 1981; Hill, *The Art of Being Belgian*, p. 88: ‘above all, Belgium has helped me to put things in their proper perspective; to see that there is not just one universal truth, but a whole range of different truths’, quoted from Derk-Jan Eppink in *Belgian Adventures*.
esteemed mixture of unpretentiousness, solidarity, and modesty. \[^{147}\] Belgitude as such refers to pragmatism as much as tolerance and practicality, or, what John Mace has called the Belgian ‘muddling through’, somewhat surprisingly recognised by the Belgians themselves as plantrekkerij or tirer son plan. \[^{148}\]

Such tolerant, pragmatic, and ad hoc mentality proved a perfect playground for the European Union’s step-by-step development. But even in the early days of Belgian independence, Karl Marx had found in Brussels’ central location, tolerant political climate, rich artistic and intellectual climate, and press liberty, the ideal ground for nurturing his communist ideas - Marx wrote the *Communist Manifesto* in Brussels in 1848. \[^{149}\] As official representatives of the Belgian Democratic Movement, Marx and Friedrich Engels could distribute their communist ideas (in the form of a parallel agenda) to England and France. \[^{150}\]

As such, Marx and Engels demonstrated the importance of understanding the Belgian plantrekkerij; while, ironically enough, they also confirmed the difficulty of effectuating any real change. It was in Brussels in particular where Communism could so generously plant its seeds, and in Belgium, of all monarchies; revolution would fail. Engels’ astonishment with ‘a population prioritising Carnival over revolution!’ \[^{151}\] confirmed the reputation of the Brusselians as Kiekefretters (chicken eaters): always longing for liberty but nevertheless preferring good food to the good fight.

### 5.1. Living in Brussels or the irresistibility of the impossible

How did writers - those travellers, observers, and reporters of the everyday - deal with a city with everyday potential as well as absurdities and frustration; a city where top-down governance is never really top-down (resisted by the everyday), and where bottom-up revolt


\[^{149}\] Karl Marx stayed in Brussels between 1845 and 1848. He wrote the *Communist Manifesto*, and the famous opening words ‘A spectre is haunting Europe — the spectre of communism’, between December 1847 and the end of January 1848, amongst others in *Grand Place* hotel ‘The Swan’ - Edward De Maesschalck, *Marx in Brussel* (Leuven: Davidsfonds, 2005), p. 113. He could express his ideas relatively freely in Brussels, through speeches for the *Deutsche Arbeiterverein* (created in Brussels in analogy with the German one), and through his writing in the radical *Deutsche Brüsseler Zeitung*, which existed between January 1847 and February 1848 (p. 108).

\[^{150}\] As members of the Belgian Democratic Movement, Marx and Engels could travel to London and Paris, officially as representatives of the Democrat Movement, but secretly to defend the Communists Committee - De Maesschalck, *Marx in Brussel*, p. 151.

\[^{151}\] Engels in a letter to Marx, reprinted in De Maesschalck, *Marx in Brussel* p. 180. Of all European monarchies, precisely the Belgian King remained seated; of all cities, in Brussels, the Republican movement soon died out.
rarely leads to full emancipation? In contrast to the unambiguous hatred towards architecture and urbanism, contemporary writers expressed a more uncertain, love-hate relationship with Brussels. For most of them, despite Brussels’ chaos and complexity, everyday life somehow always prevails: at times through irresistible charm, and at other times by deriving pleasure from even the darkest parts of Brussels’ character. Willem Frederik Hermans referred quite ironically to Brussels’ politics as a ‘delightful puppet show’.\textsuperscript{152} Marc Didden and Jean Cocteau associated Brussels with ‘the theatre of life’.\textsuperscript{153} For Staf Nimmgeers, courageously writing about even the most depressing and marginal aspects of the everyday, ‘Brussels’ charm always generously wins the day’.\textsuperscript{154} Already the title of his collection of Brussels stories, \textit{Chagrijn en Charme} (‘Chagrin and Charm’), literally expresses such mixed feelings. A love-hate relationship can also be found in Van Istendael’s \textit{Arm Brussel} - it is a mixed city, a hybrid: sweet, broken, familiar\textsuperscript{155} – and in Jeroen Brouwers’ \textit{Groetjes uit Brussel}, taking place in Brussels’ heydays of demolition fever (between 1964 and 1968):

> After one and a half years living in Brussels, your initial amazement begins to fade. […] Slowly I feel myself hardening, slowly I become shallow, each day a little less human, each day a little more city, until the day will come when I will be turned to stone and immovable. […][A]lthough I find myself slowly starting to love this city, this jungle.\textsuperscript{156}

It is a city that he dislikes, but cannot get rid of:

> [T]his centre of Europe and heart of all things, this whore of all cities who has welcomed me too, and does not let go. […][A] kitschy, mimicking and characterless superimposition of monstrosities, gruesomeness and deformities, unparalleled in Europe.\textsuperscript{157}

\textsuperscript{152} Hermans quoted in Brouwers, \textit{Het aardigste volk ter wereld}, p. 135: translated from Dutch.


\textsuperscript{154} Nimmgeers, \textit{Chagrijn en Charme}, back cover, translated from Dutch: ‘riant het pleit winnen’.


\textsuperscript{156} Translated from Dutch. First part quote: Brouwers, \textit{Groetjes uit Brussel}, p. 9; second part: p. 46; third part, p. 97.

\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., first part from p. 49; second part from p. 10.
Almost three decades later, Eric de Kuyper still agreed that one can only live in Brussels if one can stand the paralysing je m’en foutisme, while enjoying its joie de vivre; the Stalinist bureaucracy and provincial folklore, while enjoying its agreeable diaspora–cosmopolitism. Similar fascination/irritation can be found amongst the numerous expatriats who live and work in Brussels. Where else than in the cosmopolitan yet down-to-earth Brussels, could Romani Prodi enjoy the comfortable anonymity, and do, quietly and unrecognised, his Saturday afternoon shopping at IKEA? Even a merciless Hugo Claus couldn’t help but appreciate the Belgian kitsch, its exaggeration, and the incredible mix of styles even within one street.

5.2. When mixed feelings become true love … blindness (towards the negative) and adoration (of the positive) also appear

Through the rediscovery, in architecture and urban activism, of a more positive attitude towards urban culture in the mid-1990s, Brussels’ fiction and popular literature also gives proof of a reinforced attention for the positive aspects of Brussels’ everyday life and its chaos, laboratory function, self-organisation, multiculturalism, and cosmopolitanism. Events such as Hôtel Central, KunstenaarFestivalDesArts, Bal Moderne, and Brussels 2000, bringing ‘joy in a city-full-of-cancer’ would not remain unnoticed amongst Brussels writers, who would encourage a countering of the negative press on Brussels. Particularly since Brussels 2000, numerous anthologies, photographic essays, and all sorts of city guides and walking tours would appear, with a particular emphasis on the richness of the Brussels’ everyday. Often published in three languages (French-Dutch-English), and using a fresh, recognisable graphic style; such everyday reports would also become more ambitious (even trendy) in nature. Despite their self-declared modesty, such works nevertheless claimed to propose alternatives, more multiple (rather than singular) models and approaches for reading, understanding, and

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158 'It is not an easy city to live with. Or, as I read somewhere – in both languages – wearing a helmet is compulsory.’ - De Kuyper, Een passie voor Brussel, p. 141. Free translation.

159 Caroline De Gruyter, De Europeaan: leven en werken in de hoofdstad van Europa (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 2006), p. 33. Amongst expatriates, Brussels is both appreciated – large, affordable houses (p. 24), the cosmopolitan character, green, cultural activities and central position in Europe (p. 42) – while evaluated negatively for being very impoverished (p. 34), dirty, air pollution, badly organised, and traffic (p. 42).

160 ‘Ik zie het nu graag, dat agglomeraat van lelijkheid, vulgariteit, en treurigheid van al die Belgische monsters die tegen mekaar aangekoekt zitten.’ Claus, Groepsportret, pp. 18-19; originally in Haagsche Courant, 30/3/1983, interview by H.J.Oolbekkink.

161 Nimmeeiers, Charme and Chagrijn, pp.141-42. Bal Moderne was the popular closing event of KunstenaarFestivalDesArts, taking place in the street in front of La Bourse.

162 1980’s newspapers and TV journalists describe Brussels as a ‘dangerously expanding cancer’, a place to avoid against all price: ‘Satan’s gate … where the Prince of Darkness rules’ - De Ridder, Het Andere Brussels, p. 17.
dealing with Brussels. In 1997, the Vlaamse Gemeenschaps Commissie created ‘Wonen in Brussel’, an information point for buying and renting houses in Brussels. By means of tours and interactive city maps, one can choose an area to live à la carte.

Brussels 2000 would set the framework for the further enhancement of the everyday. Its commissioner Robert Palmer recognised Brussels’ collective memory in its renovated places as much as in its numerous wounds and abandoned buildings. The new aim was hence not to ‘heal’ or ‘reconstruct’ Brussels, as had typically been the undertone of earlier anthologies, but to learn and appreciate its weaknesses and hidden qualities: by curiously wandering through, exploring, and discovering the city. The belief that Brussels can only be appreciated, that its beauty, intimacy and human scale will only be rendered visible when one is open enough to discover the city, would run as a red line throughout many of the publications to come. Within the framework of Brussels 2000, one can think of the walking guide Brussel: een nieuw cultureel landschap … in de steigers, the ‘everyday dictionary’ Je me souviens de Bruxelles, and the anthology Bloem in Brussel. Literaire wandelingen. Later works include Living: reflecting diversity and identity, Brussel Bruxelles Brussels, Brussels Mengelwerk/Miscellanées Bruxelloises, Bruxelles Paysages Urbains, Bruxelles, ma belle?, and even the more traditional (patrimony-based) guides such as Des Lieux et des Hommes: Bruxelles Retrouvé, and Sgraffiti in Brussel: Kunst in de straat, both aiming to encourage us to look more attentively at our everyday city, its monuments, and architectural patrimony.

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163 E.g. Labor, et al., Je me souviens de Bruxelles, without being scientific, nevertheless claims to possibly appear more pertinent than any other study, precisely because of its attention for the everyday experience. Rather than being a complete, categorising, or scientific dictionary, it feels more affinity with the mental mapping and geography of Baedeker, Michelin or Routard guides and of the work of Kevin Lynch (The Image of the City). It presents itself in all modesty, as a manuel de savoir-vivre, representing numerous realities, dramaturgically organised through a Verfremdungseffekt (Bertold Brecht).

164 In 1998, the VGC made an inventory of 99 Brussels’ quarters, which was, in 2005 completed with a photographic report of each quarter. This resulted in the 2006 exhibition ‘Inventaris Brussels’ in De Markten, and in the publication of De Clercq, et al. Brussel Bruxelles Brussels.


167 Coirier (ed.), Brussel: een nieuw cultureel landschap; Dannemark, Je me souviens de Bruxelles; Peeters and Vanhole, Bloem in Brussel. Literaire wandelingen.

168 Lesage, et al., Living: reflecting diversity and identity, shows, through pictures, the living room of 24 Brussels families; De Clercq, et al. Brussel Bruxelles Brussels; Dannemark, et al., Brussels Mengelwerk; De Kinder, Bruxelles Paysages Urbains, invites the reader/visitor ‘to join him on an unusual stroll through the different districts of Brussels […][he/she will] and never look at Brussels in the same way again’ (back cover); Verhaeren, Bruxelles, ma belle? Portrays through 14 photographic views on Brussels, Brussels’ many faces.

Likewise, the walking tour guide *Bruxelles dans la BD. Itinéraire découverte* aims at filling in the gap more positively in Brussels’ *non-imago* landscape.\textsuperscript{170} Similarly, by showing the ‘hidden treasures’ in the midst of Brussels despair, books such as *Wonen en leven in Brussel* and *Lofts of Brussels*, hope to prove that Brussels has meanwhile developed ‘a certain way of survival that exists in getting the best out of the most disastrous and in making the inhuman bearable’ and has become ‘an ugly city where it is incredibly good to live’.\textsuperscript{171}

Meanwhile there exists a well-developed network of alternative tour guides that aim at showing the many paradoxes and unexpected faces of Brussels’ everyday life: both outside and within the official tourist networks.\textsuperscript{172} And to complete the new *Bruxellomania*, even the famous *Tintin* or *Kuifje* comics by Hergé have been republished, entirely written in the Brussels dialect.\textsuperscript{173}

The problem with this new attention for the everyday is, as we have also seen in the previous chapters, that it shifts the problem from ‘bad management’ to ‘the people’: almost as if to say that if you can’t live in Brussels it’s because you’re not open enough to its numerous qualities; because you don’t try hard enough to see bright colours through its thick layer of dirt. Institutions such as the BIP and OPB have shown how the everyday has become a welcome mantle to cover up Brussels’ structural defects.

An additional problem is the increasing populist and elitist character of the everyday. Events such as the ‘Great Waffle Baking’ in the Marolles, and the vibrant (Flemish) cultural life of the central quarters, have become clear triggers or signs of advancing gentrification. Such events no longer are lived by and for the citizens, but are visited, tourist-like. As such, the everyday had become part of Brussels’ folklore, which is on offer. Moreover, books such as *Wonen en leven in Brussel* show fancy lofts and luxurious interiors of lofts, patrimonial pearls, and even castles. *Lofts in Brussels* even goes as far as to depict the ‘lofters’ as *urban warriors*, as ‘full-time actors of the city, [taking] on its raw and brutal aspect while building a haven of peace and safety’, something that is surely no longer the case.\textsuperscript{174} That Brussels’ current ‘soft facelift’ is largely taken over by developers and a population ‘with a well-lined

\textsuperscript{170} Thibaut Vandorselaer, *La BD dans la ville: Bruxelles = De strip in de stad: Brussel = The comics in the city: Brussels* (Louvain-La-Neuve: Versant-Sud, 2007).


\textsuperscript{172} E.g. the alternative guides of official city guide *OPB Onthaal en promotie Brussels*, called ‘Brussel XL’ (www.BrusselXL.be): a series of walking tour guides on Brussels and literature (*Brussel XL1 – in woorden*); on hidden, undiscovered places (*Brussel XL2 – intiem*); on Brussels and music (*Brussel XL3 – in noten*) and on sport in Brussels (*Brussel XL4 – in actie*). The second volume explores three walking tours with well-sounding names, such as, ‘city of contradictions’, ‘from playground to pawnshop’ and ‘green secrets’.

\textsuperscript{173} *De Schat van Rackham de Ruue* (2006), *Et Gehaaim van de Licorne* (2005), *De Bijous van de Castafiore* (2004), all published with Casterman, Tournai.

wallet’, seems to be considered an unfortunate side-effect for which the authors can only hope ‘that the local, less wealthy population will not be excluded from these re-vitalizing neighbourhoods’. It is of course about the same old question on how to render cities attractive again while controlling social displacement and exclusion.

In such a context alone it is possible that one of Brussels’ most powerful architectes-promoteurs, Michel Jaspers, manages to be considered as an architectural benefactor. Then the question is whether, apart from the countless works on the everyday, it are not architectes-promoteurs who have, once again, understood most thoroughly how the everyday really works. Whereas everyday books try to ‘sell’ us, against all odds, the complexity, multiplicity, repulsiveness, and chaos of the everyday, to such an extent that we apparently need Great Waffle Baking events in order to really get the point; for architectes-promoteurs, enhancing the everyday is an evident, straight-forward matter: ‘if your company does well, this is not only to your own credit, but it means that society is in favour of your company’.

That is, seemingly, how simple the architect’s societal concern can be, even today.

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175 Piet Swimberghe and Jan Verlinde, *Wonen en Leven in Brussel* (Tielt: Lannoo, 1997), shows forty Brussels’ interiors selected, so it seems, for their patrimonial value, their ‘modern’ character (lofts), their grandeur (castles), or their inhabitants (designer Elvis Pompilio). Despite the authors’ claim to have uncovered Brussels’ real face (pp. 19-20), it displays a primarily upper-class one.

176 Deruyter, *Marollengids*, p. 91. Jaspers’ Jacqmotte project, an elitist loft project in the Marolles, is considered a pilot project for architectural and urban charity work; and his patronage role by, for example, sponsoring the Great Marollen Dinner (Waffle Bake), is celebrated as an action for the neighbourhood.

Conclusions / Incitements

This dissertation did not promise a grand proposal nor an ideal solution for Brussels, but aimed instead to lay bare a landscape of agencies, one that is first of all a Brussels’ one, but one that is also a landscape of thoughts. Nevertheless, there remains uncertainty as to where this unravelled knot, the landscape of agencies now lying in front of us, will, could, or should lead us. Is Brussels to cherish its chaos? If Brussels is stuck, but nevertheless manages to keep the machinery in motion, then, what is the problem after all? If it manages to ‘get things done’ anyway, then why bother? Likewise, when suggesting a thrusting collective, then whither this collective? Is displaying the agencies that constitute Brussels’ architecture production, and the tensions that come along with it, enough? It may give us the ingredients, and some of the attributes and peculiarities of these ingredients, but it does not tell us what to cook.

With this dissertation, I have started to unpack several agencies and intricacies that I deemed necessary for understanding why architecture and urban production are so harsh in Brussels; and, through that question, how architecture theory could be concerned more realistically and effectively with architecture’s being-in-the-world. At the beginning of this dissertation, we were stuck with a troubled potage, leaving us guessing as to exactly what it is made of. Moreover, we were stuck with theoretical habits that seemed tailored for bouillons, but are of little help when plunging into a potage.

What we have now got, at the end of this journey, is an assortment of ingredients, displayed on a large tablecloth. Some are rendered more intelligible; others remain opaque, or even bewildering. We have somehow managed to identify, and to get a grip on the spices and flavours that compose the potage. And, more importantly, we have an idea of the effect of combinations of ingredients. Whereas some agencies work astonishingly well together, other blends or combinations may be recipes for disaster. There’s Kafkaesque politics, urban activism, a fair amount of architecture promoteure... There’s considerable everyday pragmatics, a little idealism, a bittersweet touch of Reconstruction de la Ville, and a strong undertone of architek... There’s the swagger of design, warriors of bold emancipation, a careful bit of aesthetics, ‘the social’, and architectural extravaganza... The potage may have been analysed, and we may know a little more about the effect of combined ingredients; yet, nothing tells us how to make a better, more tasty potage. There’s no recipe that tells us what kind of potage we should be aiming for.
Conclusions / Incitements

There may, indeed, be no recipe to follow, no single ‘best’ soup to aspire to. However, with the ingredients in front of us, and their chemistry exposed, we’ll be cooking more carefully, more diligently. We are now aware that a little of *architect* may be exotic, but too much of it makes it too sour too easily. Too little pragmatism makes the soup lose body, but a too enthusiastic use of the everyday may destroy its unique flavour. A bit of ambition and ‘star’ architecture can spic up the whole thing, indeed, yet too much makes it greasy. A proportionate quotidian knowledge and people’s voices can balance the taste, but without the addition of a pinch of design (of the best quality available), it won’t take.

Still, between *knowing* the ingredients and their chemistries, and making a ‘better’ potage, lies a world of contingency, and of small cooking misadventures. In other words, the only way to proceed is by *more* practice, more uncertainty, risk, and experiment; yet a risk that is not entirely out of control. We now have a clearer idea of the distress that certain ingredients and their combinations may cause. Consequently, not just *any* potage will do. Nor will burning down the kitchen be legitimised as the ‘price to pay’ for the sake of experiment.

Having arrived at the end of this dissertation, questions regarding the drive of this undertaking, the ‘to what end?’, have remained partly in the open. No blueprint, no well-delineated path to follow. Only more work, more practice; but a practice that will be more informed, and therefore, hopefully, more cautious and alert. That is the modest contribution of this dissertation: to allow a slight reformulation of some of our questions and preoccupations with architecture’s engagement with the real. It may not leave us with an irrefutable recipe, but it will hopefully allow for more subtle experiments and tasty potages. In other words: work to do.

For Marcel Proust, the role of a book, of a work, is to ‘bring back to life, from the deadness caused by habit and inattention, valuable yet neglected aspects of experience’. ¹ *Good* books, are then the ones ‘that for the author […] may be called “Conclusions” but for the reader “Incitements”’.² Where does that leave a book that, by its very author, is accepted more as an incitement than a conclusion? I am not quite sure I want to know.

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² Ibid., p. 197.
Brussels is a knot, an intractable tangle. And it’s stuck. This is not a judgment, but a starting point. It’s what can be called the ‘Brussels Situation’.

With these opening lines, this dissertation announces an analysis of architectural and urban production in Brussels, as it unmistakably resonates with the complexity of Brussels in more general terms: its multi-layered governance, political intricacies, all sorts of social, spatial, and economic paradoxes, elaborate everyday *bricolage*, language issues... the list is long.

Rather than from the idealisations, hopes, curses and aversions projected onto such complexity, this dissertation starts from Brussels *itself*, from Brussels, the ‘harsh city’. It looks at the multiple workings of the Brussels ‘real’, and disentangles the multifarious agencies that are ‘at work’ in the production of architecture. At stake, therefore, is the careful understanding of why, in Brussels, architecture proves to be such a harsh business. At stake is also what nourishes and takes tremendously good care of the Brussels ‘fear of the new’, which, four decades after the urban traumas of *Bruxellisation* (referring to the destruction of a city by developers and architects) still haunts architecture. At stake are the frustrations and astonishments, but also the surprises and opportunities of Brussels’ everyday life. At stake are those agencies that sabotage the Brussels’ machinery. And yet, at stake is the fact that, somehow, things nevertheless move: Brussels functions as an inviting, highly productive artistic laboratory; and those (including architects) who are skilled in finding their way throughout Brussels’ complex governance web, give proof of how political shortcuts can even speed up processes. At stake are, thus, also those agencies that allow ‘to get things done’ in Brussels.

Rather than to ‘solve’ anything, this dissertation attempts to *problematise* the production of architecture, because it allows for adopting partial, even unexpected perspectives on the ‘Brussels Situation’. Also, along the unpacking of Brussels’ complex engagement with the real, this dissertation looks into the workings of architecture theory, and the tensions that accompany theory’s endeavours vis-à-vis architecture’s agency in the world.
In so doing, Brussels has not been chosen as a ‘case’, as either a touchstone or resource for theoretical insights, but was considered a practice. Therefore, the five chapters of this thesis deal with the workings of Brussels, and, even if to a smaller extent, with the workings of theory.

The first and the third chapter unravel Brussels’ architecture culture, as to how it has produced a unique architectural climate and mode of architectural and urban production. This unravelling renders visible different engagements with the real than the ones found in theoretical works, such as those focussing on architecture and the everyday. It also shows a pragmatic turn in Brussels’ architecture, as we have seen it emerging, more generally, throughout the 1990s; but one that is less compliant with the real than so-called projective practices, yet is as pragmatic; and one that is less subversive-oppositional than critical theories, yet is concerned. The concerned pragmatism, and the entangled (rather than oppositional) engagement with the real, as we can find it in the Brussels’ practice, seems instructive for moving beyond artificial oppositions such as those between ideological critique and compliant pragmatism; and between theory and practice as the ideal locus of critique. Such questions are dealt with, more theoretically, in the second chapter.

Whereas the first three chapters analyse architecture’s engagements with the real (the everyday), as such, by looking into both the Brussels’ situation and the struggles of theory; the fourth and fifth chapters will tie such questions to architecture’s method of engaging with the real: participation. These final chapters, however, problematise the simplifications and reductions that often underlie participatory methods, and attempt to move beyond traditional schisms such as between the agency of architecture and the social; between the architect and the user; the design and consumption/use/reception of space; tactics and strategies; aesthetics and politics; expert and layperson; software and hardware; bottom-up and top-down; and between what people want and what architects envision. In order to question such disparities, the fifth chapter will take into account the agency of unusual, even trivial ‘buildings’, such as a public urinoir; and will elaborate on mysterious, seemingly paltry yet carefully nurtured actors, such as the Brussels’ architek.

In the Brussels dialect, the word Architek is one of the fiercest insults.

This dissertation thus looks into the tensions that have accompanied, in Brussels, and in theory, the transformations in architecture’s engagements with the real; from Penser la Ville to Faire la Ville. A major stake through such shifts has doubtlessly been the role, impact, and locus of critique. This dissertation challenges such questions about critique, not by offering yet another alternative, but by laying bare some of critique’s disquieting tentacles that continue to have a firm hold on the workings of architecture. One can think of architecture’s
struggles to balance autonomy and engagement as having to do with its creative, aesthetic urge and its societal duties. One can think of architecture’s challenge to act critically vis-à-vis the establishments and authorities that are, often unavoidably, the *sine qua non* of architecture’s existence. Also, one can think of architecture’s interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary nature, related to its workings as both a discipline and a profession. By addressing such tensions, this dissertation aspires to question architecture’s liaison with critique, if only in a slightly different manner than we are used to.

The five chapters of this dissertation, and the colourful parade of actors they bring to the fore, are interlaced with *Entr’actes* that assist in relocating the reader on the map, and, as such, accompany him or her as smoothly as possible throughout the Brussels’ – and Theory’s - Saga.

And yet, since everything commences, inevitably, with the ‘Brussels Situation’, the five chapters are set in motion by an *Ouverture*, which is where the work of *problématisation* really begins.
Van Penser la Ville naar Faire la Ville
De verhouding van Brussel, en architectuur, met de (alledaagse) werkelijkheid.

Isabelle Doucet

Samenvatting

Brussel is een knoop, een onlosmakelijke wirwar. En deze zit vast. Dit is geen vonnis, maar een vertrekpunt. Het is wat je kan noemen: de ‘Brusselse Toestand’.

Met deze openingszin, kondigt deze dissertatie een analyse aan van de architecturale en stedelijke productie in Brussel, onmiskenbaar in resonantie met de meer algemene complexiteit van deze stad: meerlagig bestuur, politieke ingewikkeldheid, allerlei sociale, ruimtelijke en economische paradoxen, een nauwgezette alledaagse bricolage, taalkundige aangelegenheden... de lijst is lang.

Veeleer dan te vertrekken van de idealiseringen, verwachtingen, vervloekingen en aversies die al snel worden geprojecteerd op een dergelijke complexiteit, vertrekt deze dissertatie van Brussel zelf, de ‘harde, moeilijke stad’. Het bekijkt de verschillende werkingen van de Brusselse realiteit en ontleedt de veelsoortige ‘draden’ en actoren die aan het werk zijn in de Brusselse architectuurproductie. De inzet, daarom, is het minutieus begrijpen waarom, in Brussel, architectuur zo’n harde business blijkt te zijn. Aan de orde is ook dat wat goede zorg draagt voor de Brusselse ‘angst voor het nieuwe’, en deze angst voedt: een angst die, vier decennia na de Bruxellisation trauma’s (verwijzend naar de vernietiging van een stad in de handen van ontwikkelaars en architecten), nog steeds spookt in Brussel. Van belang zijn ook de frustraties en verwonderingen, alsook de verrassingen en opportunititen van het Brusselse alledaagse. Van belang zijn eveneens deze actoren die de Brusselse machinerie saboteren. Maar desalniettemin is het ook van belang dat, op de één of andere manier, de dingen wel vooruitgaan, of althans bewegen: Brussels functioneert als een gegeerd, uitermate productief artistiek laboratorium; en diegenen (inbegrepen architecten) die getalenteerd zijn in het vinden van hun weg doorheen het ingewikkelde web van het Brusselse bestuur, tonen aan hoe politieke ‘short cuts’ het proces zelfs kunnen versnellen. Van belang zijn dus ook deze actoren en invloeden die maken dat men in Brussel uiteindelijk ‘dingen gedaan krijgt’.

Veeleer dan te willen ‘oplossen’, ambieert deze dissertatie architectuurproductie te problematiseren, omdat dit toelaat partiële, zelfs onverwachte standpunten in te nemen vis-à-vis de Brusselse Situatie.
Daarnaast, paralel aan het ontrafelen van de complexe Brusselse verhouding tot de (alledaagse) werkelijkheid, bekijkt deze dissertatie ook de werkingen van de architectuurtheorie, en de spanningen die gepaard gaan met diens betrachtingen om de verhouding te bestuderen tussen architectuur en de werkelijkheid.

Zodoende is Brussel niet aangewend als een ‘case’, in de betekenis van een toetssteen of bron voor theoretische inzichten – maar als een praktijk, een ervaring. De vijf hoofdstukken van deze dissertatie handelen daarom over het reilen en zeilen van Brussels, en, ofschoon in minder mate, over het reilen en zeilen van de theorie.

Het eerste en derde hoofdstuk ontrafelen de Brusselse architectuur cultuur en hoe deze heeft geleid tot een uniek architectuurklimaat en architecturale en stedelijke productie. Deze ontleding toont aan dat er andere verhoudingen tot de werkelijkheid mogelijk zijn dan welke men vindt in theoretische werken, meer bepaald deze omtrent architectuur en het alledaagse. Het bespreekt de pragmatische wending in de Brusselse architectuur, zoals we die ook meer algemeen hebben kunnen waarnemen in de jaren negentig; een wending die, in Brussel, minder meegaand was met de werkelijkheid dan de zogenaamde ‘projective practices’, en tegelijk minder subversief-oppositioneel dan de kritische theorie; maar die in elk geval wel bezorgd is. Dit bezorgde pragmatisme, en de verankerde (veeleer dan oppositionele) verhouding met de werkelijkheid, zoals we die kunnen vinden in de Brusselse praktijk, blijkt instructief om artificiële tegenstellingen zoals tussen ideologische kritiek en meegaand pragmatisme, tussen theorie en praktijk als de ideale locus voor kritiek, te overstijgen. Dergelijke vragen worden meer theoretisch behandeld in het tweede hoofdstuk.

Waar, zodoende, de eerste drie hoofdstukken de verhouding van de architectuur met de (alledaagse) werkelijkheid bestuderen, door te kijken naar de worstelingen van zowel Brussel als de architectuurtheorie; verbinden het vierde en het vijfde hoofdstuk dergelijke vragen aan architectuur’s methode par excellence om zich te verhouden tot de werkelijkheid: participatie / inspraak. Echter, deze hoofdstukken problematiseren de vereenvoudigingen en reducties die vaak aan de basis liggen van participatieve modellen, en zodoende ambieuëren zij traditionele tegenstellingen te overstijgen tussen de architectuurcreatie en het maatschappelijke; tussen de architect en de gebruiker; het ontwerp en consumptie/gebruik van de ruimte; tactieken en strategieën; esthetica en politiek; expert en leek; software en hardware; ‘bottom-up’ en ‘top-down’; en tussen wat-de-mensen-willen en wat architecten voorstellen. Om dergelijke dispariteiten in vraag te kunnen stellen, zal het vijfde hoofdstuk de impact in rekening brengen van eerder ongebruikelijke, zelfs triviale ‘gebouwen’, zoals een publiek urinoir; en zal het dieper ingaan op mysterieuze, maar goed onderhouden actoren zoals de Brusselse architek.
In het Brusselse dialect is het woord Architek één van de ergste scheldwoorden.

Deze dissertatie gaat dus dieper in op de spanningen die, in Brussel en in de architectuurtheorie, gepaard gingen aan de veranderingen in architectuur’s verhouding tot de werkelijkheid: van Penser la Ville naar Faire la Ville. Wat van primordiaal belang is geweest tijdens deze verschuivingen, is de rol, impact en locus van theorie. Deze dissertatie daagt dergelijke vragen omtrent kritiek uit, niet door nogmaals een alternatief aan te bieden, maar door een aantal van de theoretische tentakels bloot te leggen die nog steeds grip hebben op de werking van de architectuur. Men kan, bijvoorbeeld, denken aan de worstelingen van de architectuur om een balans te vinden tussen autonomie en engagement, wat te maken heeft met de esthetische, creatieve verlangens van de architectuur, en haar maatschappelijke taken. Men kan ook denken aan de uitdaging van de architectuur om kritisch te ageren vis-à-vis de autoriteiten die, vaak onvermijdelijk, de sine qua non zijn van het bestaan van de architectuur. Het heeft ook te maken met het interdisciplinaire en transdisciplinaire karakter van de architectuur, gerelateerd aan diens werking als een discipline en professie. Door dergelijke spanningen aan te snijden, ambieert deze dissertatie om de liaison van architectuur met kritiek anders te bekijken, al is het maar op een lichtelijk andere manier dan we gewoon zijn.

De vijf hoofdstukken van deze dissertatie, en de kleurrijke stoet van actoren die het ten tonele brengt, zijn doorweven met Entr’actes, die de lezer herpositioneren in het geheel, en zodoende hem of haar zo vlot mogelijk begeleiden doorheen de Brusselse en Theoretische Saga.

En dan nog, aangezien alles onvermijdelijk begint bij de ‘Brusselse Situatie’, worden deze vijf hoofdstukken, eerst en vooral in gang gezet door een Ouverture: het is daar dat het problematiseren werkelijk begint.
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----- with Geert Willemyns, Brabantwijk: leven in de schaduw van de grootstad (Brussels: Vzw Sint-Lukaswerkgemeenschap, 1995).
----- with Dubois, Marc, Stationssteden: Eurostation, 10 jaar onderweg (Brussels: Eurostation NV, 2003)


----- *Re-assembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford University Press, 2005)


----- with Johan de Vos, and Jan Knopes (eds.), Living: reflecting diversity and identity (Ghent: Mens & Cultuur Uitgevers, 2006).


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Michiels, Michel, Bruxelles est malade ... mais son coeur bat: chronique de la bruxelloise, affection capitale (Brussels: Le Livre, 1996).


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Ortlieb, Gilles, Les Tramways de Bruxelles (Orléans: Théodore Balmoral, 2002).


----- with Tim Rieniets (eds) Atlas of Shrinking Cities (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2006);

Overmeyer, Klaus (ed.), Urban Pioneers, temporary use and urban development in Berlin (Berlin: Jovis, 2007).
P


**Peeters, Koen**, *Grote Europese Roman* (Antwerpen and Amsterdam: Meulenhoff/Manteau, 2007).


**Pellow, Deborah** (ed.), *Setting Boundaries; The anthropology of spatial and social organisation* (Westport, Connecticut: Bergin and Garvey, 1996).


Q


R

**raith, Frank-Bertholt**, ‘Everyday Architecture – In what style should we build?’, *Daidalos*, issue 75, May 2000, pp. 6-17.


Rasmussen, Steen Eiler, Experiencing Architecture (The MIT Press, 1964 [1959]).

Rendell, Jane; Hill, Jonathan; Fraser, Murray; Dorrian, Mark (eds.) Critical Architecture, edited by (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2007).


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Salet, Willem; Thornley, Andy; and Kreukels, Anton (eds.), Metropolitan Governance and Spatial Planning. Comparative Case Studies of European City-Regions (Spon Press, 2003).


Seghers, Jim, ‘Citymine(d)’, *Street Signs*, Volume 1, Issue 6, Spring 2004, Centre for Urban and Community Research Newsletter (Goldsmith College, University of London), pp. 10-12.


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----- L’architettura in Belgio 1920-1940, pp. 6-15.


----- ‘European integration, regional autonomy and the public: a double democratic deficit?’, Planologisch Nieuws, 1993, nr. 2, Jaargang 13, pp. 82-84.


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Urban Unlimited, De schaduwwstad: vrijplaatsen in Brussel en Rotterdam, research report May 2004, in collaboration with o2 Consult Antwerp, MUST Amsterdam, dS+iV / OBR Rotterdam and VUB Brussels.


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Vandorselaer, Thibaut, La BD dans la ville: Bruxelles = De strip in de stad: Brussel = The comics in the city: Brussels (Louvain-La-Neuve: Versant Sud, 2004).

----- with Van Hamme, Jean, Bruxelles dans la BD. Itinéraire découverte, (Louvain-La-Neuve: Versant Sud, 2004).


Van Istendael, Geert *Het Belgisch labyrint* (Amsterdam and Antwerpen: De Arbeiderspers, 2005 [1989]).


Van Zele, Karin; Henneman, Hugo; Doucet, Isabelle; Bruyneel, Géraldine, *Gezondheidsportret Brabantwijk beweegt!* (Brussels: Samenlevingsopbouw, 2008).


Vermaas Pieter E.; Kroes, Peter; Light, Andrew; Moore, Steven A. (eds.), *Philosophy and Design. From Engineering to Architecture* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008).


W


Wets, Isabel and Verhaeren, Vincent (eds.) *Bruxelles, ma belle?* (Brussels: Editons Croiseregard, 2006).


------ ‘Five designs for the seat of the provincial government of Flemish Brabant – the rise of the architectural competition in Flanders’, *Archis*, nr. 4, 1999, pp. 14-21.


------ ‘Two houses by De Smet vermeulen and Wim Cuyvers’, *Archis*, nr. 10, 2000, pp. 55-59.

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No references

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**Selection of lectures and Talks**

Cruz, Teddy, lecture in Urban Emergencies Symposium NAI 26/06/2008.


Harvey, David, lecture Urban Asymmetries seminar, 21/02/2008, TU Delft.


Moyersoen, Patrick, lecture ‘*Hôtel Central*’, 8 may 2008, Ibai Series *Le deuxième tournant*, Recyclart Brussels.


Stanek, Lukasz, 21/02/2008, Delft School of Design, TU Delft.
Selection of consulted webpages

www.zinneke.org
www.kfda.be
www.citymined.org
www.valdeurope.com
www.avoe.org
www.kafka.be
www.immoscancorporate.be
www.statbru.irisnet.be
www.seasidefl.com
www.ceunet.org
www.humanarc.be
www.brusselnieuws.be
www.archined.nl
www.imbroglio.be
www.bruxelles.irisnet.be
www.avoe.org
www.princes-foundation.org
www.urbanunlimited.nl
www.architectenkrant.be
www.peprav.net
www.spacesofuncertainty.org
www.maprac.org
www.bruxelles.irisnet.be

Selection of films

Jean Nouvel “Nemausus I” Council Housing 1986, Nîmes, France, DVD *Architectures, Volume 1* (Arte)
Liberski, *La Beauté de l’Ordinaire*
Marc Didden, *Brussels by Night*
Walter Ruttmann, *Berlin Symphony of a City* (1927),
Dziga Vertov, *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929)
Jean Vigo, *A Propos de Nice* (1929)
Hans Richter, *Everyday* (1929)
Gwenaël Breës, ‘Dans dix jours ou dans dix ans’ (DVD, 2009)
Charles Chaplin, *Modern Times*
List of interviews

Not in chronological order, but according to type and position of interviewee.

1. Interviews with Brussels-based architects and urban planners

**L’Escaut**
[Interview 2] Olivier Bastin, founding director, and teacher at *La Cambre*; with Nadine Chanvillard, communication specialist - 8 December 2007, 15-17h.

**Xaveer De Geyter Architects – XDGA**

**Arsis**

**FLC**

**Jaspers-Eyers Architects**

**ARIES**

**AGORA**
[Interview 8] Jean-Luc Quoistiaux, founding director, 19 December 2007, 14h30-16h.

**CLI**

**Coop-Arch RU**

**SUM**
[Interview 11] Livia De Bethune, project leader, 19 December 2007, 11-12h05.

**V-Plus**
[Interview 12] Thierry Decuypere, founding director, 9 January 2008, 10-11h15

**Lucien Kroll**
[Interview 13] Dag Boutsen, partner-director, 10 January 2008, 14-15h22

**MSA**
[Interview 14] Benoit Moritz, founding director, 6 December 2007, 14h30-16h
2. Interviews with Brussels officials

City of Brussels
Coordination Contrats de Quartier et Rénovation Urbaine - Coördinatie van de Wijkcontracten en van de Herwaarderingsacties
[Interview 15] André Longin, Head of Department - 21 December 2007, 14h30-16h.

City of Brussels
Maison de la Participation
[Interview 17] Constantin Lazarou, coordinator, 16 January 2008, 14h-16h.

Municipality of Schaarbeek
Renovas
[Interview 18] Françoise Deville, Director Communication - 7 December 2007, 14h-15h45.

Ministerial Cabinet Charles Picqué
[Interview 19] Thomas De Béthune, 14 January 2008, 9h30-10h37

Ministerial Cabinet Pascal Smet

Municipality of St. Josse
Maison de la Rénovation Urbaine St. Josse

3. Interviews with Socio-cultural activists and organisations

Citymined

Recyclart

L’ARAU

4. Interviews with non-Brussels-based architects and urban planners

Mueller-Kneer Architects, London

Fluid Office, London
[Interview 26] Steve McAdam, founder-director, 6 February 2008, 16h-17h18, London

Maxwan, Rotterdam
[Interview 27] Rients Dijkstra, founder-director, 18 January 2008, 17h-18h23, Rotterdam

Artgineering, Rotterdam
Questionnaire for Interviews

Indicative Questionnaire for qualitative, in-depth interviews with Brussels architects, urban planners, socio-cultural actors and official actors involved in urban renewal

First series of questions: about the practice:

- Origin: when and within what context was it set-up?
- Organisation:
  - Size: # employees
  - Disciplinary background employees
  - Inter-disciplinary: conscious choice?
- Core identity of the office
- Type of clients
- Type and scale of projects

Second series of questions: about knowledge building/sharing:

- Theoretical or ideological drive?
- Link with theory, via academic work, teaching?
- Knowledge sharing and gathering in urban renewal projects
  - Sources? Own experience, other expertises (e.g. anthropologists), social organisations, engineers, economists, ecologists...
  - How do you collect knowledge ‘from below’? Participation ...
  - What type of knowledge is collected? Use, taste, program ...
  - How is this knowledge enhanced throughout the further process? Translation into design ...
- Do you believe in participation whatsoever? SWOT

Third series of questions: The position of the architect/planner as ‘expert’:

- Did the position of the architect/planner as expert shift over time?
- Is this current position problematic?
- Need for a shared expertise and/or responsibility? Role as moderator, negotiator, integrator ...
Fourth series of questions: The Brussels Situation:

- Urban renewal in Brussels (Neighbourhood Contracts, Schéma Directeur): SWOT in terms of
  Instrument
  Implementation in practice
  Participation

Fifth series of questions: Non-human actors:

- Non-human actors in planning? Representation techniques, legislations, Bruxellisation ...
- Do you ally with such actors in order to reinforce your work’s success?

Sixth series of questions: best practices and references:

- A really good/bad planning example? Why?
- A really good/bad participatory/negotiating example
- Who would you mention if you could refer me to one project, place or person that could help me to understand Brussels?
5. Conversations, explorative interviews with Brussels-actors (without fix questionnaire), and other field contacts.

5.1 Related to the Brabant Quarter

Tim Cassiers, coordinator *Limite/Limier* project, 3 April 2006.
Delphine Rigolet, *Espace P*, 3 April 2006 (integration prostitution in neighbourhood)
Françoise Deville, Renovas, 3 April 2006 (Neighbourhood Contracts Schaarbeek).
Rabeha Afennas, inter-cultural commercial consultant, Unizo Brussels, 18 September 2006.
Stefan Decorte, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, 9 October 2006.
Laurence Jenard, Recyclart, 26 October 2006.
Sofie Van Bruystegem, Citymined, 1 November 2006.
Bruxxel Bravo network meeting Schaarbeek, 13 November 2006.
An Van Mechelen, BBOT/BNA, 16 November 2006.
Françoise Deville and Laurent Michiels, Renovas, 22 November 2006.
Bruxxel Bravo network meeting Schaarbeek, 29 November 2006.
Julien Piérart, UCL and scientific coordinator Brabant Health Portrait, 1 December 2006.
Julien Piérart (UCL) and Johan Vandenbussche (Ministerial Cabinet Dupont - *Grootstedenbeleid / Politique des Grandes Villes*), 7 December 2006.
Thierry Timmermans, CPAS/OCMW Brussels, 28 December 2006.

5.2 Brabant Health Portrait

Samenlevingsopbouw, 2008). Based on 122 interviews (47 with professionals and 75 with inhabitants).

5.3 International architecture student workshops Brabant Quarter

5.4 International architecture student workshop on architecture and participation
Coordination Interactive mapping - *Communicating space in 3D* workshop, in collaboration with Sint-Lucas School of Architecture Brussels, the House of Participation of the Brussels municipality of Anderlecht, Bauhaus University Weimar, Bialystok Poland and École Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture et de Paysage de Lille, February 2006.

5.5 Conversations

I should refer to the numerous formal and informal conversations I had in the past years with Brussels’ architects, researchers, colleagues, activists, and officials. Of a much longer list, I would like to include, with particular attention, Ludo Moyersoen, Sophie Van Bruynstegem, and Jim Seghers 5Citymined); Bruno De Meulder (K.U.Leuven), who was involved in the funding of my research within the framework of Prospective Research for Brussels; Mathieu Berger (U.L.B.) with whom I collaborated on several occasions regarding participation within Neighbourhood Contracts; Geoffrey Grulois, Judith Lemaire, Pierre Blondeel, Benoit Moritz, and Jean-Louis Genard at *La Cambre*; Tim Cassiers, Eric Corijn, Benedikte Zitouni, Stefan Decorte at Cosmopolis VUB; Dag Boutsen, Marc Godts, Nel Janssens, Annette Kuhk at Sint-Lucas; Françoise Deville; the members of Constant VZW; and the many others not included in this list.

I would like to make special reference to Marc Dubois (conversation 26 August 2009) for his invaluable feedback on the first chapter of this dissertation.
Curriculum Vitae Isabelle Doucet

1. Personal Record

1.1 Full Name

Doucet Isabelle Helena Lodewijk

Born 16 November 1976, Hasselt, Belgium

1.2 Education


2000 MA (Arch), BA (Arch) Sint-Lucas School of Architecture, Brussels, Belgium

1.3 Appointments held

12/2009 – present

Lecturer in Architecture and Urbanism, School of Environment and Development, Manchester School of Architecture (MSA) / Manchester Architecture Research Centre (MARC)

01/2008 – 06/2009 (80%)


01/2009 – 09/2009 (25%):

Design Studio MA Architecture and graduation thesis supervisor, Institut Supérieur d’Architecture de la Communauté Française - La Cambre, Brussels

01/2008 – 12/2008 (20%):

Researcher, Free University Brussels, Geography Department, Cosmopolis Group.

01/2004 – 12/2007 (100%):

Researcher Sint-Lucas School of Architecture, Brussels, Belgium

01/2003 - 12/2003 (100%):

Project advisor and coordinator in workspace planning (Clients: Real Estate Developers, Architecture firms, Corporate Business).

02/2001 - 12/2002 (100%)

Research coordinator Business Squared NV - research, analysis and team-coordination for strategic business development projects (Clients included 3M Belgium and ctg Belgium IT Solutions).

08/2000 - 01/2001 (80%)

Architecture Internship, Luc Maes Architects Brussels.
1.4 Visiting appointments / secondments

09/04/2010
One-day seminar organisation, Multiplicity and Visual Identities post-graduate master program, Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK), 9 April 2010.

Research fellow Università degli studi di Sassari, facoltà di Architettura di Alghero, Sardegna, Italy.

Spring 2007 and Spring 2008
Guest Lecturer MsC Architecture Theory Course, Drawing and Media Course (3ECTS, 24 contact hours / semester). TU Delft.

Spring 2007 till Fall 2009
Guest lecturer, MsC Architecture Theory, The Urban Question (3ECTS, 3 contact hours / semester).

February 2006
Coordinator workshop ‘Interactive mapping - Communicating space in 3D’, Sint-Lucas School of Architecture Brussels, in collaboration with the Participation House of the Municipality of Anderlecht (Brussels), Bauhaus University Weimar, Bialystok Poland and Ecole Nationale Supérieure d’Architecture et de Paysage de Lille.

May 2005

April 2005
Design Teacher research-by-design workshop, commissioned by the Municipal Council of Deerlijk, Belgium.

February 2005
Coordination international workshop ‘Dealing with boundaries: opportunity or necessity?’ (Second Edition), Sint-Lucas School of Architecture Brussels.

May 2004
Design Teacher international workshop ‘Border: out of order?’ Ecole Nationale Supérieure d’Architecture et de Paysage de Lille, France.

April 2004
Coordination international workshop ‘Dealing with boundaries: opportunity or necessity?’ (First Edition), Sint-Lucas School of Architecture Brussels, financially supported by the Socrates Program (European Commission). Included responsibilities: Concept, organisation, coordination, release CD-Rom and set-up exhibition June 2004.

February 2004

2002
Communication for the publication Spaces of Uncertainty by Markus Miessen and Kenny Cupers.
2000
Competition Obumex ‘Wash’: idea competition for the design of bathroom furniture.

1999
Student competition for the urban design for a roundabout in Genève, organised by the University of Architecture of Genève.

Juries and Guest Critic

1.5 Memberships (Academic and Professional)
- Editorial board member Footprint Journal, peer-reviewed architecture theory journal.
- Editorial staff member Urban and Landscape Perspectives Book Series, Springer Verlag.
- Scientific committee member Santé dans le Quartier (Ghent, Brussels, Liege), ANSO, Universite Catholique de Bruxelles, B. Francq and J. Piérart (2007-2008)
- Management council member Constant VZW, Media and Art collective, Brussels (2007-2010 as President)
- Member of Cosmopolis XL – interdisciplinary research centre at the VUB (Vrije Universiteit Brussel), department of Geography.

2. Publications

2.1 Edited books and journals


2.2 Academic Journal Papers


Reviewer for Science Studies, special issue Understanding Architecture, Accounting Society.

2.3 Book Chapters


2.4 Professional Journal Papers


2.5 Official Reports


2.6 Publications in Conference Proceedings


Doucet, I., ‘Negotiating (spatial) complexity: towards a science-in-action’, in: *New concepts and approaches for urban and regional policy and planning conference (proceedings)*,
edited by the European Spatial Development Planning Network and SP2SP (Leuven: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2007).


2.7 Selection of (unpublished) conference papers


Doucet, I., ‘Si ni « d'en haut » ni « d'en bas / vers le haut »… alors quel point de vue puis-je adopter?’ seminar with Bruno Latour on Re-assembling the Social, Free University Brussels, 26 January 2008.


3. Research Grants

01/2004 – 12/2007 (4 years)

Prospective Research For Brussels grant, Institute for the encouragement of Scientific Research and Innovation of Brussels (ISRIB). Official Project title: Functional mixture through the appropriate employment of boundaries, to solve the urban polarisation between planning conceptions, their conversion into rules and translation into practice.

4. Professional advisory or consultancy


Contributions (through lectures) to the Pyblik professional training program for the Brussels Regional Planning Department's administrators: 6 March 2009 and 9 May 2008.
5. Invited Speaker (selection)

Human Cities Symposium, BOZAR Brussels, 7-8 May 2010, organised by, amongst others, ISACF - La Cambre Architecture (Brussels), Architecture and Design Scotland, former The Lighthouse (Glasgow), Politecnico di Milano, Urban Planning Institute of the Republik of Slovenia.

One-day seminar organisation, Multiplicity and Visual Identities post-graduate master program, Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK), Zurich, 9 April 2010.

Guest lecture, with Benedikte Zitouni (Sciences Po), TU Delft, Border Conditions – Invisible Cities master program, 2 November 2009.


Bournemouth Institute of the Arts, United Kingdom, 11 March 2009.

Delft School of Design / UN Studio, Amsterdam, 7 November 2008.


Regional Modelling System Seminar, Delft School of Design (TU Delft), 22 June 2005, on invitation of Nelson Brissac (Arte/Cidade - PUC University - São Paulo) and Arie Graafland.


Invited for panel discussion on Urban Regeneration by Belgian politician Sven Gatz, 6 March 2009.

Invited Curator, ‘Deuxième tournant’ Lecture Series, the Brussels Architecture Institute IBAI, Recyclart Brussels, May 2008, with Vincent Calay (Université Libre de Bruxelles) - featuring, amongst others, Albena Yaneva (Manchester University), Steve Mc Adam (Fluid Office, London), Katrin Böhm (Creative Works, London), and Sara Noël Costa de Araujo (Xaveer De Geyter Architects).


City Safari Brussels, on invitation of the Urbanism and Housing Department of the city of Rotterdam, 21 May 2005.

Pyblik professional training program for the Brussels Regional Planning Department's administrators, 6 March 2009, and 9 May 2008.