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avec le produit, elle est totalement dépendante de ce produit chez BKK-3. Un bâtiment doit en effet authentifier en permanence les valeurs et qualités correspondant à sa marque. Une entreprise plutôt ambitieuse si l'on tient compte de la durée de vie nettement plus longue de l'architecture comparée celle des chaussures de sport. I.+A.R.

1 Naomi Klein: «No Logo! Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies», HarperCollins/Flamingo, London, 2000.

# English

Urs Primas (pages 28–33)  
Translation: Michael Robinson

## Mono-multiculturalism?

MVRDV's constructed neighbourhoods

The "ecology of differences" is central to MVRDV's housing projects. This is a strategy that is trying hard to come to terms with the heterogeneous needs of today's housing consumers. It makes great play with this pluralism, but sometimes falls back on architectural images that merely mask the monotony and standardization that dominate housing construction.

"Rather than creating different advertising campaigns for different markets, campaigns could sell diversity itself, to all markets at once. The formula maintained the one-size-fits-all cost benefits of old-style cowboy cultural imperialism, but ran far fewer risks of offending local sensibilities. Instead of urging the world to taste America, it calls out, like the Skittles slogan, to "Taste the Rainbow". This candy-coated multiculturalism has stepped in as a kinder, gentler package of what Indian physicist Vandana Shiva calls "the monoculture" – it is, in effect, mono-multiculturalism." (Naomi Klein)<sup>1</sup>

MVRDV's 1991 "Berlin Voids" European project is a manifesto for pluralism. This "tenement turned inside out" consists of a jigsaw puzzle made up of 284 extremely diverse dwellings: the home without a roof, the home with the super-window, the catholic home... Today people move of up to eight times in their lives on average – over three times as often as in 1950. This means, according to MVRDV, that the idea of the standard home ("one size fits all") is now obsolete.<sup>2</sup> Berlin Voids delegates part of centrally organized housing production's planning power to its future

residents. Instead of a monoculture of identical "ideal homes", a range of choices is offered. Thus – theoretically at least – individual preferences acquire a greater standing: at least the first buyers or tenants can choose a home that suits them better than a standard off-the-peg version. But Berlin Voids does not just create real freedom of choice, but – above all – an architectural image of it as well: the proud high-rise slab, Winy Maas writes in "Farmax", introduced itself to its East Berlin neighbourhood, which is dominated by "inhuman tenements", as a "vertical landscape packed full of ideals": a kind of "dwelling of the West" in other words, a built advertisement for the pluralistic promises of the market economy.

Two recent MVRDV housing projects suggest themselves as a basis for critical discussion of this double-edged strategy. Both projects – the residential block in Amsterdam's Silodam and the terraced houses in Ypenburg on the outskirts of The Hague – manage to find some "elements of architecture" among the banalities of current housing production in Holland, and they do this by enhancing the general standard beyond what is usually required for housing of this kind. That alone is an extraordinary achievement, requiring uncompromising negotiating skills from the architects, as well as talent and experience. Harm Tilman rightly points out that in Ypenburg for example a number of not particularly spectacular measures – concentrating all the parking places along the banks, treating affordable rented accommodation and expensive owner-occupied homes equally in visual terms – create qualities that go well beyond the usual architectural packaging, and that such measures are all too easily brushed aside when surface aspects are discussed in an unduly moral tone.<sup>3</sup> The rest of this essay may seem to deal above all with "appearances": if so, this is because in both these projects the façade has become the crux of a marketing strategy that no longer sells a particular quality, but difference as such.



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