Werbung

Methodological eclecticism

In both projects it is impossible to overlook the effort that has gone into the treatment of the surfaces: in the case of the residential block in Silodam, a patchwork of different materials is intended to illustrate the various "neighbourhoods" inside the large concrete structure, while in Ypenburg identical suburban terraced houses are covered all over with different materials and thus smoothed out into sculptural caricatures of themselves. In Silodam the material collage gives the block the charm of old industrial structures that have been cobbled together over the decades: a certain lack of perfection, making a comparable effect to the "mannerisms" that Le Corbusier used since the thirties to distance himself from classical Modernism. In Ypenburg, however, the effect is precisely the opposite: the lack of articulation in the canopies, guttering and other additional features gives these otherwise unpretentious little suburban houses a hint of artistic precision. MVRDV's eclecticism is not formal, but methodological: they define their approach, their ideologies and their fascinations all over again, from one job to the next.

The residential block in Silodam marries the socialist idea of the large block as a "social condenser" with the neighbourhood ideology of the fifties and Aldo van Eyck's metaphor of the building as a "small town": social pluralism is translated into a series of "neighbourhoods" – groups of specific housing types – each of which is allotted a characteristic access system, a colour and a façade material. Stacking all these lifestyles in one block produces a labyrinthine building whose corridors invite you to roam around at length: the dreariness of the "rues intérieures", which are painted in different colours floor by floor, and reminiscent of multi-storey car parks, alternates with middle-class front-garden romanticism in the multi-storey, extremely wide external corridors, with the iridescent light blue of a light-flooded passage on the ground floor or with the mysterious atmosphere of the bridges on the lower storeys, which are sparsely lit by the daylight reflected on the surface of the water.

In the Silodam development the aim is to create manageable neighbourhoods within a large residential block, but in Ypenburg the "ecology of differences" becomes a pictorial strategy intended to create "identity" within the mishmash of housing in this urban expansion project providing 15,000 units. The majority of the homes had to be built as terraced houses, working to relatively inflexible guidelines on use statistics, budgets, layout planning and construction modes. Fritz Palmbloom's master plan divided a former military airfield into a series of sub-areas with different landscape themes – moor, woodland, water etc. The first step in the sub-plan for the "water district", which was devised by MVRDV with the developer Amvest, reinforces the water theme: the buildings were given landing-stages instead of gardens, and the area of water is considerably increased from the original figure in the master plan. The second step further divides the sub-sections into building blocks which are in their turn allotted a thematic slogan, an architectural practice and a material for the façade: "Water Courts", "Patio Island", "Hedge Island" etc. On the "Hedge Island", which was further developed by MVRDV themselves, the idea of difference becomes an identity in its own right, in that not just one but five different façade claddings are used. Here the architects are pushing their own automatism of differentiation so far that it becomes almost ironic: a symbol of the panic fear of monotony, repetition and size that has shaped Dutch building culture ever since the so-called failure of the large Bijlmermeer estate.

In their "Adhocism" manifesto of 1972, Charles Jencks and Nathan Silver demanded a "democracy of the consumer", decentralized design based directly on meeting individual wishes: "You sit there and need – we do the rest..."[4] Even thirty years later – at least in the field of housing construction – that sounds somewhat Utopian.

Just as the idea of grass roots democratic co-determination by residents in the seventies was quickly absorbed by the industrial housing construction machinery, the pluralism offered by MVRDV seems to have been somewhat eroded by contact with reality. While the Silodam can still be read as a remix of the Berlin Voids ideas spelt out to address Dutch realities, the differentiation of images in Ypenburg merely masks a far-reaching homogenization in terms of programming and typology. It thus distorts its own idealistic starting-points by turning them into hollow advertising clichés.

1 Naomi Klein: "No Logo" HarperCollins/Flamingo, London, 2000.
2 Winy Maas, MVRDV et al.: "FARMAX, Excursions on Density", Rotterdam, 1994
3 Harm Tilman: "Architecture parlante in de buitenwijk", de Architect 2/2002
4 Charles Jencks and Nathan Silver: "Adhocism", New York and London, 1972

Ilka & Andreas Ruby (pages 38–43)
English translation: Rory O'Donovan

Bilateral Branding

The IP.ONE Impulse Centre by BKK-3

Heterogeneously programmed buildings are interesting investment properties that represent a current trend and receive State subsidies. Urban density and atmosphere – previously the postulates of a small radical scene are – today fulfilled in a smart mix of uses combing living, working and culture. BKK 3, whose origins as «Baukünstlerkollektiv» we can locate in left-wing alternative Vienna, employs a marketing strategy of global capitalism: branding a radical signature to make it into an urban cipher.

"Commercial development in the city" seems almost like a printer's error, should it not read "on the edge of the city"? In terms of the market economy the urban periphery has all the best arguments: lower rents, a better infrastructure, closer proximity to motor ways and the airport as well as considerable freedom from planning constraints on green field sites instead of long-winded confrontations with established urban structures and building conservation lobbies.

Given these market conditions for commercial properties IP.ONE seems somewhat exotic: a business centre for companies from the areas of technology, services, trade and industry, almost 7000 square metres in extent, in an area of historic block perimeter development in Vienna's 10th district. Here the project developer, Prisma Zentrum für Standort und Stadtentwicklung, applied a project typology in the city that it had previously used only in classical commercial areas on the urban perimeter. The Impulse Centre (IP) is not restricted to the usual supply of office and commercial premises but defines itself as "a business location offering a high level of service". The centre has its own management team that assists resident companies in matters relating to the authorities and subsidies. It stimulates the exchange of information between companies housed in the building in order to encourage the formation of internal networks and to establish a basis for joint projects. At the same time it increases the external impact of the centre by organizing public events in the building and cultivating contacts with representatives from the worlds of business and politics. Additionally, in-house companies can use a whole series of communal spaces: a fully equipped seminar room and a foyer that can be used for public events. Thanks to a municipal initiative to promote the Viennese economy entitled Wiener Gewerbehöfe the foyer can be used free of charge by companies based in the building. A restaurant established in the building ("/slash worldfood") guarantees the provision of meals during work hours and takes over the catering for events held in the foyer in the evening. After office closing time the restaurant transforms into an address for Vienna's nightlife. The other communal facilities then also become available for use by the general public. The seminar room and the events foyer can be rented for a modest fee for cultural activities in the evenings so that the location of the Impulse Centre in the city also increases the surplus value of the city itself.
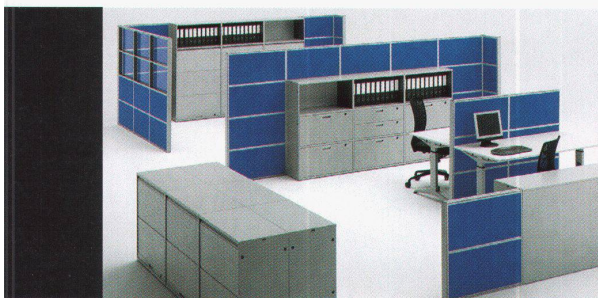
Multiple programming as a marketing strategy?
Whereas the developer had tended previously to work with "anonymous" architecture, for the IP.ONE project he deliberately turned to BKK-3, an office that is numbered among the internationally known representatives of recent Austrian architecture. In addition to considerations relating to marketing strategies this choice was also motivated by the content of the work by BKK-3. This Viennese practice has impressively demonstrated its competence in the area of multiple programming of urban interfaces with projects for communal urban living.

In the "Sargfabrik" (1992–96) BKK-3 formulated a radical antithesis to mono-functional, pigeonhole type housing developments in the city by enhancing the 75 dwelling units with social and cultural facilities such as a kindergarten, café, seminar centre, concert space and an indoor swimming pool (wbw 1-2/1999 pp. 4–13). This functional upgrade from dormitory town to living city allows the residents to enjoy leisure time activities close to their home for which they would otherwise have to travel across the city. As such communal facilities can be economically run only if they are used by "drop ins" from other city districts as well as by the residents of the Sargfabrik they automatically attract the general public and preserve the Sargfabrik from the social isolation of a gated community. In the successor project, "Miss Sargfabrik" (2001), which was built as a response to popular demand from potential tenants, BKK-3 conjugated the same programmatic concept of living but on a far tighter site (wbw 10/2001, pp. 27–33). In contrast to the open courtyard of the old Sargfabrik its offspring had to be restricted to the vacant corner of a block and BKK-3 were not permitted to build on the inner courtyard. For this reason they were able to produce their programmatic overlays only by means of complex interlocking spaces within the building. The most prominent result of this process is a functional hybrid made up of laundromat, communal kitchen, library, internet corner and tele-working room combined in a two-storey spatial formation that one can experience as a spatial continuum thanks to transparent dividing walls and a central access ramp.

In the case of IP.ONE BKK-3 were confronted with an almost identical site. Here too the main issue was how to fill the vacant corner of a historic urban block. However in this case it was permitted to build over the courtyard to provide access to adjoining old buildings that were to be connected with the new structure. In terms of its primary function this link is purely a circulation space but, by virtue of its strategic positioning, it becomes the communicative heart of the building. Accordingly BKK-3 occupied this area with the most communicative function in the brief i.e. the lecture room. Thanks to its programmatic equivocality this space can easily adapt to fit the intensive public functions arranged around it. This applies particularly to the restaurant as well as the seminar room. The inward-facing side of the restaurant meets up against the foyer and so it can easily be extended into the latter as and when required. Vice versa, once public events are officially over they can equally easily move into the restaurant. Depending on the particular programming (lecture, exhibition opening, film presentation, disco etc.) the configuration of the floor plan constantly allows new possibilities of transitory use. More than just a foyer, atrium or lecture room this space is an example of that kind of event space which Bernard Tschumi identified in the 1970s as the embodiment of an