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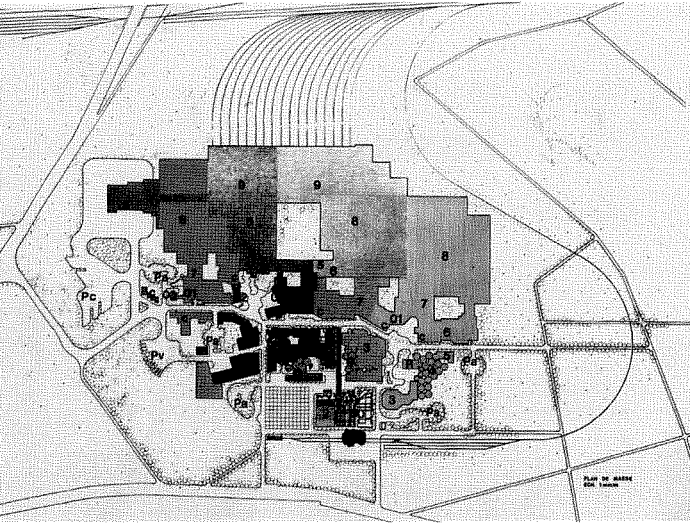
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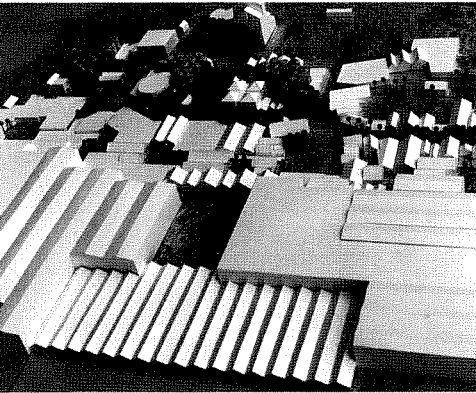
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Workplaces for Workers

Lucien Kröll



Top and above: Proposal for the Kronenbourg bottling plant in Selestat, France.

In the plan, production spaces and a train shed are at the top. These large spaces are designed as a combination of smaller volumes. Activities that do not have to be located in the production building, such as administration and storage of raw materials, are located in the smaller structures shown in the bottom of the plan. (In the model, the production floor and train shed are in the foreground.)

The buildings are arranged along a linear open space and courtyards so the complex resembles a traditional brewery village.

In the 1970s, new thinking about industrial working conditions was developed in Europe. In France, the National Agency for the Improvement of Working Conditions developed relationships with all the people concerned with this issue — business associations, unions, universities, ergonomics engineers, industrial designers and others. The agency initiated a movement of research about creating work spaces based on the experience of workers rather than the prescriptions of experts, who are only interested in “mechanical spaces.” It is a pity that we do not hear about this association any more and that its bulletin is no longer published.

Before and during the competition for a new Kronenbourg brewery (named “K3”) in Selestat, France (near Strasbourg), we attended informational sessions in Strasbourg on the improvement of working spaces; of the four competitors, we were the only one to do so. Those sessions involved experts in psychology, employment, ergonomics and brewing techniques and representatives of German and French workers’ unions. The discussion with the ergonomics engineers was rather tense; they pretended to be neutral but were, above all, interested in the productivity and efficiency of workers’ gestures. They anxiously prevented themselves from extending their

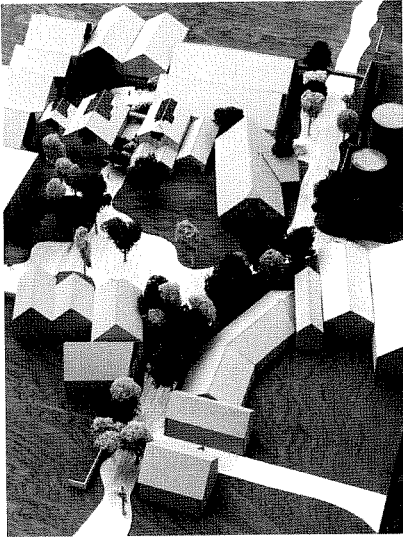
approach to less mechanical relations, such as the health and comfort of workers: They were mercenaries!

The K3 competition took place under this renewal of attitudes toward the conception and design of working spaces, right after the completion of some rather rudimentary experiments. The Volvo factory built in Kalkar, Sweden, was one of the better attempts.

Everywhere else, productivity and discipline were considered first. At best, some views to interior gardens were provided. The rest of the spaces and environments were dedicated to the engines’ comfort — not the workers’ culture, nor the involvement of workers in teams or their creativity in their own organization or their ability to create rewarding social relationships.

Our intentions of creating more lively places was understood differently by Kronenbourg’s director and by workers’ teams: we just had to adopt an open-minded attitude and translate working relationships we could observe into architectural forms.

The competition deeply worried Kronenbourg’s management. After it eliminated the first two competitors, Kronenbourg could not make up its mind between Renzo Piano (modern and brilliant technique; humans should be grateful for the opportunity to assist a beautiful machine) and us (complex



Courtyard adjacent to the bottling plant and the administrative buildings, typical of the intimately scaled spaces located throughout the plant.

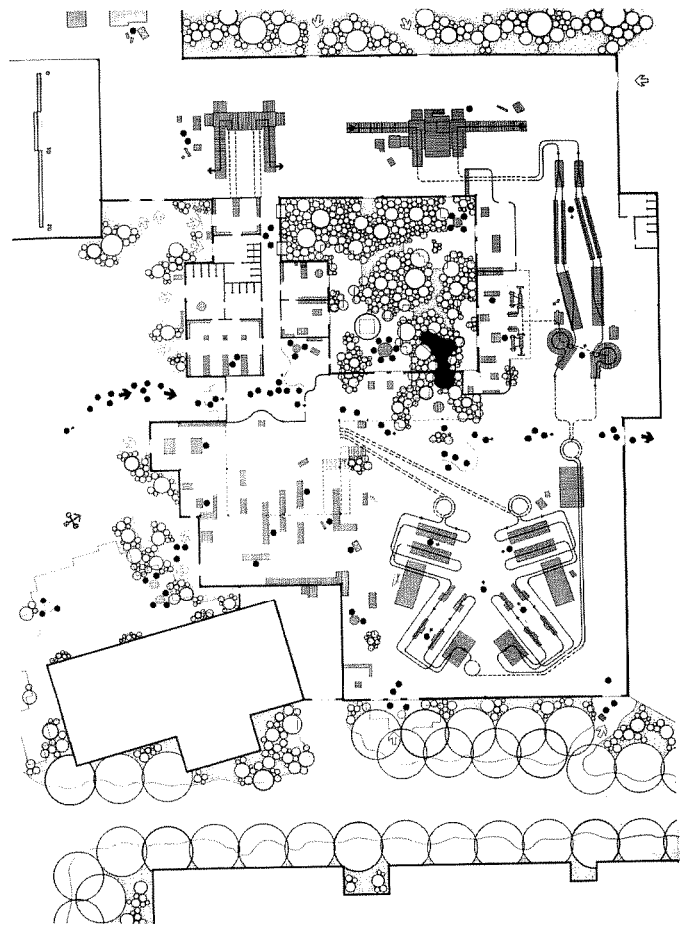
(Illustrations courtesy Lucien Kroll)

team composition and a rather populist image). We had spent some days in the old factory, questioning workers and supervisors, and we could not ignore their energy and friendly cooperation.

Piano's project finally won. It was really up to date in that it foresaw the extinction of those fragile workers' participation in redefining the concept of "factory," and it absolutely declined the possibility of using the workers in the design of the project, being exclusively technical (serious work).

What is going on today? The tendency is even more brutal and machine-dedicated. It seems that designers have forgotten about the experiments mentioned before. Architects, frustrated, have given up and just make money. When I tell my students in the U.S. that the notion of citizen's participation in city planning comes from their country, they do not believe me. Sadly this shows a loss of creative culture. Industry has simply given up dreaming, at least of a more friendly environment for workers.

Translation by Guillaume Delemazure.



Above and below: Plan and sketch of bottling plant production floor. Machines are placed to increase opportunities for worker interaction. Workers are given desks where they can store their work materials and personal effects.

