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Change Trumps Tradition: The Atlantis project of Léon Krier, 1986 - 1992

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ABSTRACT

In 1986, Hans-Jürgen Müller commissioned Léon Krier to design the Atlantis project. Müller, the owner of an art gallery in Germany, planned to host think-tanks at a remote location in Tenerife. His plan was to foster the preservation of European culture, one that for Müller sets standards for proper manners and good behaviour through art and cultural activities. The artistic and architectural setting mediated and cultivated these standards, the demise of which caused the crisis Müller saw in the world. For Krier the project was affiliated with the *Rational Architecture* exhibition of 1973 and the Reconstruction of the European City Movement.

The reception of the Atlantis project is coloured by three factors. First, from the beginning of the 1970s to the early 1990s, Krier went from being included in a select group of AA School teachers, to becoming an outsider of that same group and its intellectual sphere. Second, the client for the project wanted to be a pioneer in the cultural sector and use its larger socio-political influence for ideological purposes. And finally, in the specialized press and popular media, Krier, the clients, the project, the ideological statements, and a diffuse mixture of all were often negatively received.

The Atlantis project came at a decisive moment in Krier's career. At the same time the project's history is emblematic of a crucial turn in architectural discourse. The oppositional narratives within post-modernism had gone from possible rapprochement to complete antipathy. The Atlantis project itself was never constructed, and with it the idea that a renewed traditional discourse could belong to one unified architectural agenda emerged and also evaporated.

KEYWORDS

Architecture, Theory, Criticism, Utopia, Rhetorics, Practice

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1. INTRODUCTION

When Léon Krier designed the Atlantis project in 1986 [fig. 1], it was intended that it be built on a private site in Tenerife for clients Hans-Jürgen and Helga Müller. Half a decade later, it turned out to be a virtual project that enhanced the perception of Krier as a utopian character. Many explanations are plausible for why the Atlantis project was not built. For example, Krier's design required twice the area of land owned by the clients. Additional funding and the expansion of the property could have resolved these problems, but not only were they not forthcoming, the clients also encountered great difficulties obtaining a building permit for any phase of the project. In addition, the controversies associated with Krier — such as his book on Albert Speer (1985) that most likely upset many of his Jewish connections — might have complicated the attempt to rally support.¹ By the same token, the clients themselves had to defend their sweeping statements about the proclaimed cathartic quality of the project. In the end, they failed to raise enough money. Because the project was not realized, it could never overcome the turmoil of the promotional talks, reports, and exhibitions that often looked like public defenses.

Much has been said about the project. What remains is the question of how to identify its place in history: as an architectural project or as an ideological statement?² In case of the latter, which statement: the reconstruction of the European city or the rescue of European culture? Or did was Atlantis project a fusion of these two agendas? If so, how did it affect Krier? The problematic preparatory process shows that the Atlantis ideology — that is, the cultural politics of the Müllers, combined with Krier's mission to marry modernity with traditional building typologies and tectonics, and the perception of this mixture by others — was out of touch with aspirations of those from whom the project was hoping to get support. Nevertheless, considering that the project inspired Prince Charles to commission Krier with the masterplanning of a new town, Poundbury,³ parts of that ideology did find their place after all.

Critics often castigate new traditionalists⁴ as nostalgic and conservative. Even today, the opposition of modernists against traditionalists, which had its heyday in the 1980s, lingers on. In a public talk entitled 'Urgency'⁵ at the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) in 2007, Peter Eisenman called Léon Krier his 'nemesis' and 'the embodiment of the enemy'. In 2005, the Belgian critic Geert Bekaert may have gone even further, referring to the Krier era as an episode better forgotten. For Bekaert, Krier was counterproductive in the attempt to advance the architectural discourse of the day.⁶ By contrast, at the *Projective Landscape* conference organized at the University of Delft in 2006, Robert Somol referred to Seaside — a new urbanist project in which Krier collaborated — as an example of best practices in projecting otherworldliness. New urbanism, which originated in America in the 1990s, incorporated many tenets of the new traditionalists. Somol repeated this in a public lecture at the Architectural Association (AA) School of Architecture that same year.⁷ In 2007, the Hungarian architectural theorist and historian Ákos Moravánszky compared the new urbanist proposals to the work of Koolhaas on the basis of their social merits.⁸ And, in the last chapter of *Utopia's Ghost*, published in 2010, the American architectural theorist and historian Reinhold Martin refers to Krier and his Counterprojects when reflecting on the performative quality of architectural imagination.⁹

Arguably, some aspects of Krier's work do not fall outside the (post-)modernist mindset. The Atlantis project came along when Krier's architectural vocabulary had reached a mature state. The responses of clients, critics and colleagues often dramatized the way the project was perceived ideologically. In particular, the influence of critics such as Colin Rowe, Maurice Culot and Anthony Vidler problematized, as well as amplified, the rather new style of intellectualism deployed by Krier, Eisenman, Koolhaas, and others of their generation. The Atlantis narrative is, therefore, emblematic for an architectural discourse of the 1980s that, instead of dialectically synthesizing into one unified agenda, curdled into almost parallel worlds. Krier and his new traditionalist view ended up disjunct from these other intellectual realms.

The dynamics of that particular moment emerge by investigating a set of questions that build upon each other: (1) How did Krier enter the architectural profession in 1968 (when a radical questioning of authority had destabilized the architect's position) and how did he become part of the AA School's 1970s legacy? (2) How did the clients come up with an ambitious assignment without the available financial resources? (3) What enhanced the primarily

ideological reading of the Atlantis project? (4) How did both the Atlantis ideology and the project itself decline? (5) How did that decline affect Krier, his architecture, and the pro-traditionalist discourse in general?

BECOMING PART OF THE AA SCHOOL'S LEGACY OF THE 1970S

Today, from a perspective indebted to modernists, Krier's contribution is not seen as significant, but this was not always the case. In the late 1970s and the early 1980s, he was sharing the stage with many architects who are notorious today. In 1968, when Krier was 22 years old, he dropped out of university in Stuttgart. Krier's time in Stuttgart would later prove to have been crucial to being given the assignment for the Atlantis project. The client, Hans-Jürgen Müller, was the owner of an art gallery in Stuttgart at the time, and he recalls having met Krier at the gallery.¹⁰ After leaving Stuttgart, Krier went to work with James Stirling. Krier was fed up with the prevailing modernist discourse at the University of Stuttgart and had hoped to find an alternative practice at the Stirling office.

Such an act of protest was not uncommon.¹¹ It was a period in Western architecture in which architects actively gathered and institutionalized a voice of protest, expressing disciplinary doubts, anxiety and strident critique.¹² In 1968, for example, the Belgian architect and educator, Maurice Culot, founded the non-profit association Archives d'Architecture Moderne (AAM) in Brussels, to counter the dismay felt towards post-war architecture and urbanism. AAM's primary initiatives were to support exhibitions, contribute to research and to publish books. From 1975 to 1990 it published an international magazine on architecture and urbanism, bearing the same name as the association. One year after founding AAM, Maurice Culot founded the Atelier de Recherche et d'Action Urbaines (ARAU), which complemented the AAM initiative with political activism, urban research, and citizen participation. It is with Culot that Krier was to contribute the Counterprojects to the Venice Biennale in 1980.

Krier worked at the Stirling office from 1968 to 1974. He was in charge of putting together a book about the office, for which he provided most of the graphics. He was also involved in the 1973 triennial exhibition in Milan, dedicated to Rational Architecture and called *Architettura-Città*.¹³ The impact of this exhibition resonated throughout Europe and the United States. It expressed a growing critique that had emerged in Italy in the 1960s — more specifically, in Rome, Venice and Milan's architectural academic, intellectual and editorial environments — proposing to counter the abstract approach of functionalist modernists by redefining architecture in relation to the historic city. The seminal texts that provided the methodological and theoretical underpinning to this approach were *The Architecture of the City*¹⁴ and *Architecture and Utopia*.¹⁵ In 1975, Krier was involved in bringing this exhibition to London.¹⁶

At the age of 29 Krier was among the first teachers, including Elia Zenghelis, Peter Cook, Bernard Tschumi and Rem Koolhaas, to be part of the internationally oriented curriculum of the AA School in London, a curriculum that was reformed in 1972.¹⁷ With Peter Eisenman initiating much of the transatlantic debate, Krier was regularly invited to contribute his ideas about the classical and the vernacular qualities of architecture. Through these initiatives Krier entered a circle of intellectuals who were on their way to becoming highly influential. A decade after the questioning of authority, several position statements emerged that marked specific territories in architectural discourse, such as *Delirious New York*, *Collage City*, and Eisenman's seminal text *Post-functionalism*.¹⁸

When he brought the exhibition dedicated to rational architecture to Brussels in 1978, Krier co-wrote a manifesto with Maurice Culot as an introduction to the exhibition. The manifesto was entitled *The Brussels Declaration: Reconstruction of the European City*.¹⁹ The protection of building heritage was the main theme. Repairing the city was to be done with an architectural vocabulary entrenched in characteristics of the historic city. Any formal reference to functionalist architecture had to be denounced because it represented the common culprit that had harmed European cities. Therefore, even the non-historic centres were approached with the same formal architectural apparatus. The promotion of this new traditionalism masked the fact that the origin of the movement's vocabulary lay within the modernist's formal language because it appropriated the intellectual framework of the neo-rationalists,²⁰ a framework Krier judged as still incomplete and insufficient.²¹ For Krier the neo-rationalist framework had to be deployed strictly for the reconstruction of the European city. Therefore, traditional architecture and urbanism should be the single modus operandi, with Otto Wagner and Eliel Saarinen honoured as the originators of the polycentric model.²²

With the acclaim Krier won for his reconstruction discourse, he became connected to the British establishment, and was thus invited for teaching positions worldwide and offered several jobs.²³ He was also regularly asked to share his

thoughts in writing and speech. The momentum prompted him decide to rehabilitate the architecture (not the person) of Albert Speer. The resulting book, first published in 1985, pushed the modernist versus traditionalist dialectic to its extreme. It turned out to be a career move over which he lost clients, intellectual support, and eventually, for a while, the ability to work.²⁴

ET IN ARCADIA EGO – THE ATLANTIS PROJECT ON THE RISE

In 1982, Hans-Jürgen Müller and his wife Helga opened a gallery space in Cologne and set up the Atlantis Kunst + Design GmbH company. Out of this company four years later, the cultural project of Atlantis was born. The Müllers wanted to create a meeting place for politicians, entrepreneurs, scientists and artists who would try to resolve the crisis they saw in the world of art and culture at large. On 26 April 1986, when the preliminary ideas for the site were still evolving, the Chernobyl disaster occurred. The Müllers experienced it as the confirmation that initiatives such as theirs were of utmost importance. In that year, 1986, they approached Léon Krier, already in the limelight, to design the Atlantis project [figs. 2-5].

The Müllers requested that the design resemble ‘die Kunst des Lebens’. It was to be an ‘Ort der Schönheit’, the key to reset ethical standards.²⁵ The project was expected to be finished by the year 2000. At the [Tenerife](#) location a think-tank would develop ways to cope with the major challenges facing the world. It was presented as a gift to the world: ‘Atlantis Geschenk 2000’. To achieve this goal the Müllers intended to establish a foundation, to which about 100,000 people were to invest 25 marks per month. The Müllers planned a world tour to promote the project and raise money for the foundation. The tour started at the Frankfurt Architecture Museum on 11 December 1987.

Nevertheless, right from the beginning — the moment Krier first presented his design proposal — divergent expectations or interpretations became apparent. The client owned a site of 2.3 hectares [in Tenerife](#), while Krier’s design needed about 5.83 hectares. Helga Müller had expected something in line with the work of Luis Barragan or Tadao Ando.²⁶ Instead, the project had a traditional appearance, because Hans-Jürgen Müller considered traditional architecture as the right vocabulary to express his ideological agenda. In time, however, both the Müllers came to appreciate its appearance and size. Eventually, the controversial style would make a stronger impact, and doubling the area confirmed their growing ambition.²⁷

According to Krier’s plans, he had designed a settlement with clusters of buildings that created an organically shaped public space made up of small streets and squares. All of the buildings had vernacular and classical architectural elements, such as pitched roofs, lintels, plinths, archivolts, arcades, columns, architraves and frontons. The whole village was planned on the south-east side of the Arona hill facing the morning sun, while avoiding the afternoon heat. Of the intended constructions, approximately 12,800 m² would be enclosed spaces and 6,100 m² would be sheltering constructions, such as pergolas, patios, atria, porticos, sheds, colonnades and canopy roofs. This meant that one third of the built area would remain available for open-air constructions. Less than half (44%) of the enclosed space was designated for residences. Taking into account that all of the buildings would have a maximum of two levels, the number of residents would be about 300. A little over half of the spaces (56%) [were](#) dedicated to other urban functions such as museums, hotels, restaurants, sport facilities, and a concert hall. A clear north-south axis divided Atlantis into two parts. The axis began at the ‘Acropolis’ — a raised and independent platform framing all of the museums — and ended in the middle of the lateral ‘corniche’ promenade²⁸ overlooking the terraced landscape.

Public functions were located to the left and right of the axis, including hotels, restaurants, a covered market, a carpenter’s shop, a refectory, a lecture hall, a publishing house and a laundry. On the west side was a zone with buildings dedicated to leisure activities; on the east side, a library, an open theatre, and a piano room. This created two distinct zones for housing in the middle, on either side of the axis. Krier did not include any other typical urban function — no schools, kindergartens, small industry, waste management, healthcare facilities, or public transport. Although it was designed as a small city district, the Müllers requested none of the latter functions, since they had no desire to create a place for permanent residence. The intent was to provide a sanctuary to which intellectuals could temporarily retreat. At first, Krier had argued that such a mediterranean ‘super-club’ needed a beach and promenade connected to the sea. The idea was dismissed by the client because the lower sites, closer to the sea, were too expensive.²⁹

Many of Krier's imperatives were integrated into the project. Natural building materials determine the construction process on a human scale and, thus, traditional tectonics. Krier also believed that only using natural materials reduces maintenance costs over time. Rather than limiting building height, he proposed to limit the number of floors to achieve a varied skyline. According to Krier, a relative quantity of public space, between 25 percent and 35 percent, determines the optimum proportion. Proximity ensures that public spaces belong to the civic realm rather than to traffic. He argued for creating cities within the city, in tune with the pedestrian. An animated city is achieved by planning the dispersal of civic uses rather than their concentration. And he promoted the idea that symmetry belongs to the type — not to an arbitrary conglomerate. All of these tenets find their way into the Atlantis project. But most fundamentally, Krier did not design Atlantis as a single building. Although many different monolithic convention centres could have corresponded with the 'think-thank' setting requested by the Müllers, he opted for a conglomerate of smaller buildings, arranged as a city district.

If the Müllers had the financial resources from the start, or if they had found a Maecenas along the way, they probably would not have sought the spotlight as often as they did. The fact is that public exposure challenged them to 'over'-explain the ambitions of the project. It drove the rhetoric to its extreme, revealing the differences between Krier and the Müllers. To find broad-based support the design had to prove applicable and inspiring to others as well. It had to stand out in style as much as it did in intention. Therefore, the project had to be presented as a model in which the basic ideas superseded the temporal constraints — as a contemplative model that criticizes contemporary architecture, urbanism, and politics. It was at this level that the points of view of Krier and the clients differed. More precisely, the clients saw the project as a critique of the cultural or moral aspects of architecture and urbanism. They considered the focus to be on how this setting would facilitate a renewed awareness of shared cultural values. For Hans-Jürgen Müller, in particular, the project had to address the crisis in art and culture in general, which lead Müller to start a political party called *Die Europäische Culturpartei* [fig. 6].³⁰ For Krier, however, the Atlantis project was a testing ground for a new architecture and urbanism. At the time, it was the most complete collage of the principle ideas that could be used to oppose current neo-modernist discourses.³¹

Different agendas aside, the strategic aspect of the project included an international tour to promote and finance the project. In the catalogue of the first Atlantis exhibition in Frankfurt in 1987, curator and architectural historian Frank Rolf Werner explains that Krier was the only option for the Atlantis project because no other architect in the world had the audacity to campaign so vigorously for the reconstruction of the European city. He argued that Krier was a social revolutionary and that his intellectual contributions had grown in volume and weight in the preceding two decades, which by far compensated for the small number of projects he had actually built at that time.³²

After Frankfurt, the project was shown in Brussels, Stuttgart, Zürich, Bologna, Milan, Paris, Los Angeles, New York, Tokyo, New Haven, and Hannover. Finally, it was shown at the international conference of the Club of Rome in 1989.³³

THE IDEOLOGICAL READING OF ATLANTIS AND KRIER

For the Brussels show, Léon Krier, Maurice Culot, and their Greek colleague, Demetri Porphyrios, also a new classicist representative, produced a second exhibition catalogue, published by AAM.³⁴ In the introduction, Culot and Porphyrios closely identify the Müllers' humanist agenda with Krier's architectural project, and turn the association into a programme. At first, the project is presented in conformity with the client's vision of a means to an end: 'a place where eminent persons specialized in various disciplines will meet for open discussions on the important questions of our time, the objective being to sublimate the temptations of mass determinism and find other solutions for Humanity'.³⁵ It was to be a framework that facilitates 'men of action' — as Culot called them — to change the world for the better. At that time, Atlantis was not meant to be a preview of a new world, but rather as facilitating the work of responsible people engaged in creating a model for the ideal society. Their common goal, according to Porphyrios, was a revival of humanism. However, as the introduction continues, the level of hyperbole increases and the description of Atlantis — which is equated with utopia — becomes an ode to Krier and his work:

It matters little if Atlantis is built or not ... utopia is made into reality by the written word ... What the Goddess (Aphrodite) once offered to Pygmalion, she is now offering to Léon Krier. Under her guidance, Atlantis is undergoing a rebirth and discovers herself to be made in the image of the archetypal European city ... an island of perfection ... at the center of the world.³⁶

Thus, Atlantis is ultimately presented as the ideal city, inspired by the most perfect models of Ancient Greece. The client commissioned Carl Laubin, an expert in depicting architecture in a classical manner, to paint Krier's work for the Atlantis project [figs. 7-9]. The central image clearly makes a rhetorical reference to Raphael's painting *The School of Athens*, which emphasizes the idealization of Ancient Greek humanism, its society and its cities. The Atlantis project was the culmination of all Krier's architectural and urbanist imperatives combined with the rhetoric necessary to gather support at an international level, fused with the ideals of an exceptional client.

What happened in the exhibition catalogue is a case of architectural language being conflated with ideology, which was a tendency at the time that was rooted in the traditionalist-modernist debate. It sets the stage for an ideological reading of Krier's design.

As mentioned above, with the 1975 Art Net exhibition in London and the 1978 revision in Brussels, Krier had articulated his critique of the 1973 Milan triennial *Rational Architecture* exhibition. Eisenman's text, *Post-functionalism*,³⁷ had also formulated a critique of the perceptions generated by the *Rational Architecture* exhibition in Milan and the MoMA exhibition, *The Architecture of the Beaux-Arts*, in 1975 in New York. According to Eisenman, these exhibitions were based on a misreading of 'the modernist sensibility', due to their objections towards functionalist principles as the core of the modernist movement.³⁸ For Eisenman, the true modernist sensibility lay in the fact that modernists had recognized the displacement of humanity from the centre of the world.³⁹ Thus, rather than rejecting the modernist project on the basis of a simplified association with functionalism, Eisenman wanted to cultivate this sensibility to arrive at a post-functionalist condition. He concentrated on the formal to present an alternative reading of the meaning of form.

With this reinterpretation of the modernist sensibility, along with his study of the rationalist Terragni,⁴⁰ Eisenman claimed to be the true heir of the modernist intellectuality. Krier, in his turn, claiming to be an advocate of a more stringent rationalist idea, chose not to invent form⁴¹ *per se* but to find its architectural essence in traditional forms. With Koolhaas putting programmatic desires before formal ones,⁴² the spectrum of pluralistic views on the formal aspect of architecture was complete. What all these views had in common was that the value of form was not expressed in aesthetic terms, but rather by means of an ideological position.

Anthony Vidler's text *The Third Typology* of 1977 provides a final opportunity to discuss Krier's work with a strict focus on the architectural apparatus. In 1978, Culot and Krier solicited the text for the Brussels edition of the *Rational Architecture* exhibition.⁴³ The basic intent of Vidler's essay was to define the new rationalist perspective as an essentially architectural rather than a social stance. The nature of the city in their designs is

emptied of specific social content from any particular time and allowed to speak simply of its own formal condition. ... born of a desire to stress the continuity of form and history against fragmentation produced by the elemental, institutional, and mechanistic typologies of the recent past. ... It denies all the social utopian and progressively positivist definitions of architecture for the last two hundred years.⁴⁴

According to Vidler, the rationalists merely wanted to focus on the contingencies of any project in which architecture aims to combine modern ideals with vernacular architecture. He argues that rationalism looks for the basic elements that constitute European cities and translates these into appropriate new forms. The City Hall project in Trieste by Aldo Rossi is an example [fig. 10], notable for an absence of urban life or human activity. The same is true for the images that (six years later) illustrate the special *Architectural Design* (AD) issue of 1984, dedicated to Léon Krier.⁴⁵ In the pictures drawn by Krier — or painted by his wife Rita Wolf [fig. 11] — the main subject is architecture. In colour, style, and technique, the images resemble the work of Giorgio Grassi [fig. 12] and Aldo Rossi, which similarly stage the architectural object in the absence of urban life. If a social agenda is at stake here, it is articulated in purely architectural terms, not in mechanisms of human interactions.

The ideological reading is further developed in the AD issue of 1984, which was guest-edited by Demetri Porphyrios and introduced by Colin Rowe. Rowe projected four qualities onto Krier. First, he claimed that Krier deliberately placed himself completely outside the culture of modern architecture; second, he argued that Krier presented a complete rejection of modern architecture; third, he considered that Krier repudiated the formal, the technological, and functional premises of modern architecture; and:

Finally, that, with all this, in terms of his inferred sociology, the obvious socialist content of so many of his projects, Leon Krier, more visibly than anyone else, has sustained and maybe, amplified a strand of Modern architecture's pedigree which, for a long time has been in frightful danger of getting lost.⁴⁶

Rowe and Vidler exemplify a tension that is inherent to the perception of Krier's work at that moment (at the same time also affecting Krier's way of thinking). The difference between Rowe and Vidler has much to do with the social activist agenda of the Counterprojects that Krier contributed to the biennale in Venice in 1980, in collaboration with Maurice Culot. [The Counterprojects originated in the specific architecture activist context of the late 1960s in Brussels, where students of the architectural school La Cambre designed alternative projects as a form of critique towards real proposals by architects, developers and the city. The students worked under the guidance of Culot and in close collaboration with the AAM and ARAU.](#) As the architectural critic Isabelle Doucet⁴⁷ recently argued, the social activist connotation was less a concern of Krier than of Culot. While the social agenda was integral to the architectural proposals of the Counterprojects, it was mainly Culot who was responsible for this social content. Doucet's analysis emphasizes the difference between a first series of Counterprojects under the guidance of Culot and a second series in which Krier was principally involved. While the former series focused on local activism characterized by a variety of stylistic pluralism, the latter developed general themes within a unified traditional style. Krier's involvement was less related to the original social activist agenda than with an architectural intention.

The exhibition catalogue of the Counterprojects states that the projects were inscribed within working-class struggles. The projects rejected large-scale solutions to problems of energy management or urban planning. The question of mobility — the key to industrial urbanism — was regarded as a sign of alienation. Instead, Culot and Krier argued for the organization of the city into complex quarters, where everything would be at walkable distances and in which real innovation would emerge from working-class districts.⁴⁸ The traditional architectural elements were singled out as the sole interpretation of the vernacular vocabulary.⁴⁹ The Counterprojects focussed on local solutions to preserve the European city.

Thus, the momentum of the Counterprojects allowed a shift in perception of the same architectural imagery. Once aligned with Vidler's view of 'a formal continuity in traditional architectural solutions', Rowe expanded the perception with a social-activist agenda. The different receptions amplified the ideological connotation, as if a more profound purpose was discovered in Krier and his work.

In 1983, Krier explained his position quite clearly in a public debate with Eisenman at Princeton University. Eisenman described Krier's worldview 'in terms of the moral position that it seems to hold in relation to society and to the role of the architect'.⁵⁰ This point sparked a more general debate between the two speakers about the contemporary definition of humanity's place in the new cosmology and how that place was reflected in both the profession and in architecture in general. Eisenman claimed that the traditional succession of triadic cosmologies of theocentrism, anthropocentrism, and biocentrism were now joined by contemporary technocentrism. According to Eisenman, God, man, and nature, and, most recently, forces beyond the control of human beings had become the mediators of worldviews. Krier, in contrast, wanted to remain practical about the use of philosophy, theology or any kind of theoretical endeavour. These intellectual disciplines were just useful tools in times of confusion and assisted in making a distinction between universal ideas and particular phenomena.

During the debate, Krier stated that the task of the architect is to create beautiful, solid, and comfortable buildings — objects of timeless beauty: 'The art of building is concerned with creating an environment that is pleasing to all our senses without being alienating to any of them. Architecture is not about expressing existential anxiety or opinions of any kind. Architecture is not concerned with the private realm. It shapes the public domain, the Common world'.⁵¹ Eisenman opposed Krier's position, arguing that '[a]rchitecture is about expressing the contemporary condition of man'.⁵² Where, for Krier, universal ideas exist, consisting of the most intelligent and best solutions that have proven themselves in the past, for Eisenman, deep-rooted or built-in structures of things exist that need to be expressed.

Whether Krier intended to be a social revolutionary and custodian of European culture is highly questionable. Krier's proposals intended to counter the failed attempts of modernist interventions in European cities. This agenda does not however make him a socialist. According to Krier, the quality of being-of-the-time, acting in relation to the Zeitgeist, does not in itself guarantee the best solution. For Krier, if a conventional solution results in a better fit,

then this should be considered the better option. Likewise, if an older paradigm better suits the occasion, it should be solicited. New or contemporary does not, a priori, mean better.

Such a view still does not make Krier the custodian of European culture. If anything, it shows that Krier was a rationalist who adopted a pragmatic approach when considering design solutions. The traditional canon became his habitual means to counter neo-modernists such as Peter Eisenman, because it stood for all that the modernists' legacy did not. For Krier the formal and spatial qualities of architecture always come first. Others in turn, such as Rowe, Vidler, Culot, Werner and the Müllers, connected Krier's vocabulary to social objectives.

THE DECLINE OF THE ATLANTIS IDEOLOGY

The many press articles on the Atlantis project fill several catalogues (literally, as the Müllers collected all copies of news items on the project into binders). The general tone of these articles went from negative to devastating, with a few positive exceptions.⁵³ Only some critics appreciated it as a beautiful setting, uncomplicated and more advanced, recognizing a sense of order that springs from 'a high ethical and aesthetic consciousness'. Most, however, saw a staging of trivial mythology that lacked postmodern irony [fig. 13]. At times, Krier was even reproached for bringing back nazi-architecture in the guise of a romantic setting. The Müllers, in their turn, had to defend the narrative of their project. Was it really necessary to reactivate a nostalgia for the lost paradise by calling it 'Atlantis'? And was calling it 'a gift to the world' or suggesting a 'world redeeming effect of art' not simply too pompous? These were colossal ambitions that at times even Krier felt the need to distance himself from, by claiming that he merely aimed to design an harmonious and coherent town.

In 1989, when Krier promoted the Atlantis project on a tour across Europe, the model of the project accompanied him in a customized van. The project was now associated with a revival of humanism and infused with social and moral intentions. In that year, AD magazine published a second discussion between Léon Krier and Peter Eisenman, entitled '*My Ideology is Better Than Yours*',⁵⁴ a transcript of a discussion held that same year in Chicago. The debate obscured the issue of legitimate design decisions and intentions by only discussing fabricated ideological frameworks.

Krier had opened the debate by sketching out an opposition between the two antagonistic philosophies underpinning the traditionalist movement and the modernist movement. For Krier, the central terms 'invention', 'innovation', and 'discovery' had very different meanings in the vocabularies of each movement: 'In traditional cultures invention, innovation and discovery are means to improve handed-down systems of communication, representation, thinking and building ... in Modernist cultures, by contrast, invention, innovation, and discovery are ends in themselves'.⁵⁵ Despite the ideological opposition, the two speakers agreed on many issues.⁵⁶ They even agreed on the value of tradition, and only disagreed on the formal architectural vocabulary that should be deployed. For Krier, tradition provides us with the types and the vocabulary to address new needs. According to Eisenman, tradition shows us the way to find new types and new vocabularies, but does not provide them per se. If there was ever a time to recognize each other as both sides of the same coin, this was it. Eisenman used the concept of 'presentness' to value the relevance of contemporary discourses.⁵⁷ Krier argued that recognizing universal aesthetic and ethical principles is a moral obligation — especially when designers have become public figures. Eisenman used Tafuri to explain the difference:

At the time of Alberti and Brunelleschi, Brunelleschi was looking forward and Alberti was looking backward. Alberti introduced the subject of the Classical typology whereas Brunelleschi introduced an invention from science called perspective. ... Leon is certainly Alberti. I aspire to being Brunelleschi.⁵⁸

Eisenman's exaggeration of the Alberti-Brunelleschi opposition resembles a wider perception. Where Alberti represented tradition, Brunelleschi stood for a commonsensical understanding of change. In 1989, the year the Berlin Wall came down, 'change' was the prevalent force, starting with the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe, resulting in the collapse of the Soviet Union, immediately ending the anxieties of the United States and allied countries concerning the Cold War. And with the crumbling of Cold War anxiety, one of the hidden drivers behind the Atlantis project began to dissolve.

Since 1989, the interest in publishing on new classical issues diminished in inverse proportion to the projects under construction. In 1990, the London-based Greek publisher, Andreas Papadakis, sold *Architectural Design* — in which Krier's work had regularly appeared — to the well-known publisher Wiley.⁵⁹ The AAM also ceased to exist in that year. *Oppositions* had already been replaced in 1984 by *Assemblage* magazine. Krier was working on a book entitled *New Classicism*,⁶⁰ in which he developed a new theoretical framework, because *new classicism* lacked a clear definition and needed the support of strong architectural examples.⁶¹ The book was published by Papadakis in 1990 and has the Acropolis⁶² of the Atlantis project on its cover. For the rest of the decade Krier did not publish anything substantial to argue the new traditionalist case.

THE DECLINE OF THE ATLANTIS PROJECT

In 1986, Bruce John Graham, as a partner of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill (SOM) and instigator of the SOM Foundation, set up an architectural institute with the model of the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies (IAUS) in mind. Krier was appointed the first director of the *Skidmore, Owings and Merrill Architectural Institute* (SOMAI).⁶³ He wrote a policy statement that echoed the ambitions aired by his clients in 'Atlantis Geschenk 2000'. As the first director of the SOMAI Krier intended to create a Charter of Chicago that would counter the Charter of Athens⁶⁴ and launch a fourth industrial revolution: the ecological revolution. The SOMAI was to make primers in printed and audiovisual form. The first primer, the Civic Primer, would be about the ecological renewal of the city and the country, that is, it was a revised version of the reconstruction discourse of European cities manifesto already republished by Krier a couple of times. The SOMAI was also to publish pamphlets on a regular basis, which would report on polemical discussions between the *deconstructivists* and the *new classicists* in the same way AD had done. To reach an even larger number of people, Krier wanted synoptic versions of the primers, a children's book, a film produced by Walt Disney Productions, and toys produced by Revell. In addition, the SOMAI had to produce monographic studies and publications on under-evaluated architectural subjects and personalities. Finally, in 2000, a world fair was to be organized in Washington DC, where the *World Academy of the Environment* (also to be set up by the SOMAI) would have a seat. However, Krier resigned after only six months because of a disagreement with Bruce Graham; he was replaced by John Whiteman.⁶⁵

With the fallout of the Speer book, published in 1985, Krier's career experienced an early twilight. Combined with the knowledge that the realization of the Atlantis project seemed less and less likely, Krier chose to stress the ideological aspects of the project, seeing an opportunity to make statements about architecture and urban design. The Atlantis project thus came to represent Krier's design lexicon. Up to that point, the lexicon consisted of tenets that were still design hypotheses. They promoted his belief in a different approach. Atlantis is a fascinating scenography. Krier gave weight to its performance as a whole, supported by the clients, the tour, the public talks, and the exhibitions. When the design is not read as a collage of small narratives but rather as a general statement about a better society the basis for judging Krier's architectural apparatus is distorted. Then Krier's reconstruction of the European city also entailed a reconstruction of a global theory and even the reconstruction of society. Along the way, this bold narrative gained the upper hand and intensified the mismatch with the dreams of the clients.

The polarized reception and the many setbacks made the Müllers doubt their plan of action and to eventually alter it. Perhaps their decision was also motivated by the waning sense of cultural doom. Perhaps it was the discrepancies between their views and Krier's, which had been there from the beginning of the project. The fact is that in 1990, for the first time, the Müllers had real doubts about the project as it had thus far been developed by Krier. They had difficulty raising sufficient funds. The project was not approved by the local authorities, with all requests for a building permit failing. For all these reasons, the Müllers began to think about scaling back the project. They commissioned Frei Otto⁶⁶ [fig. 14] to create an alternative to Krier's proposal for the Atlantis project. This time they called it the 'Cultural Project Mariposa'. It was planned for the same site in Tenerife but on a smaller scale, intended to house a maximum of 30 people. They did not follow through on Frei Otto's design. Briefly, they also flirted with the idea of abandoning the project altogether, but clung to the hope that they could overcome the obstacles that were piling up concerning Krier's design.⁶⁷

In 1992, when Krier was 46 years old, Hans-Jürgen Müller convinced Jan Hoet to exhibit the work for the 'Atlantis Geschenk 2000' as part of the *Documenta IX* exhibition.⁶⁸ Hoet allowed Müller to build — across from the Fridericianum, in the area for food and beverages — a temporary pavilion that was supposed to exhibit the Atlantis project in the same way it had been shown when it first toured. Just before the opening, two Molotov cocktails were thrown at the pavilion, which then caught fire [figs. 15] destroying all drawings, images and models of Krier's

work.⁶⁹ As a result, a temporary art installation was created instead. According to the Müllers, this was the final blow to the project. Today, there is a resort on Tenerife bearing the name Mariposa which is run by Helga Müller. It was not built according to the design of Léon Krier.

The course of events is emblematic of the decline of the Atlantis ideology, the separate drivers of which, one by one, drifted away from reality. In the years after, Krier enjoyed meeting a growing interest in his new traditionalist discourse outside the intellectual realm to which he had belonged for more than twenty years. With his contribution to Seaside, a new *traditional*-vernacular town in Florida,⁷⁰ Krier was embraced by the *New Urbanist* movement⁷¹ in the United States, as a visionary and founding member. He continued his professional focus on the realisation of projects such as Poundbury in the United Kingdom *and* Cayala in Guatemala. In 2003, he was the first to receive the *Richard Driehaus Prize*.⁷²

CONCLUSION

When mining for cause and effect, separating aspects of controversy from genuine changes in underlying common beliefs and interests will always be a peculiar task. What has been more important in this argument is to discern Krier's personal design choices against the backdrop of a rhetoric in the public sphere. In the early 1980s the international debate in architecture was captivated by a perceived opposition of a modernist versus traditionalist stance. The disagreements over the formal architectural apparatus were not discussed in aesthetic terms, but rather by ideological association and visual representation. The confrontations between Krier and Eisenman obscured how both sides were indebted to a new rationalist intellectualism. In fact, the affinity with new rationalism shows that a sociopolitical agenda also played no real part in the opposition. Eventually, the real root of the opposition lies with the quest for a new respected intellectual position for the architect within society. If the societal position is what was really at stake, then we have to question the true value of that 'opposition'.

The history of the Atlantis project allows the clarification of a specific rhetoric from the 1980s about the formal apparatus of architecture and what it came to represent. It shows that by the end of that decade architectural discourse had moved away from this *reconstruction* versus *deconstruction* rhetoric — both narratives that had expected to become the new theoretical ground of architecture. The fact that this rhetoric centres around the formal apparatus without hardly any reference to a debate on aesthetics is remarkable. This lacuna was circumvented by an attempt to connect the formal apparatus to aspects of various ideologies. Eisenman made a connection with an anxiety that he believed stemmed from the displacement of modern human beings. Krier connected the formal apparatus with anxiety about the future of our built environment. Others, such as Rowe and Culot, interpreted Krier's formal apparatus as the vocabulary of a social utopianism. For the Müllers, the project had to return to ethical standards, because in their ideology our culture is declining dramatically. The latter was often disavowed as typical end-of-the-millennium apocalyptic doom watching, a cultural defeatism that permeated the new traditional discourse so much that it drove a wedge in the *pluralistic* architectural discourse that had been pursued up to that point.

The value of 'tradition' is often placed in an opposition to the value of 'change'. Depending on the perspective, 'tradition' stands for identity, working concepts, and social order — or conversely, conservatism, nostalgia, and status quo, and so on. By the same token, 'change' stands for progress, liberty, and hope — or plurality, confusion, and loss of values, etcetera. This brief history of the Atlantis project shows that, in that particular moment, by ideologically generating them as oppositional forces, 'change' trumped 'tradition' — Brunelleschi got the upper hand. Instead of realizing a discourse in which tradition and change do not behave as antagonistic notions, during the 1990s any coherence of the discourse dissolved. The opposing sides ended up with the coexistence of complete disjunctive narratives acting in parallel worlds. The traditional style would need a decade or more to recover from this blow. The way the Atlantis project fared at *Documenta IX* is emblematic. Contemporary art seeks its legitimacy in the potential to foster a concern that is recognized by a larger group. The strong resistance to the Atlantis project, symbolized by the second-rate location Hoet had given it and the *debacle of the* Molotov cocktails, indicate that the Atlantis ideology no longer had such a potential. At the same time, the strong resistance to it also demonstrates that the performative quality of the architectural imagination is hard to suppress. The otherworldliness anticipated in the Atlantis project remains inspirational to this day. Maybe today we are getting closer to making intellectually *relevant* cross-overs, recognizing the synthesis of the modernist versus traditionalist dialectic and *the erasure of* some boundaries. When it comes down to architectural merits, Alberti and Brunelleschi are equally respected.

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¹ Krier had worked on a book on Albert Speer in 1981 believing that Speer had not been fully aware of the horrors that Hitler's inner circle was planning. In 1983, when the book was about to be published, Speer died. With his death evidence came to light that Speer had always known about Hitler's plans. In turn, people began to question Krier's integrity. In an open letter to Joseph Rykwert, dated June 2013, Krier refers to Rykwert as one of the critics who intentionally ridiculed his inquiry into vernacular and classical architecture in relation to the work of Speer. In that same letter Krier says that the slander, which started in London in 1985 with the publication of the book on Speer, caused a tremendous professional setback. Krier claims that due to the slander he had lost, for example, the assignment for the design of the National Gallery extension — which afterwards went to Robert Venturi. Krier also claims that his integrity was questioned once more when, in 1988, he accepted a commission from HRH the Prince of Wales. Krier had to build a new town called Poundbury according to Prince Charles's architectural principles, which aimed to conserve typical qualities of British settlements. With the 'carbuncle speech' the Prince had given in 1984 to the Royal Institute of British Architects on its 150th anniversary, the Prince criticized the National Gallery extension proposal of Ahrends Burton and Koralek, and thus, the Prince had overtly denounced modernist inspired architecture. Many architects were offended and openly disapproved of it. After that speech many architecture-related initiatives from the Prince would be mocked. Léon Krier and other pioneers of New Classicism defended the Prince.

² In this argument 'ideology' is not simply referring to some kind of creed or collection of ethics and beliefs. It is precisely, as Slavoj Žižek would call it, referring to the underside of customs. Ideology as rhetorical mechanism appeals to our commonsensical faculty in order to accept an argument in its reduced form — that is, simplified to its essence while conveniently forgetting the 'background noise'. However, it is precisely the suppressed 'noise' which would provide the actual meaning. Žižek develops this understanding of 'ideology' in: [S. Žižek, Living In The End Times \(London; New York, Verso, 2011\)](#).

³ Cfr. supra, Prince Charles commissioned Krier to design Poundbury, a job which Krier has been holding ever since. Today, in 2016, the town is over half built. Many architects, developers and politicians from around the world regularly visit the place to study its example.

⁴ The difference between new traditionalists and new classicists or new urbanists are abstracted here. Krier is a key player for all these groups. This article focusses on how critique formulated in any of these groups applies to Krier.

⁵ <https://vimeo.com/27911744> last visited 1 April 2016.

⁶ [G. Bekaert and C. Van Gerrewey 'Rooted in the Real : Writings on Architecture by Geert Bekaert' \(Ghent, Vlees en Beton, 2011\), pp. 396-419.](#)

⁷ Robert Somol in: [B. Steele 'Supercritical: Peter Eisenman & Rem Koolhaas' in Architecture Words, ed. \(London, AA Publications, 2009\)](#).

⁸ [A. Morávanszky, 'Architectural Theory: A Construction Site'.Footprint \(Autumn 2007\), pp. 47-56.](#)

⁹ [R. Martin, Utopia's Ghost : Architecture and Postmodernism, Again \(Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2010\), pp. 165.](#)

¹⁰ Hans-Jürgen Müller remembers that Krier attempted to sell him some paintings at the gallery in Stuttgart. [HJ. Müller, Die Geschichte Einer Idee: Mariposa: Unvollständiger Tatsachenbericht \(Stuttgart, Neuer Kunst Verlag, 2007\), pp. 10.](#) Krier has a different recollection of the early encounter in Stuttgart; he only remembers buying a lithograph by J. Pfahl at Müller's gallery in 1967. In any case, the remembrance of the encounter is now seen as the beginning of a relationship of trust.

¹¹ 1968 was the year the Club of Rome was founded, against the backdrop of a ferment of intellectual revolt opposing authority. Powerful protests against the Vietnam War were occurring throughout the West, with students and most of their professors at the barricades. Roland Barthes' *The Death of the Author* was published in 1968. Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* was published one year earlier and Foucault's *What is an Author?* one year later. These leading academics had an important impact on this perception of authority.

¹² In 1967, for example, Peter Eisenman founded the *Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies* (IAUS), an independent non-profit agency concerned with research, education, and development in architecture and urbanism. He received help from Arthur Drexler to fund this endeavour. The institute became important because it was responsible for distributing the intellectual production of a number of architectural representatives of the time, including Krier and Koolhaas. From 1973 to 1984, the IAUS produced the leading architectural journal *Oppositions*, which introduced many of Peter Eisenman's European connections to an American audience — that is, Colin Rowe, Kenneth Frampton, Anthony Vidler, Bernard Tschumi, Rem Koolhaas, Leon Krier, Aldo Rossi, Manfredo Tafuri and others. Similar initiatives also occurred on the European continent. The same dynamics are present in the Italian or British editorial and academic environments, with leading figures such as Manfredo Tafuri and Reyner Banham, and influential magazines such as *Casabella* and *Architectural Design* (AD).

¹³ Rationalism in this context refers to an architectural current of the interwar period that derives not from a unified theory but rather from a shared belief in logical and rational solutions. Although it opposes a pure historicism as such, it was not a real break with tradition. History is considered a fecund source of a creative formal vocabulary. In Italy, rationalism is associated with Gruppo 7, that existed out of young architects such as Giuseppe Terragni, Adalberto Libera, Luigi Figini, Gino Pollini and others. In the early 1960s a second generation of rationalists consisted of Carlo Aymonino, Aldo Rossi, Massimo Scolari, and Giorgio Grassi. They represented a new rationalist movement called Tendenza. With the support of Manfredo Tafuri the work of the new rationalist movement Tendenza was exhibited at the triennial in Milan. References: Nava, XV Triennale di Milano, Catalogo ufficiale (Milano, 1973); Architettura Razionale (Milano, Franco Angeli Editore, 1973); Cristina Manzoni, La Tendenza: Une avant-garde architecturale italienne, 1950-1980 (Marseilles, Editions parenthèse, 2013).

¹⁴ [A. Rossi et al., The Architecture of the City. Opposition Books \(Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1982\).](#)

¹⁵ [M. Tafuri, Architecture and Utopia : Design and Capitalist Development \(Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1976\).](#)

¹⁶ According to Krier, the Art Net exhibition was a critique of the 1973 triennial.

¹⁷ In 1972, a major shift had taken place in the educational philosophy of the school due to the loss of government support. Alvin Boyarsky became the new dean and started working on an international platform. At the time, Krier was part of this new approach. In 1975 Zaha Hadid was one of Krier's students.

¹⁸ In 1978, *Delirious New York* and *Collage City* were published, Peter Eisenman's seminal text, *Post-functionalism*, first published two years before, was translated into Spanish and Krier staged the *Rational Architecture* exhibition in London and Barcelona for a third time. R. Koolhaas, Delirious New York : A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan, New ed., (New York: Monacelli Press, 1978); C. Rowe and F. Koetter. Collage City (Cambridge (Mass.), MIT press, 1978); P. Eisenman, Inside Out: Selected Writings, 1963-1988 (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 83-87.

¹⁹ C. Jencks, K. Kropf, *Theories and Manifestoes of Contemporary Architecture*. 2nd ed. (Chichester, England, Hoboken, New York, Wiley-Academy, 2006), pp. 176-77.

²⁰ Cfr. supra: Tendenza.

²¹ Krier was not the only one to consider the rationalist framework incomplete. The idea to progress the work of the first rational movement was, for example, also discussed at the last CIAM conference, in 1959. Both Bakema and Smithson repeatedly explained the main idea of the Otterlo Conference, reaffirming that the crucial task — as defined at the first CIAM — was the provision of housing. However, the state of affairs of the first modernist projects — which had not turned out the way they were supposed to — demanded alternative solutions. According to Bakema, the first CIAM meeting had provided an incomplete definition of the task. Notions such as 'Gestaltung' and 'imagination' were key to advancing Terragni's rationalism. Bakema in: O. Newman, 'New Frontiers in Architecture: Ciamp 59 in Otterlo' in J. Joedicke, ed., Documents of Modern Architecture (New York, Universe Books Inc, 1961).

²² Conversation between Krier and the author, 8 August 2016.

²³ At this point in his career he was in contact with members of the Board of Trustees of the National Gallery in London, among whom were Lord Rothschild and Sir Stuart Lipton. He was invited to teach at Yale. After an intense cooperation with his brother had ended over stylistic differences and client ethics, he was invited to join other firms. In 1985, at the request of Arthur Drexler and Philip Johnson, Krier and Ricardo Bofill were given an exhibition at the MoMA in New York. Shortly after, Bofill offered Krier to become partner in his architectural firm (which did not proceed because of issues over naming).

²⁴ Krier explains how the response towards the book harmed him professionally and personally in the open letter to Joseph Rykwert, dated June 2013. Cfr. Supra.

²⁵ Hans-Jürgen Müller's introduction to the Atlantis project in: HJ. Müller, H. Müller, P. Klöss, Deutsches Architekturmuseum, 'Atlantis: Modell Für Die Kunst Des Lebens'. Frankfurt Deutsches Architekturmuseum, 63 (1987), pp. 5-7.

²⁶ According to Krier, the idea that the client expected a different style is a post facto statement. Helga Müller, on the other hand, remembers the discrepancy as almost causing a divorce. Based on private conversations of the author with both parties in 6 July and 8 August 2016.

²⁷ Hans-Jürgen Müller remembers that the outcome of the preliminary design studies made them him and his wife scratch their heads. Especially his wife had to get used to the Greek arcadian style of architecture, while she normally felt more related to modern architecture of for example Louis Barragan or Tadao Ando, in HJ. Müller, Die Geschichte Einer Idee: Mariposa: Unvollständiger Tatsachenbericht (Stuttgart, Neuer Kunst Verlag, 2007), pp. 17-18. Krier remembers, on the contrary, that it was he who expressed his opinion about the incompatibility of their art collection with the spirit of his project.

²⁸ With the lower tourist settlements, such as the Ten Bel resort in Las Galletas, only four kilometres down the coastline, the setting is much like Krier's heimat, Luxembourg, where the elevated Chemin de la Corniche separates the historic centre from the lower city.

²⁹ Quoted from a letter to the client on 20 March 1986. The letter is part of the private archive of the Müllers.

³⁰ The original argument goes as follows: "Fundamental changes in the private, political, economic and cultural fields are inevitable, since the question of the survival of mankind is more urgent every day. The church and state are not in a position to initiate the necessary change. Nor can we expect any help from an economy whose ultimate goal is to maximize profits. The impulse can only come from a cultural movement, which is able to enforce a new order of values. The party wants to prepare such a new orientation." Translated by the author. Ibid, pp. 28.

³¹ Today the best collage would probably be Poundbury or Cayala, Krier's project in Guatemala.

³² Frank Werner in: HJ. Müller, H. Müller, P. Klöss, Deutsches Architekturmuseum, 'Atlantis: Modell Für Die Kunst Des Lebens'. Frankfurt Deutsches Architekturmuseum, 63 (1987), pp. 13.

³³ A group of world-leading scientists who expressed their strong concerns about the future of the world.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ The original text was published in *Oppositions* 6 in 1976. P. Eisenman, Inside Out: Selected Writings, 1963-1988 (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 83-87.

³⁸ Eisenman saw a disturbing basic setting in both exhibitions. The exhibitions, however, were quite different endeavours. The 1973 triennial was creating a group and a relation between Europe-America. The 1975 Beaux-Arts show was bringing back drawings in the MoMA and legitimizing the postmodern discourse within the most modern institution.

³⁹ Hence, one could no longer base form-giving on an a priori functional relationship between an individual and the physical environment. He considered abstraction, atonality and atemporality, for example, as perfect formal tools to externalize the awareness of displacement.

⁴⁰ P. Eisenman, G. Terragni, and M. Tafuri, Giuseppe Terragni : Transformations, Decompositions, Critiques (New York, Monacelli Press, 2003).

⁴¹ The question of form had been part of the ongoing revisits of the modernist framework. At Otterlo, for example, Peter Smithson had condemned Giancarlo de Carlo for simply choosing forms loaded with meaning rather than inventing new ones. In a discussion with the American participant, Lovett, Peter Smithson emphasized the severity of form and what it represents in the specific historical situation of Europe. Smithson associated the forms that de Carlo and Rogers had chosen for their buildings with the communist world and therefore

rejected their work as a possible new alternative for architecture. Peter Smithson in: [O. Newman, 'New Frontiers in Architecture: Ciam '59 in Otterlo'](#) in [J. Joedicke, ed., Documents of Modern Architecture](#) (New York, Universe Books Inc, 1961).

⁴² When Rem Koolhaas published *Delirious New York*, his position also became apparent. He suggested that the impact of architects is questionable and that it is an illusion to think that architecture has control of culture — including society — as it is being formed or transformed. The coexisting forces in the making of New York translated into a Cartesian grid for the city, an architecture with a rational and pragmatic plan, and overall shapes that allowed for the maximal freedom to house both real and surreal aspects of the city's lifestyle. For Koolhaas, the debate on form, therefore, had to be separated from the debate on architectural performance.

⁴³ According to Hays, "the essay was solicited by Maurice Culot and Leon Krier for republication in expanded form in Rational Architecture [:The Reconstruction of the European City (Brussels: Editions AAM, 1978)]" in [M. K. Hays, Architecture Theory Since 1968](#) (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1998), pp. 284.

⁴⁴ Anthony Vidler in: [Ibid, pp. 292.](#)

⁴⁵ [L. Krier, D. Porphyrios, 'Houses, Palaces, Cities'. Architectural Design, 54 \(1984\).](#)

⁴⁶ Rowe in: [Ibid, pp. 8.](#)

⁴⁷ Doucet first revisited the Counterprojects in a paper presented at the EAHN 2012 in Brussels: [I. Doucet 'Understanding Postmodernism in Practice: Or What We Can Learn from Brussels, a Factory of Counter-Projects'](#). In [H. Heynen and J. Gosseye, ed., Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference of the European Architectural History Network](#) (Brussels, Contactforum 2012, 2012), pp. 457-63. Later she developed this research into a full chapter within her book on Brussels: [I. Doucet, The Practice Turn in Architecture : Brussels after 1968](#) (Manchester, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2015), pp. 39-78.

⁴⁸ [L. Krier, M. Culot, Contreprojets, Counterprojects \(Brussels, Archives d'Architecture Moderne, 1980\).](#)

⁴⁹ That the traditional architectural elements were the sole vernacular vocabulary is in contrasts with other European interpretations of the rationalist intellectual heritage. For example the 'the Black Madonna' housing project of Carl Weeber in the Netherlands, or the projects by Mario Botta in Switzerland are both regularly associated with new rationalism. They do not, however, use a traditional style in the strict sense.

⁵⁰ Eisenman on Krier in: [Yale University School of Architecture 'Eisenman-Krier : Two Ideologies : A Conference at the Yale School of Architecture'](#) (New York, Monacelli Press, 2004), pp. 31.

⁵¹ Krier in: [Ibid.](#)

⁵² Eisenman in: [Ibid.](#)

⁵³ The record of reports in the popular press is very long. The polarized perception as sketched within the confinements of this argument is based on a selection of press releases of 1987 and 1988. For example, the article *Nochmals als Regenwurm anzufangen hat keinen Zweck*, in the Esslinger Zeitung of 31 December 1987, reports on a discussion between the Müllers and serial-editors Friedhelm Röttger and Johannes Häussler, where the Müllers have to explain their pompous speech. In another example, it was Jürgen Pahl who made reference of the nazi architecture, in the January edition 1988 of *Der Architekt*. Dieter Bartetzko problematized the missing postmodern irony within the trivial mythology that reminded of Donovan's folklore song *Atlantis*, the Frankfurter Rundschau of 2 January 1988 (The comparison to Donovan's song reappears in the *Alpina Revue Maçonnique Suisse* nr. 2, 1990). In the Stuttgarter Zeitung nr. 44, 23 February 1988, Krier distanced himself of the colossal ambitions of the client. Krier also suggested that Le Corbusier, based on his plans for Paris, might have provided Hitler with a much more inhumane setting, if he would have been appointed by Hitler instead of Speer. In the Metropolitan Review of July/August 1988, there was a much more positive approach towards the project.

⁵⁴ [P. Eisenman, 'Peter Eisenman versus Léon Krier: My Ideology Is Better Than Yours'. Architectural Design, 59 \(September/October 1989\), pp. 6-18.](#)

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ They both stressed the importance of environmental concerns and the importance of addressing ecology, economy, technology and social conditions. They agreed that architecture needs to place itself on the political agenda in order to demand policy changes that will produce more enduring buildings. It was argued that prioritizing long-term use over short-term consumption would prevent increases in the enormous maintenance bills that were already common.

⁵⁷ He believed that only new types and a new formal language could effectively deal with the sensibilities with which we live. According to Eisenman, Koolhaas' Dance Theatre in The Hague had presentness, the Parthenon does not. For Krier, the induced uncertainty and temporality of presentness would lead to the future irrelevance of architecture and the increasing deterioration of the built environment.

⁵⁸ [P. Eisenman, 'Peter Eisenman versus Léon Krier: My Ideology Is Better Than Yours'. Architectural Design, 59 \(September/October 1989\), pp. 6-18..](#)

⁵⁹ Andreas Papadakis opened the Academy Bookshop on Holland Street, Kensington, in 1964 and moved into publishing as Academy Editions in 1968. in 1975 Papadakis bought the financially troubled magazine *Architectural Design* (AD). After selling AD to Wiley Papadakis was not allowed to publish for five years due to a non-competition clause. Andreas Papadakis promoted various styles in architecture, with him organising regular pluralist debates, conferences and exhibitions. During the 1970s and 80s he published many books among which, for example, of Bernard Rudofsky, Reyner Banham, Rudolf Wittkower and Charles Jencks.

⁶⁰ [A. Papadakis and H. Watson, ed., New Classicism \(The Hague, SDU Publishers, 1990\).](#)

⁶¹ Contributions to the book by prominent names such as Aldo Rossi, Manfredo Tafuri, Demetri Porphyrios, Carroll William Westfall, Giorgio Grassi, Ignasi Solá-Morales, Charles Moore, Michael Graves, Christian Norberg-Schulz, Robert Stern, Colin Rowe, Allan Greenberg, Quinlan Terry, Robert Adam, Charles Jencks, Robert Venturi, Andrés Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk and Jaquelin T. Robertson were bound to give weight to the movement.

⁶² Painted by Rita Wolff, who was Léon Krier's wife at the time.

⁶³ The selecting panel included Frank Gehry, Stanley Tigerman, David Childs, Bruce Graham and Thomas Beeby (based on an interview the author had with Krier, on 8 August 2016). These were members of the board. Peter Eisenman was also a member of the board. Yet, it is unclear whether he was also part of the selecting panel. Ibid; Snowden, Ingersoll, and Parman, "Dialogue: John Whiteman; Graham, "Oral History of Bruce John Graham."

⁶⁴ The ‘Charter of Athens’ is a document published by Le Corbusier in 1943 as the outcome of the fourth CIAM in 1933. It reflected on the theme ‘the functional city’ based on Le Corbusier’s Ville Radieuse. The Charter was most influential in urban planning in the years after the Second World War.

⁶⁵ For the full policy statement see: [L. Krier 'Policy Statement: The First SOMai Proposal'](#) in A. Papadakis and H. Watson, ed., [New Classicism](#) (The Hague, SDU Publishers, 1990), pp. 46–51. The disagreeing with Graham was mentioned by Krier during the interview by the author on 8 August 2016. The record of Krier being replaced by John Whiteman is briefly mentioned in: [N. Adams, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill : Som since 1936](#) (Milan: Electa Architecture, 2007); [E. Snowden, R. Ingersoll, and J. Parman, 'Dialogue: John Whiteman'. Design Book Review, 15 \(Fall 1988\)](#), pp. 12–14; B. Graham ‘Oral History of Bruce John Graham’ in B. J. Blum, interviewer, [Chicago Architects Oral History Project](#), 333 (c. 1998).

⁶⁶ Krier’s brother, Robert, had worked for Frei Otto’s office in his early career.

⁶⁷ Although the Müllers pursued different paths to realise the project after all, they stayed close friends with Krier.

⁶⁸ Documenta is a recurring event in Kassel. It is considered the world fair for art. In 1992, the curator for Documenta IX was Jan Hoet. The exhibition catalogue does not mention the Atlantis project or the Mariposa project.

⁶⁹ Relating to the Documenta exhibition there are a dozen reports in the newspapers, such as *Südwest Presse*, the *Darmstädter Echo*, The *Hessische Allgemeine*, the *Abendzeitung*, the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, and so on. But most of them provide a neutral report on the fire incident and what the pavilion was supposed to exhibit. Only a couple reports, from before the incident, provide a vague insight on how receptive peoples were at the time. In the *Stuttgarter Nachrichten* of 31 March 1992 it is mentioned that the Müllers so far had failed to find sufficient sponsors for the pavilion. Das Kulturmagazin *Living* of February 1992 provided an extended section on the Atlantis project, with the professor Bazon Brock making a plea to overcome the short-sighted critique on the project — claiming that ‘documenta only has a future if it wants to be Atlantis’: a place where all who want to orient themselves towards our ‘questionable future’ can come together. The arson attack was never claimed.

⁷⁰ Seaside is a project by Robert & Daryl Rose Davis, initiated in 1981. The architects and urban planners were Andres Duany & Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk in collaboration with Dhiru Thadani, Léon Krier, and Miami University architectural students.

⁷¹ Since 1993 The Congress of New Urbanism holds annual meetings in Florida. It concentrates on making walkable and well-designed authentic cities, towns and neighbourhoods. The movement made a charter that speaks about design intentions. Krier did not sign the charter as it lacks his point on building style — the human scale construction process — and the idea of limited floor numbers in relation to the optimum density.

⁷² [The Richard Driehaus foundation campaigns for the preservation and enhancement of the built and natural environments. Since 2003 The Driehaus-prize for Classical Architecture was organised as a counterweight to the Pritzker-prize for modern architecture. After Léon Krier won the first edition, it was successively won by Demetri Porphyrios, Quinlan Terry, Allan Greenberg, Jaquelin T. Robertson, Andrés Duany & Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, Abdel-Wahed El Wakil, Rafael Manzano Martos, Robert A.M. Stern, and Michael Graves.](#)

Captions

fig. 1

Close up model picture of the Atlantis project
Entrance to the Acropolis. Designed by Léon Krier.
Source: Atlantis 1988

fig. 2

Drawing and model picture of the Atlantis project
View to the Acropolis. Designed by Léon Krier.
Source: Atlantis 1988

fig. 3

Plan of the Atlantis project. Designed by Léon Krier.
Source: Atlantis 1988

fig. 4 - above

Plan of the Atlantis project made by the author.

fig. 5 - below

Portrait of Léon Krier with the model and painting of the Atlantis project.
Source: Private archive Helga Müller

fig. 6

Gründung de Europäischen Kultur-Partei
Source: Private archive Helga Müller

fig. 7 - above

The central square of the Atlantis project,
designed by Léon Krier and painted by Carl Laubin.
Source: Atlantis 1988

fig. 8 - below

The School of Athens - Fresco by Raphael, 1509-11.

fig. 9

Atlantis at sunrise, designed by Léon Krier,
painted by Carl Laubin.
Source: Atlantis 1988

fig. 10

Aldo Rossi, Regional Administration Building,
Trieste, 1974
above - image source: Anthony Vidler's text 'The Third Typology,' 1977
below - image source: New Classicism 1990

fig. 11

Léon Krier, Piazza Sedile, Filadelfia, Calabria, 1983 (Watercolour by Rita Wolff)
Source: New Classicism 1990

fig. 12

Georgio Grassi, Student Housing, Chieti, Abruzzo, 1976-80
Source: New Classicism 1990

fig. 13

Atlantis painted by Milan Kunc
Source: Atlantis 1988

fig. 14

The alternative project made by Frei Otto, 1991.
Source: Private archive Helga Müller

fig. 15

May 31st, 1992: Hans-Jürgen Müller in the burned down Atlantis/Mariposa pavilion at Documenta IX in Kassel.
Source: Private archive Helga Müller