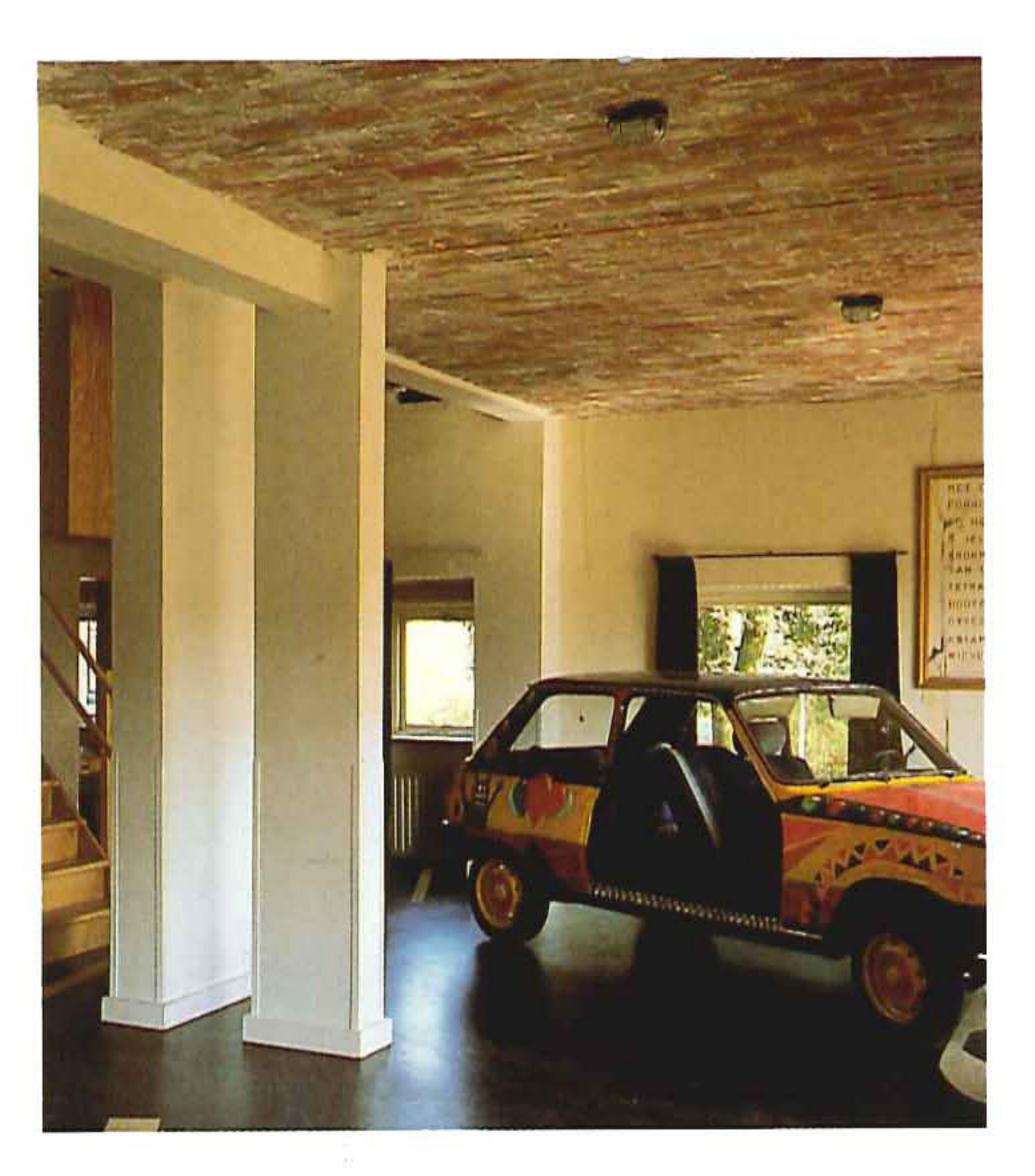
The day-nursery "Het Kasteel" ("The Castle") in Soest was designed by the architects Kirsten van den Berg, Daan Bakker, Mirjam Galjé, Matthijs Bouw and Ton Venhoeven. The latter is the only one who is a graduate of the Technical University of Delft. The others are still students there. Since the contract was given to Matthijs Bouw a different situation came about than is normal for a firm of architects. This situation was in fact taken advantage of to explore a design approach that is more appropriate to the current state of the profession. Architects are no longer the authorities, the master builders, they still were at the beginning of the century. The amount of regulations have increased and, what is more, the knowledge required in the process of construction is often so specialized that they have to consult a large number of advisors. The offices employ quite a few assistants on every individual project. They also have to deal with various subcontractors during the actual work of construction. In the Netherlands, these subcontractors are not so wilfully accepting authority, preferring to solve details in their own way for better or for worse. Last, but by no means least, architects have to deal with clients who often take the form of

committees. All these people have an influence on the design in one way or another, even though architects try to make it look otherwise. In building this day-nursery the five designers agreed right from the start that they would operate on a basic of complete equality. Not only should every idea be taken seriously, all suggestions and contributions should leave their mark on the final design. This meant, for instance, that they often worked on each others' drawings. In a way this design approach is similar to that of the Surrealists' "cadavre exquis", with this difference however, that there the individual contribution of the participants was always recognizable, which is not the case here. The design developed like a healthily growing root that constantly produces new joints and branches, like the rhizome that Deleuze and Guattari described in their book "Mille Plateaux" (14). The way the project developed, however, was also a lot like a squatting action. The entire interior structure of the original building - a domestic science school of the 50s in a traditionalist style was altered and a new interior put in its place. The reason for this was not just that the building was to be given another function; just as important, if not more

so, was that the structure of a machine for instilling discipline, - as Michel Foucault has described it (15) and which a domestic science school first of all is should be largely removed. In its place a structure was introduced that offers the children a small but real world, a world that has to be discovered, where they can explore their own possibilities and impossibilities and that is not completely lacking in danger. For example there are various rooms that are more or less inaccessible for the supervisory staff. According to the designers, Alice in Wonderland is just as much a model for this world as are the street and the jungle. In this sense this day-nursery is the complete opposite of the standard current practice in Holland, where pastel colours and cliché toys constantly remind children of their character as children without ever giving them the chance of developing their own individuality. In addition to Deleuze and Foucault, Witold Gombrowicz' novel "Ferdyduke" (16) was a particularly important source of inspiration for the designers.



Room to play for children between 4 and 6 years photo: René de Wit



Kirsten van den Berg, Daan Bakker, Mirjam Galjé, Matthijs Bouw and Ton Venhoeven. Day-nursery "Het Kasteel", Soest 1992 - photo: René de Wit



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Architecture as philosophy: the day-nursery "Het Kasteel".

