

Now & Then #5

When Form Follows Fiction

We believe in history as matter. Matter that you work with, enter into dialogue with and shape.

Robbrecht en Daem architecten, ARCH+ 220 Normcore, August 2015

Since the late 1990s, the reuse of buildings for public institutions has become increasingly prominent in the Belgian context. Working with what is there is driven more by a mix of historical awareness, common sense and budgetary concerns than anything else. Reading and rewriting histories by changing buildings involves making choices about which spaces and which stories are preserved and which are discarded. Architectural interventions actively deal with layers of the past and are an invitation to intervene again in the future. A sense of unfinishedness acknowledges that every action is only temporary, that every outcome is prone to change again. And again.

Today, in Switzerland in particular, climate change is the main driver behind the decision to preserve and adapt buildings rather than demolish and replace them. These different starting points naturally lead to different priorities and architectural expressions. From the perspective of Switzerland and with the institutional project we are working on in the studio in mind, we will revisit Belgian projects and uncover the ambitions and interests behind them. By spending time in institutional buildings in Antwerp, Brussels, Ghent, Mechelen and Hasselt, we will experience a different way of working with and trusting in what is there. The fieldwork will allow us to understand some of the strategies that have been applied. Through readings, lectures and discussions, photography, sketching, measuring, walking and talking, we will develop a lexicon of architectural elements that will contribute to refine, specify and enrich our own proposals back home.

Now & Then

Architecture is a cultural and contextual phenomenon and as such always influenced by political, economic, social, spiritual forces, as well as by the representational drive and aspirations of those that make it: aspirations for continuity and tradition, or for (r)evolution and change. Buildings can thus act as masks, allowing to be or become something else at a given moment, interpreting the now in the light of the then (be it past or future) and to materialize paradigms.

Our Now & Then seminar week series explores European and non-European contexts, focusing on some of their moments of self-definition, always caught in a web of near and distant past conditions. To do so, we will seek the help of various guides: buildings, thinkers, artists, architects, writers, politicians, who will each time help us to understand a place and a time in a deeper way, and to follow some of the paths that led to their specific condition.

18 - 22 March 2024 - Cost frame B (251-500 CHF) excl. individual arrival and departure

When Form Follows Fiction is an integrated seminar week with Denkraum#14 Courage - Unbuilding An Fonteyne, Ties Linders, Edoardo Signori, Els Silvrants-Barclay

