

Denkraum #8

Let's Walk About Form

“Each form is an active force, it creates the community, it is life itself made manifest.” These words by Alison and Peter Smithson* point at a strong belief in the power of forms in the city, claiming their active force, their generative potential, beyond a mere question of appearance or taste.

Although architecture is a *de facto* formal activity, claiming form as the main purpose of a design reflection exposes one to the dismissal of being a *formalist*. Thinking about form, pure form, seems to have many pitfalls: producing an all too autonomous architecture, a self-centered building, an architect's dream, disconnected from reality, and that once again won't change anything fundamentally. So how can we reassert that form does matter? That, as the Smithsons point out, form is actually about life, and about community, about all the things that the form enables around and within itself?

Starting from this question, we will attempt to carry out a thorough reflection on forms in their plastic, but also in their many social, political and contextual implications. To do so, we will start by observing a selection of 'pure forms', and their iterations in architecture, on different scales, in different places and times, but also in art history, in crafts, or in the Zurich urban context. This individual research will result in a collective *Atlas of Forms*, coming together in the first weeks of the studio to then feed the rest of the semester. A research that will be accompanied by the figures of Aldo and Hannie Van Eyck, whose many thematic writings on form will be read collectively, and elaborated upon.

In parallel, we will once again observe a street starting in Zurich and extending into its periphery, cutting through heterogeneous neighborhoods and urban conditions. We will develop a walking practice, a habit of observing this strip, over and over again, learning to discover the hidden qualities of the everyday. A way to go beyond what we think we know, and make the familiar seem strange again. An investigative process that will result in a situated knowledge. A knowledge 'from within' which will allow to identify relevant sites of intervention as well as investigate the agency of the architect, and will help formulate proposals to install forms along that street, establishing a new set of affordances, a connection, an articulation, a polarity, a cut. A relational approach, observing the individual form, and all that it can do for its material and social surroundings. In the process, we will discover what the pure forms of the *Atlas* can become: a building's volume, an element, an ornament. Over the course of that journey, we will be accompanied by a series of guests presenting their own relationship to the idea of form.

This semester, together, we will investigate the possibility of the form as a project in itself. Forms that are not hermetic or self-referential, but open ones, that dialogue, that signal, that offer.

* Cited in Forty, Adrian. *Words and Buildings : a Vocabulary of Modern Architecture*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2000. p167

Introduction 23 February 2021, 9:30am (location tbc). Cost: max. CHF100.
Professor An Fonteyne – Assistants Pablo Donet, Els Silvrants-Barclay, Galaad Van Daele

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Making architecture demands a constant reading and writing of reality, unveiling relationships that stem from past decisions, present dynamics and future needs. We architects are thus in constant need of specific ways of approaching the spatial questions we are confronted with. The Denkraum is thought as a place for collective reflection, organised each semester around a topic and a specific way of looking at architecture: an attitude. By taking a step aside to look at politics, literature, painting or other practices, we try to understand their potential architectural relevance, and strive to look, in turn, at our own practice from an alternative angle.

The Denkraum is a place to investigate, to structure our findings, to exchange and discuss ideas with guests coming from different backgrounds, regions or disciplines, and to position ourselves. A place where the reading and writing of reality happens at the same time. A place where the students' work and references can follow individual trajectories while remaining on constant display, concentrating questions, tensions and proposed solutions. A place where the multiplicity of individual efforts is united and develops a common reflection, discourse and production.



Imi-Knoebel, *Raum 19 III*, 1968-2006