

Not All Who Wander Are Lost

“Adolf Loos told me one day: ‘A cultivated man does not look out of the window; his window is made of ground glass; it is there only to let the light in, not to let the gaze pass through.’” This line found in Le Corbusier’s 1925 book *Urbanisme* highlights the window, and the façade it is set in, as an interface containing ideas of how one should live, and as a critical site of relations between private space and public domain, which it can foster or prevent.

As the last months have shown, when everything is locked down, all that is left is the façade to look through, and the façade to look at. Walking around a city full of buildings one is no longer allowed to enter, we gain a heightened sense of the way the facades that line the streets generate whole urban identities. A surface that encloses and protects, but also an inhabited and political space, a potentially inviting and accommodating urban presence that opens up, represents, and stages the inner life of buildings.

Elaborating on this awareness, we will attempt to reverse the design process inherited from Modernism – in which plan distribution prevails over façade composition – and put the façade first, to try and discover how it can change buildings, transform their direct environment, as well as the city at large. To do so, we will observe a street leading to the center of Zurich, cutting through heterogeneous neighborhoods and urban conditions. In the tradition of famous flaneurs and strollers, we will develop a walking practice, a habit of observing this strip, over and over again, by day, by night, from periphery to center and vice versa, learning to discover the hidden qualities of the everyday. A way to go beyond what we think we know, and make the familiar strange again. A knowledge ‘from within’, building an incremental archive of observations, which we will supplement with references coming from painting, picturing different architectural or urban ‘realities’ whose qualities we will borrow and apply. A design process like a façade, looking both from the inside and the outside, that will result in proposals to alter or re-dress a selection of buildings situated on that same street.

This semester, together, we will investigate the possibility of the façade as projects in itself, accommodating collective or public functions as well as private ones: hospitable spaces offering a different experience of everyday urban life.

Denkraum

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.

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