Denkraum #1
Optimism — Building Europe

Optimism. Can we use this term without feeling embarrassed? It seems naive and light-hearted. Can it be appropriate today? We believe so.
This attitude has multiple dimensions: federative and political, rationalist, utopian, market-oriented, positivist, top-down or driven by the civil society. We will reclaim it above all as an active posture, a practice working towards an improvement of given conditions.

Europe, whose initial aim was to erase tensions by means of economic exchanges, is now perceived by many as a rigid frame threatening countries' sovereignty, a cynical organisation pushing a hyper-liberal agenda, an instable monetary union, or a vector of massive immigration threatening the security of its members.
And what if we looked at it in an active optimistic way? Europe is a question, but also a solution: it has a tremendous potential, and boasts a series of unique achievements. Yet, they are worked out step by step, behind the scenes, keeping a low profile, and thus leaving a void, a blank or even a negative image for the union. It has become critical to rethink it.

Brussels is called the capital of Europe, but officially it is not.
We wonder whether that is the reason for the invisibility of the EU in the city.
We wonder whether this invisibility makes it difficult for EU-citizens to relate to this power, whether it leads to a lack of pride, of interest, of engagement.
The current crisis is an opportunity for redefinition, for a shift in attitude, a reformulation of the image of Europe, and of the union's binding agents.
Now is the time for Europe to become visible!

1899. Victor Horta designs the **Maison du Peuple** in the centre of Brussels, a place for the welfare of Belgian workers, but also a stepping stone used by the Belgian Worker's Party to expand. A double-edged building, offering help with one hand, spreading propaganda with the other.
1965. In spite of international protest Horta's building is replaced by an office tower.

We will regard this building as a potential, a blank image, a testing ground for the redefinition of Europe. And we will look back, we will contemplate the Maison du Peuple —the ghost building— to try and transfer some of its ethos into its successor, to try and harness the power lying in a social-political edifice.
We propose to turn this very visible and central tower into a building for Europe, or rather for all its citizens: a place for culture, for citizenship, for awareness, a place of gathering, of learning, of participation and demonstration.

Europe is young, Europe is in progress, Europe is still about building.
This semester, we will contemplate on Building Europe!

Denkraum
Making architecture demands a constant and dynamic reading of given contexts under the angle of specific briefs and questions, allowing to unveil explicit and implicit relationships stemming from past actions and present dynamics. We will investigate different ways to read, and from there we will proceed to place findings in a framework, to structure them and create our own hierarchies, to situate ourselves in relationship to it. Within the studio, the multiplicity of individual tracks will be united under the common theme, in a common space of thinking: a Denkraum.

The Denkraum is a space of presence. A place where the work is on constant display and grows organically in time, concentrating questions, tensions and proposed solutions, developing a common design endeavour and discourse, a joined output based on associative thinking and reflection by analogy. A place where reading and writing reality happens all at once. A place to discuss together and with guests coming from different backgrounds, regions and disciplines, guests who will talk to us and think along.

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