

Now and Then #1

Athens – (New) beginnings

As Italian political thinker Antonio Gramsci puts it in his *Quaderni del carcere*, “the crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born”.

Greece, as one hears, is in crisis. It went through a moment of rupture, a slow but steady earthquake sweeping through the country for several years. It destroyed a lot, shattered political, economic and social structures, but in the process it also loosened up the country’s reality, separating it into fragments now lying there, unsolidified, open for recomposition and offering potential for the rethinking of what Greece is. What will the Greek phoenix, which reinvented itself time and again during its non-linear history, now define as the “new”?

In a place like Athens, where the—literally—towering bygone days are always looming above the city, we wish to look at the present condition of Greece in the light of its past. We will observe the numerous moments of reinvention of Athens, after the grandeur of the democratic city-state, after the independence from the Ottomans, after the wars, after the dictatorships, after the crises, with a set of different lenses.

Following the structure of a Greek tragedy, our stay will be a journey in several *epeisodia*, navigating the city and its surroundings, encountering architects, thinkers, artists, politicians, and attempting at outlining an image of Greek nowness. Each episode will be grouping buildings by analogy, connecting them by means of the overarching themes they can be related to: unfinishedness, new beginnings and the quest for *greek-ness*, topography, benevolent oligarchy...

Together we will go on a series of processions exploring modernism, critical regionalism, contemporaneity and antiquity, going from theater to museum, from house to offices, from university to temple. A reading of the city, a transversal view through the histories and aspirations of the country.

Throughout our stay, the participants will be asked to register those episodes by visual or textual means. This will allow to gather traces of the trip, a collective documentation of the thoughts and works discovered during our Greek days, and the first of our *Now and Then* booklet series, which will grow with each seminar week.

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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 and Then* seminar week series will be exploring 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: thinkers, artists, architects, writers, politicians or playwrights, 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.

18-24 March 2018 - Cost frame D (750 CHF to 1000 CHF) - min. 10 max. 21 students

Professor An Fonteyne – Assistants Pablo Donet, Thomas Klement, Galaad Van Daele

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