

Now and Then #3

Sicily – Writing an Island

*"I remember Sicily, as agony
Stirs in my soul remembrances of her.*

*An abode for the pleasures of my youth, now vacated,
Once inhabited by the noblest of people.*

*For I have been banished from Paradise,
And I [long to] tell you its story."*

Ibn Hamdis (c. 1056 – c. 1133), Sicilian Arab poet

A crossing point between Africa and Europe, between Eastern and Western Mediterranean, Sicily has been a much-coveted centre of the region for millennia. Starting in classical times, the island's rulers changed every couple hundred years. First a Greek colony, it then became Carthaginian, Roman, Byzantine, Arab, Norman, Spanish, before finally acting as starting point of what was to become the Kingdom of Italy. Each of Sicily's occupants dealt in their own way with the previous layers they found there, and the island's cities and buildings allow to read these hybridisations like cross sections through time and influences, showing the island as a place of layering and overlaps, as a nuanced tectonics echoing the subduction that gave it its mountains and keeps fuelling its volcano.

But beyond this glorious past, it offers a contrasting contemporary image. While Palermo and other Sicilian cities have gradually freed themselves from the domination of the Cosa Nostra to once again show a dynamic and culturally prominent face, in between lies a vast forsaken countryside, where 1-euro houses appear as the only weapon to fight depopulation.

To try and understand this complex present and challenging future, we will travel through Sicily, between antiquity and baroque, middle-ages and present day, visiting churches, temples, palaces and small towns giving hints of Sicily's historical, geological and social reality.

From Palermo to Catania and Mount Etna, each participant will be invited to record their encounters with buildings, cities and landscapes by means of writing. Edzard Mik, Dutch novelist and essayist, specialised in architecture, will accompany us on this trip to help us translate into different types or genres of writing our spatial impression of a present made of stories simultaneously projected on the past and outlining the future of the island.

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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.

20 -26 October 2019 - Cost frame D (750 CHF to 1000 CHF) - min. 15 max. 21 students

Professor An Fonteyne – Assistants Pablo Donet, Serafina Eipert, Thomas Klement, Galaad Van Daele
in collaboration with Edzard Mik, novelist

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