

Now and Then #4

The Magic Mountain

As recently as the 18th century, the European mountains were perceived as a barren, inhospitable and hostile environment — not fit for most. Until its jagged peaks became 'landscapes', and were conquered by the look of poets and painters, becoming beautiful, desirable, appropriate.

The vogue of mountain hotels, for which alpine countries are so famous, followed in the 19th century. Places to withdraw from the industrialized, urbanized world, to rest and be cured from the ailments of modern times. A quest that endured throughout the 20th century, and was masterfully described in Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain*. A place full of rituals, of contemplation, removed in splendid isolation from a war-torn Europe, yet very much focused on this distant reality at the same time.

This Autumn, like the novel's protagonists, we will isolate ourselves, remove ourselves from our daily lives to spend a few days in one of those hotels. In a ritualized manner akin to that of the *Magic Mountain*, we will alternate moments of gathering with moments of silence, moments of movement with moments of rest, moments indoors, and moments outdoors. We will read passages from the novel, and put them in relation with texts discussing aspects of contemporary thinking on architecture or society. We will walk in the surrounding mountains, reflecting on what we've read. And we will discuss what all this could mean for us, as architectural practitioners and as social, political beings.

18-23 October 2020 - Cost frame B (CHF 250-500) - min. 10 / max. 12 students

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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.