

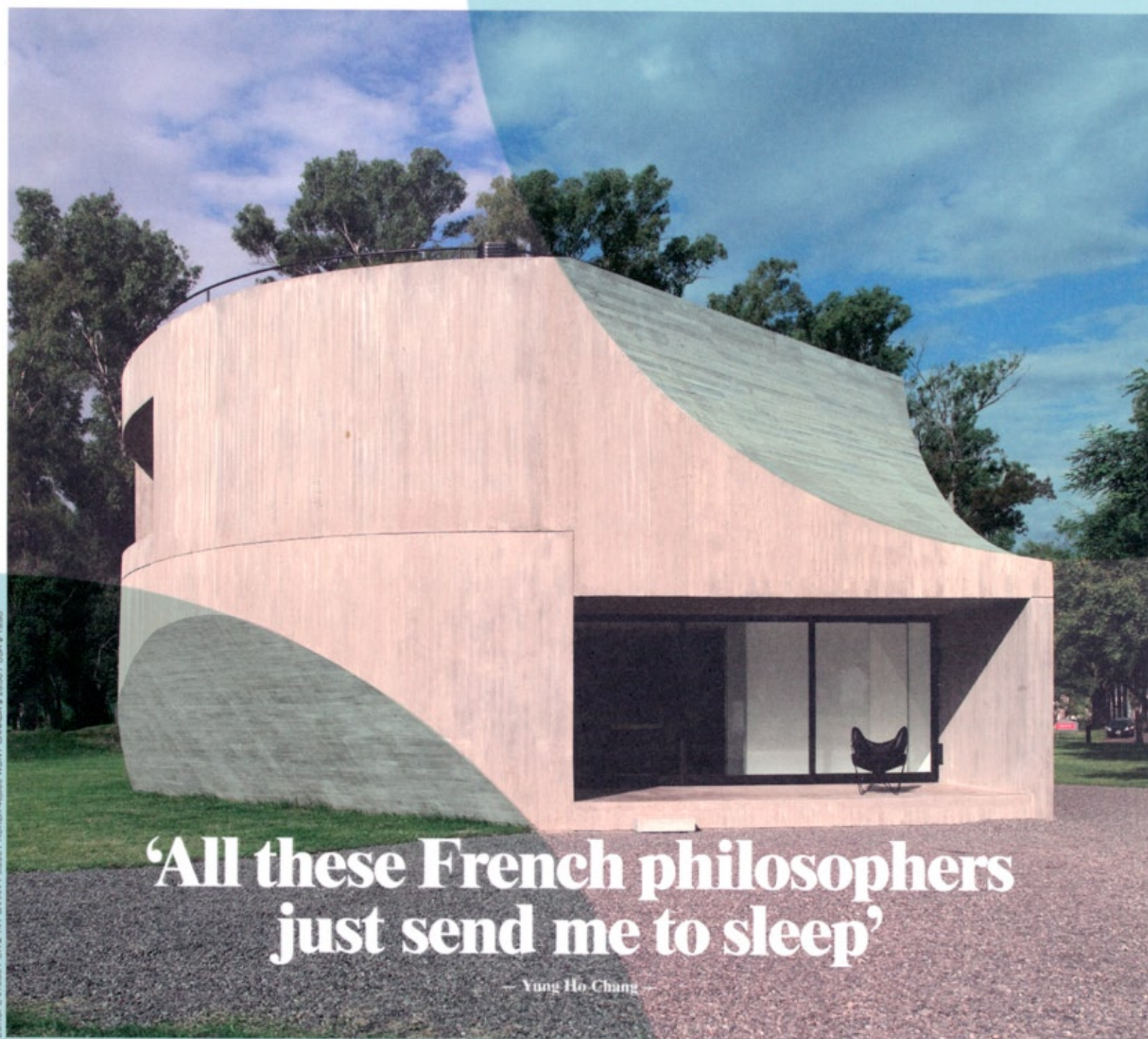


MARK

MARK Nº 20
JUNE / JULY 09

— ANOTHER ARCHITECTURE —

KEIICHIRO SAKO BEIJING — PEZO VON ELLRICHSCHAUSEN CONCEPCIÓN — KWK PROMES WARSAW — LACATON & VASSAL NANTES — OCTOBER YOKOHAMA
LIVING IN AN ARCHITECTURAL PHENOMENON — MARTINE DE MAESENEER BRUSSELS — JOHNSTONMARKLEE ROSARIO — RIKEN YAMAMOTO NIIGATA
CRISIS AND ARCHITECTURE — HIROSHI SAMBUICHI HIROSHIMA — PETER HAIMERL VIECHTACH — METROPOLIS PALABRITAS— LETTER FROM VALENCIA



**‘All these French philosophers
just send me to sleep’**

— Yung Ho Chang —

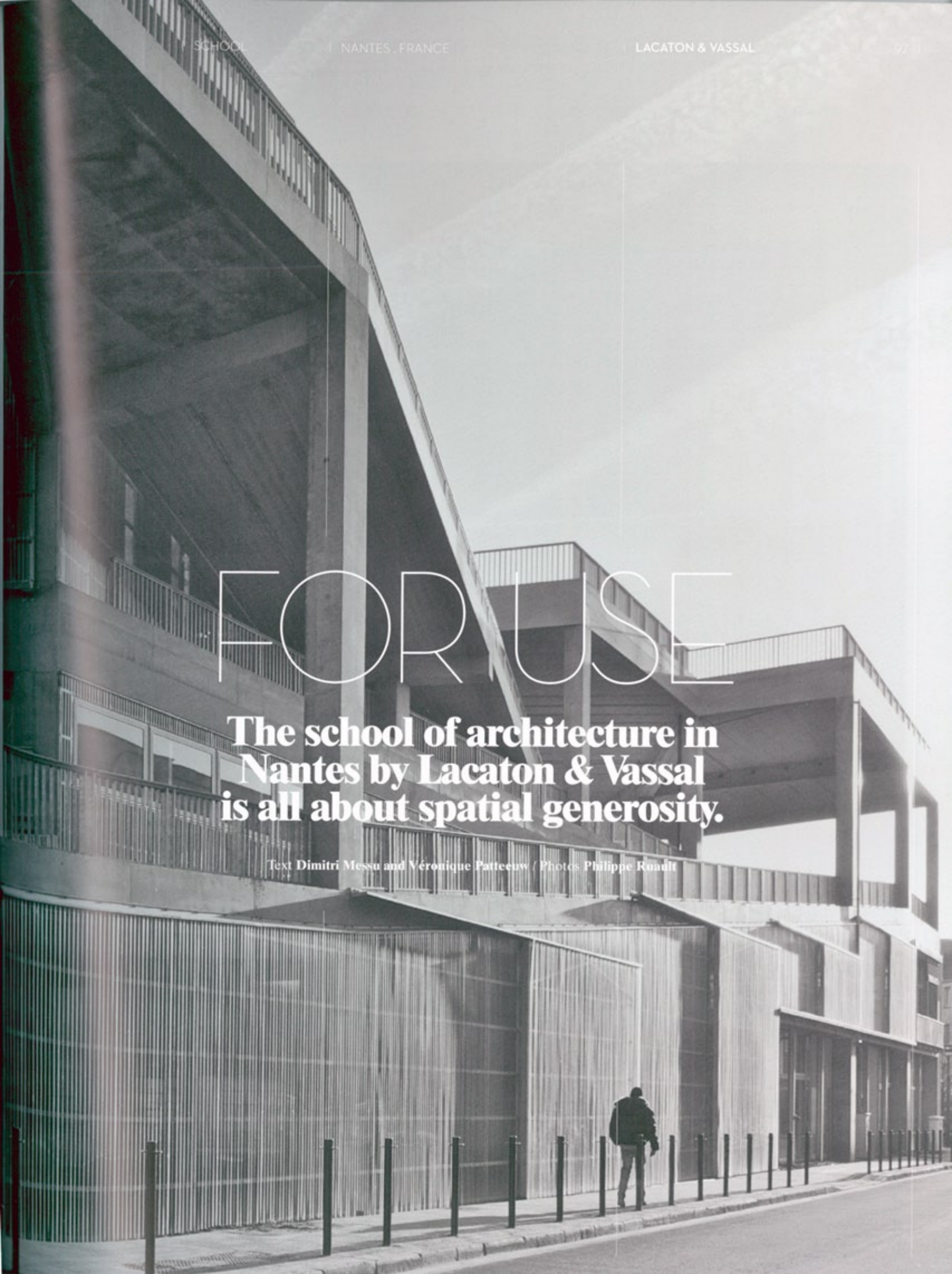
SPACE

LACATON & VASSAL'S SCHOOL OF
ARCHITECTURE SEEMS TO BE INSPIRED
BY THE MEGASTRUCTURES OF 1950S.

FOR USE

**The school of architecture in
Nantes by Lacaton & Vassal
is all about spatial generosity.**

Text Dimitri Messu and Véronique Patteeuw / Photos Philippe Ruault







Explored during the 1980s in social housing, the formula of 'a beautiful apartment is a big apartment' (coined by Jean Nouvel in projects like his Némausus social housing complex in Nîmes) is now being reinterpreted, stripped of its aesthetic implications, by Anne Lacaton and Jean Philippe Vassal. The point here is no longer *beauty* but *generosity*; no longer the *big space*, but a space that offers *capacity*.

Just one house was enough to build a reputation, to launch an approach. In 1993, the realization of the Latapie House blew a fresh wind across the landscape of single-dwelling construction. Beyond the demonstration of the luxury of space for everyone, Lacaton and Vassal, in collaboration with their client, rethought the appropriation of space vis-à-vis climate, seasons, uses. They generated a high-capacity habitat. The evidence of the selected materials, the implementation of the material and the message make it impossible to ignore the work of Lacaton & Vassal. This approach was honed and perfected

'THE BUILDING IS FIRST AND FOREMOST A CHUNK OF THE CITY'

— Anne Lacaton —

over a lengthy period before this paradigmatic dwelling was produced. First in Africa (Jean Philippe Vassal worked as an architect and town planner in Niger from 1980 to 1985), where intelligence and ingenuity prevailed over comfort and means – after all, in an African context it's imperative that you use whatever is at hand to create living space. Then, from 1985 to 1987, they worked for Jacques Hondelatte, where they acquired knowhow and a keen sense of perfection.

Lacaton & Vassal's approach is synthesized in their latest project. In Nantes, France, a city grafted on the coast, linchpin between Brittany and Aquitaine, little sister to Bordeaux, they designed the new school of architecture. Right in the city centre, this new edifice replaces the former school, now obsolete and too remote. The project is part of the restructuring of the Ile de Nantes, an area of former harbour installations and industrial wastelands now welcoming »



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01 SPACES THAT ARE NOW EMPTY CAN BE RENTED OUT BY THE SCHOOL IN THE FUTURE.

02 THE BUILDING NOW SERVING AS A SCHOOL COULD EASILY BECOME SOMETHING ELSE.

03 THE BUILDING IS EQUIPPED WITH A PARKING GARAGE, ACCESSIBLE VIA A WIDE RAMP.

‘OUR ARCHITECTURE IS ABOUT CREATING A LOT WITH WHAT YOU HAVE’

— Anne Lacaton —





building sites for offices and residential projects as well as commercial and public facilities.

The new school of architecture was completed in February 2009. It is the result of a lengthy process of work and reflection that began in 1996. Although it had no legal status, the school positioned itself from the start as *maître d'usage* (patron-user) and directed the project's programming, with the assistance of Roberto Almeida, programme designer at APOR. It is from this position of *maître d'usage* that the school's director, Philippe Bataille, was able to play a primordial role, outlining the key elements of the programme – a new school of architecture for 800 students – and supervising the various phases of the project, including programming (1999-2001), competition (2003) and construction (2006-2008).

The project was designed as a device: a platform able to accommodate numerous programmes. Starting with the construction of a rooftop square 24 m high for staging various events, the totality of the floor space will be occupied, 'capturing this idea of multiplying the urban floor and then connecting to a machine, which is naturally able to drain, to convey everything that is necessary to bring public spaces to life', explains Anne Lacaton during our meeting with the architect in Paris.

Composed of four levels (0 m, 9 m, 16 m, 24 m), this servicing structure, a kind of Friedman superstructure, provides spaces to be invented, open-ended volumes. Within this open frame-

work, the school is the first programme to be installed.

There is no formal discourse in the work of Lacaton & Vassal: there are contingent means, as demonstrated by the Una Café in Vienna, Austria, where the same demand of implementation, the same generosity in the quality of the spaces takes place (mosaics sprawl across both the restaurant dining room and the kitchen). The interior, the space, the volumes and their uses generate the envelope and establish the building in its context. This process weaves a radical communication between the produced building and its environment. From this point on, its façades are like a garment that adapts to different weathers and uses.

'The building is first and foremost a chunk of the city, a chunk of the city that encloses a school of architecture,' Anne Lacaton adds. The city carries on into the building. They have built an element that is heteronomous and anchored, that engages the users of the city in a dialogue. Through these elements, they re-examine the city, its uses, other designers. The building now serving as a school could easily become something else. Another way of creating sustainability.

To the 12,000 m² in assigned spaces, 5,500 m² of 'extra' spaces have been added, heated to 12 °C, unassigned and open to appropriation by their users. In addition to this, there are the 8,000 m² of terraces, creating a diversity of spaces and uses both inside and outside the building.

This 'extra space' is achieved within the ini-

tial budget. Often misinterpreted as 'more space for less money', the architecture of Lacaton & Vassal is generous but does not seek to be 'chic and cheap' architecture. It is within the margins of the budget that the architects find opportunities. 'Efficiency is not a precondition; it is a resource, a tool. The project is not based on the idea of efficiency, but rather on the idea of creating capacities, a generosity of use. In view of this you establish constraints, especially in terms of cost. Clearly, efficiency is a resource that enables you not to have to chip away at this generosity, this volume,' Anne Lacaton asserts. 'Our architecture is not the result of an attitude of "saving money"; it is about creating a lot with what you have,' she adds. It is putting the elaboration of a rich and generous space created within the defined constraints in the foreground.

Within the context of sustainable architecture, the work of Lacaton & Vassal is often cited, in reference to their search for standard-construction systems, their efficiency, their particular attention to the organization of the building site and to climate control in each project. At the school in Nantes, this 'sustainable' approach is elaborated in the system of double façades, in the delicate play of natural light, the limited amount of utility ducts and the fact that 95% of the building's ventilation occurs naturally. The issue of sustainability is not limited to the engineering and the formal design of the projects – above all, it comes out in the way Lacaton & Vassal conceive living and use, in the way »





buildings are inhabited and used. The ecology of architecture becomes a human ecology. It imagines a different way of living in, using and inhabiting the school. 'Sustainability means improving the quality of life while acting responsibly towards one's environment,' Anne Lacaton offers as a definition. To provide more also means to challenge the responsibility of users, of inhabitants. It does not mean leaving spaces vacant, but instead creating open-ended spaces. These spaces possess qualities, possibilities that induce various appropriations and uses.

An assured aesthetic distinguishes and makes Lacaton & Vassal's work identifiable, but this aesthetic derives from the instrument, from the process, from the space imagined and then elaborated. At times there are facilities, such as in the Palais de Tokyo arts centre, where the stamp of fabrication (the *more*, the raw, the bare) serves a project whose programme and use are more than subject to criticism.

This work regarding spatial generosity or generous architecture can be seen as a gift, a present of better living in a society. But is it a genuine gift? How can one appropriate this more if one lacks the means? How can this extra be maintained, cleaned, heated, if operational and programming budgets are not increased? Moreover, how can appropriation be engendered? How can one guard against all deviations and achieve what was originally intended?

Conscious of the risk inherent to their approach, and realistic about the responsibil-

ity imposed on the inhabitants of the school, Lacaton & Vassal insist on doing proactive work with their clients. The projected uses upon which the building is based are soundly underpinned. 'The school of architecture in Nantes is a building that allows and engenders new dynamics. The building creates the margin for manoeuvre, creates the conditions of free space, organizes them, opens them to use and appropriation.' Indeed the school is now set to benefit, thanks to this 'strategy of more', from new financial dynamics. The rooftop square can host large-scale cultural events; various spaces can be rented out. Lacaton & Vassal's architecture generates the tools necessary for the school's own functioning and survival.

As such, learning takes place not just in the classrooms or in the studios, but also in relation to what the school makes possible physically and economically. The space becomes what one makes of it. There is a gamble provoked and yet limited by the responsibility of each user. Risk is assumed, shared and claimed. Were such an appropriation to fail, it would reveal a great deal about the level of empowerment in our society and the level of collective responsibility its citizens could achieve.

Lacaton & Vassal produce an architecture of the everyday; they do not indulge in the monumental, the spectacular. Albeit dry or raw, their mode of expression is nevertheless accessible and stimulating. To complex questions, they fashion architectural answers that are simple,

yet that together form a complex structure. Everything is legible, accessible and extremely taut and imbedded. Buildings by Lacaton & Vassal demand care, attention and maintenance; they deliberately put the user in an active position.

If the architecture of Lacaton & Vassal can be defined as a political act, it is in this call to imbue each inhabitant of the building with responsibility, as a challenge to established norms. If there is such a critical position, it lies in the architecture that has been produced. «

www.lacatonvassal.com



01 95% OF THE BUILDING'S VENTILATION OCCURS NATURALLY, WHICH EXPLAINS THE LIMITED AMOUNT OF UTILITY DUCTS.

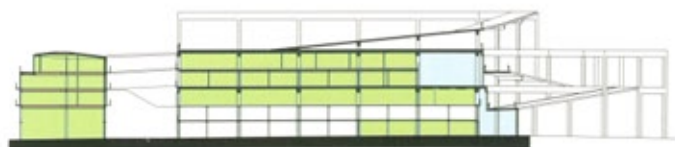
02 THE CITY, THE LIGHT AND THE CONCRETE STRUCTURE AS SOURCES OF INSPIRATION FOR ART CLASS.

03 THE 5,500 M² OF 'EXTRA' SPACES ARE HEATED TO 12 °C, UNASSIGNED AND OPEN TO APPROPRIATION BY THEIR USERS.



THE HUGE ROOFTOP SQUARE CAN
BE USED FOR LARGE-SCALE EVENTS.

BUILDINGS BY LACATON & VASSAL DEMAND CARE, ATTENTION AND MAINTENANCE



LONG SECTION.



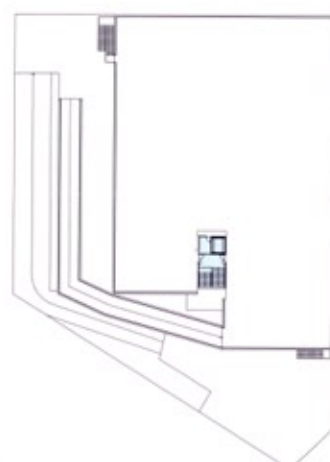
LONG SECTION OVER THE AUDITORIUM.



SECOND FLOOR.



MEZZANINE.



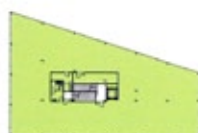
ROOF.



FIRST FLOOR.



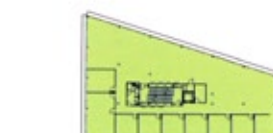
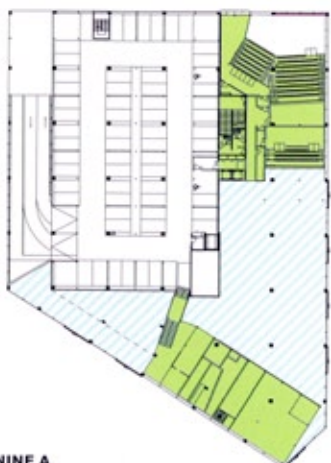
MEZZANINE.



GROUND FLOOR.



MEZZANINE A.



MEZZANINE B.



EXTRA SPACE
ASSIGNED SPACE
VOID
EXTERIOR