

*'A government office building should be as efficient as a factory.'* The search for an 'architecture of bureaucracy' by Belgian administrative reformers during the 1930s

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During the 1930s, Belgian state officials sought to improve the efficiency of the government apparatus by implementing a so-called 'administrative reform' in the different ministries and state-run corporations. This reform affected virtually all aspects of the civil service, including the working methods of the clerical workers, the office furniture, and the design of the office buildings. When the Belgian Postal Services decided to construct a new building for its giro cheque administration around 1937 (choosing CIAM member Victor Bourgeois as the architect for the complex), they were heavily criticized by Louis Camu, the 'Royal Commissioner for Administrative Reform', for not being 'scientific' enough in determining the architectural programme. Using Henry-Russell Hitchcock's noted concepts of 'architecture of bureaucracy' vs. 'architecture of genius', I will demonstrate that Camu sought to promote 'bureaucratic' design strategies which were centred around the notions of team work, a thorough division of tasks, and a 'scientific' determination of the client's needs.

Biography:

Jens van de Maele (jens.vandemaele@gmail.com) has studied contemporary history at the universities of Leuven and Vancouver. He has published articles and a book on the history of urban green spaces in Belgium. His current PhD research at the University of Ghent, Department of Architecture and Urban Planning, deals with the architectural production of the Belgian state administrations during the 1918-1970 period.