Corner of the Belgian Pavilion in Venice.
Photograph by Bas Princen, 2008.
A photograph by Bas Princen shows a room corner of the Belgian Pavilion in Venice. Not much is seen: white walls, confetti-covered floor, no chairs, no people. What’s absent from the picture is the wall outside of the building that made its austere architecture—the pavilion itself—the protagonist during the 2008 Venice Biennale.

The pavilion was built in 1907, by the Belgian Art Nouveau architect Léon Sneyers. An emulation of the Secession building in Vienna, it was a showcase of ‘contemporary’ architectural tropes, complete with pilasters, pediments and frescoes. It did not survive very long in its original form and decoration. Various transformations, first by Sneyers, then by others, were successive acts of simplification. Until the point that there was little architecture left, only a carcass, a frame for (re)presentation; a professional ‘background’ for art and architecture events. The wall we built around the pavilion cut it loose from its dominant context of the Biennale. We constructed a new pavilion to frame the original Belgian Pavilion. The enclosing wall and ramp prohibited visitors from entering the building from the main axis of the Giardini. Inside, there were only a couple of enfilade rooms, a skylight from which we took away the protective velum; a sequence, a spatiality; the building as a type. The enclosing wall was made out of galvanised metal panels, the entire floor within its boundaries, inside and outside of the Sneyers’ pavilion, covered with confetti. Tons of confetti on the floor felt both happy and sad. Confetti, finally, is only on the floor ‘after the party’. That’s exactly how it felt, in 2008, for both the pavilion and for us, the party was over.