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An essay presenting
the theoretical premise
of the tent and calling
for a pragmatic architecture
measured by its performance
in mediation.

A CASE FOR PRAGMATISM

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23. 12. 2015.

THE
TENT

Polis, Polites, Idiotes, in the Environment.

Thucydides, the 5th century historian and early political scientist, introduced, throughout his writings, the study of the synergy between the city and the individual, between the *polis* and the *idiotes*. In this dynamic feedback, the city is promoted as a collective person, with an ultimate will and set of actions that develops through the interaction and common decision-making of the *polites*, the citizens in their public function. In turn, this political individual is only explained completely if we take into account the overarching collective structure in which it participates and within which it develops a properly personal agenda. In his first take at writing history from a political point of view, Thucydides thus proposes to constantly look at the interplay and conflict between the common course and the individual agenda, regulating the behavior of each *polis* to be examined as a homeostatic system.¹

Taking this model and applying it to architecture as a metaphorical *polis*, we are immediately confronted with the lack of synthesis regarding the evolution of interactions between architects as *polites*, architects as *idiotes* as well as the end result of the process in its most extensive scale. Indeed, what truly matters is this end result, the actions of the *polis* within the reality of the constant Peloponnesian Wars we are part of. It is to be examined from the political laboratory, in our case the assemblies, the schools, the exhibitions, the debates, the books and libraries, all the way to the equally political field of impact that is best described as the environment. This word is used here in the widest of senses. There is only one possible and unique environment when it comes to the kinds of plurality we are trying to tackle, and this is the whole of the things that form the evenly covered field of perceivable matter on the surface of planet earth. Loosely inspired by Gibsonian psychology² we could specify that the environment is, from the point of view of an entity able to perceive, a set of invariably perceived *affordances*, forming a basic interactive feedback of

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Morrison, James V. A Key Topos in Thucydides: The Comparison of Cities and Individuals. *The American Journal of Philology* 115, no. 4 (1994): 525–41.

#2

Gibson, James J. *L'approche écologique de la perception visuelle*. Bellevaux: DEHORS, 2014.

what is possible and what is not.

This metaphor is close to implying that the inanimate and quite dislocated collective practice of ours has the ability to perceive an "environment" just like a living individual. This is one far-fetched hypothesis. Architecture as *polis* is also at first glance a hallucination, or at least the announcement of a highly disciplinary ambition. This might be a secret hope to start from, but it is not the point of the metaphor. In defining the field of impact and the scale of reference of the architectural *polis* as the "environment" -as if it is perceived by an imaginary individual- we can put to light the network in which we are actors, thus having some consequences and participating in feedbacks. If we see our collective decision-making on design as our common behavior within an environment of resources and conventions that regulate their use we can maybe better situate both architecture's own integrity and the possibilities for strategies within the network.

Idiocy and the modern prejudice: The hypo- thetical constitution.

In recent times, during the period in which humans have considered themselves modern, and even before the actual consciousness of this as a "fact", the actions of the architectural *polis* within the environment were most commonly summarized in styles and movements. However, coherently to the environmental hypothesis proposed above, the richest, most intricate narratives come forth in rare instances when the internal proceedings of the *polis*, including the role of individuals as *polites* and *idiotes*, are integrated in the narrative of the environment³.

This metaphor brings along the reference points for us to situate the motivations for a theoretical essay such as this one, in a time such as today; if we look at it from the point of view of the environment, architecture is predominantly the work of *idiotes*, hence making it, by definition, idiotic. The idiocy in

#3

This, I hold, is the strength of such stories such as those of Geddes, his pupil Mumford or bearded people such as Banham or, to some extent, Tafuri,

question maintains part of the original neutral meaning; idiocy, the priority of personal interest over collective decision-making should, inextricably, be accounted for along with *polites* and the *polis* itself. But within a failing public sphere, both in miniature form within architecture and in the more general sense, there is a temptation to surrender the whole to idiocy⁴.

This would be arguably acceptable, if it were a paradoxical collective decision. Far from that, this surrender now seems as an accidental byproduct of a larger prejudice, the idea that at some point we said, much like Monty Python albeit seriously: "and now, for something completely different"⁵. This supposed game-changer, the rise of the "modern", is nothing but an illusion, a constitution, which orients our understanding of reality towards purification rather than towards mediation. This contention, which is not mine, not new and will be elaborated later, as well as Thucydides' *Polis* = {*polites*, *idiotes*} paradigm, will be our rough, arbitrary transpositions from political science, in order to efficiently present all the concerns at play.

Let's admit then that architecture has also an unwritten constitution, balancing its internal forces and allowing the purification of incoherence into a highly affirmative end result, capable of any and all justifications. This constitution allows for architects to constantly understand what they do and explain it to others without ever being caught actively creating any foul phenomenon within the environment. This result is achieved by dividing power into poles, functioning like branches of government with the same virtual independence and capacity to throw the blame to each other. In truth, they can be consulted individually, but more often are mobilized in hidden collaboration with each other or even in contradiction to each other in order to provide for discourse that is apparently coherent as per what is being done.

#4

Richard Sennett. *The Fall of Public Man*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

#5

John Cleese's opening phrase for each episode of the Monty Python's *Flying Circus*, pronounced from a desk that should not be there.

The Parliament: Idiotes in outer "space"

The most prominent branch, arguably running things today is a kind of parliament. It is the most open, diverse and cacophonous place, deeply inefficient and unjust, just like US congress. Some arbitrary traits take you very far here; charisma, ego, contacts, marketing or mere populism. In short, this is all about the aforementioned *idiotes*. However, the force of this pole comes, paradoxically, from an obsession with society or, more specifically, the failure of architecture's contribution within an idealized society.

Faced with culture that seems increasingly hard to understand, we tend to take refuge in highly personal ways of making buildings, justified by the supposition that all that is good comes forth and all that comes forth is good. For a few, this is a conscious retreat to preserve some integrity but for the larger number it has had the effect of a liberating dumb-fest, a tacit approval of mediocrity at a huge scale, unleashing the deepest nihilistic forces. Thus is formed a discourse of unbearably vague "spatial quality" that is both immeasurable and uncontested and can find



an extremely wide array of application but is always meant to sell apartments, shopping malls, public space (open shopping malls), for private and state developers.

The idiotic governance of architecture today is, at least in its highest ranks, nostalgic of collective debate. However, it fails to grasp the fundamental divide within its own ruling; the central role it entrusts to an idealized new-age notion of personal creativity is deeply incompatible to any meaningful form of debate, requiring a platform for criticism. Criticism can remain civilized and honest, but the few *Idiotes* who care to discuss are profoundly and sincerely hurt by it because the framework in which they work makes each and every one of their "creations" a direct product of an otherwise unexpressed and indescribable part of themselves.

Left to these people, architecture will become the game of (bad) jokers, funky hipsters, users of meaningless terms in latin⁶ and those capable of citing Alvar Aalto and Ron Herron within the same presentation and with the same sense of naïve admiration. It will be the technique of hollow and pretentious "sensitivity", an eclectic practice of feigned sophistication, with the sole purpose to justify how two absolutely identical "T4" apartments are somehow different from one another (thus making one more desirable in the market than the other). In the hands of the *idiotes*, architecture is the craft of the "cool".

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Latin is always a good language to make something cool even cooler. In *Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni*.

Executive Branch: Technocratic Bureaucracy.

The second branch of power, which often collaborates fruitfully with the *idiotes* are the technicians. They represent the executive arm of government, amassing the most persistent modernists, the ones who still view architecture as a science that needs to configure and translate the other sciences within the city. Most commonly they deal with building physics but in some rare cases they can apply the same approach in much more far-fetched ways, for instance with the science of history.

Their conviction is corroborated by the ambient divinization of technology, worshiped as a set of solutions to problems. It is a field within which all future problems will find solutions, and all useless solutions will have problems discovered for them, for the precise reason that both solutions and problems come from science and thus nature, "facts". In all cases, all the problems and solutions will be part of the reasoned improvement of life on earth.

This pole is openly obsessed with the notion of "more", seen as the teleological course of history. This is the case of the other groups as well, but the idea of constant improvement of human capacities in all directions is here at the very core of the theoretical argument, instead of being accepted merely as social fact. It comes as no surprise then that the genealogy of vague quotes about "more", obscurely originating from Mies van der Rohe (or Philip Johnson, who also holds entry number two), is the main feature of any metaphysical debate this group will have. The architectural culture of many technicians often starts with this questioning and ends a couple of centimeters further, on the age-old inquiry about what it is, after all, that "follows function"?

Here you also have all the digital guys, the modern C.I.A. or N.S.A., defending a highly technical and formless architecture from the point of view of the computer. For them, the computer is exactly like Le

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Corbusier's *avions*, *paquebots* and *autos*; a topos of modernization that makes architecture obsolete and in need of urgent reformulation. The sole goal of architecture is thus to constantly reinvent the image of an optimistic future. Only these people, strangely corbusian, rarely have the beaux-arts flair of their master to make something beautiful or even slightly compelling out of the frantic reformulation. They also lack the all-encompassing wisdom to correctly fix the parameters of their parametric "tools", or to just explain to us what they really do.

In short, technician's architecture is an architecture of solar decathletes, people who talk more about diagrams, pie charts and graphs rather than plans, honest believers in smart-anything, 3d-printer geeks and those who believe Norman Foster and Renzo Piano still make good architecture (in some or all cases) today. Incapable to understand relativity, the technicians will insist that the numbers of all others just don't add up. In their hands, architecture is a dreamy version of engineering, doomed and hopeless against actual engineering.

Judiciary: Moralists in black grounds

Between *idiotes* and technicians we can account for about 98% percent of architecture that is produced today, both in the "high" and "profane" realms. However, there is a further need for regulation between the two and stimulation of their respective arguments at the governing ranks, so there is a high court, available for judiciary consultation. The amount of power of this branch of the extended twofold government is disproportionate to its size but fully coherent with its importance in keeping the checks and balances of the system.

These erudite wise men can be named the "moralists". Their pole is a relic of the religious, acting like an ever-returning god in a godless place. His name is still on the page, yet barred through; available but suppressed. The moralists always remind us that there is an all encompassing, compact notion that is the start and end of everything; *God*. By virtue of this presence on the page, we can proceed to explain or deconstruct all other issues, and narrow things down to theological dilemmas that are bound to perpetual debate in the high chambers of moral guidance.

To better explain *god* for this particular application we need to understand it as *classical order*. This is the group that has not recovered from the abolition of what supposedly held architecture together. It constantly deals with alternative ways in which we can reclaim, or at least put to bed the lost formal integrity of architecture, in which it is thought to have had its plain capacity both as an autonomous discipline internally and as a coherent mode of communication of meaning out in the open.

The moralists are in a constant, esoteric search of ways in which architecture can have an overarching set of principles coming from itself and explainable only within itself. They are obviously traumatized by the post-structuralist revelations on authority lin-

gering everywhere and in need of constant, fierce counteraction. Why? In short, because...freedom and hence the far fetched link of this group with a notion of moral authority, trying to rewrite laws no one understood in the first place.

To keep up with the literary structure of this libel, leaving architecture to moralists could be a tempting, though highly impossible option. They are, generally, highly intelligent writers and readers of texts, published frequently by the anyone corporation; the vast majority of architecture academia in the North-eastern United States -or whoever else knows who Jeffrey Kipnis is-, and mostly people talking about architecture without ever building anything while directing flocks of rich white kids to study renaissance architecture in Rhinoceros. The bad news is, and it is bad news for all of us, the ~~classical orders~~ will not magically reconsolidate just by being invoked, as they came out of the environment to form a meta-narrative that is clear only in retrospect, whereas, on the contrary, the design of built assemblages has always been just that: architecture as architecture within the environment as environment.



A lobby: Greenpeace, or the protestors in front of the polis with Japanese saws.

Finally, there many vague lobbies and quite some mob, made of those who are against all others, the protestors. Be it clear; these are not the aforementioned moralists having made an argument for criticality, but rather, plainly, the hippies⁷. They invert the point of view, which for the three other categories was outward looking from architecture, and try to pretend they are the environment. In this mindset, by definition architects are all bad for being part of architecture and not the vague environment, seen as something you can be part of.

The protestors try without knowing it to reboot architecture by changing it's setting, in a way that is similar, and often similarly naïve, to what graffiti does within art. They are thus obsessed with vernacular and spontaneous building, understood as fundamental alternatives for a counter-cultural architecture or counter-architecture. Such an obsession conceals how they see themselves, as another liberating avant-garde that will revolutionize architecture and make it current again for a dreamed world with dreamed people, cooperators and craftsmen and cultureless ever-interacting squatters.

Moreover, they represent a claim on innocence based on their illusion that everyone else's foul implication in the predicaments they denounce happens consciously when "they" choose to be irresponsible, greedy and general bad. "They" always do it for the money. People need to "wake up" instead, hear the problems and follow what is good in the world, because there is a huge supposed amount of good that was there all along and we just need to pick it up by means of "craftsmanship" and collaboration and artisanal burgers and additive-free tobacco and local craft beer. Once picked up, the good needs to be loaded in the old utopia guns and then fired, pointed at the sky. What an ever-repeating surprise when the cartridges turn out to be blank.

#7

Please refer here to the aftermath of Woodstock, contained in the "Stocktaking", leaflet 1 of the present work, pp. 0.
- xxviii



This lobby is vaguely defined because its members spontaneously avoid clear representation and affiliation. I am defining it according to what is, for me, its local iteration. From where I'm standing, these fellows are shouting and picketing out of the window that we need to constantly look like we're doing some sort of important manual labor and when we speak use the word "people" or "nature" more than twice in a sentence. A hardcore cluster of the protestors is found, rather unsurprisingly, in the French-speaking world, worshipped by flocks of rebellious students, grand children of Mai 68, urgently trying to save the voters of Marine Le Pen from the predicaments of globalization. If the critics take up architecture, which will never happen because they despise it by definition, we are all picking up the Japanese saw and that piece of wooden pallet with the big rusty nail sticking out. And live happily ever after.

The extended constitution of purification.

Two branches of government thus work together and against each other to justify everything extended by a judiciary high chamber as well as lobbies and protestors, influencing the precarious balance of power. Their highly defamatory description given above, as well as the arbitrary hypothesis that pinned down their definitions, make this exercise ridiculous at first glance. Indeed, each and every one of these power groups has arguments that can be highly compelling and were dishonestly concealed in the above presentation. Can anyone imagine architecture without the *idiotes'* acceptance of personal obsessions and the idea that things are, at some point, "just good"? Does anyone think architecture can be made without the technician's shiny parts or without a fair amount of technological affection and a high extent of calculated functioning? Can anyone conceive of architecture without a rich, informed, sophisticated system for the regulation and protection of common knowledge, currently defended by the moralists? And lastly, does anyone think that we can go forth without taking into account problems and emergencies in the "environment" that the mob is shouting about, as an integral part of what motivates good architecture? The horrible rant, a true libel written about each one of the categories is supposed to provocatively put forward the simple idea that the debate today is not about choosing sides. This whole work is about the tent as a constitutional amendment and now we are discussing all the preliminaries, the motivations for a constitutional proposal.

#8

Latour, Bruno. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Translated by Catherine Porter. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Or the original:

Latour, Bruno. *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes : essai d'anthropologie symétrique*. Armillaire. Paris: Editions La Découverte, 1991.

The English version was used for terminology while the French version applies when it comes to quote pages.

On a large scale, in architecture's environment just like in architecture itself, there is an extended twofold constitution applied. This is none other than the "constitution of the moderns", explained by Bruno Latour in his rather well known *We were never modern* from 1991⁸. This constitution comes from two simultaneous "artifacts": the formulated consciousness of social life, through Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*, and the revelation of the "fabricated nature of the laboratory",

through Boyle's vacuum pump experiment⁹. These two events lay the foundations for a nature-culture antithesis, powerful in itself and solidified when needed by the barred *god*, once and for all separated from direct influence to nature or culture but still present to keep the checks and balances. The antithesis is proliferated through the power of critique, constantly present to transport vacuum pumps and Leviathans "out there" and expand their application, to where purification is not implemented.

The hybrid objects of the periphery; why we need mediation.

This expanded application brought to light a function of the constitution that was not problematic before; it is solely capable of purification, from the point of view of nature or culture or at least *god*, but never of mediation, of tackling the networks that lie in the middle between the "naturally" or "culturally" or "morally" pure objects. Thus the constitution proliferated an increasing quantity of "hybrids" within the networks that are of course common to nature and culture and even *god*, and tacitly acknowledged by each one of them as the field of externalities. With their backs turned on mediation, the moderns created a true junkyard of "quasi-objects", hybrids, right behind them, a stinking mess that now brings forth the collapse of the constitution. In Latour's own words:

When the only thing at stake was the emergence of a few vacuum pumps, they could still be subsumed under two classes, that of natural laws and that of political representations; but when we find ourselves invaded by frozen embryos, expert systems, digital machines, sensorequipped robots, hybrid corn, data banks, psychotropic drugs, whales outfitted with radar sounding devices, gene synthesizers, audience analyzers, and so on, when our daily newspapers display all these monsters on page after page, and when none of these chimera can be properly on the object side or on the subject side, or even in between, something has to

#9

Latour Ibidem
pp. 39.

*be done.*¹⁰

In architecture, we could add, we have some specific quasi-objects to add to the list of the general ones. In the present state, it seems that the *polis* is unable to look at the arabesque even covered field that has spread throughout the surface of the earth. "Agriculture and city and the expansion of the city and sprawl and infrastructure and trash and buildings and favelas and old villages and gated communities and agriculture and some more other buildings"¹¹; we haven't found new ways to purify this. Instead, we insist in applying the knowledge on the idealized city-countryside antithesis that is no longer actual, if it ever existed¹².

Alongside this mysterious horizontal hybrid, we also deal with buildings that are neither temporary nor forever; we usually conceive them for as long as possible (often hoping they stay "forever") while being paid by clients who want them just for as long as it is profitable to have them. We have no answer to them, other than our silence and afterthoughts. On top of the purification imposed by our own constitution, we abide by weird regulations, asking for specific details and codified typologies. We build walls and windows or domino structures as if we were building the pantheon or the temple again and again when the struggle of materials against gravity and light is now only one of many technical concerns.

We make shiny skyscrapers in the desert and spoil precious steel and aluminum in pointless exercises of marketing, with poor detailing of the joints of the titanium panels.

When it came to a few Bauhaus exercises or the debate on the primitive hut, all could still be explained to everyone's satisfaction by *idiotes* and technicians and the occasional moralist. But our small *polis* too is now crumbling under all these monsters and here to something needs to be done.

#10

Latour, Ibid.
pp. 49-50.

#11

Editorial. San Rocco 02:
The Even Covering of the
Field. Venice; Summer 2011.
p.3

#12

From Ambrogio Lorenzetti to
15th and 16th century Dutch
and Flemish engravings to
Fischer Von Erlach's perspectives,
there is no reason to believe
city-as-culture and countryside/
arcadia-as-nature ever existed in a
compelling state of purity. Their
representation always betrays the
presence of telephone poles and
fences and machines and people in
the landscape.

Towards the abandonment of the center.

In my interpretation, this would be to start abandoning alleged yardsticks, supposed centers that are always somewhere not so far, waiting for genius discovery and glorious purification. This prejudice, the illusion of the center, applied to the interpretation of success and failure, renders in itself the debate impossible by conferring to "us" and only "us" the capacity to discern the said center, misunderstood as a coherent relationship between the result, the process and the actor. It ultimately amounts to a confusion between Thucydides's *polis*, *polites* and *idiotes* in the schematic terms of this essay, and orients the debate away from the production of hybrids and, in the case of architecture, towards the poles of the constitution.

Within the modern constitution, it is by means of this confusion that we become the one and only holders of the tools for the objective betterment of the world, the "matters of fact". This is how we separate ourselves, in the sense of humans, from the non-humans, as well as ourselves in the sense of Westerners, from the "others"¹³. These matters of fact of nature via science mean that culture now responds directly to a narrative, starting from fundamental survival and progressing, milestone after milestone, towards the promised "good life", the ultimate yardstick.

In the process, some witnessed culture's failure to comply, the "breakdown of all previous narrative paradigms, along with the breakdown of any shared language"¹⁴. This led them to a cynical unleash of nihilism, similar to the one of our own *idiotes*, which led them to perpetuate the traditions of the modern constitution¹⁵ without believing them in their essence. By consequence the debate became a pointless tail-eating snake, chasing its fleeting "freedom" and "creativity". The post-moderns (in philosophy, much more than in architecture), took away some last tools we might have had to discuss.

#13

Latour Ibid.
pp. 94-97

#14

Jameson, Frederic, Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism .Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991. pp. 84.

#15

Latour, Ibid.
pp. 46

"It is not only out of arrogance that Westerners think they are radically different from others, it is also out of despair, and by way of self-punishment. They like to frighten themselves with their own destiny. Their voices quaver when they contrast Barbarians to Greeks, or the Centre to the Periphery, or when they celebrate the Death of God, or the Death of Man, the European Krisis, imperialism, anomie, or the end of the civilizations that we now know are mortal. Why do we get so much pleasure out of being so different not only from others but from our own past? What psychologist will be subtle enough to explain our morose delight in being in perpetual crisis and in putting an end to history ? Why do we like to transform small differences in scale among collectives into huge dramas ? (...)"¹⁶

The mortal institutions that we live with combined to their widened application, produced hybrid problems through scaling effects that we constantly mistake for their causes. Instead of acknowledging the problems as they are, earthly, in a world which has no outside, we kept looking at the centers, the yardsticks hoping to explain the problem through them; if it is the centers that produce the issues, they must be linkable to the issues themselves was the hypothesis.

The moderns confused products with processes. They believed that the production of bureaucratic rationalization presupposed rational bureaucrats; that the production of universal science depended on universalist scientists; that the production of effective technologies led to the effectiveness of engineers; that the production of abstraction was itself abstract; that the production of formalism was itself formal. We might just as well say that a refinery produces oil in a refined manner, or that a dairy produces butter in a buttery way ! The words 'science', 'technology', 'organization', 'economy', 'abstraction', 'formalism', and 'universality' designate many real effects that we must

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Latour, Ibid.
pp. 114-115

indeed respect and for which we have to account. But in no case do they designate the causes of these same effects."¹⁷

Even the scale itself, when it was observed by accident, it was purified into the center of all centers. "Think global, act local" was the constitutional precision given to that regard. However it required, like all centers, a hidden hybrid externality, an environment we could save (and where stuff could be still taken from) and an outside that we could hope for (and where stuff could still be dumped).

*"A modernist takes for granted that there will always be air, space, water, heat, for the development of his or her "global view". But there is nothing global in globalization. Global is always a lot of globaloney, a lot of hot air. And of course, blowing hot air also requires a mechanism of some sort, a pump, a hairdryer — a designed hairdryer! What happened in the second half of the last century is that modernism disappeared in the exact measure where the life supports were made more explicit, one after the next. Ecological crisis, in such a view, are the slow and painful realization that there is no outside anymore."*¹⁸

So there are causes, namely actors as *polites* and as *idiotes*, and there are effects, spread across the network of the *polis* and within the wider networks that link the different *poleis*. The common ground of causes and effects, the place where they can sit on the table of negotiations, is the space between them, what was called the environment earlier in the text and differs very much to an "environment" that needs saving. The acknowledgment of this space implies, according to Latour, the urgency of a symmetric approach, where our natures and cultures can be constantly renegotiated and related to their presence on the network, the anthropological matrix they never quit. In turn, this exploration of the world from the point of view no more of the center, which has proven

to be uninhabitable, but from the point of view of the *quasi-objects* themselves. This immediately opens a debate including the difficult whole of our human and non-human collectives, *making things public*¹⁹. To make things, "pragmata" in Greek, public, relates with some amount of etymological pertinence to being pragmatic.

What it could mean to be Pragmatic (via some doctored etymology).

Here's where the whole thing starts to cut to the chase, with a first trace of the "what" question; be pragmatic, instead of being idiotic, technical, moralistic or critical. This is a first word that can serve as a literal key to the architectural agenda of negotiation I'm modestly trying to build upon in this exercise. All the badly controlled parallels, the arbitrary use of political science, ancient greek or recent, all the random concepts that float around this text as well as in my head, all this stimulation, amounts first of all to an argument for this kind of pragmatism in architecture.

Of course reality is both the starting point and destination here. In his "Twilight of the Idols", Nietzsche compliments Thucydides' quality to refuse deceiving himself, "*and of seeing reason in reality — not in "rationality," and still less in "morality."* There is no more radical cure" he says, "*than Thucydides for the lamentably rose-coloured idealisation of the Greeks...*"²⁰ Pragmatism is very much about that; refusal of idealization as *polites* and as *idiotes* within the reality of the *polis*.

As mentioned earlier, and in the short tradition of bad science of this essay, we might as well look at etymology for a while, in order to gather the main meanings that we need; pragmatism as a word emerges in English around the same time as Thomas Hobbes and Robert Boyle put forward their respective cornerstones of the modern constitution, in the mid 17th

#17

Latour, Bruno. Ibid. pp. 114-115

#18

Latour, Bruno. A Cautious Prometheus? A Few Steps toward a philosophy of Design (with special attention to Peter Sloterdijk). In Hackney, Glynne et al. Networks of Design, Annual International Conference of the Design History Society, Sep 2008, University College Falmouth, Cornwall, United Kingdom. Universal Publishers, pp.2-10, 2009

#19

Latour, Bruno. From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik or How to Make Things Public. In Latour & Weibel Making Things Public-Atmospheres of Democracy catalogue of the show at ZKM. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005.

#20

Nietzsche, Friedrich. Nietzsche: The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols: And Other Writings. Edited by Aaron Ridley. Translated by Judith Norman. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

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century. Back then, and this is already quite telling, it was used to mean “*meddlesome*” or “*impertinently busy*”. Of course, the early moderns didn’t have time for things, earthliness seemed impertinent to those inventing pure fact while slowly barring god.

The further route (and root) of the word, however, is to be traced to the Latin *pragmaticus*, meaning “skilled in business or law” itself stemming from the Greek “*pragmatikos*” signifying someone similarly “fit for business, active, business-like” or “systematic”. “*Pragmatikos*” comes itself from *pragma* the word for “a deed or act”/ “that which has been done”/ “a thing, matter or affair”. Ultimately, it all comes down to *prassein*, “to do, act or perform”²¹.

#21

Online Etymology Dictionary. Accessed December 19, 2015. <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=performance>

#22

Sloterdijk, Peter. Nearness and Da-Sein: The Spatiality of Being and Time. Theory, Culture & Society 29, no. 4-5 (July 1, 2012): 36-42.

#23

Heidegger, Martin. What is a thing?, trans.W. B. Barton, Jr., Vera Deutsch, Regnery, Chicago, 1968.

#24

Oxford Dictionary: “ORIGIN: Old English, of Germanic origin: related to German Ding. Early senses included ‘meeting’ and ‘matter’, ‘concern’ as well as ‘inanimate objects’.

#25

Wiktionary. Accessed December 20, 2015. <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/performance>.

#26

Merriam-Webster, Accessed December 20, 2015. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/performance>

Let’s do like Heidegger, a very good bad scientist -who sadly forgot to mention where *dasein* was thrown into²² when it was thrown into the world- and take words at their word. Someone pragmatic is supposed to do business, be active, in the field of things which were made. The same Heidegger notes that the word thing is in itself a *gathering*²³, and the Oxford Dictionary “a certain type of archaic assembly²⁴ as well as “matter” and “concern”.

This assembly, a public matter, and related to some sort of concern, is then there as a consequence of *prassein*, “to do, act or perform”. By mere curiosity, let’s examine what kind of performance we are talking about. The first part of performance is per-, the Latin prefix that expresses the thorough accomplishment of something²⁵. The second part, -form, is akin to the Old High German *frummen*, to further, itself related to *fruma*, meaning advantage²⁶.

Being pragmatic is to be involved in the negotiation (business) of things, understood as assemblies of humans and non-humans and amounting to a certain performance. This is the mediation duty we need to take on if we are to take any of the above seriously.



It seems to be the only definition of the architectural task that is devoid of any “center”, any priority for purification instead of mediation, and yet can be highly operable as an alternative constitution.

A CASE FOR PRAGMATISM

From naked Blaise Pascal to Robert Smithson in a space suit.

Blaise Pascal, another founding father of the modern constitution, famously stated: "nature is an infinite sphere whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere."²⁷ Robert Smithson inverted the statement to comment on Ad Reinhardt's work, noting the formation of an "Art World that is an infinite sphere, whose circumference is everywhere but whose center is nowhere"²⁸. This is not just the Art World, we might add, it is probably the World and we are in it.

In this World were *dasein* was famously thrown *in*, being pragmatic in any way is dealing with survival; it requires a much wider array of life supports than our current good-life obsession let's us designate as such. We think we are "free", when in fact we need almost everything we have. Heidegger's *dasein* is *in*, which he disregarded himself, all the while *in* his funny traditional hats and pants and suspenders and axes and a pipe and a walking cane and knives surely and a high-tech timber hut with a complex roofing system and a fireplace made out of stone and a fountain).

*"To try to philosophize about what it is to be "thrown into the world" without defining more precisely, more literally (Sloterdijk is first of all a literalist in his use of metaphors) the sort of envelopes into which humans are thrown, would be like trying to kick a cosmonaut into outer space without a spacesuit. Naked humans are as rare as naked cosmonauts. To define humans is to define the envelopes, the life support systems, the Umwelt that make it possible for them to breathe. This is exactly what humanism has always missed. (...) in the same way as a space suit or a space station is entirely artificially and carefully designed, so are all of the envelopes that constitutes the fragile life supports of humans (...) in the same way as a space suit or a space station is entirely artificially and carefully designed, so are all of the envelopes that constitutes the fragile life supports of humans."*²⁹

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Pascal Blaise. *Pensees* I-25. Project Gutenberg eBook, Accessed December 22, 2015.

#28

Smithson, Robert. *A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art*. Accessed December 15, 2015. http://www.brooklynrail.org/special/AD_REINHARDT/artists-on-ad/a-museum-of-language-in-the-vicinity-of-art.

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Latour, A Cautious Prometheus?, pp. 8

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So, to conclude, our pragmatic architecture of performance is about survival as constant mediation. As a theory for architecture it will of course be peer-reviewed by other architects, and plumbers, and stoves, and tiles and trees and dogs and all kinds of peers before it can be taken seriously by anyone, including myself. But in some best case scenario it can have a double impact, both within the "environment" to work with the quasi-objects we all face as inhabitants of planet earth, as well as within architecture's own miniature quasi-objects; the even covered field, the 25-year building, the starchitect, the client, the construction site, safety regulations, or HVAC. In our scale we need to be pragmatic, which means, like astronauts, cautiously radical or radically cautious;

*"When you check on your space suit before getting out of the space shuttle, you are radically cautious and cautiously radical... you are painfully aware of how precarious you are, and yet simultaneously, you are completely ready to artificially engineer and to design in obsessive detail what is necessary to survive."*³⁰



