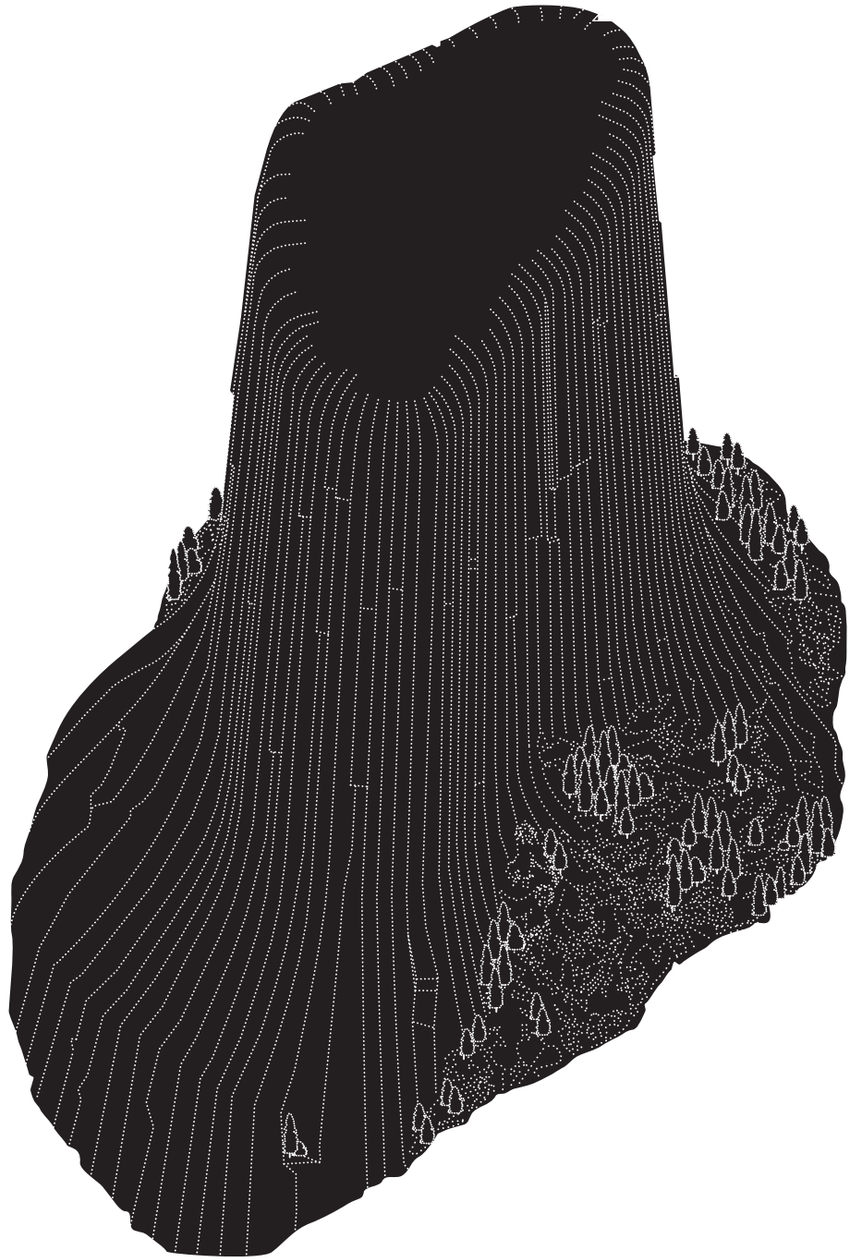
SAN ROCCO ▪ WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE PRIMITIVE HUT?
2A+P/A talks about Zeno ⁎ Pedro Ignacio Alonso on Charles Eisen ⁎ Tanguy Auffret-Postel and Tiago Borges on Jacques Hondelatte's Artiguebieille House ⁎ Pep Avilés on the Caribbean hut ⁎ Ido Avissar's *degré zéro* ⁎ Marc Brabant on individualism and architecture ⁎ Marc Britz on the Panthéon français ⁎ Ivica Brnic on huts and temples ⁎ Ludovico Centis on space oddities ⁎ Steven Chodoriwsky on the duck ⁎ Carly Dean explores the desert on Google Earth ⁎ gall on a November weekend in 2011 at Slievemore, Dooagh, Keel East, Achill Co., Mayo ⁎ Giovanni Galli on primaeval architecture in an edenic context ⁎ Giorgio Grassi refuses to answer baukuh's questions ⁎ Stefano Graziani goes to Devils Tower ⁎ Nils Havelka and Sarah Nichols on the Malm whale ⁎ Wonne Ickx on the well-tempered hut ⁎ David Kohn on the return of the *Roi des Belges* ⁎ Anders Krüger and Regin Schwaen on leftovers ⁎ Eric Lapierre on primaeval building substance ⁎ Annamaaria Prandi and Andrea Vescovini tells a straight story ⁎ Isobel Lutz Smith on the demolition of Glasgow ⁎ Nikos Magouliotis on the Three Little Pigs ⁎ Daniel Martinez on wilderness ⁎ Gabriele Mastrigli on *Delirious New York* ⁎ Ariadna Perich Capdeferro on Toyo Ito's Sendai Mediatheque ⁎ Philippe Rahm on the Olduvai Gorge ⁎ Pier Paolo Tamburelli reads the *Entwurff einer historischen Architektur* ⁎ Neyran Turan on primitive flatness ⁎ With photos by Stefano Graziani

15 €
9 772038 491006

SAN ROCCO - WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE PRIMITIVE HUT?

8 - WINTER 2013



CONTENTS

SPONSORS
Federica Zanco
Ordine Architetti di Genova

DONOR
Fondazione dEpart

FRIENDS
Bayer Klemmer
Corrado Beldi
Noel Brady – 12 Publishers
Chiara Brenna
BVN Architecture
Cafécinema
Cityförster Rotterdam
conrad-bercah
Cornell University
Massimo de Carlo
Stefan Devoldere
Olivier Ecoffey
Bernhard Eder
ETH Architecture of Territory
Francesco Garofalo
Monica Cili Calfetti
Martin Jancok
Magnus Jørgensen
Christian Kieckens
Lukas Lenherr
Liverani/Molteni architetti
Longa025
Yves Macherel
Patricio Mardones Hiche
Marzorati Ronchetti
Federico Masin
Alessandro Mendini
Maxwan Architects + Urbanists
Luca Montuori
Tom Moss
OBR – Paolo Brescia and Tommaso Principi
Luca Ponsi
Projective Cities Programme, Architectural Association School of Architecture
Moisés Puente
Cecilia Puga
Kim Rothuys
Marc Ryan
Nicolas Simon
Samuele Squassabia
Guido Tesio
UGENT-Vakgroep Architectuur Bibliotheek
Christophe Van Gerrewey
Patricia Viel
Cordula Vielhauer
Caroline Vogel
Ioanna Volaki
Clemens Zirkelbach
Cino Zucchi

EDITORIAL

Let us consider man in his first origin without any other help, without other guide, than the natural instinct of his wants. He wants an abiding place. Near to a gentle stream he perceives a green turf, the growing verdure of which pleases his eye, its tender down invites him, he approaches, and softly extended upon this enameled carpet he thinks of nothing but to enjoy in peace the gifts of nature: nothing he wants, he desires nothing; but presently the Sun's heat which scorches him, obliges him to seek a shade. He perceives a neighbouring wood, which offers to him the coolness of its shades: he runs to hide himself in its thickets and behold him there content. In the mean time a thousand vapours raised by chance meet one another, and gather themselves together; thick clouds obscure the air, a frightful rain throws itself down as a torrent upon this delicious forest. The man badly covered by the shade of these leaves, knows not how to defend himself from this invading moisture that penetrates on every part. A cave presents itself to his view, he slides into it, and finding himself dry applauds his discovery. But new defects make him dislike his abode, he sees himself in darkness, he breathes an unhealthful air; he goes out if it resolved to supply by his industry the inattentions and neglects of nature. The man is willing to make himself an abode which covers but not buries him. Some branches broken down in the forest are the proper materials for his design . . .

This monotonous fable is recounted at the beginning of the first chapter of Laugier's *Essai sur l'architecture* (1753) and, consequently, at the very beginning of modern architecture. In its sublime lack of inspiration, the fable is impeccable: no antagonists, no encounters, no

drama, no plot, no sex, no anecdotes, no noise, no ambiguity, no jokes. There is just primitive man and nature, nothing else. Primitive man is perfectly alone, just like Crusoe on his deserted island. His problems are limited to meteorological conditions: the sun's heat, rain, humidity. Still, as silly as it may at first seem, this fable is not all that innocent. Some of its curious presuppositions are crucial for the understanding of modernism. Indeed, according to Laugier, primitive man has needs but no companions, and he possesses a logic (a pretty utilitarian one) but not a language. The atmosphere is remarkably silent: in the tale, architecture is born in complete isolation, without words, without lies. Consequently, for Laugier, architecture is just a matter of shelter. Functionalism is the logical consequence of these (quite surreal) assumptions. Houses come before temples. And so private architecture is the model for public architecture. Pragmatism comes before ritual. Structure comes before space. The fundamental element of architecture is the pillar, not the wall, and its fundamental device is the section, not the plan. Against all evidence, engineering precedes rhetoric. Laugier's narration of the supposed beginnings of architecture anticipates Adam Smith's minimal recounting of the supposed origin of exchange. In *Wealth of Nations* (1776), Smith describes this unlikely, sober *Urszene:* "one man . . . has more of a certain commodity than he himself has occasion for, while another has less. The former consequently would be glad to dispose of, and the latter to purchase, a part of this superfluity" (Book I, 4).

In both of these un-innocent fables, primitives are anything but primitive: their strictly capitalistic behaviour implies a very precise agenda for contemporary society. Yet if Smith's version of the origin of exchange has been systematically criticized by thinkers like Malinowsky, Mauss, Polanyi and Sahlins (to mention just a few), Laugier's fable has perhaps been forgotten but remains one of the cornerstones of the clumsy theoretical building of contemporary architecture. In the end, over the last 260 years there have been very few critics of the French abbot. If we were to cite theories of architecture that consciously refused to buy Laugier's story, we would be left with a pretty short list, including a few hermetic statements by Adolf Loos, the fragmentary intuitions distributed throughout Rossi's *The Architecture of the City,* Koolhaas's *Delirious New York* and little else.

Most importantly, all of these authors (except maybe Loos) quit their endeavours immediately after beginning them in favour of more profitable business, leaving the work entirely unfinished.

It might sound bizarre and retro, but Vitruvius has a little help to offer here. Indeed, in his very short and commonsensical narration of the origins of architecture (Book II, 1, 1–7), Vitruvius manages to mention human evolution ("non proni sed erecti ambularent mundique et astrorum magnificentiam aspicerent"), the invention of fire and the beginnings of language and society ("in eo hominum congressu cum profundebantur aliter spiritu voces, cotidiana consuetudine vocabula ut obtingerat constituerunt, deinde significando res saepius in usu ex eventu fari fortuito coeperunt et ita sermones inter se procreaverunt"). Compared to Laugier's strict individualism and utilitarianism, Vitruvius's reference to society and language sounds quite refreshing (as much as generic common sense is preferable to more precise nonsense). And in particular, as seen through the animated multitude represented in the engraving of Cesariano (ed. of 1521, p. XXXII), Vitruvius seems to suggest a completely different idea of architecture, one in which origins are complicated from the outset, the shared precedes the private and cities come before houses. The subject that builds is not an *individual* but a *society*, and consequently architecture is a technology not of shelter but of memory – a shared deposit of the unconscious. Cesariano's wonderful image recalls the atmosphere of the initial sequence of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, with the wild apes dancing around the monolith: men gather and carry stones for their first buildings, domesticated dogs appear in the background (greyhounds!) and family scenes are tucked in between. The way men move stones around is not without violence, and the woman showing her breast to her child is rather sexy (and by the way, the son looks like he's ten years old . . .). Origins are not that clear, not that reassuring, not that safe, but at least they're not as boring or sad as Smith and Laugier would like us to think.

A discourse of man's origins resurfaces every time we are confronted with great transformations. *San Rocco 8* is no exception to this. We would like to ask you to reach back to our most distant past and discuss how contemporary architecture is still a prisoner of liberal theories about primitive man.

Might it be possible to develop a more realistic idea of our origins and, through this, a more realistic idea of what to do with contemporary architecture? Might it be possible to criticize Laugier's tale from Latour's point of view? Is there any way to take up the work that Rossi left unfinished?