CALL FOR PAPERS
San Rocco 8:
What's wrong with the primitive hut?

San Rocco is interested in gathering together the widest possible variety of contributions. San Rocco believes that architecture is a collective knowledge, and that collective knowledge is the product of a multitude. External contributions to San Rocco might take different forms. Essays, illustrations, designs, comic strips and even novels are all equally suitable for publication in San Rocco. In principle, there are no limits – either minimum or maximum – imposed on the length of contributions. Minor contributions (a few lines of text, a small drawing, a photo, a postcard) are by no means uninteresting to San Rocco. For each issue, San Rocco will put out a "call for papers" comprised of an editorial note and of a list of cases, each followed by a short comment. As such, the "call for papers" is a preview of the magazine. The "call for papers" defines the field of interest of a given issue and produces a context in which to situate contributions.

Submission Guidelines:

A External contributors can either accept the proposed interpretative point of view or react with new interpretations of the case studies.

B Additional cases might be suggested by external contributors, following the approach defined in the "call for papers". New cases might be accepted, depending on their evaluation by the editorial board.

C Proposed contributions will be evaluated on the basis of a 500-word abstract containing information about the proposed submission's content and length, and the type and number of illustrations and drawings it includes.

D Contributions to San Rocco must be written in English. San Rocco does not translate texts.

E All texts (including footnotes, image credits, etc.) should be submitted digitally in .rtf format and edited according to the Oxford Style Manual.

F All illustrations and drawings should be submitted digitally (in .tif or .eps format). Please include a numbered list of all illustrations and provide the following information for each: illustration source, name of photographer or artist, name of copyright holder, or "no copyright", and caption, if needed.

G San Rocco does not buy intellectual property rights for the material appearing in the magazine. San Rocco suggests that external contributors publish their work under Creative Commons licences.

H Contributors whose work is selected for publication in San Rocco will be informed and will then start collaborating with San Rocco's editorial board in order to complete the preparation of the issue.

Proposals for contributions to San Rocco 8 must be submitted electronically to mail@sanrocco.info before 16 August 2013.

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 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 famous *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?

▪ The Primitive Hut: A Literary Analysis, I ▪

Laugier is actually quite good at meteorology – a minor Musil.

▪ The Primitive Hut: A Literary Analysis, II ▪

In the English translation of his work, the primitive hut is called the "abode" of primitive man (it was *abri* in the French original). This word holds all the secret desperation of modernism. "Abode" is indeed the cylinder in Beckett's *The Lost Ones* (1972): "Abode where lost bodies roam each searching for its lost one. Vast enough for search to be in vain. Narrow enough for light to be in vain."

▪ Steamboat ▪

In an extraordinary passage of *The Logical Construction of Architecture,* Giorgio Grassi compares the fortune of the primitive hut among Enlightenment architects and the fortune of the steamboat among modern architects. For Grassi, what is at stake in both cases is the possibility of coming into contact with the origin of architecture directly, without anything inconvenient (like the history of architecture) getting in the way. Grassi argues that in both cases a system of norms has been replaced with a rhetorical figure.

▪ *Les Architectes sauvages* ▪

In 1964 Bernard Rudowsky published *Architecture Without Architects, a Short Introduction to Non-pedigreed Architecture,* which he followed up in 1977 with *The Prodigious Builders: Notes toward a Natural History of Architecture with a Special Regard to Those Species that are Traditionally Neglected or Downright Ignored.* While intending to counter the dominant culture of the West, which was strongly linked to modernism in the 1960s, Rudowsky's *Architecture Without Architects* ended up attacking the discipline of architecture more generally, making it no longer practicable. But does "architecture without architects" really exist? Isn't it just architecture made by *unknown* architects? Isn't it dangerous to imagine that "society" built that stuff somehow

automatically, without anybody taking responsibility for it? Isn't this implicitly racist?

▪ Josephine ▪

Primitives were fancy in the 1920s. Josephine Baker literally embodied this fashion, becoming the erotic dream of any number of architects and artists thanks to her erotic moves. She flirted with Le Corbusier: "What a shame you're an architect! You'd have made such a good partner!" Afterward he drew a series of nudes of the dancer. Around the same years, Adolf Loos – who was a brilliant foxtrot dancer – transferred all his erotic attraction for Josephine into the project for her house in Paris: a compact volume with small windows that hid a swimming pool and was clad in marble strips resembling a black-and-white tattoo.

▪ Territory Is Myth ▪

Modernist territorial projects like Chandigarh, the Plan Obus and Brasilia transcended their functional aspects to address geography directly. In such cases, the mythical side of modernism reveals itself due to the increased scale of the problem.

These projects relate back to the ancestral act of founding a city, dealing with the interplay between physical elements – such as coastlines, mountains, lakes – and social ones – culture, religion, myth. Take a look at any new city by Norman Foster and you will get an idea of how serious and profound those by Le Corbusier and Lucio Costa were.

▪ Wolken kann man ~~nicht~~ bauen ▪

At the end of the 1960s, young, so-called radical European architects started questioning some of the consolidated features of Western architecture, particularly its immobility and its solidity. An entire set of sci-fi-inspired, individual, nomadic living units appeared, coupling portability and protection from the elements, the need for privacy and the desire for extreme connectivity. These included Archigram's *Living-pod, Cushicle* and *Suitaloon,* and *The Cloud* by Coop-Himmelb(l)au. If you

forget about the Apollo mission, the ideology of the period and the Kiesler-derived organic shapes, these were all just phantasmagorical versions of Laugier's hut on acid.

▪ Efficiency? ▪

A city is not a machine. Unfortunately, when German cities had to be rebuilt after World War II, the mantra was efficiency, as intended by modernist architects. Thus the result was efficient (?) but horrible, as we can still see in places like Stuttgart or Cologne. After the war, Milan was as destroyed, but there nobody really believed in modernism. Architects in Milan didn't really know how to be efficient, so they simply continued on as before, just with new technology and a slightly newer aesthetic. The result was not bad in the end: it's efficient and beautiful enough. Looking at it seventy years later, nobody could reasonably doubt that Milan's city centre makes more sense than Stuttgart's.

▪ Inverted Pyramid ▪

In his *Le antichità romane* (1784), Giovan Battista Piranesi depicted a mysterious object nicknamed the *Gran Masso* (big boulder), a leftover of the Metelli family tomb on the Via Appia. Although Piranesi provided a rational explanation for the bizarre, primordial shape of the monument (as the unplanned result of careless subtractions of building material from the base of the original mass), he could not avoid expressing his own astonishment that such a big pile could remain elevated. The complete removal of the decorative apparatus reinforces its primitive aura, like a semi-disguised relic from a pre-Roman era.

▪ *Fischer auf der Reise nach Stonehenge* ▪

In 1725 Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach published his *Entwürff einer historischen Architektur.* The title of the book is bizarre. Translated, it would be something like "Project of a Historical Architecture" – not a *history* of architecture, but a *project* of historical architecture. Indeed, although beginning with an extremely attentive

use of his limited sources, Fischer *designs* all of the buildings listed in his book: the Temple of Solomon, the hanging gardens of Babylon, the pyramids of Giza, Sultan Ahmed's mosque, Hagia Sophia, the Mecca Grand Mosque, Naqsh-e Jahan square, the Forbidden City, the Nanjing Porcelain Tower, the Isola Bella and Stonehenge. Implicitly opposing Laugier's ideal reconstruction of a perfectly individualistic origin for architecture, Fischer opts for real and collective beginnings. There is no primitive hut in the *Entwürff;* on the contrary, there you will find Stonehenge.

▪ The Eternal Present:
Late Giedion (and late Le Corbusier) ▪

The Eternal Present is the title of the last book by Sigfried Giedion (1962/4). Around the time Le Corbusier was building the Chandigarh Capitol (1952–59) and the monastery at La Tourette (1956–60), Giedion began a parallel investigation into the monumental, the archaic, the unconscious. They both reached back to Egypt and back to Babylon, taking the same trip as Thomas Mann and Sigmund Freud. Of course, this enterprise was presented not as a critique but as a development of the presuppositions of modern architecture, and this took Giedion's argument in a totally weird direction (for instance, he still ignored Greco-Roman classicism). The most fascinating thing is that this theory, of course, is totally wrong – of course it says nothing serious about Egypt and Babylon, of course disillusion surfaces here and there, of course it speaks only of the 1950s and '60s, but still . . . Nothing is as good or promising as theories that have already been proven wrong.

▪ Argonauts (Almost) ▪

There is a strange parallel interest in anthropology in the works of Aldo Rossi and Superstudio. Even if their sources are very different, their attempts to revise a few assumptions of modernism are actually quite similar. Certainly, Rossi seems to have been far more serious and his hypothesis far more profound and fertile, but Rossi was not able to couple his extremely innovative critique of modernism with an equally innovative

repertoire of figures (and, in the end, the conservative formal repertoire somehow triumphed over the amazing critical hypothesis). In contrast, Superstudio was somehow able to visualize potential contemporary rituals, but totally incapable of finding convincing words with which to describe them. If Rossi failed because of his incapacity to remain in touch with contemporary rituals and imagery, Superstudio failed because of its incapacity to provide an argument that could go along with the images. While Rossi lacked figures (and this is why he sought these later on in his autobiography), Superstudio lacked a reason for picking the ones they had – a pure Kantian hell: "Gedanken ohne Inhalt sind leer, Anschauungen ohne Begriffe sind blind".

▪ Vico at the Downtown Athletic Club ▪

Delirious New York opens with the quote of an unexpected author: Giambattista Vico. Here is the quote (which is quite a good starting point for talking about architecture): "Philosophers and philologists should be concerned in the first place with poetic metaphysics; that is, the science that looks for proof, not in the external world, but in the very modifications of the mind that mediates on it. Since the world of nations is made by men, it is inside their minds that principles should be sought."

▪ The Pantheon ▪

You build a gigantic thing and it rains inside.

▪ Flame ▪

On Place de l'Alma there is small monument comprising a copy of the flame of the Statue of Liberty in New York. The text reads: "Flamme de la Liberté, replique exacte de la flamme de la statue de la liberté . . . "
The monument was realized in 1987, on the occasion of the centennial anniversary of the *International Herald Tribune.* The golden flame popping out of the cylinder of the torch looks like an oversized work by Philippe Starck. The flame would have calmly continued to exist in complete indifference if, on 31 August 1997, Diana

Spencer hadn't died in a car accident in the tunnel right below it. Thanks to the tragedy, the flame finally started living. The object, which up until that moment had languished in the typical state of total disregard that afflicts contemporary public art, finally found a reason for its existence. Suddenly the flame was covered in flowers, love letters and stuffed animals. Suddenly a collective memory wanted to inhabit it. As inappropriate as the flame might have been as a representation of the princess, the flame *had already been there*. And the flame was also clearly a monument, even if it was not as clear to what. Its ready-made monumentality allowed its immediate appropriation by the dead princess's cult.

▪ Mt. Rushmore, Seriously Considered ▪

In 1927, when Gutzon Borgulm lit the dynamite needed to carve the heads of four presidents into the Black Hills of South Dakota, modern architects were busy in Stuttgart with the Weissenhof Siedlung. Since then, no architects or architectural historians have ever taken Mt. Rushmore into consideration. In contrast to the monument's treatment by Alfred Hitchcock, Deep Purple, Tim Burton and Matt Groening, architects unanimously judged Mt. Rushmore to be kitschy, provincial, inelegant, conservative and, most of all, stupid.

In reality, Mt. Rushmore is not only one of the very few built things of the last century that proved capable of generating myth, but it is also better than expected. The finished monument is indeed quite good (and much better than the original project). An incredible series of failures (for instance, at a certain point Jefferson's head simply collapsed) forced Borgulm to deal with the mountain more carefully. In the end, the memorial is less brutal, less crisp, less predictable. Also, Mt. Rushmore is the only sculpture that is still surrounded by its own trash. Colossal stones brutally detached from the mountain with blasts of dynamite still lie at the foot of the monument, creating a strange Abstract Expressionist landscape right below the heads – ike concluding a country music festival with a bit of Stockhausen.

▪ Devil's Tower ▪

In *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), aliens land at Devil's Tower, an igneous rock of phonolite porphyry that emerges from Wyoming's plains. By landing on it, aliens turned the rock into architecture.

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ANIMALIBVS EXEMPLA VITAE CONSERVAMÉ Q: IMITATI SVNT & C̃ᴬ

Cesare Cesariano, *Prime Abitazioni,* in *Vitruvio De Architectura: Libri II-IV I materiali, i templi, gli ordini,* (Milan, 2002)
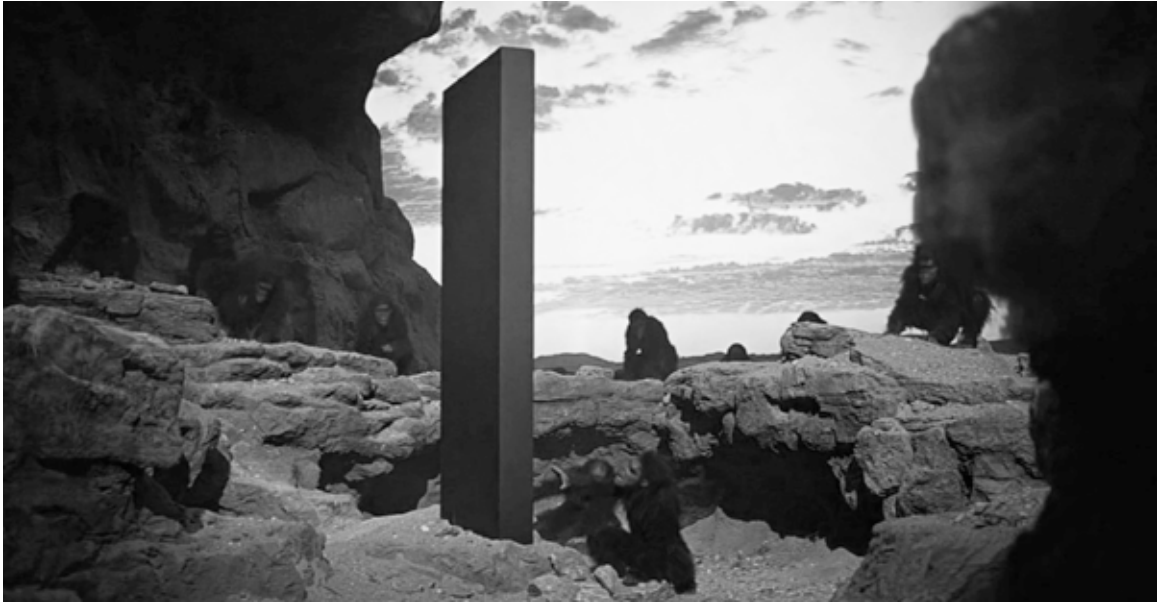
2001: A Space Odyssey,
**directed by Stanley
Kubrick, 1968**