

The third
turn,
an essay presenting
the other Neutral
and its abilities in
mediation.

The production of sense, word in the world.

The Argives are accused in the 5th century by the other city-states to be *medizers*, for being non belligerent in the war opposing them to the foreign threat. The systemic refusal to participate has since become a constant feature of classical warfare between humans. The ancient glory of the city of Argos subsequently faded away, as the shift of commercial focus, towards more warmongering *poleis*, making the case for plain action rather than status quo. In more recent times the round tables where opposing parties meet for a mere 'discussion' under the strange domes of mediation for power is no change: the third way is a dead-end. As it remains the only diplomatic, economic, military entity not claiming national interest since the apparition of nations the lack of proper agenda for the so called United Nations —with third way as mode of — is the more blatant at each failure to resolve crises. The united nations are so only in dissension. This reproduction of polarities from polis v. polis to nation v. nation to collectivity v. collectivity to individuals transposed to the ethical level is the injunction addressed by the world "to choose", to enter conflicts, to "take responsibility", blunt —in both senses— virtues of modern times.

The opposition of a A and a B forming a complex, taken from the structural linguistics of Brøndal and Hjelmslev: $\{A/B \rightarrow (A+B)\}$ is the metaphorical equation for the production of sense, a reaction called paradigm. The greatest European invention (together with science) , paradigm, is the "opposition of two virtual terms from which, in speaking, we actualize one to produce meaning".¹ In other words, to bring meaning is to participate in the paradigmatic structure which can be summed into the true story of an 18 years old Irish boy who sends a letter to both the president and the IRA asking them to describe their political project in 25 words, the boy receives two almost identical replies using the same golden words of 'peace' and 'progress'. The link meaning to power is also done by Nietzsche.²

Transposing to architecture what we have is an ever-

1.

Barthes, Roland. The Neutral, lecture course at the Collège de France (1977-1978). Session of February 18, 1978. All quotes may have been partially reformulated due to the nature of the book being only a transcript of the oral original course.

2.

Ibid. Annex.

more ooze of action and reaction between one architect and the other or even within one's career. "Perrault said antiquity is the thing and look how rational; Lodoli seems to have said rationalism is the thing, down with antiquity; Laugier said up with primitive antiquity, only source of the rational; Durand said down with Laugier, rationalization means economics; Pugin said down with antiquity, up with Gothic and look how rational; Viollet-le-Duc said up with Gothic, prototype of the rational. Eventually a voice is heard saying down with all the styles and if it's rationalism you want, up with grain elevators and look, how beautiful! "Not even the necessity of a high moral tone was at issue; nor was the polemic a simple matter of personal rancor. Profound convictions about the nature of past achievement and the nature of progress were at odds."³ And indeed progress was at odds.

3.

OASE #97, Action and Reaction in Architecture, 2016.

(The lack of third path to follow is ironically reminded to us by Newton's third law although implacable law: if object A exerts a force on object B, this is accompanied by another force, opposite but equally large, from B to A.1 There is no physical force without two masses or there is no gravity without anything to oppose it. Duality or opposition. But physics also tells us that if the minimum number of masses to account this phenomenon is two, there is no maximum. The law still applies to a number n of objects with the same clarity of action/reaction).

Today's constitution, idi-
o(t)rythmy.

When humans encompassed the globe with vessels and ideas and had enough consciousness of the tremendous change occurring to their globe they named anything participating the change or increasing it, modern, modernization, progress, the whole of the parts being the under banner of Modernity. Paradigm allowed the moderns for the grand purification of the planet earth into the twofold stories of naturalization and sociologization. The 'Great Divide' is marching under new tropics, and heavy coat of mail, to gradually purifying everything by

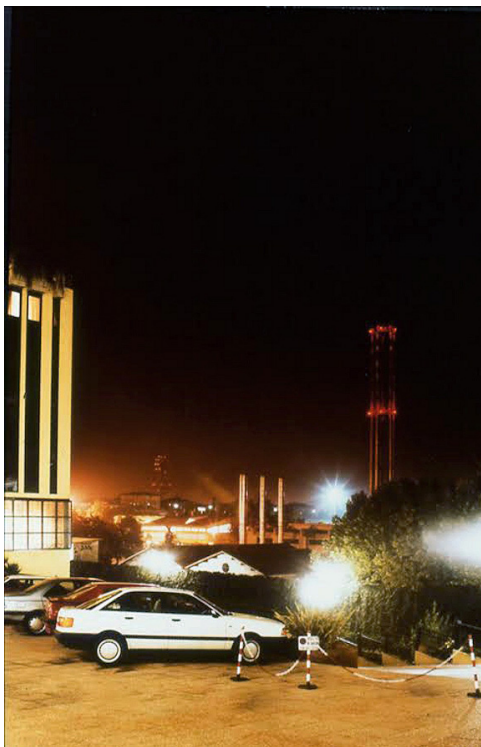
putting anything on earth in the jar of nature, objects, non-humans, science or the jar of society, politics, humans, culture. Sadly for what or who is left behind all the things that were before intertwined together are now only the fabulation of the culture-nature complex —and we could arguably say here that this is the reverse equation, although not opposite, of the aforementioned one of the production of meaning. All in all the moderns while spreading totally across the globe their total ideas were trying to give sense to the whole, eventually through . The ones that became by contrast premodern, the ancients, are only doing the mishmash of putting together things that now shouldn't. To the monism of premodern humans or oriental philosophies is opposed —in a paradigmatic way! — the new tradition of European dualism.

Under the mantle of modernity they celebrated the birth of man or the announcement of its forthcoming death. And it is no coincidence that during its peak Humanism gave us Alberti, the one who simultaneously put the architect in its ivory tower and 'invents' digitalization to avoid human mistakes in the reproduction of design thrown into the world. Overlooking two times, once on 'nonhumanity' —things or objects—once on the "equally strange beginning of a crossed-out God, relegated to the sidelines"⁴ the moderns deployed their arguments from the sequent creation and separation of those three entities.

4.

Ibid.

What lays the ground for the constitution are the 'double artifact' of the laboratory and the Leviathan. Facts are fabricated in a laboratory through Robert Boyle's experiment in the 'vacuum pump'. The 'Body Politic' of society, its consciousness can be mobilized through Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*. As Bruno Latour is claiming in his *We have never been modern*, these two occurrences in addition to 'an infinitely remote God who is simultaneously totally impotent and the sovereign judge', part of the contract and nowhere to be invoked, apart from society and nature and part of them, render the moderns unassailable. But the case that he makes is that



this outline is nothing but a story, a constitution whose untenable contract is as dreamed as its two poles. The modern constitution guaranteed by the two branches of government, that of human and that of things.

Quasi-objects in orbit and
the Middle Kingdom.

Barthes one decade earlier, quoting Fichte, describes this resource of the critique through the extension of “ ‘a superior knowledge’, not a ‘philosophical’, ‘scientific’ knowledge, but one that result ‘from the natural spirit of truth.’ ‘This knowledge pretends to be true, and to be the only one to be true, but true only under the determined expression by means of which it produces itself under all its aspects, claiming also that everything that contradicts it is false without exception, without alleviation. It wants to impose itself on every will unrestrictedly and to *suppress the right to error*: in an absolute manner; it rejects every type of compromise with what is not itself...’ ‘What arms such a form, is the way it forces them to take sides and to decide on the spot between the yes and the no: they’d like to hold their votes in reserve, in case things once more, one day, turn another way.’” If we take every words and make it for us in the small collectivity of architects, discourse deploys the same resources

As the purification progressed through the dichotomy of nature and society, the power of the critique is a constant resource at work behind to assimilate in the network formed between the poles a proliferation of hybrids ‘whose existence, whose very possibility, it denies.’ The more the moderns were going through the world with the two vases the more they left off in the middle: the Middle Kingdom. Their constitution ballooning in a sphere was consolidating its perimeter through constant refusal to see anything inside of its delimitation. If Latour is able to describe this uncanny change, and if I am now humbly able to reformulate it, that is because the end of this unwavering belief, the unstoppable escape of progress that sprawled on the globe for the last five centu-

ries occurred thirty years ago —or is it last year?— with the submerged constitution under the turbulent flow of quasi-objects that lead to its fall. What happened apart from the evenly covered field of urbanization sprawling in our own backyard was the one of quasi-objects knocking on the front door. What has been left behind? Well, remember the premoderns, the local tribes, the things they though were intertwined between culture and society altogether were so indeed but after the modern constitution they became so twice. Under the cover of reaching the poles (essence) the purification of local objects with the diffusion of science brought us global monsters (existence).

The proselyte moderns had the quality of placing a certain degree of faith into the masses whereas now this faith is placed in 'I'. But this doesn't change the relationship observer of architecture v. the architect, the two indeed will not come to terms on what a building is or do.

Death of critics and semiotic turn; power of the word.

Some element of good news is while the modernizing forces were doing the *grand écart* between the two poles of the constitutional tentacular tent to assimilate the surging proliferation of quasi-objects, another strategy was being put in place seizing the ever growing middle ground. Instead of concentrating on the extremes of the work of purification, the semiologists, linguists put their minds concentrated on one of its mediations, language. The latter isn't a 'transparent intermediary that would put the human subject in contact with the natural world' anymore but an independent, of nature or society, *mediator*. With some quirk of etymology, the best minds of our time have granted the sphere of meaning its autonomy, a way to mediate between the two non communicating vases of objects and society. "For them, language still occupies that median space of modern philosophy (...); but instead of making it more or less transparent

or more or less opaque, more or less faithful or more or less treacherous, it has taken over the entire space.” They proposed a short time shelter against the double tyranny of the incommensurable referent and speaking subject, philosophies that give the mediators their dignity. If as said at the beginning of this argument paradigm make meaning, they only needed themselves to produce natures and societies extracting their principles from narrative forms. “ Language has become a law unto itself, a law governing itself and its own world. The ‘system of language’, the ‘play of language’, the ‘signifier’, ‘writing’, the ‘text’, ‘textuality’, ‘narratives’, ‘discourse’ - these are some of the terms that designate the Empire of Signs - to expand Barthes’s title “

If they too have led us into an impasse, it is not because they have ‘forgotten man’, or ‘abandoned reference’, as the moderns are pretending, but because they themselves have limited their enterprise to discourse alone. Excellent toolbox to follow the mediation of language but fails to keep in mind the two opposite poles by solely occupying the center.

“From this crucial turning point, we have learned that the only way to escape from the parallel traps of naturalization and sociologization consists in granting language its autonomy. Without it, how could we deploy that median space between natures and societies so as to accommodate quasi-objects, quasi-subjects? The various forms of semiotics offer an excellent tool chest for following the mediations of language. But by avoiding the double problem of connections to the referent and connections to the context, they prevent us from following the quasi objects to the end. These latter, as I have said, are simultaneously real, discursive, and social. They belong to nature, to the collective and to discourse. If one autonomizes discourse by turning nature over to the epistemologists and giving up society to the sociologists, one makes it impossible to stitch these three resources back together.”⁵

5.

Ibid.



Outside of discourse:
where we can perform
better than the semiolo-
gists.

The last known occupancy of the center, the semiotic turn, is the crack through which the mediation between the two opposite poles is possible. This turn applied onto the neutral in a reflective epistemé trying to understand the value of mediation without the conscious of its own mediation within the modern constitution. Ultimately,

“the great weakness of these philosophies, however, is to render more difficult the connections between an autonomized discourse and what they had provisionally shelved: the referent - on Nature’s side - and the speaker - on the side of society/subject. Once again, science studies played their disturbing role. When they applied semiotics to scientific discourse, and not only to literatures of fiction, the autonomization of discourse appeared as an artifice. As for rhetoric, it changed its meaning entirely when it had truth and proof to absorb instead of conviction and seduction. When we are dealing with science and technology it is hard to imagine for long that we are a text that is writing itself, a discourse that is speaking all by itself, a play of signifiers without signifieds. It is hard to reduce the entire cosmos to a grand narrative, the physics of subatomic particles to a text, subway systems to rhetorical devices, all social structures to discourse. The Empire of Signs lasted no longer than Alexander’s, and like Alexander’s it was carved up and parcelled out to its generals. Some wanted to render the autonomous system of language more plausible by reestablishing the speaking subject or even the social group, and to that end they went off in search of the old sociology. Others sought to make semiotics less absurd by reestablishing contact with the referent, and they chose the world of science or that of common sense in order to anchor discourse once again. Sociologization, naturalization; the choice is never very broad. Others retained the original impetus of the Empire and set about deconstructing themselves, autonomous glosses on autonomous glosses, to the

point of autodissolution.”⁶

6.

Ibid.

The abandonment of the center in the profit of a gradient of quasi-objects, quasi-subjects of centers is much needed if we want to represent them officially in the constitution.

Looking at a careful occupier of some centers, a careful non scientist...

Roland Barthes in meditation with the arrogance of the periphery, thirds as be firsts.

If we pause for a second and grant ourselves the same right as the citizen of Argos, let's describe the field composing the third way landscape, the Neuter. (1) Grammar: neither masculine, nor feminine verbs neither active nor passive or action without regime in latin. (2) Botany: neuter flower, flower in which the sexual organs constantly abort (not a pleasant image) 3. Physics: neutral bodies which don't have any electrical charge (3) Zoologie: the drones, which have no sexual organs, which can't mate (5) Physics: neutral bodies, which don't have electrical charges, conductors that aren't the seat of any current (4) Chemistry: neutral salts neither acid nor basic (5) Politics: those who don't take sides between contenders, taking us back to the beginning of this argument. These canonical images of the Neuter are forming the rather common attitude of distress and disinterest, and it is not so hard to find where the ground of this bad image is. Historically the 'official' space of the neutral is Skepticism. The result of fool behaviors from Pyrrho's disciples: Zetetics (always looking), Sceptics (examining without finding), Ephetics (suspending their judgements), Aporetics (always looking); in short images of failure or impotence. There is no need to take the side against this image or else this essay is about the protest of an existing image, which is not a good exercise if not useless. Instead what can be done is a shift by displacement of the paradigm.

The same year the modern constitution reached its critical mass in 1979⁷, before the first cracks, Roland Barthes introduced a new regime of neutrality the aim the cancelation of paradigm, hence this is not only about the autonomization of the sphere of meaning —navigating between the two modern poles as *mediators* not *medizers*— but the will to undo the very way meaning is produced. He introduces our neutral —or “better the desire of neutral”⁸—not has something that would be a miracle emerging in history but that is already existing only badly defined. “A a general rule, desire is always marketable as we aren’t doing anything but sell, buy, exchange desire. The paradox of the desire for The Neutral, its absolute singularity, is that it is nonmarketable.” If there is no book on the Neutral, all other problems put aside, particularly that of performance, is because the neutral is unsustainable. Of his subversive course he would warn “we’ll have to hold on to the unsustainable for thirteen weeks: after that, it will fade.”⁹ The desire for the Neutral continually stages a paradox: as an object, the Neutral means suspension of violence; as a desire, it means violence.”The neutral plays on the razor’s edge”

In the 4th century, the philosopher “Phyrro, a pyrrhonian (but not the founder of Pyrrhonism, since his attitude was precisely asystematic, adogmatic), out of weariness as he was worn out by all the words of the Sophists and, asked to be left alon.(...) But Pyrrho’s own position is pragmatic, antisystematic, a kind of signm: *oudén mallon* as of ‘neither this or that’, ‘neither yes or no’”¹⁰ as to outplay silence. The pyrrhonian doesn’t contradict himself when he speaks or keeps quiet according to the occasion, which is to say like everyone else does, what’s important for him (the Neutral isn’t far): that the game of speech and silence not be systematic: that, to oppose dogmatic speech, one not produce an equally dogmatic silence. The neutral bad rap the one of restriction, erasure, minimum is one of many purification possible: partly right, largely false. Phyrro a true trailblazer of the neutral is showing us, through one¹¹ of the twenty-three fragments of the neutral, a soft distinction on the

7.

Khomeini’s Islamic revolution, which no one managed to peg as revolutionary or reactionary.

8.

Barthes, Roland. The Neutral, lecture course at the Collège de France (1977-1978). Session of February 18, 1978

9.

Ibid.

10.

Ibid.

11.

Ibid, Silence fragment.

silence that comes with harsh consequences. “Thus we see that in the end the ultimate opposition, the one that both fascinates and is the most difficult to think about to the extent that it self-destructs in its very statement is that between distinction and indistinction, and this is what is at stake in the Neutral, the reason the Neutral is *difficult*, provocative, scandalous: because it implies a thought of the indistinct, to the temptation of the ultimate (or the ur) paradigm; that of the distinct and the indistinct. “

As he wanted to go away from discourse Barthes didn't cancel the mediation of language but rather was describing a broader whole. The space of the neutral is no center, but as part of the semiotic exercise it is occupying the middle ground, as a amendment it is proposing freedom to navigate in the gradient between the poles. The transitory aspect of the gradient is to be found again in the very character of the —and the structure of the course. If as claimed before semiology is allowing itself to be disconnected of know territories and to take the network of words and discourse to go from local to global. Barthes' aim is not to abide by the discourse framework, almost as a way to outlive it or survive, he is bypassing the weakness of the semiotic production.

The 'power' of the neutral is its aim not to be discourse. Also its weakness and eventually its failure. Heidegger's epigones have converted that glaring weakness into a strength.

The proliferation of quasi-objects and the need to represent them officially in the fallen constitution, the failure of the semiotic turn to represent them outside of language in the mediation between the two poles, and in turn the Neutral's ultimate failure at producing a discourse that is no discourse, to escape language itself are all the concerns to cope with.

From objects to things.

Michel Serre draws¹² the strange parallel be-

12.

Serre, *Statues*, Paris: Champs Essais, 1987.

tween the 1986 explosion of Challenger space ship and the Phoenician colony of Carthage practice of enclosing humans in a giant brass statue of the god Baal and incinerating them there as offerings to their deity. He points out the similarities of the two events; the immense cost to their respecting societies in erecting these “statues”, the active role of “specialists” in setting the event in motion, the presence of a large crowd in an assembly of onlookers, witnessing the event in horror, and the repetitive nature of the event (ritualized or replayed again and again on screens). Following the tradition of semiotics of this essay looking at the English dictionary, ‘Thing’ will certify the German origin of ‘Ding’ —itself describing an ‘archaic assembly’—and the early senses ‘meeting’, ‘matter’ and ‘concern’ which is not different from Heidegger’s understanding of things as a *gatherings*. From that the Gegenstand and the Things are two things apart were one is dead load and the other an assembly trying to make sense of the assemblages.

With this in mind we can fully acknowledge that the modern poles of essence aren’t absolute but rather relative directions just as our cardinal poles. Seeing objects not from the standpoint of non-essence but existence, from the monsters, it is not possible anymore to adopt the terrorizing discourse of modernity... In his penultimate year Barthes attempted with this Neutral to pursue mediation outside of language, a philosophy on applied mediations or lack thereof, a position into the world that one would simply call today being pragmatic. All along the twenty-three figures of neutral study thoroughly, language, social behavior, religion, oriental philosophies, dialectics, pathology, tea ceremony, etc. The only things that the Neutral forgot to compose with were...things.

And of course this is a paradox of pragmatism without Things unless Things are not made to be re-considered if you first decompose them into pieces of words. If *Mythologies* did treat things in effect it did

not occur with the same neutral flair for asking how well they perform nor by placing the things back at the center of the stage. We may be in need a new scope to look at fragments.

The Neutral

