The Commons
Appia Novissima
Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Via Appia and Via Ardeatina, from Le Antichità Romane, 1756
After a full year of research into Metropolitan Architecture, this time Architecture without Content will tackle the Commons. In the wake of Brexit and the current soul searching inside the European continent about both the amplitude of its territory and the essence of its shared culture, this issue appears even more urgent than ever.

Of all possible cases we decided to focus our attention this year on Italy, because exactly there for a certain period of time public architecture has been a constitutional part of its civilization; i.e. the Roman machine. During a few centuries the standard urban infrastructure of any given Roman city (the theatre, the market, the agora, the baths, the temples, the basilica, the markets, the schools, the legion’s headquarters and so forth) was in fact the essential spine of public life. This architecture thus allowed the very existence of the cities the way we got to know them. Since then, the Commons experienced ups and downs, were boosted by the pride of the city bourgeois in the Gothic cities, and were even carefully planned by the newly developed modern states. In the last century, both the totalitarian state and the welfare state, used the Commons to fulfill their own particular agenda thus producing the final incarnation of the Commons as a solid architectural apparatus for the cities.

Since the eighties however, post-Thatcher politics (i.e. the Empire) has been eroding the Commons. Today, the Commons we have left in our western society has a heavily transformed profile. In certain nations, as Italy, the phenomenon was particularly evident, as the investments on welfare had been drastically cut. No more social housing, no more schools, no more post offices, no more civic centers: the desert. In the far depths of the Even Covered Field, the suburban mall surreptitiously replaced some of the functions, as such becoming the only possible stage for twisted remnants of anything public.

The reoccurring crisis of the current world-order asks urgently for a way out. Can architecture - common expression of power - enable such a rupture, or at least bring a contribution towards another equilibrium? We believe a possibility lays (again) in the formalization of the Commons. This year we want to investigate if the Commons can still be made and how they can be effective again. We will design where the problem is more evident, in the endless extension of the Roman periphery, a nasty by-product of failed utopias and criminal real estate investments, and in the northern periphery of Milan where the planned city morphs into the informal accumulation of wildly individual choices.

In Rome, during first semester, we will unfold a possible narrative following the lines of the Appia, a remarkable axis radiating from the city centre and pointing towards what is left of the Roman countryside.

In the second semester we hope to repeat this ‘trick’ in Milan, using the Northern axis of Corso Sempione.

In the tradition of the Modern, we will locate and design schools, post offices, civic centers, police stations and more, expecting to be surprised by the students even at the level of the program. Success is not guaranteed, but the stakes are too high to be ignored.
Via Appia
*Appius Claudius Caecus*

Rome, Italy
312 B.C. - ...

James Anderson (1813-1877), n. 0216, Via Appia Nuova e acquedotti di Claudio, Rome
In 312 B.C. Appius Claudius Caecus started building the Via Appia as one of his bold public works that had to deal with the supply problems of Rome. The new road, crossing the Alban hills and the Pontine Marshes, connected Rome to modern day Brindisi. This allowed the Roman forces to move swiftly and assured their supply from Rome, resulting in a clear success in the 2nd Samnite War.

In 1784 after the road fell into decline, Pope Pius VI ordered its restoration. The new Via Appia followed the old Roman Road until Frattocchie where it splitted up to end at the Porta San Giovanni. The original Via Appia Antica, lined with temples and old tombs of ancient patrician families of Rome, became a tourist attraction where the Via Appia Nuova became a national road connecting the Roman periphery to the city.
In 1796 Durand started his professorship at the newly established École Polytechnique in Paris. His “Précis des leçons d’architecture” presents to his students, future engineers at the Service des Ponts et Chaussées, a methodology to follow in order to define and design the new types of buildings (mainly public) that were needed for the new Napoleonic Era.

The 2 volumes try to convey through clear schemes and examples an idea of an architecture that represents the grandeur of the French Empire based on functionality and economy of means.
Studio Trip

*Rome, Italy*

Giorgio Sommer (1834-1914), n. 4235, Via Appia, Rome
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