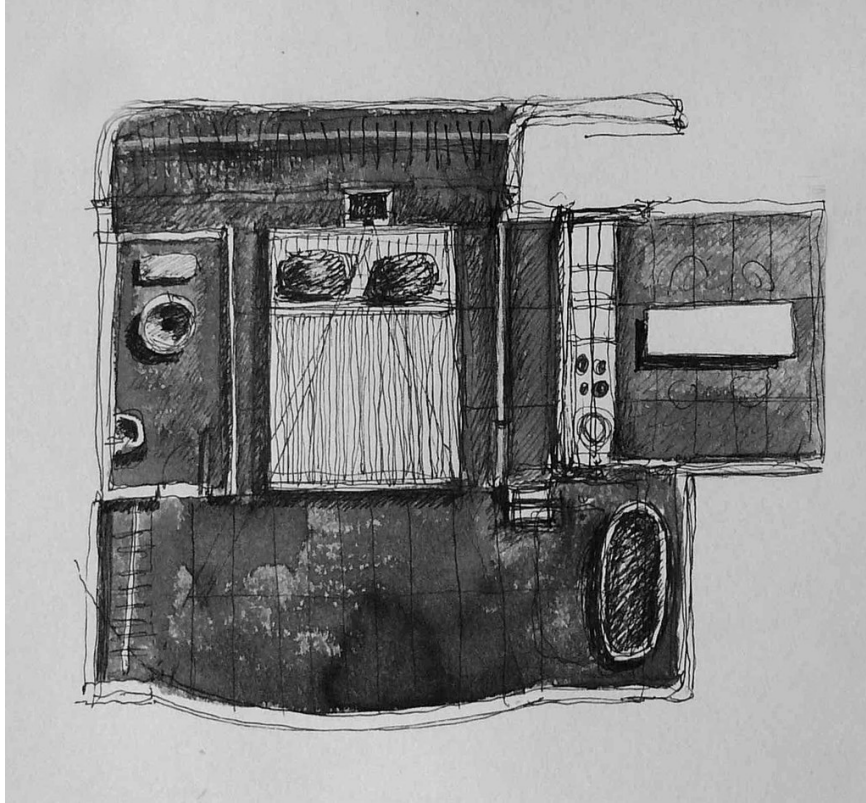# Representation is Enough
Notes on the Black Box Bed
Aristide Antonas

Aristide Antonas, The House for Doing Nothing, 2008, sketch.

> As I think about this more carefully, I realize that there is never any
> reliable way of distinguishing being awake from being asleep.
> René Descartes, *Meditations on the First Philosophy*, 1641.

BLACKBOXING AND THE INFRASTRUCTURE

Blackboxing, as introduced by Bruno Latour in his 1987 book Science in
Action: How to follow Scientists and Engineers through Society[01], cap-
tures the way that scientific and technical work often goes unnoticed or
becomes invisible because its success makes it seem ordinary or effort-
less. "When a machine runs efficiently, when a matter of fact is settled,
one needs to focus only on its inputs and outputs and not on its internal
complexity," Latour writes. "Thus, paradoxically, the more science and
technology succeed, the more opaque and obscure they (inputs and out-
puts) become."[02] However, blackboxing represents more than just a "par-
adoxical" and abstract lack of interest due to the unpredictable outcome
of scientific success. Blackboxing is not solely a byproduct of mechanical
processes that achieve success in an unpredictable manner. It embodies

01   Bruno Latour, "Opening Pandora's Black Box" in Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How to follow Scientists and Engineers through Society* (Cam-
      bridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 1-17.
02   Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope: Essays On The Reality Of Science Studies* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), 304.

the spirit of infrastructure. Blackboxing is not merely a parallel facet of scientific success among others, nor is it a coincidental inconvenience arising from mechanical triumph. Instead, it is an end integral to the logic of infrastructure, crucial for its functioning. The very existence of infrastructure depends on the possibility of this invisibility.

Blackboxing does not, then, only manifest as a phenomenon occurring alongside or following a scientific success. Quite the opposite: it precisely thrives on the success of concealing mechanisms; technology, in general, is inherently oriented toward blackboxing since mechanization arose from the success of hidden processes. If division of labor and the dispossession of waged workers is the cause of mechanical progress, blackboxing—a concept "cooked" later and in different theoretical circumstances—can more specifically name the metaphysical side of this earlier concept that describes the process of alienation.[03] We could argue that in the Fordist mode of production, whatever precedes workers' intervention on the chain has already announced the character of a hidden blackbox elaboration. This principle of hiding intermediary layers of action achieves the glorification of alienation by installing an omnipresent invisible sphere of blackboxing at all the levels of the social sphere. The raison d'être of infrastructure lies in the systematization of a series of invisible processes, hiding technological intervention behind simple and blind functionality. Every infrastructure operates through a core dependence on blackboxing. Infrastructure is consistently geared toward concealing its functional complications.[04] The functional principle of infrastructure is to forget the explanations that bring things to us in a mediated way, presenting them as if achieved or received immediately. Representation is both the prerequisite and the product of infrastructure. In this sense, blackboxing is a term that allows us to grasp the connection between an outcome and its (hidden) process.

WITHDRAWAL OF THE SELF

"Invisible mediation" serves as another descriptor for blackboxing and no conceivable infrastructure can exist without invisible mediation. Automation emerges, and automatization assumes control, in the form of an installation designed to hide processes operating beneath and behind phenomena. The spirit of infrastructure resides in its concealed, invisible zones; the success of hidden mechanisms is not acknowledged until the opaqueness of a concealed process can offer an outcome. Infrastructure, by concealing its processes, not only defines itself but also represents the scientific success that rules its internal functions within the sphere of blackboxing. A theory of infrastructure would always depend on a fundamental understanding of blackboxing. Deliberately concealing mediated activity presents an operational result that may initially surprise due to its unexpected simplicity but that then becomes easily naturalized.

It is not surprising that the black box of an airplane—where this concept originates—becomes interesting only after an accident. There is little interest in routine airplane operations concealed within the black box when its mechanisms function as expected. This perspective allows us to view the accident and the norm as a dialectic within any infrastructure system. In an analogous way, infrastructure mechanics are mostly involved with maintenance, and the sciences of maintenance are largely about repairing accidental malfunctions.

03   Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, translated by Martin Milligan (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1959). Karl Marx described his concept of alienation in the manuscripts of 1844 but those were published posthumously in 1932. In the manuscripts, particularly in the section titled "Estranged Labour," Marx explores how workers become alienated from the products of their labor, the labor process, their own essence, and from other individuals under capitalist conditions.

04   By the term "infrastructure" I mean here the entire extension of a mediated sphere proposed by today's everyday life. Operating on the web directly is one side of this infrastructure, but it extends also into a privatized zone of many city services that tend to replace the welfare state's old shared infrastructure.

A key task of this essay is to examine the role of the viewer within the sphere of blackboxed phenomena, where furniture—especially the bed—serves not only as a vantage point for observing blackboxed operations but also as an essential, inherent, and constitutive element of the infrastructure itself.
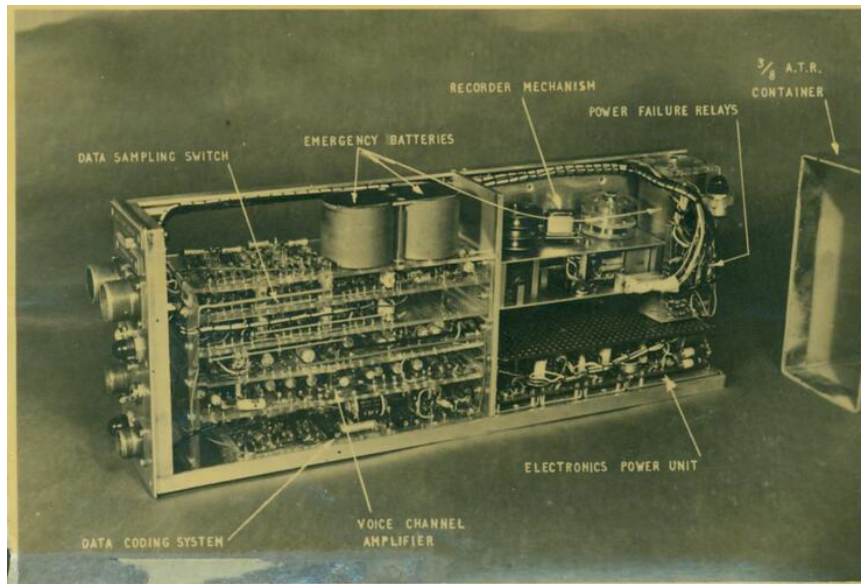
ARL Flight Memory Recorder - Prototype Airborne Signal Monitor, Aeronautical Research Laboratories, Melbourne, 1962. From "ARL Flight Memory Recorder," Museums Victoria, accessed February 24, 2025, https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/items/405748.

By highlighting the importance of blackboxing for infrastructure, we are guided towards an understanding of the "post-Western self." This contemporary hero in today's unwritten narrative can also be depicted as the embodiment of infrastructure. The hero of infrastructure is increasingly shaped by the growth of the networked systems that serve them and to which this narrative character also belongs.

The post-Western self is increasingly influenced by the process of blackboxing. When we incorporate the concept of blackboxing alongside a prevalence of prefabricated answers to open questions, typical of the post-Western self, we can even formulate a provisional definition of this meta-human figure, a human in the realm of infrastructure. The architecture corresponding to this figure and its era presents a distinct spectrum of options and delimitations. The term blackboxing frequently appears in theoretical texts related to the evolving cultures of social networks.[05] It directs research towards automatic decisions and imperceptible acts occurring in the realm of visible life, where decisions are predetermined and executed automatically without significant human intervention in the conducted operations. Blackboxing is thus a key concept for automatization.

DOMESTIC SCROLLINGS

By interpreting architectural design as part of blackboxing we are obliged to revisit the tradition of architecture as a science that creates an environment.

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05   See James Bridle, *New Dark Age: Technology and the End of the Future* (London: Verso, 2018). The concept of "blackboxing" is discussed in the chapter titled "Computation." In this chapter Bridle describes how complex systems and technologies become opaque or "blackboxed," making their inner workings inaccessible or incomprehensible to users.

Domestic space becomes a carrier of mediations. Domestic space is driven to morph into a structure supporting projections of different types; the reading of scrolling texts, the viewing moving images and video samples substitute the private and social actions of the past. Projections are not only literal light works undertaken by projectors but rather organizers of an idiosyncratic annihilation of physical space; a system of empty framed fields resembling vitrines where textual and visibly alternating content can be continuously performed. The bed may then become the name of a privileged position from which to view this field. We might already name the juxtaposed screens and monitors of many scales with their images, videos, captions, and aphorisms a "bed system" since it serves as a constant homely and hospitable zone. In this zone, we increasingly lack the contradictions of an exposure to exterior space. Social sleep operates as a construct for every individual standing in the midst of their own private zone. Physical space becomes increasingly a setting of vitrines in which to present dioramas of pleasure or scenographies of the real—while reality is provocatively exiled as an unnecessary complication. For an inhabitant of the bed, representation is enough.

The new micro-phantasmagoric realm of projected illusions will have a future for the classes that can afford a bed as a position of labor or—even better for them—for the classes that are able to extend their beds to wider environments or even to physical, exotic places. In this sense, places lose their immediacy as mere environments and become supporting elements for hosting background representations. Individuals, if they belong to the operating classes of the internet, may choose their environments deliberately. Giorgio Agamben often formulates arguments that lead to the idea that this sphere belongs to the tradition of the society of spectacle.[06] Is this tradition enough for investigating the transition from spectacle to "real" life and the bed as a constituent of infrastructure?

THE SELF-DESCRIBED AS PART OF AN INFRASTRUCTURE

An important domestic element, rooted in the world of furniture, is increasingly becoming crucial in our habitat: the bed. Striking a delicate balance between the human body's need for rest and the individual's position as an observer of a chosen representational field, the bed is here described as the immediate operator of mediated life on the network, navigating the ambivalence between sleep and mediated action.

To fully grasp the contemporary status of the bed as the locus of the individual, we would have to acknowledge the long historiography of sleep and the bed. I will not do so. However, I will try to shed light on some fragments of this historiography in order to showcase a possible theoretical provenance of this description of the bed and the individual. The bed, once a space of retreat, has now become the focal point of the contemporary home. No longer merely a place of rest, it functions as an active interface within a visible social landscape. Rather than being a space of withdrawal, time spent in bed is now performed as an act of navigating through a stream of curated content. Suspended above a reservoir of preconstructed impressions, the bed assumes the structure of a black box—a device that records, processes, and integrates its occupant into broader mechanisms of visibility and control. The plethora of this stored material is part of the tiredness leading to the bed. In its networked version, the new form of the bed condenses the domestic, the public, and even the realm of labor. It becomes *the* position for humans in the midst of infrastructure. Beginning with a general definitive observation or an aphorism about the black box bed, it stands as a constructed locus within the infra-

06   For example, see Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011); or *Profanations*, translated by Jeff Fort (New York: Zone books, 2007).
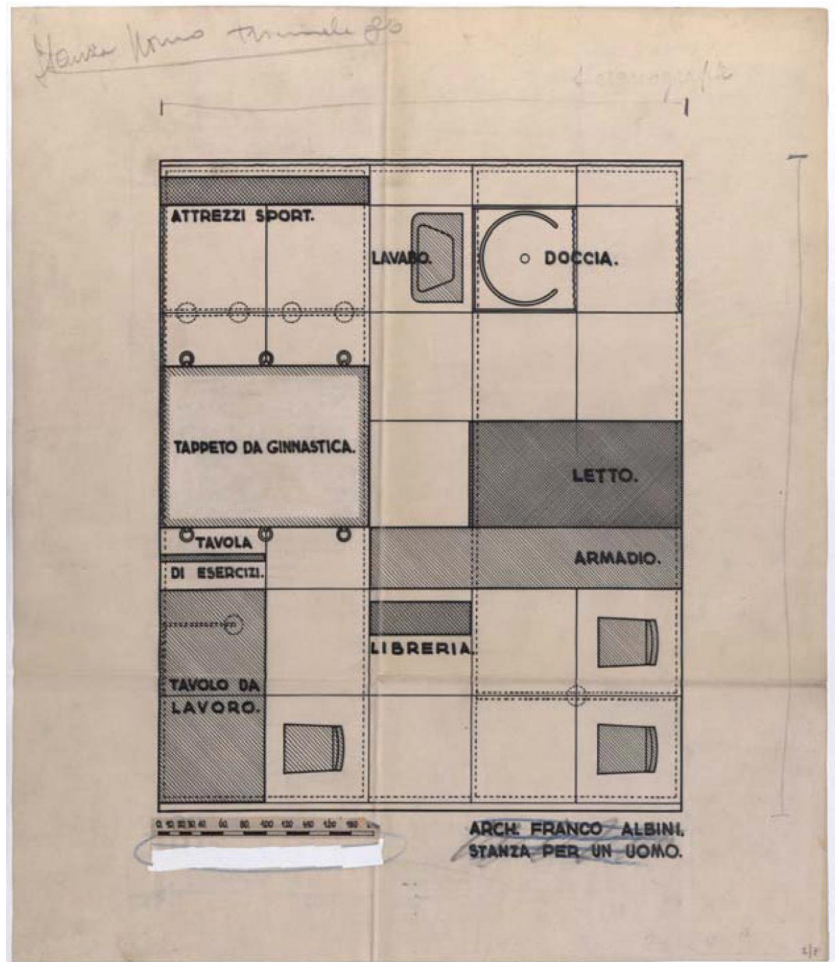
Franco Albini, Room for a Man, VI Triennale, Milan, 1936. From "Franco Albini's A Room for a Man," Socks, effective September 30, 2015, https://socks-studio.com/2015/09/30/franco-albinis-a-room-for-a-man-1936/.

structure. Its construction prioritizes a certain apathy—a trait that defines the infrastructure and can be locally condensed for every micro domestic sphere in the notion of the bed. While a radical change appears underway after the Western self, it's essential to recognize that Western thought, in some instances, has had a catalytic effect on the new situation. This can be described as the preparation for the new order of the self-in-bed.

The "I" of the Bed

The quiet and slow dissolution of the living room—or any central reception area—in a typical city apartment preceded the ascendency of the bed as a coherent single element of the infrastructure. The TV set of the past—a common screen for the entire house—has long been replaced by several personal screens, each programmed to make every inhabitant feel comfortable in the techno-domestic urban sphere. The remaining TV sets function only as additional personal screens: they serve to restore the nostalgia of a traditional household; they contribute to the memory of the tradition of common spectacle, in which the sofa undertook—in the recent past—the role of active meeting space of a household, allowing a group of people to share the space of a common apparatus for viewing a sports event, a news broadcast, or a TV series together. These invitational moments of the past decrease as we steadily move toward a culture where the individual viewer has access to a live archive open to all devices. Now in a household, priority is given to the field where multiple personal screens guarantee the commitment of an individual to their island-like

world, both underlining their social sphere and their identity as networked self. All communication with a world that lies beyond the   household can happen within this cell. Beyond-the-household has become the new core of the household as a visitable space of a lost reality; architecture, in this sense, becomes the apparatus for an impossible orientation. Architecture is meant to organize loci of narrative representation, secured at an unmeasurable distance from the core of any home. The bed condenses the sophistication of this new lack of orientation. While the diagrammatic structure of a modern city apartment remains rather unchanged, the life inside it has already become quite evidently different from what it was built for; an important part of the changes we are referring to lies in the fact of this multiplication of personal projections, mini monitors, screens, and devices. In the domestic sphere, the maximum condensation of projections around the bed defines the bed and transforms an insomniac stay into a comfortable state.

THE PAST OF THE HUMAN BED

Dreams were the idiosyncratic material that structured unique, personal human worlds in Romantic literature. In the project of Romanticism, the construction of personal worlds as works of art were thought to allow an individual's dream to unfold into a visible, shared reality. Through this lens, a solitary vision expands into a universally described world, where one person creates an environment for others to inhabit. The concept of human culture was then seen as the instructive extension of individual dreams as shown in Isaiah Berlin's impressive account of Romanticism.[07] The era of the new bed no longer refers to the creative plasticity of dream operations that characterized the exploded individual's romantic dream worlds and that expanded to the cultures of surrealism honored emblematically by Walter Benjamin.[08] The bed installs new sleeping identities of withdrawal based on fabricated, ready-made worlds. These ready-made worlds emerge from a ready-made set of inhabited and sometimes heavily populated dreams, constructed to circulate and receive their inhabitants. This is a poisoned setting to which we all have to adapt, by staying in bed. The same bed guarantees different entrances for these different worlds. Individuals have to or can choose from among ready-made protocols where different operations are performed; individuals can share data and contact constructed groups of individuals. Participation in ready-made groups—appreciating the same ready-made interests, dreams, or obligations—allows the safeguarding of ready-made identities. These viewer identities (*theorein*: to view) depend on the apraxia of the bed. The inactivity of the bed does not only guarantee the distance from the worlds it allows the horizontal human to overview, but is in itself a form of distance-making. An individual in this bed is understood as the result of accepted participation that is structured by the protocols of ready-made platforms. Lying on this bed is already an acceptance of the navigation that comes together with the horizontal position of the body. The construction of the self in this setting is based on an inflexible archive of ready-made identities proposed by the applications used; the self is identified with a composition-choice of these rigid ready-made profiles, exhausting the constructive aspect of "self-creation," leading to the creation of the human-in-bed. Such definitions of the bed-setting and the human-in-bed are necessary in order to proceed to a contemporary description of the self.

07   Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism* (Princeton University Press, 1999).
08   For example, in Walter Benjamin's "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia," translated by Edmond Jephcott, Surrealism: the Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia, visited on february 3, 2025.

THE METAHUMANIST SELF

The idiosyncrasy of the contemporary bed and the parallel structure of public space as a function of the domestic via the internet seem to depend on an era of increasing withdrawal. We have only now started to experience the first effects of this meta-humanistic constitution of a different human self. The future of the culture of the bed is linked to a visible transformation of the Western past; the post-Western bed is already a noticeable quotidian element in today's Global-Northern way of life—Asia being visibly a pioneer of it. The Western canon is often linked to   an interesting openness to the concept of the Other. We may even challenge the following aphorism: that the most precious theoretical construction of the West is related to an unprecedented inscription of otherness in the frame of the self. But, from another point of view, we can also detect in Western literature the indices of an idealized autonomy of the self. In this short text I claim that this second culture, of a certain independence of the self, inaugurates the idiosyncratic urban status of bed systems that nowadays cities are becoming.

Three different direct references to texts related to the culture of Western withdrawal will follow—three descriptions of idiosyncratic conditions of sleep or hypnosis extracted from the literature of the West. The references have never been presented as related to such an issue but are brought to the field of this investigation as possible precedent projections to the topic. A specific definition of the self-in-bed—exploring the dynamics of sleeping or waking and the meanings that these on-and-off situations assumed in the Western bibliography—sets the frame for envisioning the post-Western bed as a specific function. All three references appear to idealize differently an individual and contribute to shaping the distinction between the individual to the—sometimes menacing—community. All three describe by allegorical means the position of a subject in the word and allow to speak or silence the human figure's relation to the common sphere, seen as a function of common sleep.

THE CAVE

Plato's allegory of the cave in the *Republic* (514a–520a) is the first theoretical installation I refer to. Written around 380 BCE, it can be seen as an inaugural text for Western philosophy; the description of Plato is at the same time a description of a very idiosyncratic setting and the description of a specific performance taking place in this imaginary setting. The setting is an imaginary cavern that has a mouth that opens to the light above; a passage leads from this opening all the way down to some imprisoned people. But these people have lived there from infancy, with their legs and necks bound in chains unable to move. They can only stare directly forward, as the chains stop them from turning their heads around. They don't remember any other situation of life than this. Far above and behind them blazes a great fire and between this fire and the prisoners, a low partition is erected along a path, "something like puppeteers use to conceal themselves during their shows," Plato explains. Some other people who belong in the setting of this prison are continuously carrying objects back and forth along the path and behind the partition wall; they do this with things of every kind: images of humans and animals, carved in stone and wood and other materials. Some of these other people speak, while others remain silent. The captives, having never seen anything of themselves or one another, and only the shadows on the cavern wall before them—restrained, all their lives, with their heads facing forward only—would consider the truth to be nothing but the shadows of the objects moving behind them. Plato then builds a parable concerning this strange cave, depicting a heroic victim of the consciousness in the setting. Let's say, Plato continues, that someone is forcibly dragged up the steep climb out of the cavern.

Jan Saenredam, Plato's Allegory of the cave, 1604, engraving. From The British Museum, 1852,1211.120.

Let's suppose that someone is firmly held until finally he stands in the light of the sun. He would be agitated and even begin to complain. Under the sunlight his eyes would be nearly blinded, unable to discern any of those things that we call real. It would then take time, Socrates says, for this hero of the cave to get used to seeing the things of this higher reality. Slowly he would start discerning the shadows, the reflections of things in the water and, next, he would come to see the things "themselves." The hero of the cave should remember now his fellow prisoners and consider himself fortunate for his own transformation and feel pity for the captives who still live in their illusionary world. And if the hero of the cave comes back to the prison and tries to explain to his fellows the situation in order to liberate them to a higher plane, they might raise their hands against him and kill this person even if he tried to save them.

The allegory of the cave can also be seen as a radical narrative concerning a community in repose and the individual's responsibility towards awakening. While the community of prisoners is sleeping in the coziness of an unreal projection on the dark internal border of the cave, an individual alone can only be awakened after escaping and confronting the community. Individual responsibility is shown here as a rupture of community law. On the contrary, the community is seen as sleeping idiosyncratically, allowing illusion to reign; the sleeplessness and vigilance of this community of sleep derives from the community norms; it is only a painful departure from norms that can prove the wakefulness of an individual. Awakening is to be achieved by rejecting the common. Truth is depicted as synonymous with a certain estrangement, a confrontation with the common understanding. The awakening of one individual against the illusional world of the community mocks the common as inherently flawed and seeks the individual as the exceptional breaker of common protocols. Plato uses the metaphor of a person overcoming the pain of the eyes, attempting to envision the sun after a life in the dark, to illustrate the difficulty of comprehending an invisible ideal world. The personal example of Socrates vividly portrays this clash between a personal stance against the common rituals of social life, as forming the core of the political. This clash of the personal against the communal becomes a classic motif to describe responsibility and the political in various contexts, from Machiavelli to Hannah Arendt and from Rousseau to Badiou.

Socrates: Imagine that far above and behind them blazes a great fire. Between this fire and the captives, a low partition is erected along a path, something like puppeteers use to conceal themselves during their shows.
Glaukon: I can picture it.
Socrates: Look and you will also see other people carrying objects back and forth along the partition, 514c things of every kind: images of people 515a and animals, carved in stone and wood and other materials. Some of these other people speak, while others remain silent.
Glaukon: A bizarre situation for some unusual captives.
... Socrates: So we are! Now, tell me if you suppose it's possible that these captives ever saw anything of themselves or one another, other than the shadows flitting across the cavern wall before them?
Glaukon: Certainly not, for they are restrained, 515b all their lives, with their heads facing forward only.
Socrates: And that would be just as true for the objects moving to and behind them?
Glaukon: Certainly.
Socrates: Now, if they could speak, would you say that these captives would imagine that the names they gave to the things they were able to see applied to real things?
Glaukon: It would have to be so. ... (515c)
Socrates: 515c Then, undoubtedly, such captives would consider the truth to be nothing but the shadows of the carved objects.
Glaukon: Most certainly.

THE FLYING MAN

Avicenna's experiment of the Flying Man is an important second reference. Avicenna directs an abstract conceptual thought experiment; its abstraction can be of great importance in researching—beyond its original context—the character of the urban bed within its infrastructure. Avicenna wrote this argument around 1020, while imprisoned in the castle of Fardajan in the Iranian province of Hamadan. The self in this experiment is presented in a less heroic way than in the case of Plato. We could say that Avicenna is using a scene similar to that of Plato's prisoners but in order to show the normality of the human condition; structured as a deserted oceanic island, the Flying Man is presented cut off from every other element around. Its self can exist with no environment; it seems after the thought experiment that the self can be identified with a hypnotized empty center not necessarily linked to any exterior space. The self mystically belongs to oneself, and a certain type of sleep of the self is enough to prove its existence. The observing subject has proved self-sufficient, even if there is nothing to report from nor to be reported if we test a focused observation of this observer. The Flying Man not only proves the existence of a separate internal human world of the soul; the flying man also establishes a masochistic proof of the existence of the self by a manifestation of its invisible circular self-understanding; the experiment demonstrates that this invalid (by definition) other-less self can still be considered as intact or as an independent whole. The described radical self-sufficiency also represents a maximum refusal of the flying man's body, any type of materiality, and of any human community. What the experiment also "proves" is that the seemingly traumatic neglect of any sensual data does not obstruct the sphere of human normality.

"One of us must suppose that he was just created at a stroke, fully developed and perfectly formed but with his vision shrouded from perceiving all external objects — created floating in the air or in the space, not buffeted by any perceptible current of the air that supports him, his limbs separated and kept out of contact with one another, so that they do not feel each other. Then let the subject consider whether he would affirm the existence of his self. There is no doubt that he would affirm his own existence, although not affirming the reality of any of his limbs or inner organs, his bowels, or heart or brain or any external thing. Indeed he would affirm the existence of this self of his while not affirming that it had any length, breadth or depth. And if it were possible for him in such a state to imagine a hand or any other organ, he would not imagine it to be a part of himself or a condition of his existence." Avicenna

This quasi-masochistic appearance of a supposedly autonomous self as resistant to many senses of "normality" can be also located in Peter Sloterdijk's concept of "anthropotechnics" in his provocative essay "Du mußt dein Leben ändern,"[09] a title borrowed from a fragment of Rilke's enigmatic poem "Archaic Torso of Apollo." Sloterdijk organizes a view of Western modernity through "anthropotechnics," creating a history from various cultures of the self and insisting on a masochistic challenge of the self to break through one's own limits. Such a history created from various cultures of the self traverses a range of references from the stylite self-punishment of sitting alone on columns to the banalization of self-challenging in modern athleticism and the world of sports records. The fragment of Avicenna could intriguingly inaugurate this modern Western tradition of exploring the limits of the body and the cultures of self-erasure that can promise the core of the real self. Simultaneously, the flying man serves as a prerequisite for the post-Western man and what we refer to here as the inhabitant of the "black box bed."

09   Peter Sloterdijk, *Du mußt dein Leben ändern.* Über *Anthropotechnik* [You Must Change Your Life: On Human Engineering] (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2009).

"Like a prisoner who dreams that he is free, starts to suspect that it is merely a dream, and wants to go on dreaming rather than waking up, so I am content to slide back into my old opinions; I fear being shaken out of them because I am afraid that my peaceful sleep may be followed by hard labour when I wake, and that I shall have to struggle not in the light but in the imprisoning darkness of the problems I have raised. ... 'Suppose, indeed that I don't even have hands or any body at all.' ... 'I shall think that the sky, the air, the earth, colours, shapes, sounds and all external things are merely dreams that the demon has contrived as traps for my judgment. I shall consider myself as having no hands or eyes, or flesh, or blood or senses, but as having falsely believed that I had all these things.' ... I will suppose, then, that everything I see is fictitious. I will believe that my memory tells me nothing but lies. I have no senses. Body, shape, extension, movement and place are illusions. ... Now that I have convinced myself that there is nothing in the world - no sky, no earth, no minds, no bodies - does it follow that I don't exist either? No it does not follow; for if I convinced myself of something then I certainly existed." René Descartes, *Meditations on the First Philosophy*, 1641.

A CARTESIAN FRAGMENT

A collection of fragments from Descartes's *Meditations on the First Philosophy* forms a third reference to another sleeping condition. From our perspective, Descartes, who certainly knew of Avicenna's impressive example, grounds the concept of a different "flying man" in reality. Descartes describes himself as trapped by the illusions of reality. We do not deal any more with allegories being projected to a different world. The setting for Descartes is his own room. From his perspective, he sees himself as an individual trying to flee the illusional reality of a prosaic cave based on the invisible stability of the flying man whom he does not quote; Descartes implants illusion in the real world, where reality becomes a state of illusion. In this context, humans doubt their own existence, struggling to discern the illusionary from the real; the mystic invisibility of the soul is transformed into rationality, conditioned by the intellect.

If dreaming can be seen as equivalent to sensation, then humans can be conceived as always floating in an illusional reality. In this sense, Descartes solidifies the possibility of the "black box bed": a system that organizes ghostly durations for illusionary works. Descartes, while working thoroughly for rationality, simultaneously prepares a different, un announced masturbatory field of phantasmagoria for an individual self; the residue of the human's sensual garbage could already deliver this area of constructed illusion; constructed illusions can then substitute reality. Descartes's deceptive approach reserves a necessary cut into the human's experience of the world, defining the environment as a false background. Descartes underlines the intellectual material out of which the black box bed can emerge, for a black box always would require an external test to prove its validity. Here, we could claim that the bed leads to any framed duration of "pleasure and labor" as the epitome of a domestic withdrawal that characterizes the constitution of "the political in a bottle." The black box bed is already announced in the Western philosophical canon as a promised semi-autonomous place of withdrawal, bypassing the interrogative consciousness of the Cartesian question of "the self and the world"; deliberately accepting a post-Avicenna situation where overflying
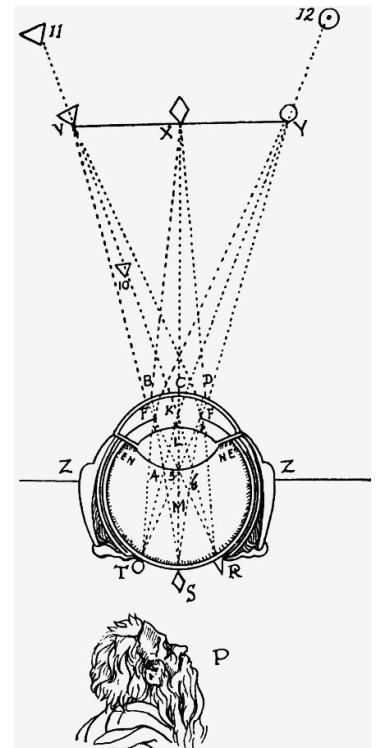
Aristide Antonas, Bloom's Notes on "Life and Prison" by Catherine Malabou, 2021.
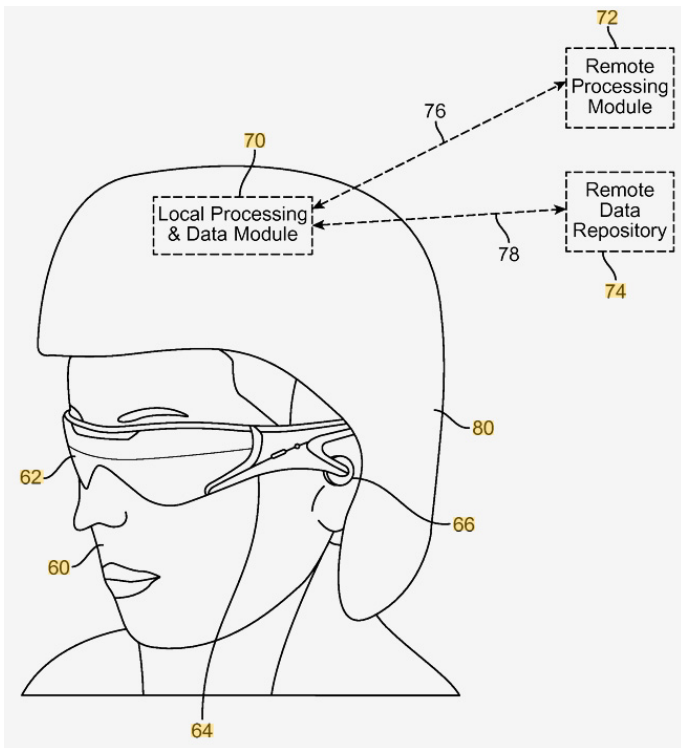
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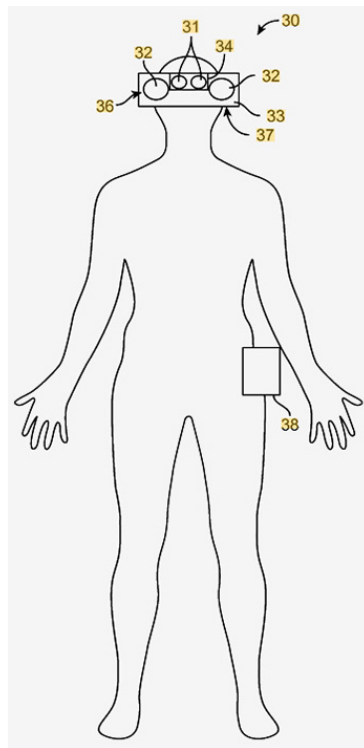
ii

Left: Patents for augmented reality systems. A 2020 patent by Magic Leap, Inc. (i) and a
2013 patent by Samuel A. Miller (ii).
Right: The eye as a camera obscura. From Descartes, *La Dioptrique* (Leyden, 1637), 61.

a world of data is similar to the indifferent, senseless air entourage of the figure of the floating man; and consciously resting in a lonely platonic cave where the prisoners know about each other and the existence of an exterior world, even as this exterior world becomes increasingly undesirable. This position becomes the *par excellence* position we are driven to, in a mediated sphere of the black box bed—the promoter of mediated experiences substituting the lost immediacy of the past with confined categories of ready-made experiences.[10]

THE "SLEEP SONATA"

I suggest that these three references could be seen as inaugurating the era of the black box bed, making sense of the past of post-Western sleep. They also speak to the relation of an individual to the community: integration and resistance to it, complacency and refusal, sleep and wakefulness. I juxtapose to the three fragments two instances of designed spaces in the form of architectural projects to inaugurate a technical investigation into modalities of social sleep. We could argue that social sleep is what any society tends toward; nevertheless, philosophy—from the Presocratic fragments until now—was supposed to deal with a certain awakening of humans from society's repetitive rhythm and toward a certain resistance to this rhythm. The black box bed is announcing a certain end of philosophy.

Focusing on the three fragments, I will refer here to two projects that can serve as architectural examples to reposition and rephrase the fragments that were cited. The first one deals with an understanding of a city as a common sleep structure of a specific social group; it radicalizes and shows the social sphere as divisible into common sleeping units, presenting a technical and modern perspective of sleep. It is the Sonata of Sleep by Konstantin Melnikov. The Sonata of Sleep ("Sonaya Sonata" in Russian) cuts, isolates, and organizes a common frame for human sleep, reserved separately from waking life in a technical way.

The Sonata of Sleep by Melnikov is a project for "Dormitories for the workers, with natural sounds recorded to accompany sleep." It was presented as a part of a 1929–30 plan for Moscow, designing worker's clubs outside the city. Melnikov's wish was that revolutionary Soviet social values could be expressed in his buildings, although at the same time he publicly defended on many occasions "the right and need for personal expression," which he claimed as the only source for "delicate design." His projects were unpredictable, unusual, and ultra-original, described at times as "unreal and fantastic," even though most of them were realized. Melnikov followed the path of the organic combination of space with simple volumetric form, thinking of his architecture as "transparent walls" and putting the elevations in second place. His Green City project was an entry to a competition where Melnikov proposed an idiosyncratic division of the city into six parts; it was proposed in 1929, when the Soviet authorities announced a competition to design a garden suburb outside Moscow, where workers could be sent to recuperate from the strains of factory labor. The Green City was to house 100,000 workers at a time and provide a range of recreational and cultural activities. Melnikov's scheme for his Green City entry to the competition divided the area into six sectors: forest, farmland, garden, zoo, nursery, and the "pieslice," his laboratory of sleep. With the aim of organizing rest by means of the "rationalization of sleep," Melnikov provided an unprecedented scheme for a different daily life. In this design, he introduced "sleeping quarters"—rest blocks for the workers—close to green areas with forest, gardens, orchards, a zoo, a children's city, public spaces, a train station-concert hall, and a "solar pa-

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10　See Karl Joris Huysmans, *À rebours* [*Against Nature*] (Paris: G. Charpentier et Cie, 1884, 2004). In this novel, the hero (Des Esseintes) avoids any immediate experiences and withdraws to a villa where he only experiences life through representation, reading books and viewing paintings. This extreme aesthete position seems to be banalized into a figure of the hyper modern spectator-proletarian.

vilion." These dormitories had to be built by a collective, bringing togeth-er the efforts of different specialists, including architects, musicians, and doctors. For Melnikov, sleep was a curative, more important than food and air. He wanted to fit out the dormitories with hydromassage; thermal regu-lation of heat and cold by means of stone stoves; chemical regulation with the aroma of forests, spring and autumn; mechanical regulation with beds that rotated, rocked, and vibrated; and finally, sonic regulation by means of "the murmuring of leaves, the noise of the wind, the sound of a stream, and similar sounds from nature" (including storms), all of which would be heard by placing special sound horns at opposite ends of the dormitories. These would also reproduce symphonies, readings, and sound imitations. Melnikov planned to replace bothersome "pure noise" (showers, washba-sins, neighbors, conversations, snoring…) with "organized noises" based on the principles of music. Melnikov named these "sleeping quarters" and their concerts "Sonatas of Sleep" (SONnaia SONata in Russian), taking the Russian root *son* (Sleep) and using the play on words to allude to the famous Claire de Lune Sonata (Lúnnaya Sonata) by Claude Debussy. In the end, this project was never realized, nor was his dream of creating the Institute for the Transformation of Humankind.[11]

As a materialistic poetic piece, the Sonata of Sleep separates reali-ty from the dreaming world with an emphasis that seems absolute. The sleepers are positioned so that they have a relaxing sleep, but they are supposed to gather in a common building reserved for this purpose. The project rejects the idea of a personal space for good sleep. The two in-clined parts of the building guarantee the best body position for sleep-ing, while between the two long parts of the building, there is a space for bathing; at the two sides of the composition, booths were reserved for the scientists keeping vigil to care for the sleepers and provide the best quality of sleep. Workers in the then-new Soviet Union would then sleep techni-cally better than humans in the capitalist world because of this benevolent surveillance. Surveying the sleeping community takes an exemplary form and addresses a type of "care of sleep as a common good"; a hospital-like space reserved for good sleep, as if sleep is to become a phenomenon for care and social observation. The proposed pause from productivity and the schism from spaces of labor are here paradigmatic, creating spaces where insomnia is excluded by definition.

"The dormitories had sloping floors, to obviate the need for pillows, and the beds were to be built-in "like laboratory tables," in the words of Frederick Starr, author of the standard monograph on Melnikov. Starr goes on to describe the further pains Melnikov took over the ambiance:

> At either end of the long buildings were to be situated con-trol booths, where technicians would command instruments to regulate the temperature, humidity, and air pressure, as well as to waft salubrious scents and "rarefied condensed air" through the halls. Nor would sound be left unorganized. Specialists working "according to scientific facts" would transmit from the control center a range of sounds gauged to intensify the process of slumber. The rustle of leaves, the cooing of nightingales, or the soft murmur of waves would instantly relax the most overwrought veteran of the metrop-olis. Should these fail, the mechanized beds would then be-gin gently to rock until consciousness was lost.[12]

11   From Miguel Molina Alarcón, *Sound Experiments in the Russian Avant Garde: Original Documents and Reconstructions of 72 Key Works of Music, Poetry, and Agitprop from the Russian Avant Gardes (1908–1942)* (London: Rer Megacorp, 2008). Text offered together with a Sound re-crea-tion of the sounds of the Sleep Sonata: Miguel Molina & Anxo Invisibel. Production Date: 2007.
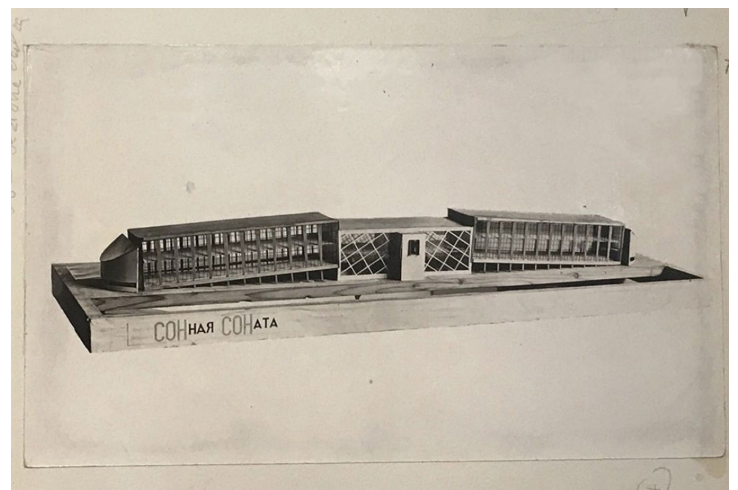
12   S. Frederick Starr, *Melnikov: Solo Architect in a Mass Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 179. Cited in Tony Woods, "Bodies at Rest, Konstantin Melnikov's Sonata of Sleep," *Cabinet* 24, Shadows (Winter 2006–2007).

Konstantin Melnikov's private bedroom, Moscow. Photo of the early 1930s. From
Schusev State Museum of Architecture Collections.
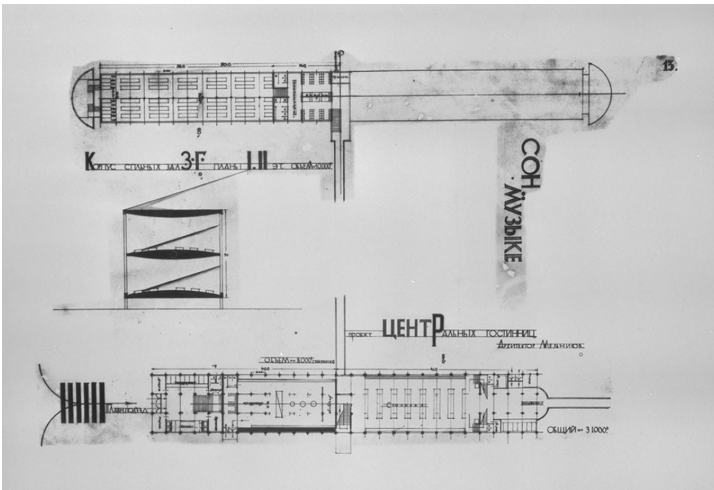
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Konstantin Melnikov, Green City project, 1929-1930. Plans and section of dormitories (i)
and model (ii). From Schusev State Museum of Architecture Collections.

THE HOUSE FOR DOING NOTHING

I allow myself here to also refer to the House of Žižek, which I designed in 2008. I do so since this architectural design was undertaken as a response to a text belonging within the same tradition, in a first attempt to show the different relation to the "observation of a sleeping human." A reverse exhibitionism may be detected here, transforming the observation of a community into an invisible systematic setting destined for one. At the same time, sleeping humans shift from being productive figures, for whom sleep serves as the necessary counterpart to their active lives, to somnambulant individuals who are present and active only across varying stages of sleep. Surveillance becomes tele-controlled and personal, relating to the infrastructure of interdependent network positions that the users of the beds occupy. In this condition, the bed becomes much more than a piece of furniture. The culture of the post-Western bed is still presented in its archaic form in the Žižek project; the bed also serves as a selected scenography of the self to be presented. The bed follows the new cultures of the self when changed radically after humanism. Self-care and self-attention would become the luxurious prerequisite of insomnia; the post-Western bed guarantees this insomniac human state rather than "real sleep," since the permanent connection of humans to the network is guaranteed whilst in bed. The more we understand a hybrid of insomnia and somnambulance, the more we approach the character of the space that a user of the black box bed needs.

Aristide Antonas, The House for Doing Nothing, 2008, plan. In collaboration with Katerina Koutsogianni and Kristy Garikou.

The exposure to danger of the hero of the black box bed is minimized. The opening to the self, which came together with the aporia and a negative answer about the meaning of the self in the Western past, seems to be lost in the frame of the post-Western human condition. This is also

where my critique of this specific discourse of Žižek was based.[13] The dormant-represented exteriority was seen by Žižek as a still-possible critical and traditional withdrawal; for him it would drive to consciousness as if we could still live in the platonic cave. Seen from this perspective it is only in the realm of withdrawal to the black box bed that contemporary and future politics can take place. Accelerating this situation is a necessary political stance in order to judge and see how the politics of this future can happen. It is not a coincidence that some major issues of illegal trafficking of information take the form of political struggle, as in the case of Julian Assange, for example. The consciousness of a deliberate idiosyncratic unconsciousness is a necessary step to determine the position of the user in front of the dilemmas of this era. In parallel to this theme, and in order to be practical in designing an extended bed, I supposed that if a person decides to stay secluded and connected to the social sphere, then the responsibility of this person for the situations that happen around them would depend on the infrastructure regulations of a black box setting; Žižek became my example because of a beautiful condensation of this withdrawal in this exceptional fragment of his; I found a good moment to criticize it then, with a building that was providing a controlled dose of poison. The moment that a reader would feel attracted to the "responsible house" I would have succeeded in introducing a rupture between a vivid and a dormant distance to representation. A kind of bed urbanism was announced at the same moment, claiming the position of oneself into ready-made representations had become a topic of domestic and urban significance.

There is a hidden violence in this seemingly happy return to "the House." So, designing a house for Žižek and an "exemplary place for withdrawal" is meant to underline that the desire for a bed and for doing nothing, for the users of the network, was just showcasing and emblematizing a banal normality of an already visible era of the bed. The poison of this extended bed is only understandable when we see its potential success sarcastically. Obviously in a different understanding of laziness, defined in the past by Paul Lafargue in his legendary "Right to be Lazy," doing nothing was systematically introduced as a desirable future of socialism;[14] even a few hours of exploitation were considered by Lafargue as an absurd goal for the working class. Automation could already in Lafargue's time promise a drastic reduction of working hours. The enjoyment of laziness and the maximum augmentation of the happy, inactive parts of life was the goal. The machine has a meaning—Lafargue thought—if it can free humans from working time. There is no meaning in creating more time for work after freeing human time from work. The only meaning is no work. But the right to be lazy does not correspond to the state of networked common withdrawal in the time when Žižek is operating; the laziness of Lafargue has little to do with the insomniac state of being ever-present from the scenography of a bed in this new setting of "doing nothing" while working and "enjoying" in the same position; post-Fordism and the blurring of the limits of labor and enjoyment have prepared the field for a new insomniac bed of labor and the representational paradise of all stored durations, which anybody can follow accordingly. An idealization of a new concept of desert is to be defined as the representation of an a-demic reality, where *a-demia* could be seen as characterizing already the post-network city.[15]

The historicity of the concept of laziness is then the reason one can still be suspicious about the withdrawal that Žižek is highlighting in the

13   I started this work by trying to answer with design this text fragment from Žižek: "A critical analysis of the present global constellation—one which offers no clear solution, no 'practical' advice on what to do, and provides no light at the end of the tunnel, since one is well aware that this light might belong to a train crashing towards us—usually meets with reproach: 'Do you mean we should do nothing? Just sit and wait?' One should gather the courage to answer: 'YES, precisely that!'" Slavoj Žižek, *Violence* (New York: Picador, 2008).

14   Paul Lafargue, *Le droit à la paresse* [The right to be lazy] (1883). Also see more recent views of this "end of labor," for example, Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams*, Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work* (Verso, 2016), or Aaron Bastani, *Fully Automated Luxury Communism: A Manifesto* (Verso, 2020).
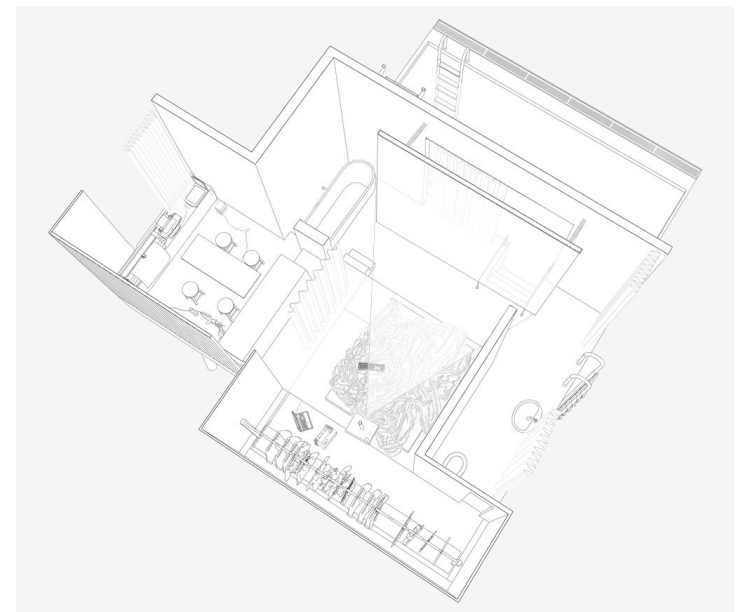
15   A-demia is a term proposed by Agamben signifying the negation of a collective sphere; α-δημος would mean in ancient Greek a common-less setting in which demo-cracy would make no sense. Within a post-Western system of broken *demos*, populations are at the mercy of the ruling classes.
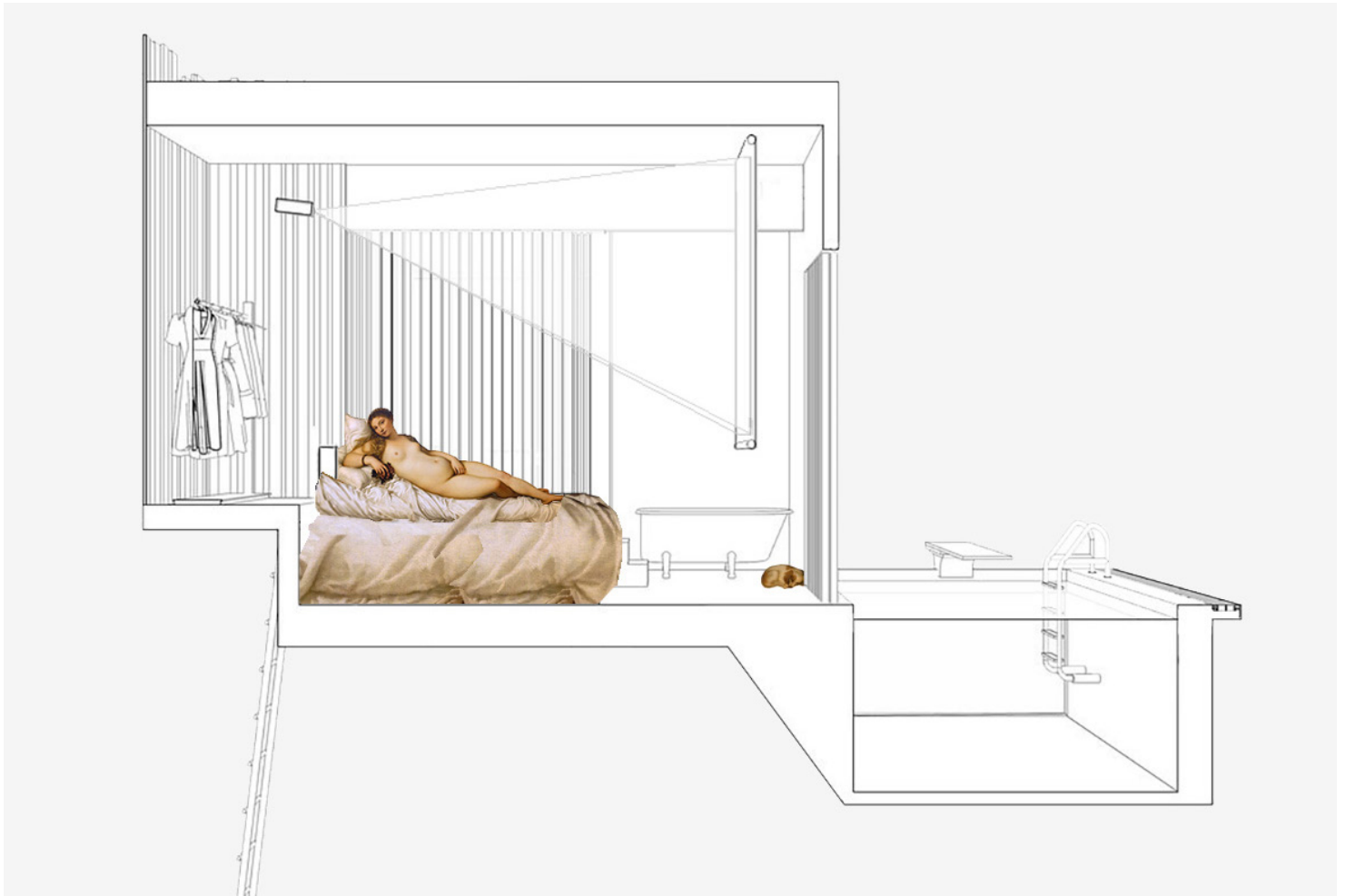
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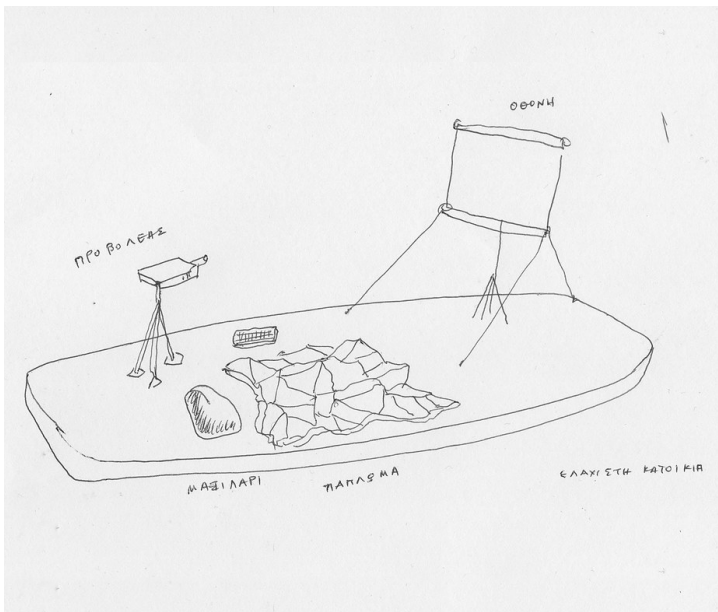
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Aristide Antonas, The House for Doing Nothing, 2008. In collaboration with Katerina Koutsogianni and Kristy Garikou. Perspectival section (i), sketch (ii), and axonometric view (iii).

specific fragment.[16] Slavoj Žižek neglects an important paradox of contemporary domesticity: it is only in the condition of withdrawal that the human community is formed. The entire geopolitical order can be normalized only if this principle prevails, when the function of the network presupposes this microscale colonization of human domestic order. Living within the information infrastructure and its logistics rationale transforms individual users of the networks into the ready-made clientele of systems of financial services. We experience a bizarre community constituted paradoxically by personal withdrawal in the infrastructure sphere. And this is underestimated in the fragment as if it were unnecessary to even mention, while the introduction drove emblematically to this situation of the common self. The utterance leads the readers to the same position they were already occupying, but now the position of a heroic stance is attributed to them; naming Žižek's wished-for description of an individual as the most common one creates a contemporary "hero of the common position." This is the hero of the black box bed.

The black box bed is precisely the character of Žižek's residence. "The house for doing nothing," as I've called it before (also "The Responsible House" and "The Slavoj Zizek Residence"), connects the user's position in the bed to an infrastructure of similar roles.[17] These roles materialize abstract networks into a tangible architecture of furniture.[18] This furniture takes its form and meaning from the Western representation of the subject in relation to the community. It can be seen as a culmination of this trajectory, conceived together with the micro-phantasmagoria of protocols; the protocols of the bed are destined to serve labor and pleasure by homogenizing time into the apathy of involvement with homogeneous durations. The individuals in the black box bed forget where they are in a way similar to Avicenna's flying man experiment: paradoxically, a human in this situation of plausible soft incarceration proves that humans can still exist in a more-or-less voluntary exile from the representational mode, where reality can be intentionally or obligatorily avoided—always already conscious.[19] A black box bed is supposed to guarantee a chosen plausible representation of reality for the person whom it accommodates; the material scenography of the place where the user lays seems to become unimportant, because this is the bed's transformative power; transforming narratives of reality into the banality of the bed. The type of sleep generated by the already-visible (and still-hidden as such) contemporary figure of this bed is a permanent acceptance of representation as a questionable mediated sphere where nothing stands as real, yet. Sleep on the black box bed can also be described as a quasi-permanent state of hypnotized insomnia; sleep follows awakening, and awareness follows unconsciousness, while the vigilance of any external world becomes programmatically targeted. The output of this black box bed as described here is more a transformation of the real into an acceptable representational mode; it is an input rather than an output. The idiosyncratic black box, an autoreferential setting, directs the user to a permanent state of silent comfort. If Marshall McLuhan's leitmotiv "medium is the message" was a solid basis for the creation of the new post-Western subject, we witness a specification of this process that relates the use of the media to a desired stability of a social system.[20] Images and sound are used in order to create a characteristic social silence. In this new stability, the position of the user becomes mediatic in the sense that today the bed becomes the message.

16   Strangely enough, we have to include in this history of laziness a particular side of education; it is not only in the emblematic approach with regard to a noble apraxia found in the *Future of Our Educational Institutions*, which Friedrich Nietzsche maintained in 1872 while teaching in Basel. Nietzsche was then emphasizing an aristocratic knowledge that was addressed to having no practical goal. Additionally, the etymology of the word *school* (-σχολή in ancient Greek) is the same word, only differently accented, as σχόλη, meaning leisure, as Jacques Brunschwig mentions. Schools in their Greek versions were places for doing nothing other than theoretical investigation, theory (θεωρία) meaning then "viewing from afar."

17   *The House for Doing Nothing* was the focus of a solo exhibition at the Frac Centre-Val de Loire in Orléans, France, from April 27 to September 16, 2018. The exhibition was curated by Abdelkader Damani and Luca Galofaro.

18   "Heterotopic Architectures: Žižek Residence by Aristide Antonas (in dialogue with dpr-barcelona)," The Funambulist, effective July 1, 2011, https://thefunambulist.net/editorials/heterotopic-architectures-zizek-residence-by-aristide-antonas-in-dialogue-with-dpr-barcelona-2.

19   Adolfo Bioy Casares, *Plan de Evasión* [A Plan for Escape] (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1945).

20   *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, 1964.

Thinking back to this itinerary between fragments projected into a state of political apraxia because of an acceptance of a representational order of things, we can now describe the era of the black box bed: Plato's obligatory engagement to representation, Avicenna's sufficiency of an exterior-less world, Descartes's illusion as reality, Melnikov's controlled sleep, Žižek's bed-exhibitionism of withdrawal; these nodes were selected as belonging to the same tradition of the West due to a piece of furniture under schematization. They also open the chapter for the next season for humans. And the question that corresponds to this new phase will be the question of politics in the era of the black box bed.

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Aristide Antonas is an architect, writer, and visual artist living and working in Athens and Vienna. His architecture is presented as a theoretical investigation linking fiction to practice. His latest publication is *Archipelago of Protocols* (2016).

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