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Isabelle Doucet, *The Practice Turn in Architecture: Brussels after 1968*

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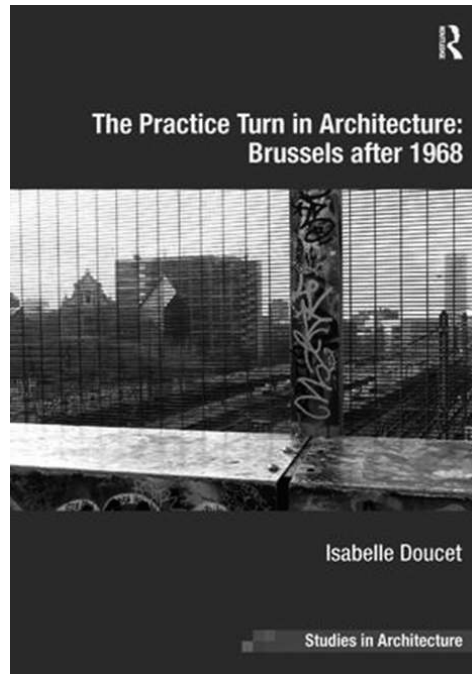
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Isabelle Doucet, *The Practice Turn in Architecture: Brussels after 1968*, London, Routledge, 244 pp. - July 2015 – Paperback: £14 - ISBN 978-1-4724-3735-8 / Hardback: £56 - ISBN 978-1-3153-0875-3

- 1 *The Practice Turn in Architecture: Brussels after 1968* is a book about architectural theory and its critical theory legacy. It addresses the transformations and hopes for criticality under recent debates in architectural theory that we can call «practice turn in architecture». The case study in this sense is Brussels and its critical practices; the guide-question of the book is «how to find a point of entry to this complex city?». Isabelle Doucet decided to study this kind of critical practices in Brussels after a symbolic date, not only for the city but for the Europe in general, “the 1968”. The connection between politics and architectural theory is clear: how we can try to understand the semantic of “participation” or “access” after the revolution of 1968? The starting point is the crises of the criticality in



recent architectural theory and the author, in this sense, would like to unpack the methodological relevance and challenges of pragmatism perspectives for architectural theory. Only after this premise, that is of course a sort of philosophical premise, it's possible for Doucet the argumentation about a strong relationship between Brussels (as a model), architectural theory and pragmatism. This is the reason of the transformation of this book: from an academic book to a journey. Navigating between Brussels' two official faces is not an easy matter: politics and underground culture, Dutch and French, Europe and Anti-Europe... Based on this strange double-soul of the city Isabelle Doucet used the interview as a favorite instrument for critical theory legacy in architecture. The City, this is the argument of the author, is a practice (a sort of architectural equivalent of “form of life” in Wittgenstein philosophy): «cities are fabricated through landmark buildings, but they are equally enacted by citizens, users, mind-sets, words, and all sorts of mundane infrastructure and practices». The city as a natural object, the idea of “city” a sort of aggregate of architectural structure, is completely different from the idea of “city” as a social object: the practices and performance makes a city, this is the point (city without performance is engineering, not architecture). After a brief introduction to architectural culture in Brussels Doucet, indeed, dedicated its analysis to the practical turn in architecture in urban planning. Since the mid-Nineties a new generation of theorist started to challenge a critical theory that had become only intellectualized and whose contribution to design practice had been limited to abstract and formal experimentations (this is the begin of the division between “old” and “new” theorising). The new generation of architects, after 1968, are the authors of the transformation of architecture in a practice of life: a several socio-technological and economic changes are now a strong ingredient of the assumptions in architecture. Brussels in this sense was a privilege theater: the practice turn in this city coincided with significant changes in the architectural profession and architects were mobilized in a global market economy through their landmark buildings or stararchitect status. This is the begin also of a “new pragmatism”: «confronted with a post-political city

informing an appeased architectural practice, architectural theorist did not just search for new modes of theorising architecture through practice, but also for modes to theories critical engagement thorough practice». Isabelle Doucet traces the history of this movement until the rising of the Interstitial Activism: an epochal campaign in the heart of Brussels by squatting in a vacant housing block threatened by demolition; this action involved artist, activist, intellectuals and civil society. The rhetoric of participation became reality: is the transition from the institutional project to the practice from the bottom. The Interstitial Activism was a space of encounter, an interstices (Heidegger) of refusal of dominant orders. Based on this part of the history of Brussels Isabelle Doucet argue that not only architecture, but also life in general, emerges from interstices (a space of encounter between body, design and environment).

- 2 In general the book is characterized as a sort of detailed agenda for architecture after the critical reappraisal of architectural debates from the Sixties through to the Nineties. Brussels, despite the masterful guide of Doucet to the city, is an excuse to explore the radical connection between philosophy, architecture and social progress.

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