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Ambiance of annihilation: Emerging oppositions to openness

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Abstract. *The tittle explores ambiental thresholds and emergence of immateriality, in contemporary architectural and landscape design, on the basis of interaction between synthetic vocabulary and environmental performativity. Contemporary environmental design advancements form the epicenter of the submitted doctrine. By juxtaposition of systematic environmental speculations with ‘the rustic’, two levels of annihilation are detected. The first deals with amplification of tangible boundaries, able to embed new environmental properties and the second with invisible instrumental values. Having traced and put into words this evolution – from natural environs as we know them, towards unprecedented environmental performativity – this paper discusses multiple issues of human tolerance and ambiental engagement.*

Keywords: *annihilation, environmental design, nature, performativity*

Introduction: The weather outside is sunny and bright

This paper is formed on further elaboration of extended research outcome on dematerialisation of (architectural and landscape) ‘enclosure’. The tittle indicates levels of extinction or obliteration of boundaries between manmade environs and their surroundings. ‘Ambiance of Annihilation’ aims at discussing certain spatial qualities on emerging speculations of environmental design. The paper discusses certain observations on modes of immateriality and proximity to natural environment, between two different theories; that of Marc-Antoine Laugier, as expressed through his ‘Essay on Architecture’ (1755) and that of Sean Lally, as expressed through her doctrine on ‘Material energies’ (2014).

Within this scope, the very notion of ‘enclosure’ can be discussed and questioned, in various ways. How can we define ‘enclosure’ in contemporary thinking? Where does it start and where does it end? Looking back, towards essential orders of ‘enclosure’, for man in his primitive state, there is the urgent quest for place of rest (Laugier, 1755 -p. 9 - 14). ‘*On the banks of a quietly flowing brook he notices a stretch of grass; its fresh greenness is pleasing to his eyes, its tender down invites him; he is drawn there and stretched out at leisure on this sparkling carpet, he thinks of nothing else but enjoying the gift of nature; he lacks nothing he does not wish for anything*’. For this methodological environmental narrative, natural ambiance very soon transforms from ‘*place of rest*’ to ‘*cognitive place*’ and soon the man, even in his

primitive state, becomes aware of multiple thresholds of shelter and 'enclosure', opposing to endless territory of natural openness. *'But soon the scorching heat of the sun forces him to look for shelter. A nearby forest draws him to its cooling shade; he runs to find a refuge in its depth, and there he is content. But suddenly mists are rising, swirling round and growing denser, until thick clouds cover the skies; soon torrential rain pours down on this delightful forest. The savage in his leafy shelter does not know how to protect himself from the uncomfortable damp that penetrates everywhere; he creeps into a nearby cave and, finding it dry, he praises himself for his discovery. But soon darkness and foul air surrounding him makes his stay unbearable again. He leaves and is resolved to make good by his ingenuity the careless neglect of nature. He wants to make himself a dwelling that protects, but does not bury him. Some fallen branches in the forest are the right material for this purpose; he chooses four of the strongest, raises them upright and arranges them in a square; ... Thus man is housed'*¹. Thus man is protected and recessed from inconvenient and unpredicted natural openness.

For Marc-Antoine Laugier, all splendors of 'enclosure' humanity ever conceived have been modeled on the *'little rustic hut'* that he described very long back, intending to comment upon principles on different kinds of edifice and organisation of urban open space. In his line of collimation with natural order, carefully chosen pieces of natural matter set upright, horizontally and on top of each other, create order of column, entablature, pediment and roof. Therefore, columns and ceiling (entablature and pediment) become the essential vocabulary of 'enclosure' for Laugier, who never lost sight of *'little rustic hut'*. Man in his primitive state engages with natural environ, becoming gradually aware of natural intensity and potential thresholds of habitation. The state of primitive 'enclosure' and invention of primal synthetic vocabulary is consistent with nature (the tree: column, the forest and the cave: ceiling and protective surrounding). Humanity has performed great evolution from engagement with green *'sparkling carpet'* of natural rest to inventive surfaces 'with embedded sources of energy' (Lally, 2014 -p. 70–71). In Sean Lally's recent publication *'The air from other planets. A brief History of Architecture to come'* someone may reference to various expressions of emerging immateriality. Despite the fact that S. Lally concentrates on applications of contemporary scientific advances, undoubtedly fictional at many levels, it is impossible to overlook the originality of the approach, towards a very promising emerging direction and sensitiveness in future re-orientation of symbolic vocabulary for 'enclosure'.

Sean Lally (2014 -p. 41) states that the natural surface we inhabit is currently being re-invented through refinements of existing layers (masses, pockets of space, etc.). Her speculations involve continuities of manipulations that gradually make use of unprecedented materials that might have never been considered for protection or 'enclosure'. How would we imagine 'shells of air' in order to further create new spaces?

1. *The original reference is from Laugier's 'Essay on Architecture', in which its true principles are explained and invariable rules proposed for directing the judgment and forming the taste of the gentleman and the architect, with regard to the different kinds of buildings, the embellishment of cities and the planning of gardens; published by T. Osborne and Shipton (1755). Available at <https://archive.org/details/essayonarchitect00laugrich>, visited on 5th of May 2016. The precise extracts are from a later version in English published by Hennessey & Ingalls, Inc. (1977).*

Within such juxtaposition between primitive forming of taste for 'enclosure', based on comprehension of crafting, and speculations of designing the energy within human environment, obvious shift of paradigms can be stated. The parameters of such a shift lay far beyond the extent of this paper. Within this shift, two levels of emergence of immateriality are detected. The reasoning of this distinction is based upon elemental and ambiental thresholding, and furthermore about qualities and statements of stepping detachment of materialistic territories. Within certain bewilderment arising, there are questions about re-definitions of essential principles of 'enclosure' within environmental appropriation to come.

The first level of this subtle distinction is dealing with obliteration of precendented 'enclosure', potential amplification of boundaries, in order to render conventional statements hidden or un-seen. The second is dealing with instrumentation of 'enclosure' and dispensation of conventional statement of separation, towards encircling qualities.

Abandoned hierarchies *'The column must be strictly perpendicular, because being intended to support the whole load, perfect verticality gives it its greatest strength'* (Laugier, 1755 -p. 15–17). This can be described as state of pure reasoning and brave steps towards a direction of rationalisation of 'enclosure'. But it can also be viewed as mere observation of natural surroundings, in the means of mimicing of trees that are naturally perpendicular or almost. *'The column must be free-standing so that its origin and purpose are expressed in a natural way'* (Laugier, 1755 -p. 15–17), or else it must be freestanding as the tree in natural context. *'The column must be round because nature makes nothing square. The column must be tapered from bottom to top in imitation of nature where this diminution is found in all plants'* (Laugier, 1755 -p. 15–17). Finally, *'the column must rest directly on the floor as the posts of the rustic hut rest directly on the ground'* (Laugier, 1755 -p. 15–17). Whether architecture has surpassed or not the essential order of architecture as Marc-Antoine Laugier traced it and stated it, in his *'little rustic hut'*, is not in the course of this paper. The mode of imitation and further representation or reproduction of structural properties detected in nature is a point taken and could further be opposed to emerging qualities of 'enclosure', in cases of environmental design advancements.

Marc-Antoine Laugier also states that *'people want to live in closed spaces, not in open halls'* (Laugier, 1755 -p. 15–17). It is upon this statement that he is willing to overcome the rational of natural consistency. It is for the sake of 'enclosure', which is not structurally or synthetically necessary but established for purposes of human tolerance, that Laugier is faulting natural consistency. Maybe someone could view an attempt of describing potential re-arrangement of natural elements and forest matter, in means of creating diminutive protection, rather than 'enclosure'.

'A building of freestanding columns carrying an entablature needs no doors or windows; but, being open on all sides, it is uninhabitable. The need for protection from the inclemencies of the weather and other more engaging motifs force us to fill in the intercolumniations and, consequently doors and windows are needed' (Laugier, 1755 -p. 52–53). At this point, Laugier discusses natural consistency, overlooked once again, due to additional extents of tolerance. From natural consistency to energetic performativity, various properties of human habitation can be transformed.

On certainty: 'Enclosure' questioned & emerging hierarchies

Architecture is much more than diminutive 'enclosure' on a given setting. It is the re-invention of the setting itself (Lally, 2014 – p. 11). Starting from this someone can trace different states of being 'enclosed'. The microclimates of internal heating and cooling, outdoor shadows and artificial lighting, vegetation, the importation of building materials, and the new activities that will occur there create new places in time on-site (Lally, 2014 – p. 11–12). Stereotypical 'enclosure' consists of walls that are used to define an outline created to protect what lies on one side of this, from the climatic or environmental context on the other side (Lally, 2014 – p. 12). It is difficult to overstate just how much, both the creator and the 'enclosed', rely on these very outline to define what we refer to as 'enclosure' (Lally, 2014 – p. 12). Sean Lally confidently and clearly states that strategies, for how we organise activities and define physical boundaries in an environmental context, will be fundamentally re-written. Shifts from clearly defined boundaries to Intensities nested within their surroundings can be traced in landscape design, throughout known history of mankind. Oasis, as a pocket of moisture, vegetation and vivid colours, set against a backdrop of monotone territory is a timeless stereotypical 'enclosure' (Lally, 2014 – p. 13). Instead of conceiving space as a mass of inert and ossified energy, standing in opposition to its surroundings and carving out space, why not seek to intensifying those very energy systems we know that are capable of creating micro-climates and distinct eco-systems. Therefore, energy systems would become architectural materials themselves (Lally, 2014 – p. 14). Instead of dealing with the shell or the surface boundary, why not dealing with the space itself.

The boundary attributes properties of 'enclosure', by exaggeration of difference between the inside and the outside, the 'enclosed' and the open. An intelligent groundcover system, capable of shaping distinct spaces that people can engage and use regardless of existing environmental forces, is different to the stereotype of oasis, in means of statement, but perhaps is not different in means of performance. Embedded in the groundcover system could be sources of light, heat, moisture and sound, performing to define distinct spatial conditions.

Environments of no qualities

Nature encloses, in the means that trees do, forests do, caves do, and so on. This is a fact that can be discussed through a variety of direct and indirect references. According to Marc-Antoine Laugier human edifice, at least those created for human habitation, are consistent with natural order, comprehending and even reproducing specific aspects of natural entities. Does energy 'enclose'? According to Sean Lally and Weathers practicing team, 'material energies' are about to become a set of building materials. To what extend is the artificiality of interior space a desirable achievement for contemporary living. What happens when the weather inside is sunny and bright?

Within this line of thinking, there could be certain unexplored thresholds between re-arrangement of matter (primitive and crafted 'enclosure') and re-circulation of energy (advanced and superficial 'enclosure'), between walking into and moving round, between protective environment and revolving environment. The '*little rustic hut*' was conceived through means of understanding, explaining and re-producing essential principles of natural matter. Separation could be detected as fundamental

tool for protection, in this primitive state. But what is the tool for protection in emerging performative 'enclosures'?

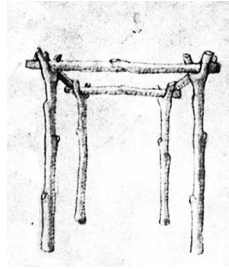


Figure 1. Primitive hut



Figure 2. 'Midsummer Snow Storm', 2009. Peter Liversidge

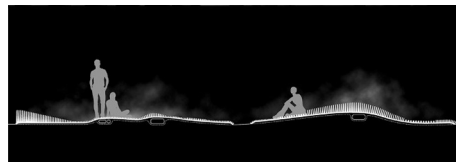


Figure 3. 'Shagg', 2009–2010. Section. Sean Lally WEATHERS



Figure 4. 'Wanderings', 2008–2010. Rendering. Sean Lally WEATHERS

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