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Laugier's Primitive Hut as a guiding architectural principle is a contradiction of its theory when applied to today's houselessness epidemic in the United States

One who studies architecture will inevitably become acquainted with Laugier and his theory on what is considered correct and good architecture. It is from the graphic illustration of Laugier's "primitive hut" that years of architectural history formulated a grandiose and fabricated foundational story— one that pushed the glory and beauty of Greek and Roman architecture. However, what would happen if we applied Laugier's principles— taking the image of the Primitive Hut— and relating it to something considered grotesque, incorrect, and by most— not even befitting the category of architecture? For as long as humans have been housed, houselessness has existed, like the two sides of a coin. If a home exists, then there inevitably is someone who lives in one— and one who does not. So, while architects praise and glorify the classical orders, the foundations of structure, and even formulate fairytale like origin stories— the unhoused remain cast aside. Unhoused individuals are often considered "lesser," "a nuisance," and "an eyesore" in society— viewed much more negatively and "below" the mighty and historic field of architecture. How, as ethically- and morally correct architects, can individuals agree and praise Laugier, but continue to dismiss unhoused encampments?

The illustration on the cover of Laugier's *Essai' Sur L'Architecture* displays the image of a woman in classical Greek dress, gesturing towards a structure formed by four trees. The four trees imitate pillars, the leaves forming a pediment above. The message behind the image is clear, as the trees mimic classical Greek orders and architecture, the cherub bystander and woman lounging on elements from metopes, and columns— solidifies the belief that Greek and Roman architecture was formulated from nature (Laugier).

It is important to clearly define what is meant by homeless when discussing such a nuanced and complex issue. Today, it has become more favorable to use the term houseless, as a home is far different from a house. From Christine McCarty, "Home is a relationship with place, where building is conveniently present, but not foregrounded." (McCarty). In relation to architecture it becomes a gray area— many claiming that individuals are homeless as they do not live in traditional structures or buildings. However, it is entirely classist, and ridiculous to brush off houseless individuals' encampments or areas of stay as not worthy of the title of architecture.

If Laugier's primitive hut is the foundation, the beginning, of all beautiful buildings— can one wave off houseless structures as something beneath architecture. Today in architecture, what is and is not defined as good architecture is blurred and often lost, but by drawing from Laugier's tale of the Primitive Hut, "...he is in need of a place to rest... 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 his purpose; he chooses four of the strongest raises them upright and arranges them in a square; across their top he lays four other branches; on these he hoists from two sides yet

another row of branches which. Inclining towards each other meeting at their highest point. He then covers this kind of roof with leaves so tightly packed that neither sun nor rain can penetrate. Thus, man is housed.” (Laugier). Laugier's foundational words for the beginning of architecture create a grandiose story, one that when applied to houseless structures of today, lends itself to the very foundation of architecture and the need for shelter. So, it becomes blatant that the high and mighty discipline of architecture is selective in what Laugier's words are employed on. Truly, how do these principles not apply to houseless individuals today? It is clear that architecture as a discipline chooses to be classist and disregard houseless shelters and encampments as beneath it.

If the Primitive Hut stands as the foundation of correct architecture, and was the creation of a house, how is it ethical or correct to destroy houseless individuals' camps, or places of residence? Today, houseless individuals are displaced without regard, even criminalized in the process. In San Diego, CA, Mayor Todd Gloria has pushed ordinances that allow for unhoused individuals to be displaced, “With Gloria’s blessing, Whitburn [city councilman] said he will next month introduce an ordinance banning camping on public property when shelter options are

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It becomes evident that the image of the Primitive Hut in pure design elements does not stray far from that of a tent or simple shelter– and so the question remains– what differentiates the Primitive Hut, and modern houseless encampments? The answer is quite simple, classism. Classism is deeply rooted in architecture, both historically and today, while Greek and Roman works are celebrated in western architecture, buildings created by common people or as necessity are disregarded, “‘It’s a war on the poor,’ Theo Henderson often likes to note. And indeed, it is, in the liberal city of Los Angeles, where homelessness is the leading public issue of concern. While politicians expand the criminalization of homelessness and promise to “end encampments,” thousands of Angelenos are consigned to living and dying on the streets, and thousands more are on the edge of eviction.” (Henderson). It is time that architecture and even moreso, society recognizes that everyone deserves a dwelling, and if western culture is to continually romanticize and uphold concepts such

as the Primitive Hut— homes of all varieties must be recognized as architectural feats. The imagery of the cover of the Primitive Hut celebrates and glorifies simplistic and necessary design as the root and beginning of the entire profession, and so as houseless encampments are torn down— brushed off as lesser than, it becomes evident that to the West the Primitive Hut is only applicable to buildings belonging to individuals in a higher class. There must be a shift in how houseless encampments are perceived and regarded as a whole, both from an architectural and societal standpoint. As architects, and humans alike, housing must be regarded in the same light in the Primitive Hut, a feat of effort, of necessity, and foundation. Housing is a human right— and no structure is to fall beneath the discipline of architecture.

Work Cited

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Henderson, Theo, and Roy Ananya. “Everyone Has an Idea for Solving Homelessness. What If We Listened to the Unhoused?” *Los Angeles Times*, Los Angeles Times, 9 May 2022, www.latimes.com/lifestyle/image/story/2022-05-09/theo-henderson-ananya-roy-on-solutions-los-angeles-homelessness-unhoused-erasure-nimbys.

Written in 2022, the article “Everyone Has an Idea for Solving Homelessness. What If We Listened to the Unhoused?” written by Theo Henderson and Ananya Roy, studies and relays the lives of houseless individuals— by interviewing those who live in Los Angeles and are unhoused. By interviewing houseless individuals and asking what they desire— the article is a great source for material that is not as greatly tainted by the bias of housed individuals. The information is helpful in pulling the perspective of unhoused people— and aids in the argument of classism within architecture and society.

Laugier, Marc-Antoine, et al. *An Essay on Architecture*. Hennessey & Ingalls, 2009.

Laugier’s *An Essay on Architecture* was written in 1753. Marc-Antoine Laugier, considered to be the first modern architectural theorist wrote *An Essay on Architecture* in efforts to persuade readers to return architecture back to its foundations of classical order and simplicity. Citing Roman and Greek creations to be the most clean and beautiful work, and was in great opposition to Baroque architecture. This source stands as the groundwork for the argument of the above essay. Most importantly, the cover of the essay— which reveals an image of the Primitive Hut— a concept utilized to relay Laugier’s principles. As it is by taking Laugier’s theories on architecture and more specifically the Primitive Hut, and applying them to the houseless issue of the 21st century that the core of the essay can be explored.