



Two Way Mirror and Hedge Labyrinth', 1989

Notes

1 Marc-Antoine Laugier was a mid 18th Century French urban planner and theorist. Like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Laugier set up his model of the 'elemental rustic hut' to criticize the degradation of modern urban society: architecture would be derived from an uncontaminated Nature. The 'rustic hut' was supposed to be a reduction to man's and architecture's original nature to its 'own self-sufficiency...when there was no oppression of man by man, architecture and man were closest to nature.' Laugier's designs for the cityscape saw the 'city as a forest'.

The metaphor of 'Nature' which Laugier had introduced into the urban order took the form of a symbolic antidote to the corruptions of this city order, while at the same time, paradoxically, being an ideological rationale which sought to naturalize the city as contemporary environment which replaces nature – or becomes a better nature.

Laugier himself turned to city planning, recommending that the urban street plan be laid out in a picturesque manner to represent nature. Thus the city was to become a picturesque, forest-like parkscape with winding streets like the country as the basis of its structure. Gradually the needs of capitalism rationalized the urban plan. More logical and geometrically renewing plans developed, so that buildings could be erected and demolished every ten or twenty years while maintaining the overall layout and semiotic logic of the city.

2 – The 18th Century, neo-classical formal garden evokes a romantic version of the Greek myth of Arcadia. The park within the city represents the domestication of the countryside and the triumph of the bourgeois order over the rule of the aristocratic nobility (landed class). The park within the city served to rationalise the contradictions between the city and the natural environment in now exploited as well as to obscure the true historical relation of the city relative to the earlier system involving cultivation of the countryside. The picturesque was a way to internalize the old aristocratic order. The countryside, for the rationalists of the new order, was also the only point from which to criticise the degeneration of urban society. Laugier's myth of the 'primitive hut' paralleled Rousseau's notion of the 'Natural Man': urban architecture was to be ideally derived from its pure state as both Greek pure form and uncontaminated Nature, a reduction to Man's and Original Nature.

On My Two-Way Mirror Pavilions

Short Statement by Dan Graham

My pavilions in two-way mirror glass mimic the condition of architecture in the city. They simultaneously evoke the historical precedent of garden pavilion forms from the Renaissance and rococo fabriques in the Western garden-art to the Chinese garden pavilions, which used circular open portals and windows. Renaissance pavilions were often quasi-educational as well as entertaining experiences.

My pavilions are to be experienced from both the inside and outside. Depending on the lighting conditions at a given moment, then can be mirrorized on the outside, and thus conceal the existence of interior viewers or equally transparent and reflective simultaneously from inside and outside. They demonstrate to the viewers their own bodies and themselves as perceiving subjects – and also allow them to see other spectators perceiving themselves. The relation of inside to outside because of the perceptual properties of the materials constituting the pavilions, is in constant flux, dependent upon the clouds, sun and environmental features. These alterations in turn effect the perceptions of the viewers, their perceptions of themselves, of other spectators, of the landscape, the material/structure of the pavilion.

The properties of the mirror-reflective-glass used in the pavilions' sides cause one side to be either more reflective or more transparent than the other side at any given moment. A pavilion with a transparent ceiling allows any overhead sunlight to fall directly upon its interior walls – causing them to be more light-reflective than the outside of that pavilion. People outside of this pavilion can more readily see inside, while people inside see images of themselves in the mirror, but less of the outside. This changes every moment relative to the cloud cover and position of the sun in the sky as well as the shadowing of the nearby trees. On a cloudy day a state of almost equivalent semi-transparency/semi-mirror reflectiveness is the norm. By contrast, much more of a difference in the reflectiveness of the outer surface against the inside surface exists on a bright sunny day.

My pavilions are architecturally usable spaces – temporary, outdoor shelters in an Arcadian tradition. This 'type' begins after the Enlightenment with the notion of the 'elemental rustic hut', first proposed by Marc-Antoine Laugier. (1) The 'rustic hut', the 19th century gazebo, the temporary pavilion built by de Stijl or Modern architects for expositions, and the contemporary urban and suburban bus shelter are 3 historical-type precedents. The Arcadian setting recapitulates a process through the French Garden to the English Garden through the Sculpture Park – the dual myths of Arcadia and the Edenic Garden. The places the materials and forms of the modern city – glass and reflective-glass with steel supports – in a 'natural' or utopian setting.(2)