

## MIMESIS & C<sup>IE</sup> – THE (UN)WALLED MAN

### Author :

Jean-Jacques JUNGERS  
 Assistant and PhD researcher  
 UCL Loci Bxl Belgium  
[jean-jacques.jungers@uclouvain.be](mailto:jean-jacques.jungers@uclouvain.be)

### ABSTRACT / INTRODUCTION :

From the Borromean knotting of concepts world, scene and obscene which represent the material, symbolic and mythological dimensions of our environment, the article explains the process of civilization at work in our societies. In our view, this process characterized itself by the *obscene placing* – to put behind the scene, in French *mise obscène* – of an important part of our environment. It is specific to the social animal that is the human being. When he stands on the scene, he always hides a part of his condition. The one he is ashamed because it places him in front of the ontological void that constitutes him.

The modern movement radicalized this process by elevating the *obscene placing* up to a principle. This principle constitutes, in our opinion, a denial of together : the complexity of the human being, the fragility of his environment and the specificity of his condition. However, it was the way, followed by the moderns, to hide themselves the ontological void which they were nevertheless constituted. As a result appears a new man, a *man without condition* which, surrounded by the comforting decor of the scene, has lost the consciousness of both, its constitutive frailty (body and environment) and the destructive nature of its own way of life. If one refers to scientific forecasts, he now runs blindly towards an imminent ecological drama that could end with nothing other than the inhabitability of his own planet.

This opens a double urgency: first, to identify and understand the devices at work in the process of *obscene placing* and subsequently, to reflect on how to change them. It being understood that human awareness would impact its behavior and, thus, would influence the catastrophic projections of our scientists.

According to our interpretation of the Lacanian definition of primitive architecture, it can be considered as one of those devices because it allows the man to isolate the obscene from the scene (Jungers 2015). Hence, we hypothesize, to open what follows, that the plausibility of the mimesis is related to the mimetic power of architecture. Mimesis and mimetic would, therefore, be two sides of the same coin. Mimesis is ideational. It traditionally regulates the imitative arts in the way nature has to be represented. Mimetic is material. It allows some animals to survive in this nature by using, according to Roger Caillois, three strategies: intimidation, transvestism and camouflage.

To clarify the links between mimesis and mimetic, we will draw hereafter, the contours of this particular animal that is the man, at the same time, talking, symbolic and social animal. On the way we will approach the issues of mimesis and mimetic which will allow us to conclude by pointing three devices used by architecture to hide the obscene: the wall (hiding), the type (meaning) and the parergon (sublimation). These three devices enable the human being not only to hide from himself the obscene, but more than that, to hide from himself that architecture which itself hides.

### Keywords :

*architecture, urbanism, psychoanalysis, philosophy, anthropology, ...*



## HOMO SAPIENS

Why would the human animal be different from the other animals? How could we consider that he is not, he would reply, him who became the first geological force of the planet (Anthropocene)? How to explain this unique rise in the animal kingdom, him yet that nothing originally predestined, to the hegemony of the living, considering his constitutive fragility compared with other animal species?

### Talking animal

We will respond first, that the human being is a talking animal. He is able, like many other animal species, to produce signs understandable by someone else. Excepting one difference : only the human language allows to bring to the consciousness of each other, things that do not exist (Harari 2015). Only the man is able to point a phenomenon or to invoke a transcendental idea and thereby able to mobilize a group in the name of that idea. Values, beliefs, symbols, ... constitute the “mythical glue” (Harari 2015) which allows the multitude to act as one man, offsetting the weakness that originally characterized the human animal.

### Symbolic animal

We answer, then, that man is a symbolic animal. From this ability to deal with the non-existent appears in the head of the human animal, the consciousness of the indetermination of his own existence and, with it, the perception of a void. This essential void or *ontological void* generates a lacking, that of meaning. For Sartre, the real particularity of the human being is that he feels the need to define his own essence, i.e. his place in the light of the “Great Whole”. Therefore, the human animal searches, by necessity, a transcendental logic, a “world” because, on the representation of it, will depend the definition of his essence, his function, his role. This role in whose name he will transform his environment to accommodate the scene. Von Uexküll, whom we mentioned above, does not escape the rule when he concludes his book “a foray into the worlds of animals and humans” by introducing us to the idea of the “One”. “If one wanted to sum up [the] objective characteristics [of the different environments, he said], only chaos would result. And yet, all these different environments are fostered and borne along by the One that is inaccessible to all environments forever” (von Uexküll 1956). Despite its inaccessibility, von Uexküll thus poses that a transcendental coherence does exist just like the tree around which many animals and insects live without being aware of its existence. This transcendental coherence, he calls it *welt*, literally “world”.

The symbolic animal which is man finds himself driven by the lack of meaning. So much that he can be seen as the prisoner of “meaning”. Originally it was even “very difficult [for him] to distinguish between the two spheres of the being and the meaning” (Cassirer 1975). This is, for example, the case with the Hopi, an indian animist society of Arizona. The snake because of its formal analogy with lightning plays a central role in their traditional secret ceremonies. By the strict observance of these ceremonies, the snake allows them to control the rain. According to Aby Warburg,

[...] The creation of a symbol, for example, the “snake” for the lightning, should be seen as an act of intellectual emancipation. Frightened, the Indian seeks to understand the fleeting phenomenon of lightning by comparing it to a snake, that he is capable of handling concretely. Better: the two entities merge - and what is remarkable is that, in his thoughts, he omits the “like” that maintains separate the two elements of his comparison: for him is the lightning snake. [...] If the flash is uncontrollable, we can take control of the snake, although it inspires dread. He can make it part of his body (Fritz Saxl in Warburg, 2011).

In our region, advertisers have long understood our primitive inclination to the lack of distinction between signifier and signified by loading with world any object they wish to make desirable. Thus, everything is done to make us believe that Michael Jordan, a well-known basketball player, jumps so high thanks to the magic shoes he wears and not because of a long and repeated training. Just like the snake and the lightning for the Hopi, a symbol can be defined as a three-dimensional object: spatial, temporal and social (Debray 2001).

But if this inclination to the indistinction is, as we said, the prison of the human animal, it is also his opportunity since knowledge builds itself through symbolization. It begins, in fact, through the establishment of a first connection between a meaning and a thing. Over time, this link will be questioned if the man makes the observation of its inadequacy. It continues with the research and the definition of a new link which, over time, will himself be questioned. According to Elias, the civilizing process would go in the direction of an increasing congruence between meaning and materiality. The use of the symbol “sun”, for example, is “more congruent with reality [today] that it was the case a hundred or even thousand years ago when we believed that the sun god traveled the sky in his fiery chariot” (Elias 2015). Ernst Cassirer explains the emergence of religion to the detriment of magic in the same way:

It is the insufficiency and the failure of the magic that opened the way to religion. It was necessary the decline of the magic that gives birth to the religion. The man saw that he had taken for causes what was not, and that all these efforts to act all these imaginary causes were unsuccessful. His sentence was sterile his curious ingenuity had remained unproductive. He had pulled strings to which nothing was attached (Cassirer 1975).

Gradually, the human animal has risen from the practice of magic to the practice of religion, science, etc. Some troubled periods of history contradict this trend although it seems that the long term confirms it. They are there to remind us that this virtuous movement is not guaranteed.

In art, this quest for knowledge has led to what we name the mimesis. Like the man who, at a young age, learns through imitation, humanity through art has started to produce a representation of his environment. “Like all other symbolic forms, art is not the simple reproduction of a given reality, ready-made. This is one of the paths to an objective view of things and human life. This is not an imitation but a discovery of reality” (Cassirer 1975).

In the book X of the Republic, Plato warns against the so-called imitative arts. He disqualifies them through the painter that he relegates to the rank of an imitator in the third position behind the artisan (who knows practically how to make a bed) and God (who is at the origin of the concept) (Platon 1993). Therefore, Plato in the name of a beautiful, good and true world, will throw out of the scene the imitative arts in order to deliver the human animal from the false and the deceit.

Aristotle has a different opinion on the question. He divides human knowledges into three main areas; the theoretical (physics, mathematics and metaphysics), practical (ethics and politics) and poetic sciences (productions). In the latter, he further distinguishes disciplines who complete nature in performing what it is unable to perform (such as, for example, architecture, medicine, shoemaking, agriculture, etc.) of those which merely imitate it (as it is the case of sculpture, painting, music, poetry, etc.). Although distinct in their end, they join, however, both through the protocol that governs their production. By enacting rules, as it was the case for example with the “Beaux Arts”, the human animal equally defines the right way to imitate and to complete nature, binding thereby architecture and the imitative arts. Moreover, for Aristotle, unlike Plato, the imitative arts product should not be seen from the theoretical angle but under the very specific angle of the poetic sciences. This one does not reside in a quest for objectivity, but rather for universality. It is precisely there that they educate us on ourselves. Moreover, it is because the act of imitating is a source of knowledge, that it is also a source of pleasure. Consequently, this source constitutes the first engine of poetry, the consideration of the viewer being the second. His satisfaction derives from the representation based simultaneously on the feelings and the intelligence required to understand the causal links that constitute the fiction. These multiple movements from which emerge a tension in the spectator’s head lead, in the end, to a liberating outcome. It relieves the spectator from the tensions generated by the story and, in the same movement, from a part of the tensions of his own life. Fiction has, therefore, a power of purgation called Catharsis (L'Atelier d'Esthétique 2002). The imitative arts are a source of knowledge and balance. There is, therefore, no reason for Aristotle to reject them outside of the city.

The mimesis is not a copy but rather an imitation. It is more a free reproduction of the nature that does not oblige to the accuracy. It departs from the model where it is not appropriate (Littré 1874). Thus, Alberti in his treatise on painting writes: “consider always in nature what we want to paint and always retain what is the finest and most decent” (L'Atelier d'Esthétique 2002). Like the idealists for whom “the painter work for a single purpose: to restore his true nature to nature. The term mimesis is, therefore, paradoxical, since more than nature itself, the artist mimics the theoretical principle of this nature” (L'Atelier d'Esthétique 2002). This was also the case for the builder of the scene. Like the mimesis for painting, the man in the name of ideational representation of our environment, the world, determines what is worthy to stand on scene and what is not. “To ‘locate’ himself in a place, to organize it, to inhabit it, many actions which presuppose an existential choice: the choice of the universe that we are prepared to assume in ‘creating’ it. But this ‘universe’ is always a replica of the exemplary universe, created and inhabited by the gods: it, therefore, contributes to the holiness of the work of the gods” (Eliade 1957). So begins the battle between the world and the earth as reflected in the temple of Göbekli Tepe. Recent discoveries make it possible to believe that progresses in agriculture appeared “[...] to support the construction [...] of a temple. According to the conventional scheme, pioneers began by building a village. From prosperity, they built a temple in the center. However, Göbekli Tepe suggests that the temple could have been built first and that afterward a village was formed around” (Harari 2015). The hunter-gatherers passed gradually to agriculture during the building of the temple which confirms the thesis of Jacques Cauvin : the anteriority of the symbolic on the economic.

### **Social animal**

Finally, we will answer that man is a social animal. Within a society, he plays a role on scene in the name of the great Whole, the world. From the mismatch between the *imago mundi* that legitimizes his role and our environment arises a residue that needs to be concealed. This fact, Edgar Morin calls it the principle of exclusion (Morin 1994). Any model excludes not only the ideas that do not conform to it, but also the problems that it does not recognize. The scene and the obscene appears therefore with the appearance of the concept of *welt*, world, and its definition. From the scene, the human animal will thus extract everything that would prevent him to be what his vision of the world imposes him to be. This *obscene placing* doesn't always stem from a conscious choice. It imposes itself on the individual taken that he is in the bonds of mutual dependencies that attached himself to the others. (Elias 1969). In the process of civilization, repression evolves towards a form of auto control in favor of a prospective attitude. This phenomenon first appeared among the elites who see it as a means of distinction (Elias 1969). It then spreads into the lower classes which are attracted by the desire to belong to the upper classes. Thus, in history, nothing indicates that the degree of sensitivity has changed for rational reasons. “A lot of taboos that men use in their social relations have [...] not the slightest relation to hygiene: they draw their justification in the ‘painful feeling’ that results from their breach” (Elias 1969).

These “painful sensations” induced embarrassment which characterizes the man facing the object that brings him in front of the ontological void which constitutes him, precisely what he “refuses to be but is nevertheless condemned to be” (Anders 1956) a mortal animal who, without world, wanders. According to Elias, the civilizing process is directed towards “privatization” of every bodily function, to their rejection in specialized enclosures, out of the sight of the society.

All bodily functions are invested gradually with a feeling of shame and unwell from a social origin so that at the end even the words that evoke the subject are submitted by a set of rules and restrictions; men mutually hide these functions and avoid anything that could awaken the memory of those. When this is not possible - we think of the wedding - it uses sophisticated social ritual and verbal formulas that respect the norms of modesty, which help to overcome the shame, embarrassment, fear and other emotions aroused by these driving forces of human life (Elias 1969).

The moral and hygienic motivations are only, in the eyes of Elias, a means used to obtain a specific behavior from an individual, leaving him the illusion that it is his own choice. This manner of imposing behavior on individuals without their knowledge is the object of modern psychological theories, especially psychoanalytic. They deal with “conflicts between socially unfeasible instinctual forces on the one hand and the model of social requirements anchored in the individual on the other hand” (L'Atelier d'Esthétique 2002).

In a synthetic way, let us remember that the human animal together talking, symbolic and social animal, appropriates a part of its environment by arranging a scene on it which is rid of the obscene in the name of an ideational world.

## ARCHITECTURE

From our environment defined by our physiological faculties, we position the scene. It is bounded at its edge by a place where the natural meets the supernatural and drilled in many places by special locations that are termed sacred. As this is, for example, the case with the scene of the Hopi. It is defined, on one hand, by a natural border formed by the shores of the Great Canyon, the snowy mountains of Flagstaff, etc beyond which lies the realm of the mistress of the snakes, the Kachina spirits, etc. (Perez 2004). And on the other hand, it is drilled in several points by different places that enable the communication with “the dead and those who are not born yet”. In the Hopi tradition, these points can be a source, a cliff, a mountain, etc. They are fractures “in the homogeneity of space [...] symbolized by an ‘opening’, through which it is made possible to pass from a cosmic region to another.” (Eliade 1957). More generally, the metaphor used to name some of them is unambiguous, the navel, a gap that connects men to their nourishing mother, the earth. This is true for the Greek Omphalos (Greek temple), the Roman Umbilicus (Roman city) and the Sipaapu of the Hopi. The latter is a hole on the floor of the Kiva, the Hopi’s “temple”, which is mostly blocked by a piece of wood that is removed during ceremonies to allow spirits to incarnate. For that reason, these openings are called sacred. They cannot, as revealed by its etymology, be touched without being defiled and without soiling back because it contains a force that is always ready

to escape to the outside as a liquid, to discharge like electricity. So it is necessary to protect the sacred from the profane [...] It is an active nothingness that debases, degrades, ruins the fullness towards which it is defined. It is, therefore, appropriate to ensure a perfect isolation of the sacred and the profane : any contact is fatal to the one as to the other (Caillois 1950).

Hence, it comes the double meaning of the word, that of “sacred” and “cursed” (TLFI 2013). During the reconstruction of a Greek temple, for example, irrecoverable pieces could not be evacuated from the sanctuary because over time they have been contaminated and became sacred and should, therefore, be buried under the new temple. In the same order of idea, the Greek architect stated in their specifications, the need to evacuate from the site, within five days, all new stones considered unacceptable because of damage (Hellmann 1998). The relationship between the scene and the sacred is thus very sensitive. We now understand better why the sacred is kept out of the scene, obscene. Approaching one of these special places cannot, therefore, be done without severity and without observing codified behaviors. Some, as in the case of the Sipaapu, will require a particular arrangement at their edges in order to ensure the right distance between the profane and the sacred, between the scene and the obscene. This arrangement is called architecture, a prosthetic surround which enables the man to isolate the obscene from the scene by the establishment of an elaborate hardware device. This discipline articulates to do so the wall, the figure, and the parergon. These can create a distance that preserves the man of an overly abrupt relationship with the obscene. Thus offering the religious man “[...] two complementary areas : one where he can act without fear or trembling, but where its action uses only his superficial person, the other where a sense of personal dependency holds, contains, directs each of his impulses and where he sees himself unconditionally

compromise” (Caillois 1950). The “profane” man belongs the first environment. He must be preserved from the second. Only the priests and the Pythia had the right (and the power) to tread the adyton of the Greek temple. “The pilgrim does not enter the classical Greek temples, which is designed for an outdoor vision. It is a Doric peripteros around which we turn.” (Hellmann 1998). The primitive architecture may well be, from this point of view, considered like something that is organized around a gap. In the Republic, Plato allows us to measure the symbolic charge of this word in reporting us the testimony of a person that came back to life:

... in a certain prodigious place, wherein there are two gaps in the earth next to each other, and also in the heights, two other gaps of heaven, right in front [Souls] were telling stories to each other, some moaning and weeping at the memory of all they had seen and experienced during their journey under the earth [...] on the contrary, those who came from the sky told the happiness she had known and visions of unimaginable beauty (Platon 1993).

The temple would, for that reason, be this surround in the same time container and ultra signifying membrane that lines a gap (in Greek a chaos) enabling man to communicate with the dead's and the gods that are held obscene (hidden or inaccessible). The temple has, therefore, the dual task to prevent the mix between the living and the dead and to compensate or even to sublimate the drama being played within it by an excess of significance and order. The cave is its natural expression, the lifted stone its condensation, the cairn its development, the temple its improvement: a surround of an extravagant signifying power that borders a gap (a chaos) from which could gush the dead. Here stands, we believe, the mimetic origin of architecture, to contain and to dissolve the drama that is being played within it.

Let's turn now to the mimetics categories proposed by Roger Caillois in his book *Medusa and Cie*:

[...] (1) The transvestite, each time the animal appears to be trying to impersonate the representative of another species; (2) the camouflage, [...] thanks to which the animal is able to merge with the environment; (3) intimidation finally, when the animal paralyzes or terrifies his attacker or his prey, without that the fear is justified by a corresponding risk “ (Caillois 1960).

It appears that these three categories can be transposed in architecture: intimidation and wall, transvestism and figure, camouflage and parergon. In a mimetic perspective, these three devices give very concretely to the human animal the ability to hide himself the obscene, but more than that, to hide himself that architecture itself hides.

### Wall (ergon)

The wall, as the artwork, does not hide that it hides. It confines and conceals the obscene while assuming its presence as the expression of a limit, a ban, a power and, thereby specifically, the trouble or the intimidation that it may cause. Asia Minor in the Hellenistic period was distinguished, for example, “by the quality [...] and complexity of its fortifications, [These seem ...] to respond more to the desire to assert power and independence than to a strict defensive concern” (Hellmann 1998). The wall is the symptom of the *obscene placing*, the ergon, the artwork. It referred to the *firmitas* in the sense that it represents the ideals of the “*homo faber*, fabricator of the world : permanence, stability, duration”. (Arendt 1958). The work can be the support or the protection, vertical and horizontal (roof, wall, floor).

### Figure

The figure, for its part, loads the ergon with world. It is travestite by symbolization. It turns it into a signifying from which the signified becomes inextricable for a group or a society. The figure masks the wall with the meaning to which it refers. “I do not see a series of walls, but a home” and thus the expression of a use (*utilitas*) that makes sense. This meaning that stops the decryption for Lacan.

### Parergon

The parergon finally adorns the ergon that supports it. Like the camouflage, it dissolves the artwork, the *ergon*, taking in his volatilization what it hides. If the wall is no longer perceptible, what it contains is no longer either. The obscene surrounded by the charms of architecture, the *venustas*, finds

itself sublimated as if by magic. The wall, shall we say, separates, is adorned and disappears. The parergon (frame, column or clothing) has no technical or structural function. It fills a gap of another order. “Without this lack, the ergon would not need a parergon. The lack of the ergon is the lack of a parergon, a clothing or a column which nevertheless remains outside of it “(Derrida 1978).

The concept of parergon uncovers the special relationship between ergon and parergon. Would it have something to do with the trouble that we mentioned concerning the ergon? It is in all cases due to the ergon that appears the parergon. As it was perhaps the case for the Cairns of Clava (Inverness, Scotland), for example, that have been equipped with raised stone circles several years after it was finished or the Greek temples of which “[...] the outer peristyle once adopted for the chief's house, reappeared [...] to magnify the temple isolating it, since it is not technically necessary to support a heavy roof.” (Hellmann 1998) So, the parergon, fills the lack of the ergon which itself contains the obscene. Therefore, it allows us to highlight the double cause of the primitive architecture : the obscene is the cause of the ergon which itself is the cause of the parergon.

## CONCLUSION

The double cause of primitive architecture allows us to emphasize the two meanings of the word void : the first meaning puts the human animal in front of the obscene (what exceeds him). The second immersed him in the meaning (what corresponds to his dimension). In this light, the Greek temple appears as a symbol of the human constitution. It is simultaneously the admission of the existence of an uncontrollable power that must be contained and the opposite, namely, the staging of an “absolute” knowledge materialized through architecture. Ultimately, the Greek temple seems to be the expression of an order based on the repressed consciousness (by the man through the parergon) of the existence of a power or a chaos that is beyond human understanding (gods, complexity, ...). This collective repression forms the “mythical glue” that we mentioned above. From this point of view, building a temple is an inaugural gesture since it freezes in the stone a worldview and defines what will be worthy of being on the scene and what will not be. We understand therefore why the representation of a world, in art the mimesis, is inextricably linked to the dissolving power of architecture, the mimetic.

It follows from the above, that our *man without condition*, like our ancestors, illusioned by the architectural charms, is finally a *man without wall* (which nevertheless immures himself). For him, the issue of architecture stands consequently less on the wall as a perceptible element, than on its dissolution.

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