

***Inclination Towards Tree Canopy: Architecture Origin, Space Demarcator,  
Dwelling and Art***

Ana Masnikosa, University of Belgrade, Serbia

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**Abstract**

Architecture allows us to position ourselves culturally. The moment when the canopy of a tree is translated into architecture is the moment of its positioning in the landscape and the emergence of the idea of building. In the conflict between architecture and landscape, the canopy is the element that connects the exterior and interior architecture. It pulsates with the weather, materials and manifests the space to which we give meaning. At a time when human dwelling was still indeterminate, it could have been anything, at the same time a house, a city, and a forest. The main goal of the paper is to point out the connection between the tree canopy and architecture, that is, to re-examine the space of the canopy to which we constantly return, thus building a place. The canopy, as an emerging element of the urban landscape, can be observed from several positions, which reflects its stratification and ambiguity. This study deals with the examination of its spatial phenomenon from various angles: the origin of architecture, dwelling, space demarcator, artistic instrument (tool) and architectural boundary. The mentioned relations are connected into one whole by the architectural atmosphere and experience. The first part of the paper presents the definitions of terms. This aims to place them precisely in the previously mentioned relations. The resulting interrelationships are observed through the phenomenological concept of architecture-landscape-atmosphere. In this concept, the inclination towards the canopy represents the human need to constantly return to it through different media, interpreting it in different ways.

**Keywords:** Canopy, Architectural Experience, Architecture Origin, Architectural Atmosphere, Extended Landscape, Space Demarcator, Dwelling, Art Instrument, Architectural Boundary

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## Introduction

The idea of the original house is part of the conceptual architecture. It enters the field of landscape and the field of architecture, in a word, the field of place. The moment when the canopy is turned into a shelter is the moment when the idea of building is born. When the human place of residence is undefined, it can be anything, at the same time a house, a city, and a forest. The main goal of the work is to point out the connection between the tree canopy and architecture, that is, to reexamine the space of the canopy to which we keep returning, in this way building a place.

In the first part of the paper, I would refer to definitions and interpretation of key words in the context of research topic. The next part of the paper contains processing of each of the following positions from which the tree canopy is examined:

- Architecture Origin
- Space Demarcator
- Dwelling
- Art

The analysis of the first three positions is followed by the analysis of the project House with a view of the water (Casa de los Ojos de Agua), which represents a set of all the theories and arguments mentioned up to that point.

Inclination towards canopy in the phenomenological concept of architecture-place-landscape represents the human need to constantly return to it through different mediums, hence, it connects all the mentioned positions. Methods for their processing are comparative analysis of relevant ideas and their interpretation; interpretation of relevant data, metaphors, theories and arguments starting from Marc-Antoine Logier's Essay on Architecture (1755), using Heidegger's reflections on the topic of place-making, interpreting the canopy through the phenomenon of boundaries, and finally, placing the canopy in a contemporary context as an art object.

The goal of the analysis is, among other things, the adoption of new perspectives, placing the research object (the treetop) in a new context and recognizing new research questions and problems. This paper points out to the phenomenological connection of space, place and nature, which further complexifies their position in landscape and architecture.

## Key Words Definitions

It is necessary to define the canopy from three angles: the angle of nature and the angle of architecture and landscape. The crown is the upper part of the tree made up of branches without a trunk, it is a combination of leaves and branches in one upright form of vegetation. On the other hand, the canopy is at the same time a part of the landscape, but it is also a collection of elements. What determines the canopy is the position, domain, quality, type and connection of all the consisting parts. Empty fields are also an integral part of its form. They are located between the mentioned elements, but also between individual crowns.

In English, the word canopy is a synonym for a decorative covering above bed. In the context of architecture, a canopy is a type of shelter. The word comes from the Latin conopeum, which means ceremonial canopy, and from the Greek word kōnōpeion, which means a net over a bed used to protect from mosquitoes. The landscape contributes to the concept called nature (Šuvaković, 2005, p. 448). However, the landscape is also a medium of exchange

between man and nature, that is, subject and other. Therefore, the landscape is similar to money, it has no special properties, but rather expresses the limitless reserves of potential of the exchange value of human and nature. The landscape is simultaneously the present space and the displayed space, the signifier and the signified of the representation of nature, that is, the frame and what the frame encompasses with sight, feelings and reason (Šuvaković, 2005, p. 448). According to the German philosopher Joachim Ritter, (Joachim Ritter, 1903-1974), landscape is nature that becomes aesthetically perceived by a sensitive and sentimental observer (Rivera, 2019, p. 75). Looking from etymological perspective, landscape is the space of the perceived environment, the environment that is observed, the scene, the region. It cannot be studied as an individual, because it is defined by human perception. The landscape is a relationship, a connection, a link; a synthesis of the observer and the environment, it is not a place that can be limited, it is not a natural object like a river or a mountain, nor is it a location like an island or a valley (Berleant, 2019, p. 9).

On the other hand, cultural landscape is a creation of man, it can be interpreted as a text composed of symbols created in the past and present signs. The cultural position of the urban landscape is further complicated by the individual influence of different social groups and their influence as a whole (Lefebvre, 2014). In the following text, the landscape will be viewed from the position of space and architectural forms, elements and plans, although the symbolic meaning of the landscape cannot be separated from its material perception. This position is not primary in this research problem.

Apart from these important definitions, it is necessary to place the landscape in the phenomenon of experience. Rivera gives a definition of landscape experience in the relation between urban environment and natural environment, he connects it with exploitation and daily obligations, i.e. everything that is outside the urban environment (Rivera, 2019, p. 73). On the other hand, Rivera also gives a phenomenological definition: the landscape experience is an indefinite combination of the representative horizon and the aesthetic experience of theoretical totalitarianism (Rivera, 2019, p. 73).

When it comes to architectural atmosphere, it represents a concept that should connect all of the above, in its most general definition it represents a unique feeling and mood that is caused by the physical characteristics of the space (Zumthor, 2003). The architectural atmosphere connects both organic and inorganic. In a certain sense landscape atmosphere and architectural atmosphere are equated, architecture is both outside and inside, therefore architectural elements are an integral part of the landscape and what it evokes to the viewer.

Space can be anything, therefore this term is the broadest of all the previously mentioned ones. Architecture is the production of space, be it furniture, garden or landscape, (Lefebvre, 2014). If architecture is the production of space, we can conclude that architectural experience is simultaneously architectural practice and the experience of architecture, both human activity and passivity towards and within that space that can exist without the act of building.

The border (peras), according to the Greeks, is not where something ends, but where something begins its existence (Heidegger, 1954). There is no separation without connection, the border does both.

## Analyzed Positions

In the following part of the paper I will analyze the positions from which I observe the tree canopy as an element in space. The positions are presented chronologically in relation to examined literature, therefore the first position is the origin of architecture, which is based primarily on architects and theorists from the eighteenth century, followed by the position of space and housing, which are based on sources from the twentieth century, and the position of art that belongs to contemporary discourse.

### The Origin of Architecture

The first sign of settlement, i.e. staying in one particular place is lighting a fire and preparing a meal. Together, fire and food represent the hearth, the original gathering place. The first alliances were made around the hearth, the first customs were developed and the first cult was formed. The hearth is the first and most important, moral element of architecture. The remaining three elements are: the roof, the fence and the mound, together, they protect the hearth from external influences. As these protective elements developed, so did skills such as ceramics, metal shaping, and carpentry (Hale, 2005).

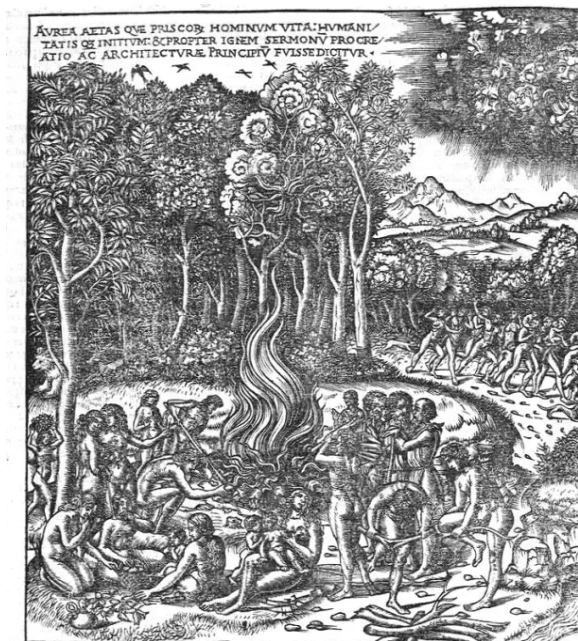


Figure 1: Cesariano, C. (1521). The Discovery of Fire [Engraving]. Sophia Journal.  
<https://www.sophiajournal.net/sophia-5-the-modern-shelter>



Figure 2: Rivius (1548). The Discovery of Fire [Engraving]. Sophia Journal.  
<https://www.sophiajournal.net/sophia-5-the-modern-shelter>

According to the Roman architect Vitruvius (Vitruvius, 80–70 BC-15 BC), the origin of architecture goes back to the discovery of fire and the gathering of people around it. After a certain time people needed something to sit on, and then a shelter (Gülpınar, 2016). Therefore, the original house was created from materials that inside themselves had characteristics or properties of construction, that is, the potential to become building elements. Trunk/pillar = wood/beam.

Logier (Marc-Antoine Laugier, 1713-1769), one of the first architectural theorists and the main theorist of the Age of Enlightenment, identifies the origin of architecture within the laws that apply in nature. According to Laugier nature is synonymous with reason. The hut was the most perfect imitation of nature, a presentation of the human intellect in survival. Therefore, it can be concluded that construction arises from the formation of reason, and consequently, language. The two illustrations at the beginning of Logier's essay on architecture present the idea of a primitive hut, and each is an artist's interpretation, but they also illustrate the idea that all the principles of architecture and its basic elements are derived from the rustic hut. Later, when other materials were mastered and wood is no longer in use, the elements used in building a rustic hut are still imitated (Gülpınar, 2016).





Figure 3: Elsen, C. (1755). Rustic Hut [Engraving] Sophia Journal.  
<https://www.sophiajournal.net/sophia-5-the-modern-shelter>



Figure 4: Wale, S. (1755). Rustic Hut [Engraving]. Sophia Journal.  
<https://www.sophiajournal.net/sophia-5-the-modern-shelter>

A forest or a cave was not enough for a man to protect himself, so he was forced to build. As previously stated, man's original shelter was constructed by joining four branches into a square structure, which was then covered with leaves and mud to form a primitive hut. In this composition, the four branches represent the columns, the horizontal elements on them are the architrave, the frieze and the cornice, and finally the roof (Wittman, 2007). Laugier adds that the hut must protect the man, but not bury him. Considering that the external environment presents both the terrible and the soothing, architecture must shelter the one who inhabits it, while at the same time offering him a view of the world (Wolfgang, 1984).

The German architect Gottfried Semper (Gottfried Semper, 1803-1879) mentions the wooden hut three times in his texts. The comparison with Vitruvius's primitive hut is the most important mention, i.e. its representation of the first dwelling and symbol of sacredness. Vitruvius says that the primitive hut is a direct descendant of the Greek temple. However, Semper believes that it is important only because of the general composition, but unimportant when it comes to the detailed shaping of the artistic form (Hale, 2005). It represents a return to basic architecture freed from decoration. Laugier presents the idea of the archetypal building and the primitive hut, which inspired the reawakening of Greek art and architecture (Laugier, 1755).

According to the Italian architect Tafuri (Manfredo Tafuri, 1935-1994), Laugier reduced the city to a natural phenomenon. Disorder or disharmony is only an appearance, what Laugier believes is that it is necessary for the city to appear natural, not rigid. By imitating nature, we can construct cities (Hill, 2006). However, if architecture is an imitation of nature, should it have done a better job than Logier's primitive hut?



Figure 5: Filarete (1465). Adam, the First Builder [Engraving]



Figure 6: Filarete (1465). The Original Column [Engraving]. Origins of Architecture. <https://originsofarchitecture.wordpress.com/2012/12/28/origin-myths-in-renaissance-vitruvius-editions/>

A primitive hut may be the only necessary architecture, the equivalent of a bird's nest or a turtle's shell. Wright's organic and Corbusier's machine metaphors for buildings arise from the conceptual connection between art and nature and form and function. Two acceptable models for architecture are natural, like the body of animals, and mechanical, like a ship. Like a tree in a forest, the building rises from the ground towards the light. The ground is

limited by base and foundations, and it becomes an essential part of the building. Wright says that every building must be complete within itself, containing everything within itself, not as a multitude of things, but as one thing (McClung, 1983). Singularity.

As one of the examples of the inclination towards an original canopy, Rykwert cites Defoe's Robinson, who as a civilized man was forced to go back and seek shelter on a deserted island in a tree. Today, baobab trees, due to their size, are often used as a hideout, their trunk as a house, i.e. a place for dwelling (Rudofsky, 1964).

Architecture is also the worship of a place, that is, a man's need for art. Its origin, apart from only in architecture, can also be found in those moments of worship. However, the search for style and appearance overshadowed man's need to build. The search for the origin of architecture should start from human need (Odgers, 2006).

### **Demarcator of Space**

In the garden, what is without actual use is synonymous with potential. The use of any element can change from day to day. The garden has no door, but it has its own size and area, so the border still exists. On the other hand, landscape belongs to everyone, just like space belongs to everyone. In England, in the eighteenth century, landscape architecture found its basis in landscape paintings. English landscape architect Kent (William Kent, 1685-1748) was influenced by painters such as Nicolas Poussin, Claude Lorrain and Salvatore Rosa.

Unlike a painting, which is observed from a certain distance, the garden visitor is drawn into it, into the landscape, he is a part of it. The sense of sight is no longer the only and primary one as in the case of observing a picture, the visitor is affected by all external influences, he has no control over what surrounds him. What he sees is in relation to movement, even though it does not move. Plans that are built from trees and other elements are constantly expanding, upgrading and supplementing while at the same time building a body and consequently a space. It can be said that by observing the landscape, it expands more and more, and becomes bigger with no end and no limits. However, there is an indication of a boundary in the landscape: the horizon line. It is essentially unattainable, but it can be materialized by treetops, mountains, the sea, etc. According to Jung, what is primitive is to lose boundaries in order to be completely immersed in the world around us.

Distant landscape plans are visually colonized, they enter gardens across established boundaries (Hunt, 2021). Views of the landscape can form different plans, aspects, figures and forms. One of the key elements in the landscape are precisely the canopies, they can also be focal points, like the passageways they form in Kent's Rousham Garden, while lending their shadow to the sculptures around them, or while creating the Wrightian illusion of opening the space into which we enter through the small door.

Bodies can also build architecture even though they are oriented towards other elements. People on the beach move in relation to the sun, while they are anchored in the rocks, canopy, and shade. The beach landscape shows how we nest and place ourselves in relation to the elements that already existed in nature. With this kind of architecture, we build places in the middle of the landscape, in the middle of changes brought about by external influences. Odgers says that the seeds of architecture are actually people, beings, the primitive is not far in the past, but is still present in us (Odgers, 2006).



Space is what a place is made for, what is released within its boundaries. Spaces take their essence from place, not from space. Building never shapes a space, and yet because it produces things as places, it is closer to the essence of space than all geometry and mathematics (Heidegger, 1954). The door makes the difference between the outside and the inside. Unlike the wall, the door speaks. Man has set a limit for himself that is conditioned by his being, and the moment he goes outside again, there is no limit (Simmel, 1994). The door is movable, but the threshold remains static, it signifies rootedness (Reijnen, 2018). When it comes to a window, the direction of environmental influence is always from the inside to the outside. The window is there so that one can look outside. Canopies cross all borders, they enter the interior space and affect it phenomenologically. Wherever it is located, inside the city, in the yard or formed in a row of trees, the canopy marks the space and, in parallel, gives its interpretation and structure. A tree, as a form, is a good indicator of relations in the neighborhood. Small branches proceed from larger ones, which proceed from the trunk, which together produce distance, but not separation. The leaves that grow at the end of the branches communicate through the middle, that is, the base, not with each other. So, is wood a form or a structure? It presents stability, dynamism and fragile but uniform growth (Lefebvre, 2014).

Japanese architect Tadao Ando uses natural elements such as light, wind and rainwater in his projects. These atmospheric architectural events take place in that seemingly empty outdoor space. They are essentially invisible, but phenomenologically present. The wind moves over and through the house just as it moves between the canopy (Odgers, 2006). The canopy in the city is most often in the background of what is actually happening. Its spaciousness is never in question, it can represent all of the above, a border, a focal point, and yet remain a part of nature, which is why its position in architecture is complex. Its boundaries are not strictly defined, but it has its own threshold, a pedestal that changes over time. Be it form or structure, both definitions give it space and movement gives it a reactive character, but we give meaning to its space.

## **Dwelling Place**

Japanese architect Sou Fujimoto (Sou Fujimoto, 1971-) believes that living in a house is similar to living in a tree. There are many branches that conceptually represent indeterminate rooms, they have no physical walls and are not isolated, but are connected and constantly redefined. The views from those rooms are constantly changing. Totalitarianism is formed by mutual connections. Branches develop, while at the same time changing their direction. Forests survive on the basis of networks and density created by natural selection. The evolution of building and defining a place can be compared to the growth of forests and trees whose scheme is a collection of diverse parts without connecting elements.

Architecture begins at the moment of defining the place for construction (Fujimoto, 2006). Does architecture start even earlier? At the moment of tracing the position, a transformation of nature takes place, which is followed by negotiations about its state. Such negotiations are reduced to rough movements of earth and stones, to taming nature. This is exactly why the garden is the initial state of architecture. The boundaries between exterior and interior pulsate with weather conditions, materials, and these boundaries define the shelter.

When the human place of residence is undefined, it can be anything, at the same time a house and a city and a forest. According to Fujimoto, that place is like a small Earth and it represents the most primitive and futuristic architecture (Fujimoto, 2006).

The French philosopher Benoît Goetz (1955-) believes that architecture is not limited by the skin that represents the structure, but that it also acts from the outside, the building consists of internal and external architecture. What architecture is, emphasizes its opposite, what it is not. It is a reflection of actions, thoughts, attitudes. Therefore, there is no architecture without non-architecture. Architecture is a construct, a situation, it is just one moment in the world where beings and art coexist (Goetz, 2009). Thus, Goetz, like Fujimoto, deals with the boundaries that define two states, architectural and non-architectural.

Children sitting under a tree make an architectural decision choosing that particular location, thereby marking it as a place with their presence. Architecture is a conceptual organization, it is based on an intellectual structure. Entering a landscape that has not yet been affected by human presence, no matter how short a stay, signifies marking of the place. After the first place, like lighting the fire, new ones are born, such as places for rest, food, that place can be fenced, etc. By organizing such different places, a person begins to deal with architecture consciously or unconsciously. Although architecture is an act of the mind, architecture does not always involve physical construction. It can also be just the recognition of a certain location as a place, such as a tree, a cliff, or the foot of a hill (Unwin, 2009).

### **House with a View of the Water (Casa del Ojo de Agua)**

The House with a View of the Water is a combination of an authentic space and an unusual setting of dwelling boundaries. On this project, we can see the geometric order that marks the place and the structure that emphasizes the environment in which the house is located. The building was designed by architects Ada Dewes and Sergio Puente in 1985-90. and is located in Mexico.

The house has two main segments: dining room and a bedroom, while other rooms such as the kitchen are located in a separate building. Elements that are normally common for a house are omitted here or interpreted differently. It was built next to a mango tree on the steep side of the hill. The platform on which it was built is located practically above the water source and is surrounded by rocks and vegetation. The platform can be reached by a staircase leading up to and from the platform. They represent thresholds, so they enter and exit the platform, thus placing it in an intermediate position. The front corners were taken away and lowered below the level of the bedroom, in order to create a shower and on the other side a toilet. In this way the platform has no visual obstacles to the forest that surrounds it. A wall was built towards the hill. On this wall there is a passage for stairs to go up, as well as an opening for one branch of a mango tree. In this way, the canopy is attached to the house. A frame has been made above the front steps to mark the door, or boundary, but there are no walls around this opening. Four columns support a cantilevered platform above which is the dining room. This level is reached by a third flight of stairs. The dining room shares a wall with the bedroom. There are mosquito nets around it, while trees form a wall and canopy a roof over the dining room. The house is reminiscent of Mayan and Inca temples, with the dining table and bed being altars that together with shower and toilet represent the main primitive places that are confined by the house (Unwin, 2014).

In the example of the House with a View of the Water, we can see the broken form of the box whose boundaries only hint at the volume of the space, but it does not stop at those boundaries. The forest has been released within the residential area. Architectural practice and the practice of nature are completely mixed. The combined visual, acoustic and olfactory

experience of the environment is part of sleeping and dining. Traditionally, the most basic purpose of a house is a safe place to sleep, but this does not mean that the house is necessarily a box cut off from external influences. Odysseus hollowed out a bed for his wife and himself in an olive tree, the Greeks believed that trees were the original abode of the gods. In this example, the bedroom is the most protected room, however, using modern materials, the natural scenery becomes part of it. It is simultaneously a written and erased space, so the forest and the hillside would not exist as a place if man had not made them a place. The character of the canopy is inscribed in the house itself, which is why this space is both open and closed, the result of this transparency is the constantly changing views of the building. The roof is also materialized in the canopy, and in this way the processes of nature, movement, and conditioning by the weather unify the architectural and landscape experience.

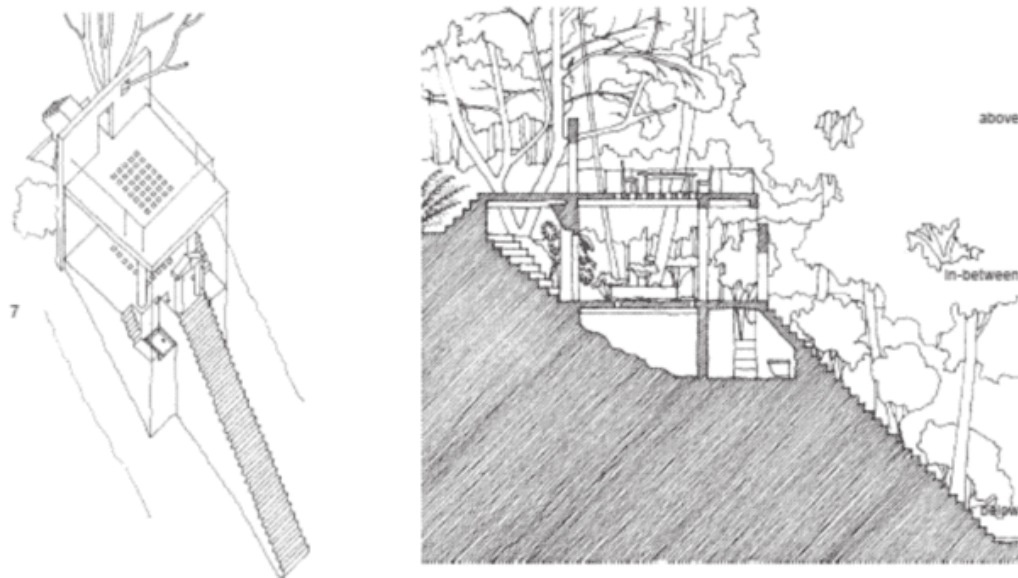


Figure 7: Dewes, A., Puente, S. (1985). Casa del Ojo de Agua [Perspective and section].  
Architectural and Design

<https://www.facebook.com/architecturalanddesignRy/photos/pcb.2795138610757142/2795138180757185/?type=3&theater>

## Art

The canopy as an object of art, i.e. its medium, can be interpreted in an unlimited number of ways that depend primarily on the artist who uses it to express an idea, a thought, point out a problem, etc. Canopy or the whole tree viewed in contemporary discourse is no longer just a building element or part of architectural practice, it is interpreted as canvas, installation and sculpture. In the following part, four art projects are shown, with a canopy at the center of their events.

From 2003 to 2009, the artist Philippa Lawrence worked on a specific project, Bound, which involved wrapping bare branches and trees with fabric. First it was an oak that was struck by lightning, and then other trees followed. Filipa drew attention to the form of the human body and wood by placing the familiar element (fabric) in an unusual way. This kind of intervention in nature changed the focal point of the landscape, as well as the boundaries, where the garden begins and ends, where nature ends and art begins. The act of tying is human, it represents that something is secured, connected, held. Wrapping the tree can also be interpreted through the metaphor of healing.



Figure 8: Lawrence, P. (2003-2009). Bound [Photography]. Philippa Lawrence  
<https://philippalawrence.com>



Figure 9: Christo and Jeanne-Claude. (1998). Wrapped Trees [Photography]. Christo and Jeanne-Claude  
<https://christojeanneclaude.net/artworks/wrapped-trees/>

Wrapped Trees, a project by Christo and Jeanne-Claude in Beyeler and Brower Park, Switzerland (1998) is an installation in which 178 trees are wrapped in polyester fabric. Unlike Philippa Lawrence's bare trees, here, the volume and movement of the crowns is in the foreground. This movement is projected outwards through the fabric so the positions of the branches and leaves are additionally enlarged. The transparency of the material emphasizes the light that passes through, thus building the geometry of the shadow on the fabric. Through this materialization of the empty space, the canopy is transposed into an architectural element, i.e. it acquires walls.

The central motif of research on the Alberi project by the Italian artist Giuseppe Penone is the temporal conditioning and changeability of tree forms. The project consists in returning the original form of the wooden beam to the wood from which it was created. Pennone noted that although the beam was reduced to a block with straight edges, the knots and texture of the wood clearly indicated the positions of branches, knots and any other irregularities. Removing layer by layer, Penone reveals the original tree through a sculptural intervention. However, he does not go to the end, that is, he leaves a part of the beam to talk about the intervention process. In front of each subsequent object made of wood, we notice its origin, once there was a tree and a canopy. Trees represent an exploration of identity. Pennone returns the primitive to the material viewed at that moment as building material, along the way showing the entire process from nature to construction, as previously mentioned, the primitive is always present.

South Korean artist Myoung Ho Lee (Myoung Ho Lee) places canvases behind the trees he photographs. This way he is building a kind of landscape graphic. This is a type of in-situ landscape painting, i.e. installation of landscape painting. Miyong's trees are shaped by the surface and texture of the fabric, they emphasize its form, structure and at the same time align its plans. By simplifying the landscape with canvas and purifying the background, our attention is focused and the tree becomes art placed in the space of the landscape.



Figure 10: Giuseppe Penone. (2008). Nel Legno in the Wood [Photography]. Giuseppe Penone <https://giuseppepenone.com/en/works/1398-nel-legno>



Figure 11: Myoung Ho Lee. (2013). Tree [Photography]. Ignant <https://www.ignant.com/2019/01/22/nature-framed-by-myoung-ho-lee/>

## Conclusion

A primitive hut is a primary moment of architectural inventiveness, an architectural prototype. Heidegger, Jung, Alvar Aalto and Corbusier all had their own huts. However, primitive does not mean simple, thoughtless or devoid of symbols. The hut and the temple are architectural ideas that are not limited to their materiality. They can be philosophical dimensions, their application is not subordinated to rules, but can be influenced by time by thinking. The restoration of the canopy is precisely reflected in this relativity, it can be either one or the other building depending on the interpretation and culture, therefore it is a part of architectural practice as much as man is a building element of architecture. Both natural and artificial always have the characteristic of being determined by space, but place is determined exclusively by man. On the other hand, lifestyle is what determines the shape and character of housing.



Despite the close connection of the canopy with the terrain, it has an aerial quality and a rhythmic composition. Therefore, the canopy blurs all architectural boundaries while retaining its ambiguity and artistry. Time is involved in the perception of the canopy, it signifies duration and rootedness, while at the same time it manifests movement, and landscape and architecture give it history. The position of the canopy is unquestionable in each of the four positions treated. It confirms its man-made place in architecture, landscape and art.

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**Contact email:** [anamasnikosa@gmail.com](mailto:anamasnikosa@gmail.com)