Re-Emerging Idea of Nature: In between Environmental Humanities and Architectural Theory

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Timothy Mitchell stated that contemporary democracies are intrinsically dependent on the abundance of energy produced by fossil fuels. These "carbon democracies," as he terms them, are the nation states in which it is understood what is democracy. On the other hand, the idea of architectural and urban space has always been the theoretical and practical inspiration for the idea of democracy. However, in the climate change emergency and with the shifting paradigm within the new geographical epoch, the Anthropocene, this kind of theoretical background illustrates a great enigma for the democratic essence of contemporary urban and architectural space. At this point, the study aims to research contemporary endeavors to solve this enigma within the framework of environmental humanities studies and philosophical discussions. With the help of this collected knowledge, it ties to the theories using an ecologically inclusive point of view for design interventions made to architectural and urban spaces. It is a challenge to transform the discipline's anthropocentric and carbon-dependent idea of democratic space to an object-oriented, inclusive paradigm, and enlarge its democratic and inclusive characteristics for the "more-than-human."

Architectural theory is traditionally anthropocentric. Since Marc-Antoine Laugier's theoretical illustration of "Adam's House in Paradise", Western design rhetoric has always focused on the human experience or human well-being in a Cartesian sense, in which the subject, the human; and the object, the place (or the ultimate Other, as Slavoj Žižek terms it) is separated sublimely. The original outbreak of that idea was the modern avant-garde movement of Japanese "Metabolist" architects for whom the way to design is to be one with the milieu. Today, especially related to the current realization of the failure of the anthropocentric ecological sustainability solutions, the anthropocentric focus on the subject has changed drastically to create a new non-anthropocentric way of thinking, especially in theoretical research. However, the practical level of the paradigm is still blurry and not adequately translated into architectural theory and practice.

To this end, the proposal aims to frame the subject between a trio of sociological debate, ontological debate, and architectural theory based on environmental humanities, object-oriented ontology, and ecological design. Recently, Graham Harman opened a debate to change the point of view for the being and (for the sake of the proposal) for the design methodology from subject-object relationships to object-object relationships. From that point onwards, the "object" began to include everything and was no longer limited with physical finiteness as a boundary. As an example, a human becomes an (hyper-)object who cannot be framed by his or her body, house, or economical aspects; it is the object that identified with massive linked networks connected with its ontological effects and massively distributed in time and space.