

Rousseau's influence on Laugier



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Any person, be it a philosopher or an urban planner, needs inspiration in the creation of his work. In this case, the writer was tasked to connect the influence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (an 18th century philosopher) on his architectural contemporary Marc-Antoine Laugier (a mid-18th century theorist and urban planner). Rousseau's greatest influence on Laugier is the theory of the natural man. Rousseau asserted that man was good in the natural state and was corrupted by society.

Laugier asserted that the principles of architecture, like those of the other arts, are based on nature and the process of nature influences architectural rules. Laugier cited the little rustic hut as his most basic example. The simplicity of it all (four pieces of upright wood as columns, the horizontal wood pieces atop the columns are the beams or the entablature, and two sets of wood that were placed at different points and meet in the center at an angle form the pediment) can be carried throughout architecture.

An ancient example, the Maison Carree, is found in Nimes, France, in which such structure followed the laws of nature (column, entablature, and pediment), while maintaining perfect order and beauty. Laugier also cited violations of nature, much like Rousseau's corruption of society on man.

Laugier cited faults like engaged columns instead of freestanding ones, pilasters instead of rounded-diameter columns, swelling of column shafts at the top instead at the bottom, placing columns on pedestals, and other faults in the entablature and pediments.

Violations of Laugier's architectural essay were rampant during the Late Renaissance period through the Baroque period. An example cited was the

Royal Chapel in Versailles, France. An obvious "flaw" for Laugier was the use of square pilasters, in which the rounded columns on the second level rest on pilasters. While a lot of modern architectural wonders nowadays "violate" Laugier's principles, there are also other architectural examples that stick to the laws of nature. However, the need for shelter is still followed in buildings, however flawed they are or not.