



Housing – A Critical Perspective.

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Abstract / Initial Proposal Form:

1. Paper / Proposal Title: Sustainable boundaries and current construction practices: unlocking environmental and social hermeticity for long term adaptability

2. Format: Written paper

3. Author(s) Name: Claude Saint-Arroman

4. University or Company Affiliation: Goldsmiths University

5. Abstract (300 words):

This presentation challenges a perceived paradox between self sufficiency and self containment in mass housing formulas. It focuses on institutional and physical boundaries between private and public space, considered separately in statutory and legal frameworks, and in corresponding architectural designs. The purpose is to explore the concurrent mutuality of privacy/publicity dynamics and the potentials this offers in providing future paradigms for the collective project of urban sustainability. I am here transposing into a critique of high density housing theories such as Donella Meadows' (1991) whereby the awareness and application of sustainability is a collective endeavour; in the construction industries, sustainability is increasingly assigned to the building's 'performance' rather than to its users' concomitant participation in that performance during the building's lifetime.

My thesis conceptualises the boundary as an architectural element that not only divides but also unites; as a dynamic point of adjacency between spaces that

regulates their intersection as well as their separation. As such, the boundary is regarded as an agent between two sides in a tripartite symbiosis, and as the centre of relationship between parts. This concept might be envisaged as a design tool for integrating a relational dimension to the configuration of urban space(s), and for integrating environmental factors currently assessed separately: climate, nature, social and utilitarian infrastructures all 'meet' at the same physical architectural boundary. I argue that its degree of flexibility is commensurate with its potential for assembling separated realities and for generating long term social and architectural viability.

This proposition is in friction with more defensive conceptions about the boundary that support hermeticity: protection of privacy and of propriety, from neighbours, from damage and from climate change. These are scrutinised through the lens of architectural boundaries in selected case studies, to highlight contradictions such designs generate with regards to sustainability, and to initiate a debate about their implications and relevance to long-term evolution towards a more ecological urban future.

7. Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Claude Saint-Arroman
Teaching, University of East London

Claude Saint-Arroman was a practicing professional architect for 15 years before returning to academia in 2010. During this time, she worked on medium and large scale housing projects in London, and was concerned about spatial and construction conventions which regard social, anthropological and environmental factors as separate. Her PhD research with Goldsmith University explored the wider meanings of sustainability through phenomenology and material culture, and the concept of the boundary presented here evolved alongside a focus on urban relationality.

Claude's research investigates thinking 'habits' which support hermetic designs (privacy, fear of otherness/conflict, social propriety and planning etiquette, order through categorisation) and examines a variety of architectural boundary strategies in housing blocks and estates in London which reflect and/or perpetuate them but also reveal degrees of relationality that defies them. The proposition that thinking habits can be detrimental to change was first put forward by Gregory Bateson in his *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (1972); Claude's work is preoccupied with the possibility that slight paradigm and design alterations at the boundary could potentially provide beneficial long term contributions to urban policy and sustainability.

Claude carries this principle beyond housing with her architecture students in design and in theory at the University of East London, where she has been teaching for five years.