



## **High Altitude Architecture – An Unconventional Marker for the Anthropocene**

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High altitude architecture refers to all anthropic elements built over the altitude limit where natural elements enhance permanent living: water in liquid state and sufficient oxygen. Depending on the geographical position, the altitude limit can vary from 3.000m in the temperate zones to 5.000m over the sea level in the tropical and subtropical zones.

High altitude architecture is a recent phenomenon: the consequence of changes in the attitude of humans towards the extreme natural environment, influenced by the intensifying technological development. Its evolution phases could be possible unconventional markers for the Anthropocene: from a rare and primitive anthropic gesture to a global and extensive phenomenon, with a significant impact on the environment and an irreversible transformation of the conceptual relation between humans and high mountains.

In the XVIIIth century, scientists and Romantic artists were the first to approach remote, dangerous high territories, as precursors of the future anthropic expansion and therefore for the Anthropocene. They built small stone shelters called temples of nature, meant to observe and admire the environment.

The first ascent of Mont Blank in 1786 marked the beginning of the heroic climbing era, a new anthropic activity, aiming a glorious human physical achievement. Architecture followed closely this event, in an incipient primitive phase, with small huts and rudimentary bivouacs and brought along the first discussions on the ethics of building at high altitudes. Pioneering mountaineering touched the apogee in 1953 with the first ascent of Mount Everest. This event could be the symbolic beginning of the Anthropocene, as humans managed to reach the highest point on Earth and opened the route to the most famous summit. High altitude architecture slowly moved from primitive gestures to more complex objects, able to host the increasing number of mountaineers.

The first decade of the XXIth century brought along a new significant change in the social paradigm, marking the irreversible evolution into the Anthropocene. High mountains became entertainment products and brands ready to be consumed, accessible for everyone. New technologies for building and transportation became the catalysts for an intensive mass tourism. Architecture found a perfect background to test the latest technologies in autarchic and iconic objects. High altitude territories faced an intense phenomenon of anthropic colonization and suffered, beyond the environmental impact, a fundamental and probably irreversible alteration of meaning.

In front of this inevitable human invasion and ideological mutation, the question on the ethics of high altitude architecture remains open for the future, as part of and unconventional marker for the Anthropocene.