

The public space of the architect is quiet and empty

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...If Heidegger arrives at the question of in what language our era would be able to think in, he turns time and time again to the extract of Nietzsche's 'Also sprach Zarathustra' in which Zarathustra says: 'There it spoke to me as a whisper: The most silent words bring the storm, thoughts which approach on tiptoe govern the world.'

These words bring us nothing but more riddles to solve. What is the meaning of 'most silent words', if in our time everything requires preciseness, clear and sharp communication. And how could those silent words lead the world? What leads the World, are the enormous organizations with multiple branches in which economy, science, technology, and computer science are all intertwined. It is even more bizarre that these most silent of words are not our words at all, but rather the words that come to us, which are spoken to us and in such a fashion that they don't say anything really. They are quiet. The question is whether these most silent words indicate everything that we are against, namely, that we, in the urge to become information files, have been left behind empty, and other words have been left to ourselves... (Technology and Computing. Chapter Form in metaphysics and information technology. Th. W. Oudemans)

The abovementioned quote of Professor Oudemans is very striking to me. It is Nietzsche whom is quoted in the quote about the 'most silent words'. It is he, the philosopher, who sees another appearance of men, and ascends. As he writes, the 'last human being' that arises at the same time as the death of God. Nietzsche's life was controlled by fits of insanity. He lived his life with one leg in the normal world, and the other leg in a prophetic world of 'a herd without a shepherd'.

If the architects of today can learn something from him, it is that Nietzsche, at the same time he spoke of the 'most silent words', speaks of another order, an order in which a Devine God will vanish from the centre of life.

Le Corbusier has read Nietzsche, he speaks of a silence, but as silence as a secure place. It is possible that Le Corbusier is fully aware of those same 'most silent words that bring the storm' as what Nietzsche is talking about in the Zarathustra. Just as in Nietzsche, Le

Corbusier sees a new order in progress, although his subject is only architecture, which inevitably enforces itself.

My suspicion is that this experience of emptiness in the form of a quiet and empty spot goes hand in hand with a new order in progress and the emergence of man.

An order, stirred up by a storm, which is not ours.

There is no room for silent words.

What architect is nowadays involved in a quiet and empty arena, such as Le Corbusier has been in all his life? Although, in his case, it is still a quiet and secure place, it will remain a problem, just as he described himself. He most likely sees it as a problem to truly build a quiet place, a realized place within an architectural structure. Apart from his power and influence in the architecture of the time, he should have been aware of the absence of power.

*'I have not experienced the miracle of faith but I have often known the miracle of inexpressible space' . *2*

Le Corbusier must have found out at the end of his life that he himself was the only person that could have found that quiet and secure place. At the end of his life, he said: *'Architecture is nothing, life is everything'*.

This was a very remarkable statement from the most influential architect of the 20th century who devoted his entire life to architecture. This was a life that he might have tried to approach by means of architecture.

I can imagine that also in this time there were architects that would like to have made an attempt for the creation of a quiet and empty place, but who was to be the commissioner? The government? That is highly unlikely, because they too wanted a market price for their land, in which the costs of their investments should be recovered. Apart from that, a true created space should have a function, or in other words, should fit within the economics of expenditures and profits.

I expect from another architect that he has kept busy with the quiet and empty space in our time. His images are very convincing to me. This architect is the American John Hejduk (1926-2000). His designs are mostly restricted to paper. Only one single design has been realized. Hejduk has always had a remarkable place in architecture, mostly because he doesn't build. He designs explicit architectural concepts, which seem incompatible with everyday practice.

At the end of his life, like a Michelangelo, he builds a cathedral like an architect and paints his final judgment like a visual artist.

In the small modest booklet *Sanctuaries, the last works of John Hejduk*, from 2002, his last two concepts are shown together with an essay *Architecture's destiny*, of Micheal K. Hays, which puts the work in perspective. The two designs are entitled *Cathedral* and *Enclosures*. *Cathedral* is a design of a 'contemporary cathedral' in the form of a large photographed wooden Marquette. The *Enclosures* design includes thirty-two color drawings and paintings.



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Cathedral

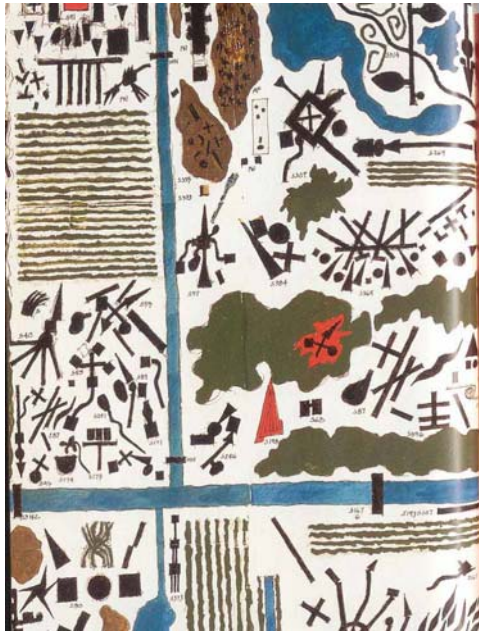
If I, as a visitor of this modern and angular space, on the outside would look at a lengthy, relative low facade, then I would see a multitude of abstract forms hanging on the wall. Sometimes the shapes reach the ground, other times they crawl toward the edge of the roof. The entire wall is without color, the Marquette is made of wood. Many of the abstract forms are old designs by Hejduk himself, cubes with frames, funnels, sometimes cut-away, then cylinders like thick chimney pipes, followed by small high pyramid like chapels. Everything

is apparently placed in random order. You could say that his private design history is hanging from the wall as a collection.

Then, I reach the opposite wall. This one is also provided with many different forms, but is also split with tubes in primary forms such as circles, rectangles, and triangles. A single spot on the wall is even equipped with a group of thorns that split the wall as if it was a body. The wall is wounded. There is something human to this image.

The splitting or wounding of the wall can be best seen inside the cathedral. It allows daylight to come in, just enough to give the experience of a house of God. There are volumes and small houses inside that express the same image language as the outer wall. Most objects are firmly on the ground and are concentrated around the center of the cathedral. Between these odd random forms is something recognizable. The little bit of daylight, extracts the light sharply. A cross. It reaches to the ceiling. But John Hejduk was not a religious man. What is it with that unspoken reference to hundreds of years of Christianity? Does this space need a cross?

I wonder what I should have thought about this cathedral if this cross would not have been present. But that does not improve it. More so, with good designs everything should be part of a whole so that a removal of a single element makes the whole less powerful. The words cathedral and cross are intertwined. Without this cross, a word such as cathedral is unthinkable. An existing image of man adheres to this design.



Sanctuary 1, 1999-2000



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Enclosures

The *Enclosure* drawings/paintings were created prior to his death in 2000 right after the design *Cathedral*.

The beautiful colored paintings are, according to Michael Hays, the answer to Giotto's frescos of Saint Francis. They portray an unspeakable space, an apocalyptic space.

It includes thirty-two drawings/paintings that portray different events and stories without captions. Sometimes the images possess a mythological nature, and then they have a dark mood references to the Fall of Humanity from The Bible. The angels appear as bright optimistic colors, nothing ominous. In these images, it is about the meaning of men in space. For Hejduk, they formed the last referral of an architect to his profession: architecture, as if the last frames of an architectonic space have almost been neutralized.

In the image, man is enclosed by a wall or frame, and thus forming a space that is unlocked at the same time by a diversity of its meeting with creatures that have no problem with breaking through the space. Apart from that, the sun appears in its many colored shapes, a sharp concentrated ray of light that man radiates. These angels and mythological animals unlock space, and they meet man.

The images show the absence of power, a power that is always present within the imagination of architecture in the classical sense as in our current era. Man is shown as an encounter, in the impossibility of a singular existence. In this unspoken space, the border of man, as an encounter between life and death, reveals itself.

*1 Th.W.Oudemans, *Techniek en informatisering. Hfst.Vorm in metafysica en informatisering*. Assen, 1997

*2 D. Lyon, *Le Corbusier leven en werk*, Libero, Parijs, 2001

*3. Zaknic, *The final testament of Père Corbu*, Yale University Press. Connecticut, 1997

*4 K. M. Hays, *Sanctuaries the last works of John Hejduk*, Whitney Museum of American Art, 2000