John Hejduk  Representations of the imaginary
Behind Constructed - Reality

My interest is the relationship of architecture to cultural representation. The subject of my research is the late avant-garde architect, teacher and poet, John Hejduk. Many of the texts that contain his work are out-of-print, yet highly sought-after, fetching unexpected sums in the open market. He is something of a cult-hero to a rather small group of architectural theorists and practitioners who regard him as a genius yet, an anomaly among his peers. For Hejduk, whose prolificacy as a visual artist and poet is lesser known than his corpus of architectural production, it is the intertextuality of his oeuvre that distinguishes him from others whose work has helped to define the late avant-garde in architecture. According to Daniel Libeskind, his work is “transcending the totality of human existence — this attitude underlies the dilemma of bringing together terms which only the human heart in the poetic moment is capable of reconciling. The well-knit polarization (inside-outside, private-public), identified with the abstract character of architecture, can give no resolution to the content of reason nor to the regret of sensuality both of which submit to moments of vengeance, exacting retribution for their depersonalization.”

Hejduk served as the Dean of the Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture at the Cooper Union until his death in 2000. Throughout his career as educator and practitioner, he moved in architectural circles mostly in New York City and also traveled extensively with what is sometimes referred to as his traveling carnival of architectural animals. "Perhaps on one level we might interpret this apparently playful, seemingly deliberately ephemeral construction of a traveling architecture as an example of what Jeffry Kipnis and David Shapiro have recently noted as Hejduk's difficulty in joining, in agreeing; of his relentless drive to distance himself from contemporary fashions.”

The theme of cultural representation in architecture is taken up by K. Michael Hays in his recent book Architecture's Desire: reading the late avant-garde. In the chapter Desire, Hays explores architectural practice during the period of the 1970s to the 1990s when a paradigmatic shift occurs that as he explains, resets the trajectory of architecture in the twentieth century. He describes this period as the "Age of Discourse" when architecture turned to align itself with other disciplines that took language as the means for self-analysis. While Manfredo Tafuri, offering a hyperbolic reaction and citing this as the failure of architecture to project its intellectual independence in defiance of a growing consumer-oriented society, Jacques Derrida provides a more rational perspective: "This moment was that in which language invaded the universal problematic; that in which, in the absence of a center of origin, everything became discourse — provided we can agree on this word — that is to say when everything became a system where the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences.”
Tafuri’s criticism, however justified was diffuse and failed to recognize the intellectual investment being made by a handful of architects, mostly operating in New York, who would inevitably engage in the heavy labor of lifting twentieth century architecture from the confinements of a toxic strain of modernity. “The “over-and-over-again” indictment of the postwar avant-garde—the empty, numbing repetition of forms left over from the presumed authentic historical avant-garde—became something of leftist trope after Peter Burger’s Theory of the Avant-Garde (German 1974: English, 1984).” The early avant-garde, which fell victim to its own relentless utopian formalism of social equality and mass production, witnessed the public shift away from modernism. Architecture’s autonomy had been subverted by the very social order with which it was complicit, leaving it abandoned, stripped of its street-cred and seeking a way to reconcile itself to a new existential plane.

“This architecture is a reflection on the foundation and limits of architecture itself.” Hays describes this seasoning of the discipline, the moving away from its socio-political function to one that aligned more closely with art and the making of things, enabled it to free itself from all that was real. In the late phase, the architectural symbolic begins to close in on itself, to regard itself as a vast accumulation of signifiers, rather than as the never-concluded, positive production of meaning. The late avant-garde’s introjection of loss and absence means not that the architectural object is empty, lacking, freed of contact with the real—as Tafuri and Rowe have it—but rather that the object renders its pathological content directly; it is the very form in which a certain lack assumes existence, the form necessary to imagine a radical lack in the real itself.”

We are confronted with the temporal context of the late avant-garde, architects that included Colin Rowe, Aldo Rossi, Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Peter Eisenman, that followed the Le Corbusian period of the first half of the twentieth century. In this post war-Levittown-is-king-era, when architecture’s social value was bankrupt and had reached its nadir, “architecture found itself challenged as a mode of cultural representation by more commercially lubricated media. Feeling the force of changed historical conditions and a developed consumer society, the most advanced architecture of the 1970s retracted the frame of identity between the architectural object and the socio-material ground.”

Identity as the un-conditional term of its existence was the presentment of need. Architecture had become divided within itself; its objectness had become disenfranchised, not gone but displaced by an ‘Other’ self, (In Lacanian terms, the Mother or something exterior to architecture), endowed with a hunger for a codified position from which to operate within the ether of culture, no longer in the form of object, but symbol. Lacan’s theory provides language of the Symbolic: “in contrast to the imaginary, the symbolic involves the formation of signifiers and language and is considered to be the determining order of the subject signifier over the signified;” “For this primordial distinction goes well beyond the discussion concerning the arbitrariness of the sign as it has been elaborated since the earliest reflections of the ancients.”
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To pursue this formulation of the symbolic a bit further, once architecture had reorganized its need, as a demand, the actual need was met by a substitute, or avatar, that is transcendent to the object of desire. With in the larger field of Desire, as stated in Lacan, is the force of constant cohesion and understood as the engine that runs the entire psychic system; connecting and reconnecting the signifiers and signified which explains why Lacan is associated with the use of metonymy, a virtual social network within the psyche.

Hays establishes his own theory based upon Lacanian desire as a way of explaining the identity crisis going on in architecture in the 1970s. It is plain that architectural desire is manifest in the ‘objects’ of the late avant-garde as the symbolic desire for the ‘other’, its signifiers and use and of language; “its oneness — desire is architecture’s unconscious; desire as the pursuit of architecture’s original object forever lost, (The Tabernacle in the desert, the Vitruvian tree house, the primitive hut). Hence the obsessive search in this work for architecture’s fundamental codes and principles, all the time knowing full well there can be none, that outside the architectural Symbolic is the radical nothingness of the architectural Real.”10

As we will see in Hejduk’s work, his use of architectural objects as fragments, inverted, broken pieces of the real are sublated and transformed into the new Symbolic that we are to understand as analogues of the lost social context. Similarly, his use of repetition in formal strategies for his wall houses, and most particularly in his haunting artwork compiled in the volume Pewter Wings Golden Horns Stone Veils, Hejduk reveals his desire for something lost, described by Hays as an equivocation of sorts, that becomes a symbol of architecture’s lost fulfillment, and possibly its death. Hejduk is not alone on his ideological journey traveling toward the path of architecture’s Other; Eisenman, Tschumi, and Rossi are equally prodigious in their explorations of symbolic forms that will, against all odds, reveal the ‘Other.’ “Through desire, architecture is rendered eccentric to itself. And there are moments when an architectural experience produces the conception of eccentricity — moments of becoming affects, encounters that are non-representational modes of thought; moments when a sensation just barely precedes its concept and we glimpse very basic, primitive architectural ideas, axioms for future architectures.”11

Hejduk is important because, or perhaps in spite of his failure to co-opt criticism and deploy it for his own populist radicalization. In his meandering cathexis, there was more below the surface than there was above, which necessitated a rigorous, almost pathological repetition of operations to construct and deconstruct the inchoate parade of objects over which he obsessed. Hejduk understood the limits of architecture as imaginary constructs (constraints) that were like most things, victims of the moment that was sure to pass.

“So too it happens in the enclosure of a night bus journey
through mountain roads when for a moment we look up at receding pines on coal slopes, a house appears illuminated by the very darkness of the pine. There is a sense of overwhelming antiquity and a sadness pervades. There are architectures of dusks; their crystallizations codify dense opacities, their windows impenetrable, reflecting voidness; and they speak of erasures. The houses are like a papier-mâché doll whose eyes are closed when she lies horizontal, but when she arches up to the vertical, the eyes open...yet the circles are vacant...there is nothing behind...only composition."12

John Hejduk

(excerpted from a critique written for Ricardo Scofidio and Elizabeth Diller on the Kinney House)

The Wall
One of the fundamental themes in Hejduk’s extensive personal oeuvre is the wall, which is expressed as the subversion of the plan, a methodological distortion of paradigmatic space. In the Wall series, he breaks with the homogeneity of Euclidian space by turning its orthogonal axis ninety degrees subverting the traditional role of the plan and moving to a higher level of abstraction. We see in Hejduk a kind of quid pro quos with his own Other, a resolution that moves him from a maker of autonomous objects that live in peripheral space to a creator of space whose margins are filled with his autonomous objects.

"The mystery of houses is the mystery of our mind We move from room to room and only inhabit the present. Abandoned rooms are like abandoned thoughts, we can remember them and so we can return to them. As the shell of a house encompasses external rooms for our body, the shell of our body encompasses the interior rooms of our thought. We rummage through the attics of our houses. The idea of house is the idea of forever."13

John Hejduk 1979

The Wall Houses reflect his ideological affinities with Le Corbusier, his Villa Garches and Villa la Roche most specifically. Though unlike the master, Hejduk disputes the notion of exteriority as having subsumed all traces of emotion leaving the interiority bereft of everything but void. "The frequent appearance of the Wall House or the compressed plane in John Hejduk’s work is a fascinating spatial resolution of this dilemma. It shows concretely how a univalent surface can open itself to an unrestricted movement by arranging itself around an original restriction. The etymology of this thinness, as well as its doubling, indicates the problem of impenetrability and access whose paradoxical essence lies in the chimerical nature of objectified space."14
Detlef Mertins, in his critique of Hejduk’s Bernstein (Wall) House, discusses the issues of exteriority and interiority through the discursive language of formal logic and effect; “Unlike the earlier Diamond projects, which combined interior spatial density with exterior volume simplicity, the Bernstein House externalizes its figural ambitions, pushing the stair tower and chimney to the outside, leaving the interior rather empty. In terms of the well-known distinction made by Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky between literal and phenomenal transparency, the Bernstein House is somewhat ambiguous.” Mertins compares the Bernstein House to Le Corbusier’s Villa Garches not in its formalist program nor in perceptual terms, rather in terms of meaning and expression derived through architecture’s cultural representation. He continues, “The Villa Garches is distinguished by the indirectness of its self-disclosure and its reliance on the cognitive device of the façade to represent the three-dimensional internal order of the building. — While the divisions, openings, and projections of the façade at Hejduk’s Bernstein’s House register aspects of the interior in the manner of the Villa Garches, the building could also be said to body itself forth more directly by placing elements of the interior on the outside and obscuring the representational device of the façade. This duplication of formal strategies for the disclosure of the inner being of the building effectively undermines both. Moreover, by the emptying out the interior Hejduk problematizes the assumption that the object has an inner essence that is susceptible to external expression. The Bernstein House, then, signals not only a crisis of the modernist project of transparency — be it first or second order — but its conversion to the opacity of the mask for the Masque.” 15

The stages of development of the Wall House actually began between 1963 and 1967. In addition to Le Corbusier, credit is owed as well to Mies van der Rohe and to Piet Mondrian. Hejduk chronicles the history of architectural space, presumably with some constraining boundaries, and declares that paradigmatic space is the result of forces of the right angle. In diagrams Hejduk describes his notion that the originary, primitive shape in architecture is the square and that when viewed in isometric projection is actually a diamond. Extruded into the Z coordinate, the diamond appears as two squares connected by invisible vertical planes.

I pondered the idea of positioning Hejduk in the horizontal, that is, on the therapeutic couch but conceded to myself that its contrivance would be a distraction from the content and meaning of his words. But you can imagine.

Hejduk speaks:
"In the Diamonds, one is always talking about the edge membranes. That membrane is an edge condition, a line condition, a threshold condition. It’s non-physical; it’s physical by memory. There’s a universal; it’s an expanding universe. It’s emanating form a center; it’s an explosive center. There is an armature, which is reflecting energy out to the corners, and then you build up that condition outside. The differential is that in painting, it’s you sitting there looking upon the wall, contemplating. Leonardo Da Vinci comes to the conclusion that painting has to be the finest art because it’s a contemporary art. You’re sitting there looking and you build your world, a certain non-physicality, the person is not moving, he’s sitting, he’s looking, it’s the mind and it’s
John Hejduk  Representations of the imaginary

the eye. You’re static but the painting is moving, the painting is evolving. That’s a very beautiful idea about painting and the static condition. The minute you start the physicality of moving, which is architecture, you can look at the object if you’re looking in a fixed Renaissance point of view and you’re looking outside of it. As you approach the membrane, there is a point where you physically come inside. It’s a marvelous way of memory, of seeing, of moving, of static and non-static.”  

Hejduk referred to this as the “moment of the hypotenuse” casting a blind eye to the phenomenological affects of seeing. Apropos of this moment, is the chapter The Line and the Light in Lacan’s writing Of the Gaze where he asks, “What is the desire which is caught, fixed in the picture, but which also urges the artist to put something into operation?” Here Lacan refers to Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s Le Visible et l’invisible where the function of vision is described as the complexity of interlacing and intertwining and that what we see is a labyrinth comprised of the many strands that require our ability to perceive how they intersect.

Lacan asks, “How can we try to apprehend that which seems to elude us in this way in the optical structuring of space?” Acknowledging the work on the part of Kant, Alain and Plato, he offers an explanation of what he calls the deceptiveness of perception stressing the fact that “perception finds the object where it is, and that the appearance of the cube as a parallelogram is precisely, owing to the rupture of space that underlies our very perception, what makes us perceive it as a cube. The whole trick, the hey presto!, of the classic dialectic around perception, derives from the fact that it deals with geometrical vision, that is to say, with vision in so far as it is situated in a space that is not in its essence the visual.” So as to privilege the science of matter, Lacan then explains that the “relation between appearance and being, which is the philosopher, conquering the field of vision, so easily masters, lies elsewhere. It is not in the straight line, but in the point of light — the point of irradiation, the play of light, fire, the source from which reflections pour forth.”

Between 1968 and 1974, and upon the completion of his research for the Diamond House and the Nine Square Texas Houses, Hejduk submersed himself in the design of houses, most particularly the Wall Houses.

Hejduk speaks:

“The problem as I saw it was that the biomorphic forms placed in front of the gridded frame were located on the lower grade level; I felt the necessity that the wall be freestanding, acting as a tableau upon which the biomorphic elements should be suspended. The element should float, up in the air playing off the geometric flat wall — On one side of the wall (the past) the circulatory elements — the ramp, stair, elevator — were placed. They were volumetric, opaque, monochromatic, in perspective with the structure grounded. The color was white, grey, black; the materials reinforced concrete, steel, cement. Once the single inhabitant passed through the wall he was in a space overlooking a landscape (trees? water? earth? sky?), which was basically private, contemplative and reflective. There were three suspended floors cantilevered from the
collective elements. The materials on this side of the wall were glass and reflective metal; a fluidity was sought after. Whereas the collective side was hard, tough concrete, the private side was inwardly reflective, a light shattering into fragments, mirror images, moving along the polished surfaces of metal”.

One can imagine the provocation of a plan like Villa Savoye, whose plan contains the same or similar principles of inside-outside, private public, as well as the formal arrangement of a compressed spatiality of post cubist painting as in George Braque’s Studio III. Hejduk speculated on the deformations of these visual antecedants that subliminally, unconsciously acted upon his psychic creativity. As Peggy Dreamer suggests, it is the state of mind of the author that is one aspect of the project that draws us in and conditions the choosing of mnemonics as the structure for criticism. Hejduks’s architecture seems to cross the boundaries between creative license and creative obsession, almost as if the bipartite arrangement of interiority /exteriority, past / future apply to more than the arrangement of space in the house but also within psychic space of Hejduk’s own deeply stirring world.

The relationship of the viewer to the Wall House is one that bears mention. I refer once more to the Villa Savoye and the nature of how it is perceived. Like the Wall House, the elevations have their own physiognomy, appearing to stare out at the visitor and at the same time reveal the motion inside; a generative façade that is embodied with life that is visible from each side of the wall; a simulacrum of membrane that both separates and aggregates the spatial cloud in which the houses exist.

Hays wrote, ”A dimension of the figural is already present in the Wall House — not of clichéd images or recycled meanings: rather it is a dimension of gesture and referral that opens up a sense of a world outside the purely syntactical organizations whose domain, it has been assumed, encloses the early experiments of both Hejduk and Eisenman (recall the Wall Houses were first presented with Eisenman's early house projects as having common purpose).”

Walter Benjamin wrote about the perception of the reciprocal gaze, ”— Looking at someone carries the implicit expectation that our look will be returned by the object of our gaze. Where this expectation is met...there is an experience of the aura to the fullest extent...Experience of aura thus rests on the transposition of a response common in human relationships to the relations between the inanimate and the natural object and (the person)... To perceive the aura of an object we look at the means to invest it with the ability to look at us in turn. This experience corresponds to the data of the memoire involutaire.”

Homologous to Benjamin’s aura is the Lacanian theory of double articulation of the subject as both the viewer of the object and under the watchfulness of the object itself, pictured by its gaze. He references the sardine can floating at sea and the sense that the reciprocal gaze situates each in time and space. Required for this engagement is that the subject and object are able to view and/or be seen reciprocally, either in a reflecting surface such as a mirror, or upon a screen. It is
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explained alternately as either a projection onto a screen offering a perspectival view or that is a projection from the object likened to a light source casting its cone of illumination. The latter is interrupted by a fixed opaque screen that Lacan refers to as a blotter or membrane that reduced the intensity of brightness coming form the source.

"Lacan calls the coincidence of the two planes “image-screen” or the mask and it is this that determines what can and cannot be seen and how it is seen and helps us to manage what is seen by giving us an Imaginary-Symbolic system with which to represent things to ourselves and ourselves to others. Man in effect knows how to play with the mask as that beyond which there is the gaze. Lacan states, "the screen, is here the locus of mediation", Hejduk’s image-screen with its similar dialectic of flatness and depth, opacity and transparency — his Mask of Medusa — is his Wall. The Wall traces Architecture’s gaze; we are placed before the Wall by architecture’s gaze. For Hejduk as for Lacan, the image-screen is an apparatus of the Imaginary/Symbolic necessary for our social and cultural existence — a historically generated repertoire of images and codes through which we as social subjects are constructed in something like an architectural mirror stage (can it be mere coincidence that one side of Hejduk’s Wall is a mirror?) by forces of architectural desire.” 22

Architectural Representation as Multilateral Ideological Systems

A central trope of modernism has to do with our relationship to the real world. A crisscrossing of theories from philosophers Husserl, Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger, to psychoanalysts Freud, Lacan and Ferenczi, each having their place of influence here, yet some will remain mute in order to circumscribe the subject limits of this paper. As a point of departure, we can recognize the systemic approach to the objectification of the real world by considering Merleau-Ponty whose theoretical position is that we are all hard-wired to receive that which the world represents to us as a “constancy” of figuration and objectivity that provides access to meaning and broad-based understanding. In Phenomenology of Perception he writes: “A thing is, therefore, not actually given in perception, it is internally taken up by us in so far as it is bound up with a world, the basic structure of which we carry with us, and of which it is merely one of many possible concrete forms.” 23

A collateral perspective, neither homologous nor mutually exclusive, is that of the constructed reality, an inverted reality perhaps from what Merleau-Ponty describes, which relies upon the intention of signifiers and symbols that are constitutive elements of the existing social order and which are capable of ideological representation. The disciplinary nature of architecture is one that constructs conceptual representations that have socially symbolic value. “Architecture comprises a set of operations that organize formal representations of the real, rather than merely being invested with an ideology by its creators or users, it is ideological in its own right — an imaginary solution to a real social situation and contradiction (as Louis Althusser’s take on Jacques Lacan puts it); that is what is meant by autonomy” 24
"Traditionally, the category architecture has constituted itself on the basis of satisfying a double negation, namely that it is not-urbanism (which is without a site or structure) and not-sculpture (which is without function). Additionally, architecture is seen to be “bigger” than sculpture and "smaller" (or less numerous) than urbanism. Hejduk’s constructions, however, emerge as a positive exhaustion of this dichotomy since they can be provisionally framed under all three discourses and scales, sculpture-architecture-urbanism." 25

What are we to think about the significance of John Hejduk’s work? It is characterized as an architecture of autonomous forms, of objects removed from their contexts of origin, a symbolic self-referential, perhaps narcissistic production of a non-negotiable language. At once, we can assess the hostility to conformance, the deliberate avoidance to engagement of the real world, a general mistrust that may have come from the discredited accumulation of unbuilt work. Hejduk stood in opposition to the formalism of science on the basis that it promoted mass production, yet he continued to develop his own closed order that would produce (masses of) new possibilities.

Peggy Dreamer, a student of Hejduk’s wrote an essay, Me, Myself an I: “How strange, but not fortuitous, that someone like Hejduk who seems at all cost to have avoided the commodification of his persona, should so strongly insert his person into the critical discourse. The writings surrounding the work have inadvertently directed attention to the mystery of the author “himself”. 26

“Hejduk’s objects, his heroes, are also products of this narcissistic agenda. If the psychoanalytic urge is inwardly motivated, its effect is outwardly directed. The objectification of the self, the urge to thwart morality by solidifying the life into an object” is a fact of both psychosis and autobiography. In the cross-fertilization between the inner and outer worlds, each acts as a representation to the other... (Hejduk’s heroes) reenact, by the consistent cross referencing of the inhabitant-subject with the building-object, the process of self-objectification at play in the autobiographical process in general. 27

Daniel Libeskind in his 1984 Introduction to the master works volume called Mask Of Medusa, originally published in 1978, wrote this about Hejduk: “In resisting the pressure of opinion about the function of the architect, John Hejduk has recovered a reality of architecture that is impervious to the division between praxis (knowledge) and poiesis (craftsmanship). This emerging truth, linked as it is to an to an overcoming of the positivist, purely human quest for domination as well as of the blind imitation of chance, inspires his recent work with the radical, one might say an ethical, dimension.” 28

Stan Allen’s essay called Nothing but Architecture frames Hejduk’s stance on theory and practice in this way, “Hejduk resists the theoretical, not out of anti-intellectualism or antipathy to thought in architecture, but in recognition of theory’s tendency toward reduction, regulation and
repetition. Rather than submitting each example to the rule of theory, Hejduk elevates the individual utterance to the status of the general. Hejduk's "field of operations" in turn produces something like theory, but more fluid: a systematic thought capable of accommodating architecture's status as a non-circumscribed discipline." 29

To understand Hejduk's architecture is to detach from the comfort of familiar signifiers that have served to codify success and that have resulted in a condensation of the linguistic critique. "For if architecture is neither an immanent realization that contains nothing other than that which was put into it (ego cogito) nor an impenetrable other superior to its producer or medium, then one is denied a refuge in either the mechanics of method or in form's transcendent requirements." 30 As it relates to the Wall projects, upon which much of Hejduk's non-theoretical, eidetic ruminations were based, "This elevational chronotope must constantly produce itself, continually exchanging contexts, programs, subjects, and objects. It is a smooth screen of continuous narrative projection, which means that space produced by his work. Hejduk's refusal to posit solutions is integral to the time-space produced by his work." 31 Nevertheless, Hejduk reveals his own inner landscape of sinister landscapes and brooding skies, ruminating on worldly events (or purging his own demons), using a variety of metaphors and mnemonics, exploring themes of imprisonment, nature, death, and memory, some of which will find their way into later sections of this paper. The Hejduk we encounter in his visual representations appear as nightmarish scenes of forbidden places: symbols of smokestacks, prison gates, and chambers of death. His imagery is that of war and deprivation, yet it is a scenography absent a social presence. The images operate on our counter-intuition of his experiential inspiration; he was not a child of war rather American–born with most of his time spent in New York City. His evocations of terror and death must be sublimated in his disaffection for humanity and his mistrust of authority.

A fascinating assessment of Hejduk's work and legacy is the final essay in Hejduk's Chronotope, Errand, Detour, and the Wilderness Urbanism of John Hejduk, by Catherine Ingraham. The essay, a fluid condensation of the Hejdukian unconscious, slips back and forth between the compartments of disciplinary criticism and clinical psychoanalysis. Her use of mimetic narrative is an allegory within an allegory as she draws lines of intersection between Hejduk's Lancaster/Hanover Masque, and two separate texts; the work by seventeenth-century historian Perry Miller about the early settlements in America called "Errand into the Wilderness" and the notes from an experiment of the Pine Processionary caterpillars conducted by French naturalist Henri Fabre.

As Ingraham explains the significance of Miller's text, the second and third generation settlers had lost confidence in the errand of taming the new wilderness; these settlers did not share the sense of purpose, "the conscious intention of the mind," 32 of the original settlers, rather they were sent to do an errand, in service to the divine, the superior authority. The story is the fall from grace, the failure to fulfill the errand of settling the wilderness. Ingraham inserts her gaze; "Hejduk is, and seems to have always been, both the figure of the father, who maintains the original mission, and the son, who wanders from the path." 33 She then diverts her attention to
the implications of the wilderness: “Most of Hejduk’s work is not situated within the American city and it would be hard to determine how American urbanism specifically, if there is such a thing registers itself in his work. The new urban population of Hejduk’s work — those who are concerned above all with their formal, architectural relation to the world and are even named on terms of that relation — is, similarly without a body-politic or even an a nationality.” 34 Ingraham uses this to suggest that place or the absence of it is a constitutive part of identity and that Hejduk, whose work embodies neither place nor identity, a virtual wilderness, the unfulfilled errand, a representation of the recalcitrance of human nature.

In the Pine Processionary, the experiment involves the indigenous caterpillars, which become trapped on a circular path of their own making and that after eight days of going round and round and nearly expired from lack of food, the scientist places a tempting pine branch for their delectability, that will save them, but they are unwilling to deviate from the path. By chance, one caterpillar finds a way out from the circular path to freedom and survival. The correspondence to Hejduk is several according to Ingraham. The first is the lesson of life and death and the implications of deviating form the path, and the perils of not doing so. Second, we can speculate on the double bind of Hejduk’s repetitive formal logic of the wall: was this his way out of the wilderness, his means of deviating from the sameness of what he understood to be the empty objects of the late avant-garde? Alternatively, we can interpret his insistence, his loyalty to his own constructed representation, a pseudo hallucination of persistent imagery, from which he could not withdraw.

I especially like Ingraham’s perspective on this as she posits this thought that “Hejduk’s work is iconicropic, which is to say it is work whose essence is images, thus Hejduk’s architecture is the architecture of the picture-book. According to Freud, dreams are also predominantly images; as he remarks, “ dreams think predominantly in visual images and.... what are truly characteristic of dreams are only those elements of their content which behave like images.” Dreams hallucinate and...construct a situation out of images.” 35 Ingraham’s thesis is that Hejduk reverses the image-word relationship of psychoanalysis by reducing the word to “a condensed and cryptic “poetics” that the image subsequently elaborates and interprets. — The problem with this reversal is that, 1) we are not dealing with dream images or dream texts, but with dream-like material (i.e. allegory), and 2), once we make the image the elaborating instance of the word we can no longer make use of Freud, although we can still make use of Lacan’s gap. In other words, it doesn’t make sense to speak of the psychoanalysis of a subject where the subject’s words have themselves become cryptic images. This is not psychoanalysis but psychosis.” 36

In the ten years since his untimely death, Hejduk remains a fascinating subject for research and speculation of architecture’s place in modern culture. His production of images and textual ruminations constitute a compelling personal narrative as the sum of his life and work. The semiotics of his inner world are manifest in his discursive oeuvre: it is the narrative of modern culture as seen through a set of overly determined signifiers.” If we cannot conceive the
human without narrative, then it is incumbent on us to include narrativity in the originary scene, in the emission of the originary sign — The material sign is the basis of the arts: it is musical as sound, danced and figurative as gesture, and so on. The institutional inheres as a potential in any real use of the sign. But once we grant this, we must conceive the originary—and every subsequent—use of the sign as “narrative. Narrativity requires nothing of the sign beyond its own inherent temporality.” 37
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Endnotes


4. Ibid., p. 4

5. Ibid., p. 11

6. Ibid., p. 11

7. Ibid., p. 12

8. Ibid., p. 13


11. Ibid., p. 18.


13. Ibid., 123.


18. Ibid., p.94.


20. Ibid., p. 95.

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26. Ibid., p. 65.

27. Ibid., p. 69.


32. Ibid., p.130

33. Ibid., p. 131

34. Ibid., p. 131


36. Ibid., p. 137.

37. Gans, F. Eric, Department of French, Department of French, University of California at Los Angeles, CA.
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