Genius, Genus, Genealogy: Hejduk's Potential Angels

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Genius

In his essay on "Genius", Giorgio Agamben returns to an ancient model of genius, more specifically, the genius of the individual human subject. It replaces the Romanticist model (where genius is exclusively an indeterminate volatile imagination or eccentric performative madness) with a subtle personification of a near-continuous, but contingent "murmuring" within and beyond the body that houses the individual subject. Genius here is sometimes like a guiding proprioceptive sense integrated within the body, sometimes like a trace memory pressuring the body from outside:[1]

> If the life that is held in tension between 'I' and Genius, between the personal and the impersonal, is a poetic one, the feeling that Genius exceeds and overcomes us from every side is one of panic, the panic that something infinitely much greater than what we appear to be able to endure is happening to us (Agamben, 2006: 96).

The subject, under genius, is no longer the transparent Enlightenment subject under reason, but is returned to a perpetual dissonance between this watching invisible spirit and the uneventful ground of work and days. As such, the individual for Agamben is never still or complete, but clearly is rethought as a slowly oscillating "potentiality", whose genius is the "subtle body" that signifies indeterminacy, as Agamben explains:

> But this most intimate and personal of gods is also the most impersonal part of us, the personalization of that, within us, which surpasses and exceeds ourselves. "Genius is our life, in as much as it was not given origin by us, but gave us origin". If he seems to identify himself with us, it is only in order to reveal himself immediately afterwards as something more than ourselves, in order to show us that we ourselves are more and less than ourselves (Agamben, 2006: 95).

Since the potential of genius remains fugitive and invisible, the potential of Agamben's genius to inform architectural thought, as the manifestation of invisible desires, is both necessary and elusive. To ask the question of the promise of potentiality demands identifying the necessary minimal difference between genealogy and genius within the intentionality of design, between the epistemological foundation of (architectural) origins contra the poetic possibility of the *un*-representable moment, as accidental chance or event. The incomplete

"subject-under-genius" is thus a subtle crossing of above-below, of before-after, and most importantly, a crossing of the visible-invisible. The task of genius within contemporary architecture, following Agamben's claims, is to always remain potential, and the task of the architect, in the uneasy position of artist, is to always remain a subject "without content" (Agamben, 1994: 55).

This claimed content-less-ness of artists, and their differential works, realizes the nascent objecthood and autonomy of conventional Modern Architecture (-without-qualities) – as neuter, minimal, mute – pulling most works towards a *topos* of the generic. In response to this tendency, John Hejduk's enigmatic and speculative later works (specifically *Bovisa, Vladivostok,* and *Victims*) suggest invisible coercive possibilities within the immanence of late-Modernist life and form, resonant with Agamben's anachronistic model of genius. Within Hejduk's cryptic architectural tableaux sometimes occurs the peculiar figure of the angel, this most ancient avatar of genius and an anachronistic figure, which was almost abandoned within the visual languages of modernity. Hejduk's oeuvre, perhaps best reconsidered as a research project of associative imaginaries crossing signifier and signified, is helpful for refining the question of what is possible within the contingency of the image of architecture. Hejduk's angels are certainly in resonance with Agamben's later texts on genius and potential, as both thought-systems emerge from a questioning of the excesses of material facts and a search for that which grounds unpredictable yet definitive events.

Potential

Is this therefore architecture's "genius", architecture's potential? In using Agamben's constructs to clarify Hejduk's later work, a distinction must be made between the contingent and the potential. Contingency lies closer to the bare life of work and days, closer to genealogy than genius. It is significant that Agamben describes contingency through the image of an angel:

> Know that Gabriel has two wings. The first, the one on the right, is purified. This wing is the sole and pure relation of Gabriel's Being-with-God. Then there is the left wing. This wing is grey; it has to do with a dark figure resembling the crimson colour of the moon at dawn or the peacock's claw. This shadowy figure is Gabriel's capacity to be, which has one side turned towards non-Being (since it is, as such, also a capacity not to be). If you consider Gabriel in his act of Being through God's Being, then his Being is said to be necessary, since under this aspect it cannot not be. But if you consider him in his right to existence in itself, this right is immediately to the same degree a right not to be, since such is the right of a being that does not have its capacity to be in itself (and that is, therefore, a capacity not to be) (Agamben, 1991: 271).

For Agamben, potential is always unrealised capacity – it is the lack that drives the production of a series, and that which is the visual 'missing matter' from each specific work of art. And as every work is like a prologue, a "broken cast" of another never realised, so will later works in turn "be the prologues or the moulds for other absent works, [and] represent only sketches or death masks"

(Agamben, 1993: 3). This phenomenology of appearance is of particular importance for exposing the function of Hejduk's works as a counter-memory of modern architecture.

Genealogy

Agamben situates a genius (always singular), which holds and exceeds the subjective body (again, always singular), as unique. Genius therefore has no visible genealogy, which, since Nietzsche, is a question of the differential relation between corporeality and epistemology.

Genealogy, after Nietzsche and Foucault, is not a tedious historical narrative of before and after, but traces the movement of descent (*Herkunft*) of invisible drives and forces, as it simultaneously proposes an emergence (*Entstehung*) of the suppressed, in and through the situated body. Neo-Nietzschean genealogy may appear to be the dissolution of the individual (as a body) into a series through language, where individual drives submerge into cultural manoeuvres. Yet, Blondel wisely warns "if genealogy is the discourse that consists in relating cultural phenomena back to the body, it only really achieves this as a result of a textual labour and movement, which are irreducible to the systematic unity of discourse" (1991: 258). Dissolving historical imperatives, this alternative Nietzschean promise of genealogy "disturbs what was previously immobile; it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself" (Foucault, 1977: 147). The elusive curvature of effects traced by this mode of genealogy "attaches itself to the body … it inscribes itself in the nervous system, in temperament, in the digestive apparatus; it appears in faulty respiration, in improper diets, in the debilitated and prostrate body of those whose ancestors committed errors" (147). The flesh of stones, the fabric of architecture, recurs as such a body. Vastly divergent architectural discourses all perform within their desired symbolic discourses (of power, truth, desire) where the series of visible works are configured as an (illusory) inevitability. Individual works of architecture always function to conceal and contain the Nietzschean invisible descent of past drives, as impulse or potential.

Hejduk's spatialised, mytho-poetic narratives demonstrate this difficult genealogical labour and movement. They reveal and expose what is latent or silenced, but necessary, within modern architecture and repeatedly stage the possibility of a haunting genealogical emergence, the liminal emergent event – which is also an artistic "moment of arising" for Foucault, "the principle and the singular law of an apparition" (148). Repressed apparitions, vaporous ethers, and angelic ciphers seek to remind us that the determinist perception and representation of the moment is the nagging problematic of utopian modernist space proper, and it is no surprise that such apparitions return to 'dwell' within Hejduk's singular prescient representations, as if all subjects-under-architecture lived like the ancients, "surrounded, in the invisible air, by wandering avengers who never forget the 'ancient contaminations' " (Cheatham n.d.: n.p.).

Hejduk's late works appear to illustrate Agamben's ancient model of the genius as the haunting limit-function of the incomplete and contingent subject:

We need therefore to see the subject as a field of tensions, whose antithetical poles are Genius and 'I'. This field is covered by two joined but opposite forces, one that proceeds from the individual to the impersonal, and the other from the impersonal to the individual. These two forces live together, they intersect, they separate out, but they can neither free themselves completely one from the other, nor perfectly identify each with the other (Agamben, 2006: 96).

Genus

Whilst under the pull of an individual but impersonal genius, the individual is still like others, and thus always an instance of the tearing between individual *genius* and a collective *genus*. Agamben defines *genus* not simply as an empty "generic being" but as a reactive "original container (both in the active sense of that which holds together and gathers, and in the reflexive sense of that which holds itself together and is continuous) of the individuals who belong to it"(Agamben, 1994: 80). This genus is the muted concept of the individual without difference, without qualities, separated from genius. Prototypical and without temporality, the genus is soluble within the individuals forming a series or set, reflected in the monotony of modern architecture. The genus resists architectural speculation, when genus is type. The genus of architecture is a non-existent generic and vague category (approximating type) within genealogy, and as such can never be its object, which must always exhibit individual difference. Blondel notes that the object of Nietzschean genealogy is a precise exposure of (generic) "factors that allow grouping to take place while themselves remaining *hidden*" (1991: 250). These factors, including concealed values, drives, desires, and memories, are present but latent within monumental history, knowable only through their translation into the specific images, forms, and affects of architectural languages. This is why Nietzsche insisted:

> We knowers are unknown to ourselves, and for a good reason: how can we ever hope to find what we have never looked for? … The sad truth is that we remain necessarily strangers to ourselves, we don't understand our own substance, we must mistake ourselves; the axiom, 'Each man is farthest from himself' will hold for us to all eternity. Of ourselves we are not 'knowers' …" (Nietzsche, 1989: 149).

Under these criteria, the genealogy of architecture, after the writing degree zero of ascetic modernity, must be a genealogy of all that which is invisible behind and within the stated materiality of architecture, where furtive glances, imperfect gestures, and failed encounters equal or exceed schemas in significance. For Foucault, such a genealogy of apparitions is the foundation of a necessary and compulsive counter-memory, which, by definition, is neither metaphysical nor transcendent, but real and immanent. Hejduk's last projects can be read as such a 'counter-memory' of teleological modernism which accepts but tasks the grid of formalism, and works from the possibility of a visual emergence of the perceptible unknown, the murmuring of potentials, from the contingencies of the generic type (as angel, machine, landscape, or narrative) imagined as dissonant series, without origin or end.

Non-Origin

Between the contested historiographies of modern architecture and Hejduk's enigmatic 'refusal', where is it possible to begin with a Nietzschean genealogy of the unknown/unseen 'genius' of architecture? History, after Hegel, always demands an origin, yet Foucault offers "the origin lies at a place of inevitable loss, the point where the truth of things correspond to a truthful discourse, the site of a fleeting articulation that discourse has obscured and finally lost"(1977: 143). The origin is the thus the site of disappearance and descent whose insignificance, according to Nietzsche, increases with its knowledge: "…the more insight we possess into an origin the less significant does the origin appear" (1982: 46). The superficial tracing of an origin, retroactively misperceived as foundational truth, is actually a vanishing point in the search for the descending forces of genealogy: it is always provisional, like philosophical truths that perform as masks concealing further masks. In the extreme, to find the propulsion of meaning, "the genealogist needs history to dispel the chimeras of the origin" (Foucault, 1977: 146). The fixed "origin", as described within narrative history structured as a genealogy of influence, is always untimely, always too early or too late, incomplete, provisional. Agamben concurs with these revisionist claims for the diminished epistemic truth of the origin within genealogy when he affirms "the origin itself can be neither fulfilled nor mastered"(1999: 155). For Agamben, the transient origin is always only a floating potentiality, not fact, in the present moment. His sustained exegesis of Walter Benjamin leads him to posit the origin as neither factual event nor mythical archetype, but one that acts, as for Benjamin, "as a vortex in the stream of becoming and that it manifests itself only through a double structure of restoration and incompleteness" (155). Note how Agamben, in refuting the myth of the integrative origin, duplicates this double structure of temporality between potentiality and contingency, (again) as the split future of the incomplete subject-under-genius:

> That is, man is a unique being in two phases, a being who is the result of the complicated dialectic between one side not (yet) singled out (*individuata*) and lived, and another side already marked by fate and by individual experience. But the part that is impersonal and not isolated (*individuata*) is not a chronological past which we have left behind once and for all (Agamben, 2006: 95).

The spectre of dialectic time, as the open, the empty, and the effervescent creates fission for the moment, as an existential throw of the dice, a choice between the genealogical tendency and the irruption of difference. Within this double-valent structure of the potential subject, the genius itself becomes a double agent serving dual temporalities:

> … we are dealing with a single Genius that is however changeable, now white then dark, now wise then depraved. This means, and it is worth noting that it is not Genius who changes but our relationship with him, that from luminosity and clarity everything becomes opaque and dark. Our life principle, the companion who directs and makes our life pleasant, is suddenly transformed into a silent stowaway who shadow-like follows our every footstep and conspires in secret against us (Agamben, 2006: 98).

Following Agamben, the subject-under-genius and the spatial labour and movement of architecture (as art) evade and escape the determinism of the event as singular: the event is properly defined as both "projective past" and "future anterior", a condition described by Lacan as a history neither past definite nor present perfect, but a future anterior of what one will have been for what one is in the process of becoming (1977: 86). And both temporalities, as interval, are always a descent and a crossing beneath and behind any fixed origin.

Invisibles

And what results from this untimely, diminished, out-of-joint origin? Following Heidegger and Blanchot, "the origin of that which has no origin is the origin of the work of art" (Taylor, 1987: 246; see also Silverman 1994: 49-50). The work of architecture, when it is within art, is without origin, a working of non-knowledge. "To live with Genius means, … to live in the intimacy of an alien being, to keep oneself constantly in relation with a zone of non-consciousness" (Agamben, 2006: 96). As Nietzsche claimed, this non-knowledge is a necessary foundation of the body, which is the tantalizingly obscure object of (architectural) genealogy: "nothing … can be more incomplete than [one's] image of the totality of *drives* which constitute [a man's] being"; we "can scarcely name even the cruder ones: their number and strength, their ebb and flow, their play and counterplay among one another, and above all the laws of their *nutriment* remain wholly unknown" (Nietzsche, 1982: 118).

The phenomenology of art is formed from the obscure origin of the non-origin or, more specifically, the becoming visible of the invisible, because "it is the invisible, and it alone, that renders the visible real" (Marion, 1996: 4). Theologian Jean-Luc Marion shows how "the visible increases in direct proportion to the invisible … the more the invisible is increased, the more the visible is deepened" (5). Marion, in considering modern theology after phenomenology, adds a third dissonant operative term, *the unseen*, to this visual dialectic: the unseen, "only provisionally invisible, always exerts its demand for visibility in order to be made to irrupt"(25). And this categorical unseen is the volatile original non-origin of art, that which is condensed and displaced into the contingent image. The image is only an apparatus of capture; the space within images is fragile, ephemeral, finite, visible, presented otherwise. In a modern world increasingly closed to transcendence, Agamben turns to Hegel and claims that "art loosens itself from itself and moves into pure nothingness, suspended in a kind of diaphanous limbo between the no-longer-being and not-yet-being" (1994: 53).

Hejduk's Angels

> I cannot do a building without building a new repetoirof characters, of stories, of language, and it's all parallel. It's not just building per se, it's building worlds (Hejduk, in Shaprio 1991: 61).

From the 1984 IBA competition entry entitled *Berlin Masque/Victims*, and continuing through his later works, Hejduk slowly and deliberately fused litera-

ture, poetry, and art into potential architecture, where architecture performs as a series of visible containers of the unseen. He once stated:
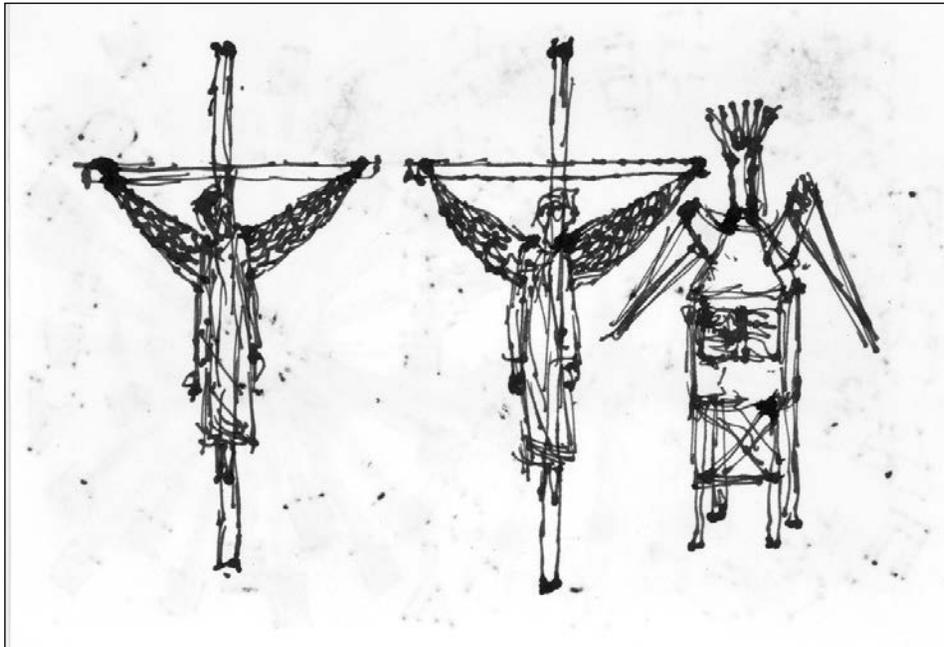
> When an architect is thinking, he's thinking architecture and his work is always architecture, whatever form it appears in. No area is more architectural than any other. My books, for instance, are architecture that you can build in your head. When the research succeeds, it can express the ineffable, which is ultimately translated as spirit. Imagine a drawing and a sentence taking shape at the same time (Hejduk, 1997: n.p.).

The recombinant alogic of his masques, their near-repetition and their transposition of differential animate and inorganic figures (iterated across categories) implements the prior multiplicity necessary for world-making. Calvino described each of our individual lives as a "combinatoria of experiences, information, books we have read, things imagined" (1993: 124). Encyclopaedic inventories of objects and styles, their potentiality allows for multiple recombinations.

By the late 1980's, John Hejduk's architectural speculations increasingly included the disturbing presence of diminished angelic figures within multiple architectural meditations. They do not overtly represent supernatural messengers or hang in ordered celestial harmonies, but often come into representation as entangled. Hejduk's works bear affinity with Blanchot's idea of language as composed of "angels with intertwined wings" (Blanchot, 1982: 195), in that he intertwines architecture's potentiality within contingent images. Hejduk's anachronistic angels are flattened into encyclopaedic, Tarot-like image-spaces appearing and disappearing. Cinematically, they are without progression and their blank diegetic space, outside of topography or history, remains constant.[2] The presence and persistence of these angels indicates that they are of significance, but a significance not immediately apparent. Only a patient questioning of appearance as such will reveal that "the always hidden becomes the always there" (Deamer,

2 These cinematic units of narrative analysis are assumed in the introduction of Hays, Hejduk's Chronotope

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1996: 69). In the wake of modernity and the rise of "absence-of-god", or negative theology, these angels become the typology of the unrepresentable alterity of potentiality within contingent architecture. Following Agamben, - "an experience of potentiality as such is possible only if potentiality is always also the potential not to" (1999: 250) - architecture's contingency would be "something whose opposite could have happened in the very moment in which it happened" (Duns Scotus, in Agamben, 1999: 262).[3]

The discontinuous, but identically scaled, spatial logic of *Bovisa, Vladivostok*, and *Victims* is deliberately iconic and anti-perspectival – the occasional appearance of the descended angels marks the expulsion from the fullness of the theological vanishing point of the implicit rational subjective of perspective. Situated in response to real places, Hejduk's projects appear as clear and distinct grounded icons within an implicit invisible spatial continuum that is neither transcendent nor immanent. Hejduk's reiteration of angels within the persistent blank diegetic space of the masques can be read as the annunciation of that which lies before or behind representation, the angel's ancient function. However, Cacciari warns that annunciation does not involve the "becoming visible of the invisible, the translating-betraying of the invisible in and for the visually perceptible" but, rather, an opening for human beings to relate to the invisible - that "Invisible which the Angel safeguards precisely in the instant in which it is communicated through its forms" (Cacciari, 1994: 3).

Angels were always historically transcendent messengers; their displacement into the visible immanence of Hejduk's masque-spaces constitutes a fantasy as event, specifically one of reversal, turning, or troping. Hejduk makes this explicit as "when an angel penetrates a wall and becomes trapped in it, life and death implode at the moment and space and time fall into infinity" (Hejduk, 2002: n.p.). Echoing Agamben's subject-genius coupling, Hejduk's visual narratives repeatedly stage the descent and entanglement of the genius (guardian angel) into the body (architecture's material form) across these projects, blocked from ever achieving immanence and transcendence, always potential and contingency. As such, Hejduk's individual angels surface as wary ciphers, a visual 'almost nothing' that is over-determined and yet immobilised. In their entirety, they form a genus excluded from functionalist doctrine, and as a genus perform as evidence of a hidden or latent order.

The genus of Hejduk's angels function to "exscribe the unseen". This notion of exscription, as defined by Jean-Luc Nancy, is a potentiality: "by inscribing significations, we exscribe the presence of what withdraws from all significations, being itself (life, passion, matter)", and, "… the being of existence is not unrepresentable: it presents itself exscribed" (1993: 339). Marion defines the unseen as a special category of the invisible, of concealed Being, as the potential of the image: "the unseen admittedly falls under the jurisdiction of the invisible… it is able to transgress it precisely by becoming visible" (1996: 25). Here, Being, in the Heideggerian mode, is that which is outside but coupled with representation – the vacant spaces of the unseen, potential, invisible within Hejduk's masques. His drawn angels, captured into separate iconic postures, are pure potential, an annunciation of the "outside" of instrumental representation. Within atheological modernity, "the Angel has no proper place, but for this reason it is the necessary figure of the instant that brings to a standstill the arrow of time, that interrupts the continuum" (Cacciari, 1994:

33). What is presented in Hejduk's masques is not medieval nostalgia but "the re-inscription of modernist opacity back into representation itself; it means the mask that figures a real that did not exist before its representation" (Hays, 1996: 11).

The angel, as the figure of exteriority, is anticipated in the influential opening of Rilke's *Duino Elegies* that illuminate Hejduk's angelic potential:

> Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angels' hierarchies?
> and even if one of them pressed me suddenly against his heart:
> I would be consumed in that overwhelming existence.
> For beauty is nothing but the beginning of terror, which we are still
> just able to endure,
> and we are so awed because it serenely disdains to annihilate us.
> Every angel is terrifying.
> And so I hold myself back and swallow the call-note of my dark sobbing.
> Ah, whom can we ever turn to in our need?
> Not angels, not humans, and already the knowing animals are
> aware
> that we are not really at home in our interpreted world
> (Rilke, 1982: 151).

In describing a function of the angel in Rilke's poetry (equally applicable to Hedjuk's angels), Blanchot notes that the creative work "touches upon absence, upon the torments of the infinite; it reaches the empty depths of that which never begins or ends" because the image "constitutes a limit at the edge of the indefinite" (1982: 196-7,254). And Angels are always already this potentiality of the limit-experience for, as Cacciari notes, "their own tremendous presence is a sign of dis
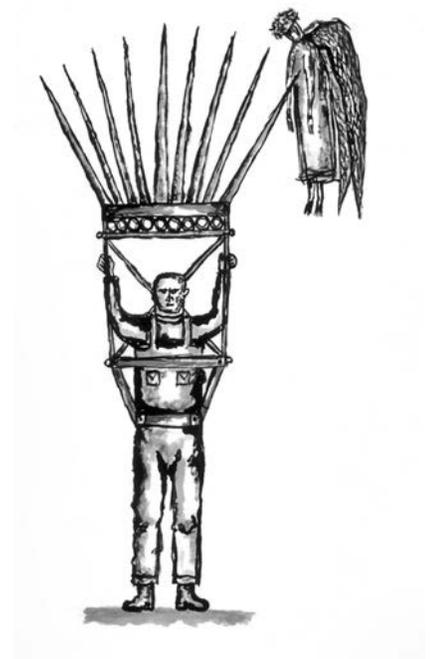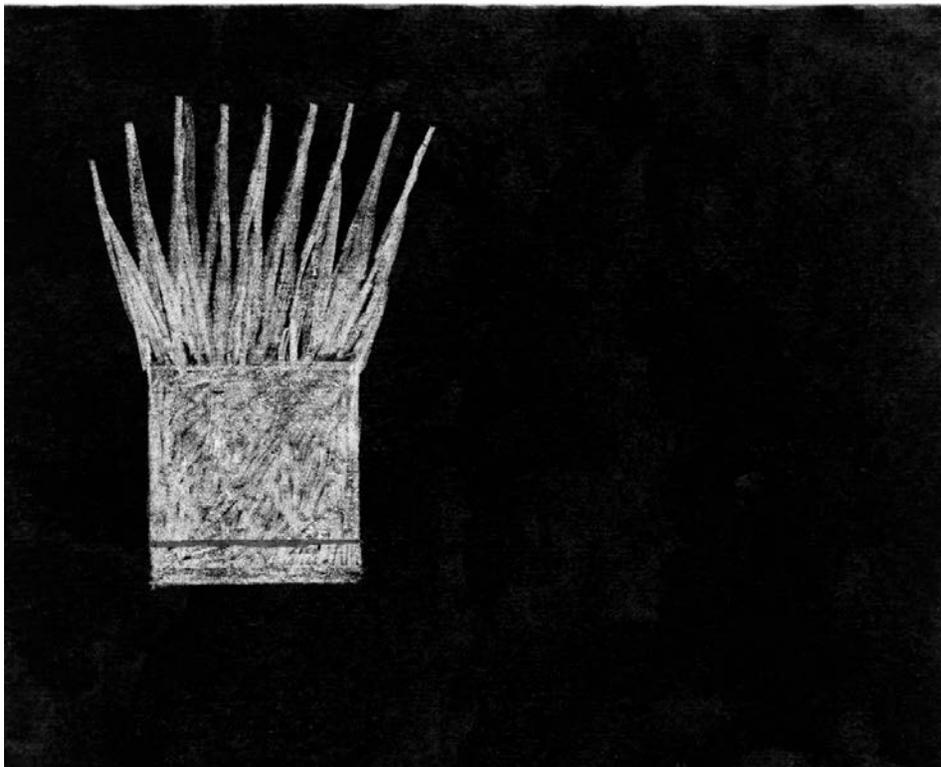
Above: Hejduk, 'Angel Catcher', Bovisa, 1987

Left:
Hejduk, 'House of the Suicide', Bovisa, 1987 (where the "The Record Keeper of Hallucinations … reads the poems of Rilke to the point of obsession") 'which is not turned to us nor do we shed light on it' " (Blanchot, 1982: 139-40)

tance, of separation … instead of being the guardians of a threshold, here Angels appear to be unsurpassable demons of the limit" (Cacciari, 1994: 9,11).

The series of fallen angels in *Bovisa* are a narrative of loss, named 'The Angel Watcher', 'The Angel Catcher', 'The Crucified Angel', '(Angel) Autopsy', 'Angel Collector', and also the 'Via of the Crucified Angels'. Their fall is not a fall from transcendence into immanence, or from abstraction into the concrete, but a hori-zontal fall of the unseen into "murmuring images". In their fall, these Angels are transmuted in a manner similar to Blanchot's description of the reversal of art, of making the visible invisible in Rilke. In this "transformation of the visible into the invisible and of the invisible into the always more invisible" being un-revealed expresses an "access to the other side 'which is not turned to us nor do we shed light on it' " (Blanchot, 1982: 139-40).

Hejduk's symptomatic angels are excluded from the contingency of machinic modernism, but haunt its representations; the building-machines reciprocate by reverting to their prior medieval forms, perhaps to suture an imperceptible ge-nealogical break. The materiality of architecture in Hejduk's medieval machines are drawn with precision, yet they are light, ungrounded; conversely, the angels caught in the images are irregular and earthbound. In the project *Vladivostok*, He-jduk noted "the air in Vladivostok is much thinner; the weather of Vladivostok is a vaporous, angelic time-space, … 'the space created at the moment of the event.' Anachronic, anatopic" (in Hays, 1996: 12). The masques and their angelic figures can be seen in this light as an emergence, an event, of the making visible of a real that was only a potentiality within the *corpus-genus* of modernism proper.

The hermetic genealogy of Hejduk's literary-architecture is a counter-memory drawn and descended from autonomous architectural (and literary) modernism in that it repeats and re-arranges its components in different ways. As counter-memory, it mutates modernism by re-actualising it "along different and multiple series" (Colwell, 1997: n.p.). Peggy Deamer notes the motivation of Hejduk's coun-ter-memory: "in *Vladivostok* and the *Mask of Medusa*, the narrative presentation shows that, as in mythology and psychoanalysis, following after doesn't neces-sarily mean following from" (1996: 69).[4] The repeating event of the angel-machine coupling is both a "projective past" and "future anterior" whose limit oscillates between event and memory, potentiality and contingency. In Hejduk's diminished angels, the genius of architecture is but this poetic possibility of the unrepresent-able event, contra origin.

Hejduk's Angel works, potentially outside architecture and opposed to generic modernism, expose that which is concealed but affects the body-in-space, using minimally differential relations between fantasy, figure, angels, and machines. By transposing the angel into modernity, Hejduk relies upon the icon of architectural masks and the opacity of emptied space in his attempt to re-familiarize what had been banished to the exteriority of modernist architectural thought and represen-tation (Jameson, 1975: 52). The unique atmosphere conjured in Hejduk's masques, and the incidents of entangled and murmuring angels, entangle three registers of architectural thought - the unseen, formless alterity, the logic of construction – into architecture's murmuring potential.

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