

STITCHING VOIDS

Architecture as Infrastructure

Thesis Abstract:

"When there is nothing, everything becomes possible". The project aims to regenerate New York through its very own anti-thesis. The strategy is to engage with the context of the site, Manhattan island, by complimenting it with the elements of its contradiction. Where the viewer expects architecture, expressed typically in above-ground solid structures, the architect will submerge with voids beneath the soil. Where the user expects infrastructure, the architect will embed cultural programs. Where order is expected, in a mad instant, chaos will break in.

Thesis notes:

There is a reason why you start a book like your thesis dissertation describing how a book like this should or should not be made. It is because a lot of discussion is being constantly made about how a book is made rather than on what truth it holds. This book is not made in the conventional form that you would probably expect it to be. You might think that it does not rise up to the "academic standards" for which it is being presented. But in reality, this book is now being written after the very same concepts which it claims that its dissertation holds.

Cut everything in the middle.

You know how a cut-section of an architectural project shows much the very same of what this project is? And you know how that when you attempt to start an important work, let's say the book of your thesis dissertation, you always get stuck on how to begin? The beginning is always the most difficult task in any project. That is because you get lost in the chicken and the egg problem. Which comes first, the thinking or the doing? So, as Aristotle put it, "for the things that we wish to learn, we learn by doing, everything should start in the middle. As such, you would be taking a cut-section in your life and paste it directly in your book. Why did I say "life" rather than "project", which is the one subject of this book? It is because a thesis you would present in the form of a project cannot be detached from your lived life, and if it was, it would only be doing so to verily manifest a detachment one has with one's self.

The author of this book cannot accept this to happen to him. He regards knowledge to be, above and before all, a meeting with one's self. He would prefer to preserve his integrity than to fall victim/criminal of such detachment. Was that not Nietzsche's condition for a philosopher to reserve our respect, "to preach by example"?

Hence, the middle should be the locus of all beginnings. After all, those beginnings, haven't they begun earlier? In preceding and ancestral traces?

Many a time we miss the core of a project that we, ourselves, are creating. It is through deep discussions we make with those interested that we arrive to the core of the truth we are trying to materialize. I do not wish for my dissertation to turn into a critique of the world of academia, but much of the (so called) dissertations that are being written and presented in this field are in reality devoid of substantial meaning. I do not mean to speak of

theses that hold debatable content, but of those that are in a level less than to be designated valid. I, myself, have started writing this dissertation after a discussion I had with fellow laureates about how copy/paste their books were created. Their justification was that they were following literal guidelines that to them seemed sterile, or because they knew their books wouldn't be read in the first place. If they weren't going to be read anyway, wouldn't it be rather more of value if it held within it some personal truth, even if it was not to follow conventional guidelines? Alas, students are accepting being marginalized after this very image that their professors had portrayed to them.

Chicken and egg. Image and reality. Thinking and doing. These are some of the themes that this thesis will try to investigate.

What is a city? A city is an amalgam of people and their constructed environment. Given the fact that a built environment takes generations to be constructed, in all probability, the shape of a city of people has been formed by their predecessors. This gives an idea about how they were, and how we came to be. Something we vaguely refer to as culture. The Crystal Palace, for example, gives an idea about a people living in an age of advancement in science, social and industrial revolutions, where standardization and mechanization have become the norm, and the toil of ornaments done by craftsmen has come to be regarded as unnecessary. Beauty is thus seen in the steel structure of the building, the precision of its joints, and how naturally its load is transmitted to the ground. But... are the people living in the city not affected by its shape? You see a young man raised in a privileged gated compound in New Cairo, growing up to try and secure a job that would enable him to provide for the same standard of living in which he was raised, in a city where 45% of its population lives below poverty line. If this young man grows to become an architect, would he not pursue commissions to build gated compounds with pseudo-classical Greek orders? Has he not been shaped after the shape of his own city?

Hence, in the problem of the city, we are faced with the same paradox that writing this book faces: who shapes who? The city or its people?

Again. To break the toil of this loop, we shall begin from the middle.

"The only true solution, is precisely where human judgment sees no solution. Otherwise, what need would we have of God? We turn toward God only to obtain the impossible. As for the possible, men suffice." – Chestov

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