John Hejduk, on a walk with Raimund Abraham and Aldo Rossi in the old part of the city of Providence, in Rhode Island, tells us about the houses on the East Coast of the United States. The article, published in Mask*) along with a photograph by Paul Strand (figure 1), deals with the use of a tower called widow’s walk, which citizens of the old city used as a place from which to look out to sea. The widow’s walk, located in some of the houses along the coast, is a room used by the women of the wharves when they returned from fishing. According to Hejduk, they went up to see if their husbands disembarked from the fishing boat after months at sea. In that moment, and after being so many time distanced by thousands of kilometers from the person with whom they shared the house, when looking through this window, they would find out if they would indeed live with them again in that same house. Many seamen, during the whaling season in the Pacific, which lasted around half a year, suffered terrible accidents hunting the whale. Some of these women had seen them die and were depressed. The other fishermen had to see how they lost so many companions, how they lay inert on the deck of the ship. The body was thrown into the sea, could not even be returned to receive burial on land.

Those stories were commented on by the women, married to the captains and sailors of the ships, who lived in fear whenever a ship left to go fishing. The interior within a widow’s walk was between two very sensitive extremes for these women. The way in which this room was used, a viewpoint in the upper part that protrudes above the roof of the houses, built in wood, embodied very intimately life and death, hope and despair.

The book entitled Time in New England*) shows a portrait of New England from stories told by its own inhabitants during a period of time from 1600 to 1940. The chronicles of fishermen in search of whales, reminiscent of Herman Melville, along with Paul Strand’s photograph of a widow’s walk, convey a sense of rawness3. The meaning of these parts of these houses is a stark communicator of the feelings and fears suffered by women when it is discovered what they were used for. They reflected from a window of the deaths after the death of one of the occupants of the ship is in an intimate linked to this piece that stands out from the roofs of many homes on the East Coast.

It could be assumed that all this was the subject of discussion between the three architects who walked between the houses, through the streets of the old city.

THE NEW ENGLAND MASQUE

John Hejduk, in a house he designed in 1983, located two widow’s walks by means of two small towers overlooking the sea. The proposal, entitled New England masque, has two windows above the main floors (figure 2). A boat, attached to the shoreline, alludes in the sketch to the relationship between this piece and the ocean (figure 3). From behind, other types of links are found with the hill through the fence, the road, the labyrinth and the tree mass, showing other possibilities between the two sides of the house. The almost direct link with the sea is opposed to the confusing and complex routes that show its relationship with the territory. The house, dedicated to the architect Regg Goldberg, duplicates some of the pieces. The layout is in plan of two living rooms, two kitchens or two widow’s walks (figures 4 and 5) that are separated from the sea by means of the privacy of the light that penetrates the interior on both sides, which seems to express outcomes among its inhabitants. They are the expression of contents that, although they are partially covered by urban building, are part of the project as a means capable of expressing themselves, in turn, through theatre and cinema.

New England masque, as a project, is capable of presenting links that are specific to painting, theatre or cinema, with all this implication it has for architecture. As Hejduk says, Countesse de Haussmann by Ingres, Albom’s Becomes Electra by Eugene O’Neill, The Shining by Stanley Kubrick or La Roche House by Le Corbusier7 are in The New England masque, through the game of the time and the space, the link between these works is not direct, the spectator does not create similarities in an immediate way between them, but from the mystery that each one presents. New England masque is able to contain and enclose Countesse de Haussmann’s mutilated body within its walls to make sense of the feminism in each widow’s walk. In the same way, according to the Greek tragedy of Electra, the silence that envelops the pier is the place that surrounds the darkness of confrontations and coexistence between people inside a house. The labyrinth, the link to the hill, in turn a means to access, the place, and the concrete from different that from allowed by the views from the viewpoint, also from the meaning that is lost in it, as shown by Stanley Kubrick in The Shining. At the same time, the transformation explained by John Hejduk when he talks about the La Roche house, as it were an ecclesial site*, exposes the complexity assumed by a housing program when it is capable of expressing other activities. The proposal goes beyond telling how a house works. It transmits changes in the ways of life. It manifests new needs defined from the abstraction itself, or from a direct relationship with the history of the site. John Hejduk has developed the Masque in one of the most enigmatic locations of the New England East Coast.

The city, from the proposal, will transform the place to give to understand the infinity of times that is able to contain a space. Each pieces, driven by its inhabitant, pose the interaction between 67 subjects. The

Hejduk says: “I always affirm that the architect starts from an abstraction and moves towards a reality, and the best architects are those whose reality, when it is finished and completed, is closer to the original abstraction. A painter travels the opposite way: parts from reality and moves towards an abstraction. But ends up defining a reality. Painters who say closer to reality while performing abstraction are the best painters. They do not eliminate the figurative.”

This proposal between the figurative and the abstract will be the precedent to the projects that John Hejduk will develop in the last quarter of a century. It is one of the most original architectures of the 20th century, due to its involvement in the cultural development of the West. The projects will be titled by Masques*) and arise from the theatrical programs developed in the period of cultural and literary flourishing in the England of the XVI.

THE MASQUES

John Hejduk, in his masques, the meaning of the work done so far, it will develop numerous structures for any city in the world with the commitment to generate new architecture programs for the citizen. If we understand New England masque from the widow’s walk, a piece capable of expressing and transmitting the sensations of the people who occupy its interior we could say that this piece influenced the construction of the masques that will develop years later. The masques will be the expression of its inhabitants. It will be understood as the place of the event and, therefore, as a means of representation (figure 8). They will be proposals to occupy the public space. In squares and streets of numerous cities of the world, John Hejduk will pose and develop infinity of architectural pieces for the people who inhabit them. Berlin, Vladivostok, Riga, Hannover and Milan (in the Bovisa neighbourhood) are some of these cities. Through these ephemeral pieces, some fixed and others moving, Hejduk transforms the urban space. In these structures, its inhabitant is intimately linked to the instrument that surrounds it. Its body, defined as an organism and covered by the skin that shelters its organs, is, in turn, all of it, another organ that is part, inescapably, of the shell that covers it. This person, the subject, is the masque that merges with the object, which is the body of the work. In turn, the use is intimately linked to the masque. It raises a relationship between the instrument and the person who uses it, because the object and the subject are two elements that appropriate the expression of the mime for a representation of its architecture.

The mime*, as pantomime and properly human figuration through the gestures where words are not used, has a direct relationship with the masques of Hejduk. They are mime expression through the building that encloses the subject. The events that occur inside are absorbed by the object itself, as it communicated by osmosis. Without saying a word, they go to understand something more than the use that its inhabitant can give according to new programs. From ancient times to the present, mime, the art of healing dance and clowns, were intimately linked to human passions. It was not a mere entertainment12, it was developed as a means of expression through which the abstract and the concrete were linked, and very intimately linked. The expression through the body, by eliminating the voice, establishes conditions that swing between these two aspects, abstraction and reality, which are very close but which, in turn, are two aspects that are either separate or opposed poles. By eliminating the voice, Hejduk proposes an instrument of communication among people, the real gesture expressed by the body, which is used to accompany speech, becomes a very different mode of expression when accompanied by sounds. The expression is filled with abstraction through mime messages. It involves leaving aside the eloquence of spoken language to expose a body language. It shows what the speech does not express by itself. The gesture is an expression of the hidden. The trembling of a hand when taking a glass of water in the middle of a talk, however well prepared the speech, no mannering eloquent and clear the words, will always be the means by which the speaker shows his nervousness. That which is always hiding and that remains inside us, just expresses, through the gesture, a hidden state of mind. The gesture, in this case, ends up being a feeling that one tries to hide.

John Hejduk, one of the architects who has best known how to show the opposite ends in people’s lives in architecture, presents proposals that underline the desire that in many cases of the masques that will develop in the last quarter of a century, John Hejduk proposes architecture as an expression of the interpretable and, therefore, from the possibility of transforming meanings. Through the pieces he fills the city with gestures that, wherever they are located, turn the place into disturbing situations.

One of John Hejduk’s most well-known masques, Victim*) was presented to the contest convened by the BAA*) in the city of Berlin. For the contest -in which almost 200 proposals were submitted, according to the documentation of the proposal itself-, John Hejduk will develop the Masque in one of the most enigmatic locations of the Berlin Wall. Attached to the Berlin Wall, between Streismann Strasse and Wilhelm Strasse (Figure 7), the proposal of 67 structures, if they had been built, would have created new inventories for the city in a space full of different activities (figure Bi). The city, from the proposal, will transform the place to give to understand the infinity of times that is able to contain a space. Each pieces, driven by its inhabitant, pose the interaction between 67 subjects. The
relationship between the pieces, between a third and a citizen, or between all of them, proposes to make these links.

Afterwards, a narrow and horizontal peephole allows access to the exterior. The viewing lens is located above a sloping facade and the corridor that surrounds the peephole. The peephole is a narrow and horizontal slit that allows a view of the exterior. In this way, the viewer can see the exterior without leaving the interior of the space.

The piece, as an instrument that has to propose a new program, has the purpose of guaranteeing security. The security will be guaranteed by the structure itself. From the outside you can see that it is composed of different elements. On the one hand, the staircase that leads to the room of the painter's piece is visible. On the other hand, the facade that surrounds the staircase is visible. The staircase is composed of triangular tubes that relate the interior stay with the sky, denying connections with the level of the pavement of the city of Berlin that security is put into operation or not, or even that which exists.

"Security is not a building that enables improvements according to what a society needs. It is not a currency. Who has best explained, by the simplicity of his words, the relation that we find this structure among its proposals, as if it were a key piece of the tradition, the movement, driven by the inhabitants, transforms the meaning of space, giving it "quality that do not reveal, in paths that are not preserved", but rather, are evident. The priority of guaranteeing safety is not achieved through the presence of the piece. It is not a military object that defends us. The evidence of sensitivity is the means to create new conditions of space. Although Security is a temporary piece that modifies the space where it is located, it is really its inhabitant who presents its transformation. The ephemeral part of the piece is not in the presence of the installation at a specific moment; rather it is in the fleeting of the sensations when they are presented, when they are expression and when they are felt as such.

"Security is a device. It makes possible the equivalence between commodities, each convertible into any other: within the market made world, within the market made world, anything can be exchanged for any other, however disparate. I can go to the market with a diamond, buy or sell books and leave it with some shoes; I can change a bicycle for hours of work in a hotel. Miscellaneous things can be worth like furniture. All thanks to the universal translator, the money that absorbs the character of anything until it becomes homogenous to all the others, representatives and all represented by money. All things, except one, unique and indefinable, give its existence to the other, which is love.

"But love as man and his relationship with the world as a human relationship; then, you can only exchange love for love, but not for truth [...]. You love without revealing love, that is, if your love, as love, does not produce reciprocal love. If through your vital exteriorisation as a living man you do not become a loved man, then your love is impotent, it is a capital."


3. “It’s curious. In Europe towers always signify defense or preservation of a monument or land mark. In America, the widow’s walk meant both hope and despair, life and death in the same element.” HEJDUK, John, op. cit., supra, nota 1, p.91.

4. Gerri Goldberg was one of the members of the exhibition Women in American Architecture: A Historic and Contemporary Perspective. The exhibition, held in 1977, was organised by The Architectural League. A group of women, in a male profession, demonstrated the quality of their work in design, architecture and urban planning after the increase, in the early seventies, of the enrolments made by women in the Architecture career. It appears in: http://archleague.org/2014/07/women-in-american-architecture-1977-and-today/

5. “The Madame d’Haussonville painting related to the New England House. You’d have to put in the book Gloria gave me in 1949, Time in New England by Paul Strand. The film “Mourning Becomes Electra,” 1952, and the visitation to Deerfield, Massachusetts about 1965, which was very important: Colonial houses of a certain kind. We have to make relationships along that line.” HEJDUK, John, op. cit. supra, note 1, p.126. “Okay, it was a functional thing, but it has an ‘otherness,’ an ‘unrevealed characteristic,’ or what is the sensibility of the Madame d’Haussonville painting; we don’t have that kind of mood in modern architecture. So when I refer to O’Neill’s Mourning Becomes Electra, that is a very American thing. It’s based on the Greek play Electra, but O’Neill turned it into an American thing.” HEJDUK, John, op. cit. supra, note 1, p.129.


7. “I’ll tell you what I think the La Roche House is. You enter in here and there is a big hall which is three stories high– I call that the congregation area. You go up the stairs and there is a balcony; that’s the pulpit. This could be the altar, this black marble table which appears to be levitating. It comes off a single point. Behind the altar is the fireplace and one of those lamps. Someone entered and said Something is wrong with this place. You can’t sit around the fireplace.” I said “you weren’t meant to.” Up here where the library is, it’s really the choir. And the procession goes down into the major room which is why there are clerestories. (For a living room?) The other half of the twin house, or the other house where the caretakers stay, is part of the whole thing: it’s a normal house. And the little garden stones out under the living room are like tombstones. They are like little tombstones for the garden. There are things about Corb which writers have never commented upon. The La Roche was always an atypical house for me, yet La Roche as the most beautiful house I have ever seen, the most mysterious.” HEJDUK, John, op. cit. supra, nota 1, p.127.

8. HEJDUK, John, op. cit., supra, nota 1, p. 128.

9. “In the days of Elizabeth of England, in Elizabethan times, the most important and celebrated work for the architects was to make a masquerade, which is not a mask, but rather a special type of architectural work called the Masque. The Masque a construction, a structure that was introduced in another building. Behind the facade of the Masque there was a mechanism like behind a stage. They were built like Leonardo’s war machines, and the participants in the Masque were not only the actors, but also the spectators. The Masque had neither beginning nor end, people could enter at any time they liked and wanted, and participate in the Masque. But the function, the program of the Masque was silence. It was all mime and pantomime. The construction of the Masque, of this type of element, ended in England when public executions were introduced. I think the concept of Masque has something to do with new and authentic programs.” SÁNCHÉZ-ROBLES, Cecilo, et al., eds. John Hejduk. Seminario de arquitectura. Valencia: Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, 2004.

10. At the moment when Hejduk, Raimund Abraham and Aldo Rossi comment on the meaning of the widow’s walk, they understand that this part of the house acquires the condition of expressing, as if it were a question of mime, the properly architectural sense of this tower, from its more sensitive phenomenon, and how it transforms the sense of the house and its environment.

11. There are many pieces that refer to the scenic representation, such as the piece entitled Masque or Pantomime Theatre, Reading Theatre or Public Theatre, all of them from Berlin Masque. HEJDUK, John, Berlin Masque. In: Chelsea, New York: Autumn, 1982, No. 41, pp. 7-53. It also appears in: HEJDUK, John, op. cit., supra, note 1, pp.138-153. 12. “There were, also, philosophers who saw in the mime something more than mere entertainment”. NICOLL, Aldo. Mask, mimes and miracles. New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1963, p. 82.


14. The IBA (Internationale Bauausstellung Berlin) will be the international architecture exhibition that will serve to reflect on housing and urban renewal in neighbourhoods near the Berlin Wall. Many lots, due to their proximity to a border area and the political and social conditions that plagued the Cold War, despite being part of the center of the city of Berlin, were unbuilt, with plots full of herbs and abandoned objects. KLEIHUES, Josef Paul, ed. Dokumentation. Offener Wettbewerb. Berlin, Südliche Friedrichstadt Gestaltung des Gelädes des ehemaligen Prinz-Albrecht-Palais. Berlin: Internationale Bauausstellung Berlin, 1985.

15. In the state of ruin due to the bombings, its demolition was paralyzed after the intervention of Walter Gropius and the actions of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation and Edwin Redlub, co-founder of the Free University of Berlin. Refer: https://www.berlinerfestspiele.de/en/aktuell/festivals/gropiustag/ueber_uns_mgb/das_haus_mgb/geschichte.php

16. “In the days of Elizabeth of England, in Elizabethan times, the most important and celebrated work for the architects was to make a masquerade, which is not a mask, but rather a special type of architectural work called the Masque. The Masque a construction, a structure that was introduced in another building. Behind the facade of the Masque there was a mechanism like behind a stage. They were built like Leonardo’s war machines, and the participants in the Masque were not only the actors, but also the spectators. The Masque had neither beginning nor end, people could enter at any time they liked and wanted, and participate in the Masque. But the function, the program of the Masque was silence. It was all mime and pantomime. The construction of the Masque, of this type of element, ended in England when public executions were introduced. I think the concept of Masque has something to do with new and authentic programs.” SÁNCHÉZ-ROBLES, Cecilo, et al., eds. John Hejduk. Seminario de arquitectura. Valencia: Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, 2004.