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MONU #24: DOMESTIC URBANISM

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In an interview with Herman Hertzberger in Monu #24: Domestic Urbanism, Hertzberger talked about a few concepts about domesticity and urbanism.

BASIC UNITS

Hertzberger believes that units have to be 30-40 square meters to make houses affordable in the future. The units should have everything fundamental inside, but with the possibility of extensions and manipulations according to family, age and other considerations.

NEARBYNESS

For Hertzberger, high-rise buildings disconnect people from the street and from contact with their neighbors. According to him, the word domestic means first and foremost what is behind the front door. But it is important to have contact and mutual relationships with other things and people as well. The threshold between the apartment and the communal and the public spaces has to be designed and public space has to be domesticated.

NEW THINGS

Hertzberger thinks that there are possibilities to create common spaces today but we have to find out what these new things are that bring people together.

NEW LIFESTYLES

For Hertzberger, working at home does not have to make houses so different for that purpose. As long as space is domesticated, every space can work. But the workspace also needs to be open so there is connection between the different spaces.

MAKE SPACE BUT LEAVE ROOM

Hertzberger thinks that architects can create guidelines and design the basics, but leave the rest to the users. He described the gridiron plan as an example where a very simple basic division of blocks exists but every block can have different functions. He believes that having rules allow it to be free because freedom is the way you interpret the rules and what you do within the rules. Without rules there is just chaos.

- Table: The principle idea for the Centraal Beheer building is that everything starts with a space with a table. This creates a space of around 16 square meters, which was a sort of theoretical building unit or building stone. It was the base for where you are supposed to feel accommodated and domestic. And for people to come together it is important to have this horizontal element, which you need to sit around, to make contact and to avoid people walking away too quickly. At a table you can have something to drink; you can read your papers and other such things. Of course, the most terrible fights and exciting love affairs can happen at a table as well. (Hertzberger)

- YKK Dormitory: A headquarters building to accommodate short-stay apartments for the trainees of the company and for other staff. (Hertzberger)

- Architects should stop being too concerned with aesthetics but think about thing that can practically be improved. This is about new paradigms, and we have to think about architecture in this way, rather than thinking in terms of simply creating nice forms. (Hertzberger)

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Bernd Upmeyer, “Domesticity: Interview with Herman Hertzberger” in Monu #24: Domestic Urbanism, Spring, 2016.