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A Rainy Day in Late Spring at the Cistercian Monastery of Novy Dvur  
Dobra Voda

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John Flaherty

## A Rainy Day in Late Spring at the Cistercian Monastery of Nový Dvůr Dobrá Voda

In June of 2013, while traveling as a student of architecture on the John K. Branner Fellowship, I passed through Bohemia and stayed for several days in the guesthouse of a small Trappist monastery named Nový Dvůr. The buildings comprising the monastery were recently constructed, realized over the course of the past decade by British designer John Pawson. The architecture together with the surrounding landscape leave a striking impression and, as I came to realize, also betray a certain opposition at work in the life of the monk.

One can think of a monastery as a civilization reduced to the scale of a few buildings. Distant colonies become only a stone's throw from the center of this miniature empire. At the heart of the monastery is the church, an abstract space for ritual observance. In the church, the monk is at the same time very productive and very unproductive. His diligence produces nothing tangible beyond fleeting sounds against a backdrop of silence. To sustain his spiritual activity, he must dirty his hands, so to speak, in the surrounding fields and forests and in the various workshops and outbuildings, deriving goods to use or to bring to market. The daily procession of the monk, mapped out in rigid detail,

has him continuously vacillating back and forth, back and forth. He is in the church, then he is out harvesting timber; he is in the church, then he is out tending the garden or fish pond; he is in the church, then he is out constructing a shed; and so on. There is both a close connection to



Figure 1 Photograph by author.

the land and, within the church, an immeasurable distance from it. The materiality of the architecture gives voice to this perpetual dialogue—a pure white interior and a wilder, textured outside. But peeling paint, leaks in the ceiling, and other early signs of entropy already appear within.



Figure 2 Photograph by author.



Figure 3 Photograph by author.



Figure 4 Photograph by author.



Figure 5 Photograph by author.





Figure 6 Photograph by author.



Figure 7 Photograph by John Flaherty.

