

April 2014

Dear Mayor,

## **Site, Insight, Incite!**

### **INSIGHT**

Human knowing is complex and magnificent. We know with our mind and body, in waking thought and dream images, in memory and amnesia, in enactment and insight. We know as monads and dyads and triads and fields. We know with language and fantasy, with sex, and gender, and queerness. We know through traumas, and pleasures, culture and politics, drive and instinct, cognition and emotion, aggression and love.

We learn to recognize our own feelings through the mirroring of parents and caregivers and we think within a relational field of people and places. The physical environment participates in these learning processes of

widening human and social experience. Architecture creates stages on which new ways of living can occur.

## **SITE**

Architecture is another way of thinking, it is a process of building boundaries. We design spaces but our tools are its limits; we trap places between stone and glass walls. But building envelopes do more than enclose, facades also need to connect. A building is an interface between our fragile body and the powerful forces of nature, between individual solitude and the social, pulsating metropolis.

Buildings facilitate the connection of the individual to the city and its infrastructure. Electricity travels in and out of copper wires, pumped water arrives at our faucets and sewage departs for the treatment plant. People enter and exit in rhythmic currents and air, light and heat stream in and out. Architecture is a meditation and elaboration of self-other relations.

Physical spaces, like their inhabitants, simultaneously have undeniable limitations and myriad possibilities. Like psychoanalysis, architecture awakens thoughts, memories, dreams, projections and affect, creating the liminal space between the individual and the world, between ego and reality. It is in this intersubjective zone that we live our lives.

## INCITE

Trauma restricts our emotional and rational abilities; it dissociates and splits off affect. Our environments also segregate population and functions, relegating that which is less beautiful or unstable to hidden peripheries. Mental health is the ability to embrace life to the fullest. Urban health might be similar. The task of architecture is to expand the range of human experiences and activities, to invent and nurture spatial pathways for robust living.

Our cities create spaces for human activities. Public monuments evoke respect for organized democracy, homes shelter and rejuvenate, schools promote community and curiosity and malls entertain with consumerism. We expect these spaces to feel good and safe

Architecture has always been a conservative cultural expression. It depends on governmental support, financial institutions, building codes and clients. While twentieth century modern art expanded the subjects deemed appropriate for art, modern architecture remained loyal to an almost unchanging mission, stated by Vitruvius two millennia ago. It embraced the task of “*firmitas, utilitas, venustas*”.

While stability, unity and beauty are positive aims, buildings must also embrace broader goals. Is it not our task as architects to facilitate a reclaiming of those split off and to help people, places and functions burdened by dissociation due to trauma or repression? Shouldn't our city be home to the most diverse and magnificent expression of human knowing and living?

It is through the reality of the architecture SITE, the radical will to INCITE and the empathic, emotional INSIGHT, that architecture can become a transformational agent creating spaces for living.

Sincerely,

Esther Sperber  
Studio ST Architects  
[www.studio-st.com](http://www.studio-st.com)  
[esther@studio-st.com](mailto:esther@studio-st.com)