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SITE, INCITE, AND INSIGHT—ARCHITECTURE AND PSYCHOANALYSIS: COMMENTARY ON LEANNE DOMASH'S PAPER

ESTHER SPERBER

Coming from the field of architecture, Sperber explores the processes in which buildings expand the range of human experiences. Using the 19th-century term "empathy" from philosophy of art as well as current psychoanalytic notions of mentalization and the relational understanding of trauma, she contends that the building can reconnect the inhabitant to affects that have been avoided, split off, or dissociated by trauma or nonreflective parenting. She further articulates the difference between architecture and the Winnicottian transitional object. While the transitional object garners its power through the child's projection of affect to compensate for the unavailable mother, buildings always act as both symbols of their functions and the embodiment of the function they represent. Buildings literally and emotionally contain, shelter, and protect. The building in site creates new personal and social experiences that, like psychoanalytic insight, foster new ways of being.

Keywords: architecture, empathy, deconstruction, building, transitional object, inanimate, relational, Winnicott.

"If I were asked to name the chief benefit of the house, I should say: The house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows us to dream in peace."

—Gaston Bachelard (1958), *The Poetics of Space*

Introduction

Architecture and psychoanalysis have rarely been discussed together, which makes Domash's paper a significant addition to the literature in this field. Domash reflects on the "intersection of psychoanalysis, architecture, and design" (this issue), hoping to use these insights to work more effectively with her patients. She usefully inquires into the intersections and overlaps of architecture and psychoanalysis, which I approach from the other side, as a practicing architect. I applaud the attempt to learn from our respective disciplines' practices and insights, and to allow these understandings to affect our respective practices. Ten years ago, when I was choosing a name for my architectural firm, I wanted to call it "in-site," linking insightful thought with the particular, situated experience of site-specific architectural design. I still regret listening to the concern that people would hear "in-site" and think of "incite" rather than "insight." It is this triangular

Address correspondence to Esther Sperber, Studio ST Architects, 330 West 38th Street, Suite 1003, New York, NY 10018. E-mail: esther@studio-st.com

association between the site of the building, the insight of experience, and the disturbance of incitement that I will explore in this paper.

Despite psychoanalytic interest in the arts, little has been written on architecture and psychoanalysis. Of the works on this topic, a significant number analyze the architect's creativity, motivation, and the designed building through a psychobiographical study. This would include Leonardo (Freud, 1910), Philip Johnson (Tutter, 2011), and Frank Lloyd Wright (Anderson, 2005; Towmbly, 2005; Winer, 2005). I have been interested in the ways psychoanalysis and architecture can each further our understanding of the creative process (Sperber, 2011, 2013). Few have written about the emotional and mental experience of a building (Freud, 1936; Stokes, 1951; Danze, 2005; Sonnenberg, 2005; Mallgrave, 2010), and Domash starts to fill this void by analyzing her emotions during a visit to the Jewish Museum in Berlin, designed by Daniel Libeskind. Her article contemplates the ways in which the building itself facilitated her profound experience of remembering Jewish life in Germany before WWII, the horror of the Holocaust, and a certain forgiveness for this atrocious past. Domash suggests that Libeskind, in his design, was able to create a space "which allows me to confront the horror in the context of a safe haven, like a good analytic session" (this issue).

I would like to respond to two claims made by Domash. The first is that a building, like an analyst, is a containing environment (literally!) that enables the visitor to access a wide range of feelings, both positive and negative. Domash makes a second suggestion, that the building can be understood as a Winnicottian transitional object or potential space, suspended between fantasy and reality. She suggests that from the experience of the Jewish Museum we can "learn a set of principles that will help us create facilitating environments for our patients" (this issue).

I would like to expand and support the first suggestion by tying it to both the 19th-century concept of "empathy" and to current psychoanalytic notions of mentalization and the relational understanding of the effects of trauma. However, I would like to articulate a different understanding of Domash's second claim that architecture acts as a transitional object. While the transitional object garners its power through the child's projection of affect to compensate for the unavailable mother, buildings always act as both symbols of their functions and the embodiment (some with greater success than others) of the function they represent. The analyst, like the building, also occupies both positions, symbolizing in the transference all that the patient needs while also acting in the here-and-now as a new and better object and subject for the patient. The real building, in*site*, creates space for new modes of personal and social experiences in much the same way that the analytic insights foster new ways of being.

From Modernism to Deconstruction

I clearly recall my excitement when I first came across the images of the winning design entry by Daniel Libeskind for the new Jewish Wing of the Berlin Museum. The competition was launched in 1987 and the building opened to the public in 2001. It was during that decade, sometime between the design inception and the ribbon-cutting actualization, that I must have encountered this radical proposal. Daniel Libeskind's design was shocking on many levels. Formally it belongs to an architectural style that was named Deconstruction by Philip Johnson and Mark Wigley in their 1988 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Deconstruction aimed to challenge modernist architecture's emphasis on the centrality of function and purity of form, while at the same time opposing the architectural style of postmodernism, which looked back nostalgically at the historical, decorative cultural symbols and tried to reincorporate them. Deconstruction also challenged the widely held axioms of humanistic architecture. It questioned the assumption that buildings must look stable, challenged preconceived notions of beauty, and experimented with new ways of understanding functionality (Tschumi, 1980).

Architecture can be defined as the practice of creating spaces that expand the range of human activity and human experience. Public monuments evoke respect for organized democracy, homes are sheltering and rejuvenating, schools promote community and curiosity, and malls entertain with consumerism. But while feeling good and safe are valuable experiences, might architecture have denied us aspects of the human experience by avoiding emotions such as fear, isolation, sadness, or nostalgia?

Unlike art, architecture is a conservative cultural and artistic expression. It depends on governmental support, financial lending institutions, and compliance with building codes, and is often subject to a long approval process by neighbors, community boards, and municipalities. Early-20th-century modern art was a revolution, not only in style and technique; it also expanded the subjects deemed appropriate for art. Impressionism celebrated everyday bourgeoisie life; modernism added the painful as well as the abstract; and contemporary art brought the abject, the disgusting, and the political into the consciousness of the museum gallery. Art was no longer restricted to the celebration of man's centrality, the pleasure of beauty, and religious awe. Art could be bad, transgressive, provocative, and disturbing.

Architecture, on the other hand, has been loyal to an almost unchanging mission. Since stated by Vitruvius two millennia ago, architecture embraced the task of "*firmitas, utilitas, venustas*"—that is, to be structurally stable, functionally useful, and aesthetically beautiful. Modern architecture continued this tradition

and did not join the rebellions of other fields (Eisenman, 1976). On the contrary, not only did it place function, comfort, and civility as its goal, it continued to hold onto the humanistic understanding of subject and object and the agency of man in dominating the environment. At times, architects allied with efforts to promote social change by designing homes for the working class, safe factories, or public amenities. Nevertheless, for the most part architecture did not resist political and financial powers (Dreamer, 2013). These powers patronized modernist architecture, and architecture in return gave global capitalism beautifully branded building icons with all the accompanying comforts of controlled ventilation, temperature, and lighting.

Deconstructionist architecture dared to question these positivistic assumptions. Following Derrida, it pointed to the inherent cultural bias and power structure in the linguistic and symbolic systems embedded in architecture (Wigley, 1993). To resist these axioms, deconstructionism embraced a formal expression of disjointedness, disorientation, and at times discomfort (Tschumi, 1988). These intentionally transgressive design choices allowed some of the unpleasant emotions stirred by urban living and family structures to inform our physical environment. Vidler (1993) links the architecture of disjunction, of hyper-urbanization, and alienation with Freud's Uncanny, tracing the experiences of anxiety and paranoia back to an earlier period of modernism expressed in transparency and opaque mirroring.

Mentalization and the Relational Field

Whereas Freud thought that trauma leads to repression (1896, 1910) that can be reversed by remembering, repeating, and working through (1914), many psychoanalytic thinkers today feel that trauma removes memories and restricts the range of affect in ways that are not reversible by remembering alone.

Mentalization, as suggested by Fonagy et al. (2002), is the process by which we are able to understand and regulate our own feelings and comprehend the feelings of others. We learn to mentalize from our good-enough parents who reflect back our feelings to us. The parent's affect-mirroring to the overwhelmed and confused baby acknowledges the legitimacy of those feelings while also assuring the child that these emotions can be contained and regulated. The self is "not merely open to environmental influences" but rather "constituted through these interactions with the social environment" (this issue). It is therefore in the act of mentalizing that the parent supports the baby's expansion of his sense of self and other. Adults who experienced deficient mentalization by early caregivers may have difficulty recognizing their own emotions and regulating them. The analytic task therefore is achieved by the analyst's mentalization and mirroring, allowing affect to be revalued (Jurist, 2005), and by doing so, enabling the patient to partake in all that human life can offer.

Relational psychoanalysis, while differing in significant ways, shares the goals of widening the patient's emotional range through the affective participation of the analyst. It suggests that in trauma, or not-good-enough parenting, aspects of the self and ways of relating get dissociated (Bromberg, 1998), split off (Davies & Frawley, 1992), or unformulated (Stern, 2010), leaving the patients with unthought known (Bollas, 1999), not-me experiences. The relational task in psychoanalysis is therefore not to assist the patient in remembering or reconstructing a lost past, but rather to find ways to reconnect to those split-off dissociated parts and to widen the patient's authentic affective range, allowing both pleasant and unpleasant affect to emerge without flooding and retraumatizing her. Ferenczi (1949) already pointed to the ways in which a neutral response to a patient's unimaginable traumatic story may reenact the denial that was part of the original trauma. Mitchell (1986), in a memorable image, describes how the analyst must join the patient in a dance. The dance starts with the limited range of moves that the patient knows, and slowly the analytic couple expand their repertoire. Health therefore is not equated only with happiness, but with the ability to experience life in its fullest within a relational matrix of self-and-other correspondence.

Buildings and Affect: Empathy

Relational psychoanalysis and mentalization both value the ability to experience a wider range of affect. Both also suggest that the self's development depends on an interactive, intersubjective field in which we are affected by and affect others. Domash suggests that buildings can also act as the dyadic other to the visitor. She writes that the building "immediately confronted me with the trauma," yet she continues to describe how "the design was done so thoughtfully, I was never overwhelmed" (this issue). Can buildings provide the needed mirroring and containing that would allow us to access feelings and memories such as the Holocaust, which are so difficult to hold? And if architecture, like a parent or analyst, can trigger affect, might it not be time for the buildings to embrace a range of feelings wider than stability, utility, and beauty? Is it not our task as architects, like psychoanalysts, to allow our clients to reclaim those split off or dissociated feelings?

I find an interesting precedent in the late-19th-century concept of empathy being widely used to understand the experience of both art and architecture in the philosophy of aesthetics. The English term "empathy" was introduced in 1909 as the translation of the German term *Einfühlung*, which literally means "feeling into," coined to explain the human ability to "feel ourselves into," to experience the feelings of another—including nature, art, and other people. Empathy, much like mentalization, is the capacity to comprehend the other's feelings through a mirroring and reflecting of those feelings. Theodor Lipps (in Mallgrave, 2010) argued that this was not only central to philosophy of art but was

the basis for any human recognition of the other as a minded creature (Stueber, 2013). Whereas sympathy recognizes a parallelism between subject and object and acknowledges a distinction between them, empathy is a fusion of subject and object.

Empathy was understood not only as a mental process, it also involved a bodily reaction to the work of art. Wölfflin suggests that the architectural "physical forms possess a character only because we ourselves possess a body" (in Mallgrave, 2010). Gravity, he continues, is a universal force pulling the building matter down. It is the correlation between our bodily experience of gravity and our understanding of this same force on the architectural structure that creates recognition and an emotional reaction. In an interesting turn, this century-old philosophical idea of empathy as the primary way of understanding the minds of others was revived in recent years by the neuroscientific finding of the mirror neuron process, providing empirical evidence for Lipps' ideas of empathy as inner imitation (Freedberg & Gallese, 2007).

As Domash notes, "I was also struck by Libeskind's intentionally throwing us off balance" (this issue). Libeskind's Jewish Museum was one of the first public buildings to embrace affects that are purposely disorienting and unpleasant. It articulates the trauma of the Holocaust by pointing not to an understanding of these events but by capturing the sense of the unthinkable, the void, the Uncanny and the dead end. Nothing is as we know it. Floors slope, walls tilt, and windows look like wounded scars cut into the metal flesh of the exterior cladding. It is a building designed to formally, conceptually, and emotionally disturb the visitor. It was this disturbance that intrigued me when I first saw the design. It awakened an entire community of architects to new sets of feelings that architecture had never investigated, and it did so by estranging us from what we had come to expect from buildings.

Domash describes the ways in which the building evoked strong feelings in her. Her feelings swing between the horror of the death camps and a renewed appreciation of the magnificence of the Jewish participation in the cultural wealth of Germany prior to WWII. She confronts the voids—both symbolic and physical—in the building that reawaken the traumatic experiences and link to the inability to comprehend and mentalize the Holocaust. But she also feels the building as a sheltering, mediating, and containing presence. She writes, "I entered the museum as a depressed, unhappy patient, and the effect on me was like a powerful short-term dynamic therapy" (this issue). For Domash, the building brings back traumatic memories but manages to do so, as a skilled therapist would, without overwhelming or flooding her with feelings she cannot tolerate. She continues to state that Libeskind is "able to contain both the horror and a sense of a holding environment within the same structure" (this issue). Domash sees the architect as a participating presence in the architectural experience, which allows excluded affects to be found and felt.

Others have experienced this building differently. A recent book titled *Space and Psyche* (Danze & Sonnenberg, 2012) contains two articles discussing this museum. Architectural historian Rykwert (2012) takes issue with both Libeskind's Jewish Museum and Eisenman's Holocaust Memorial (also located in the center of Berlin). In both cases, he finds the architecture evokes a masochistic self-punishment rather than true memory and mourning. He feels that these structures, more monuments than buildings, prescribe emotions rather than suggesting them. Psychoanalyst Sonnenberg (2012) describes how confused he became during a visit to the Jewish Museum. "As the structure and I interacted," he writes, "I was affected in a powerful and very tragic way" (p. 120). He experienced himself "in the here and now and the past simultaneously, again experiencing a merging of inner mental space and outer physical space, again realizing that I was interacting in both passive and active ways with the space I saw, entered, and experienced with all my various senses" (p. 120).

But beyond the differences in the individuals' subjective experiences of the museum, all three accounts suggest an emotional reaction caused or aroused while visiting the Jewish Museum. These accounts support Domash's view that a space, like a friend, a book, or a therapist, can evoke feelings that we may already know, or assist us in reconnecting to those feelings we have long avoided. Buildings, in their physical embodiment, reflect and mirror empathic in-feelings, linking back to the architect.

We can therefore expand the mentalizing pair and the relational or intersubjective field to include our situated experiences as bodies always contained in physical space. Inanimate objects of art and architectural environments participate in our sense of self (Gentile, 2007). This has been suggested by Greenacare (1957) and Modell (1970) as a particular characteristic of the artist's skill, but pertains not only to the creation of art but also to the experiencing of art. Domash eloquently writes that architecture "is concerned with memory and can provide the viewer with a completely new way of looking at the world, something not thought of or experienced before. That is how we lead ourselves forward" (this issue).

The Architectural Object

Architecture is unusual among the arts in that it does not represent an object or feelings outside of itself. Its meaning resides—might I use Heidegger's (1951) term "dwells"—within its actual attributes. The building's roofs and walls physically protect us and emotionally give us shelter; its columns support it from the pull of gravity and metaphorically support our activities in it; its concrete foundation is securely buried in the earth and symbolically creates the foundation on which an institution can be built.

Domash explains that for Libeskind, "architecture is real, communicative, emotional, complex, and must take risks" (this issue), and she agrees with him when she writes that her article examined "the value of actual space as transitional or potential space" (this issue). While Domash uses the terms "transitional area," "transitional space," and "transitional subjects," I would like to use this as an opportunity to question the ubiquitous use of Winnicott's term "transitional object," famously residing between fantasy and reality. Each of us may have objects that hold the double purpose of real and symbolic in personal ways, and for Domash, the Jewish Museum in Berlin may occupy such a place. However, buildings, as I see them, are always both symbolic and real. Our emotional response to the building is not an illusion, fantasy, or a projection of longings for protection and shelter. We experience emotional and physical responses to environments that we observe from afar or are touched by from within. It is our embodied reaction to the physicality of light, sound, orientation, and stability of the building that affects us. Winnicott's transitional object, despite its physicality, operates in an internal intrapsychic realm—but a building is always a concrete relational event. It is a communication infused with empathy or distortion, linking many components: the mind of the architect, the cultural sphere, the physical stone and glass structure, and the subjective inhabitant.

Loewald, in his book *Sublimation* (1988), elaborates the difference between a sign and a symbol. While a sign is an arbitrary signifier of an object or idea, a symbol maintains the link between the symbolic images and what it symbolizes. A snake in a patient's dream, Loewald writes (p. 486), is a symbol for the penis while also maintaining the associations to actual snakes. If the snake is understood concretely only as a snake it loses its psychoanalytic meaning, but if it is translated as a sign only to signify the penis, it is emptied of affective meanings of the fear, power, or seduction of snakehood.

Laplanche (1999), also troubled by Freud's intrapsychic, isolated, self-sufficient system, suggests that our sexual and erotic desire does not originate in bodily functions or internal fantasy but rather is a reaction to actual, enigmatic, suggestive, mysterious, and often unconscious messages we receive from our parents. It is the unconscious nature of the parental message, the fact that the parent is also other to himself, which creates Eros and desire. It is the importance of the real, albeit hard-to-decipher messages we receive from the external environment that is important to my argument.

Buildings, like Loewald's symbol, hold actual and metaphorical meanings, and like Laplanche's enigmatic message, desire is not projected from within: rather it is implanted, and communicated to us from without. Rendell (2010) makes the compelling case for seeing architecture and art criticism as "trialogues." In this three-way communication, the architect, the building, and the visitor all jointly create the situated experience. Similarly, Pérez-Gómez (2008)

sees architecture as a communication when he writes that architecture "communicates not a particular meaning but rather the possibility of recognizing ourselves as complete in order to dwell poetically on earth and thus be wholly human" (p. 108). We hear the building and talk back to it.

Conclusion

I end, much like Domash does, by wondering how psychoanalysis might learn from the architectural experience. I join Domash's effort to notice the participation of spaces, places, and buildings, the sites of our habitation, in the processes that allow us to experience life to its fullest. Nevertheless, I think we should question the all-too-common use of the term "transitional space" to refer to the space of psychoanalysis as a unique place that fosters reflection and projection. While analysis offers a special place for patient and analyst to express and explore less rational, ordered, and socially acceptable sides of themselves, it is nevertheless a real experience, an experience connecting past, present, and future through symbols, messages, and transference.

We encounter the building as a structure that relates to us but also exists independently of us—and this encounter expands our sense of self. Similarly, the analytic couple is internally co-created yet maintains the independent externality of their lives and circumstances. They foster transition, but are real objects. It is the reality of the site, the radical will to incite, and the empathic insight that are the transformational agents of architecture and psychoanalysis.

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Contributor

Esther Sperber is the founder of the New York–based award-winning firm Studio ST Architects (http:www.studio-st.com), dedicated to exploring the embedded logic of materials and structures to generate new spatial experiences. She lectures and writes on the intersection of psychoanalysis and architecture, two fields that aim to reduce human distress and widen the range of individual and social experiences.