

Chapter 3

Kissing disciplines, relational architecture

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How do disciplines interact? How does one field affect, question and transform another? Is knowledge from one area of study applicable to others? In this chapter I will explore a potential overlap between relational psychoanalysis and the understanding of the architectural experience, both as a creative design process and the phenomenology of inhabiting and dwelling within the architectural space. Relational psychoanalysis has brought to the fore a new attention to the mutuality of the therapy process, contending that we discover our own minds only through the intersubjective field that is shared with others; a view that exposes the interdependence of the analytic dyad in which analyst and patient together construct the analytic space of healing.

In the field of architecture there has been a long-standing reluctance to see design as anything but the independent creation of the lone architect. In this view of history, the creative process and the reality of the architectural design exclude a wide range of innovative processes which arise from the inevitable messy interaction the architect will have with the building's physical surroundings, the clients and the many other participants in the design and construction process (Sperber, 2013).

In this chapter I use Aron's ideas, raised in his "Mutual Vulnerability: An Ethic of Clinical Practice" (Chapter 2 of this volume), to expose a previously hidden aspect of the architectural practice. I suggest an overlapping sensibility between the psychoanalytic understandings of vulnerability as Aron describes it, and a resistance to accepting the mutuality and vulnerability inherent in the work of the architect and the field of architecture. I also point to a particular manner in which two disciplines—architecture and psychoanalysis—can meet and affect one another, while maintaining their own unique identity. This manner of interaction may be seen as a kiss, an idea influenced by Lavin's book *Kissing Architecture* (2011).

Mutual vulnerability

Aron tells a story that challenges us to reexamine the binary habits that typically characterize the parameters of psychoanalysis; opposites such as woman-man, passive-active, care-cure, Jew-non-Jew and relational theory-drive theory. Aron tells an alternative history of psychoanalysis, one that is akin to the experience of early childhood trauma. This trauma was a result of the anti-Semitism experienced by Freud and his followers, the difficulties of immigration and a general culture of misogyny and homophobia. Like personal trauma that creates dissociation and defensive splitting of painful unformulated affect, so did psychoanalysis split off a part of its own self, limiting its emotional and behavioral range. As Aron explains, the discipline chose to favor the “masculine,” rational, scientific, autonomous view of interpretation and cure over what it saw as the “feminine,” caring, interpersonal and vulnerable aspects of therapy which it split off. Aron suggests that just as personal health depends on the ability to embrace and accept a wide range of self-states, so, too, the field of psychoanalysis can survive only if a new pluralism of theory and technique is embraced.

Coming from the epicenter of relational psychoanalysis, Aron considers the analytic project as always co-created. This follows Aron’s notable and prolific contributions that demonstrate how insight, pain, hope and cure reside in both analyst and patient and flow in and out and around the dyad (1996, 2013). In this chapter I suggest that a relational view of the world can help us better understand other fields such as architecture and their specific dissociated histories.

Over more than a century, psychoanalytic ideas have influenced our cultural vocabulary and permeated many parts of the humanities. Freud’s original brilliance extended far beyond inventing a therapy. He created a constellation of structures, myths, ideas and metaphors that, having been stated, frame the way we understand the world. We can use, argue or reject these concepts, such as the unconscious, narcissism, Oedipal strivings or transference, but we can no longer un-think them. Following Freud, other psychoanalytic thinkers have contributed to a general academic discourse. We find Melanie Klein’s ideas in art theory and Jacques Lacan’s concepts of the “Real” and the gaze in critical theory and film theory. Jessica Benjamin, Julia Kristeva and Judith Butler have all played major roles in shaping contemporary feminism and gender studies.

Relational psychoanalysis developed over the last thirty years in the United States. From a foundation of object relations and interpersonal psychoanalysis, it has developed a language of understanding the inherently relational nature of all human interactions. Contributions from Mitchell (1993), Aron (1996), Benjamin (1998), Davies and Frawley (1992), Bromberg (1998), Ogden (2008) and many others have elaborated a theory of self that is no longer an isolated, fixed entity. Relational psychoanalysis asserts that our experience is always a complex configuration of multiple selves. These selves emerge in the specificity of an interactive matrix between self and other, creating relational moments. This understanding of the human experience has significant technical implications for therapeutic approaches. Relational psychoanalysis rejects the analyst as neutral observer; instead it sees the analyst as an involved participant in the understanding of the interpersonal and intersubjective events of the analysis. This dyad, though not symmetrical (Aron, 1992), co-creates the analytic space. Relational psychoanalysis believes that all social interactions occur within a field of interconnectedness, a web of attachments, and continue the flow of conscious and unconscious communication.

These relational ideas resonate with my architectural design experience. I suggest that these insights, although developed in the protective space of the analytic interaction, and through a close attunement to patient-therapist dynamics, can emerge from the cocooned consulting room and participate in a conversation with other disciplines. I therefore venture to explore what these psychoanalytic ideas of mutuality, intersubjectivity and a co-created relational field add to the understanding of architecture.

Architecture and psychoanalysis

Architecture and psychoanalysis seem to be very different practices at first glance. Architecture is charged with building physical structures to solve complex sets of human and social requirements and needs. The completed project is a building, a physical structure that can be inhabited by the private client or the public organization that commissioned it. To realize an architectural project, the architect needs to manage a large team of collaborating parties which includes consultants, engineers, contractors, project managers, financing institutions and government approval agencies. Budgets, schedules, all-nighters, punch lists, filings, change orders, emails and spreadsheets are the stuff from which an architectural practice

is made. At the completion of the project, the architect may proudly show her work to friends and colleagues and publish the beautiful images in glossy magazines and monographs.

Psychoanalysis by comparison is a very private affair, framed by the repetition of time and place unfolding in the interiority of the consulting room, and amidst the minds of the analytic dyad (Sperber, 2014b). Outside information is carefully filtered through the subjectivities of the analyst and patient, entering by way of their verbal and non-verbal styles of communicating. Intellectual and emotional dramas are performed or enacted by them, and for them, in the consulting room theater (Loewald, 1975; Schafer, 1976). The results and effects of this joint analytic work remain ephemeral and “disguise and consent” are required when the analyst presents this work to a wider public.

One notices some other intriguing differences between architects and psychoanalysts. Architects, when presenting their work, tend to focus on the final product, showing photos and plans of the completed project. It has been a long-standing tradition in architectural magazines to publish photos that are not “contaminated” with people so that the pure forms of the building or interior are documented as abstract, uninhabited and uncluttered spaces. Although at times architects may show a sketch or diagram explaining the conceptual background of the design solution, they typically do not dwell on their process of design. The creative method remains hidden, a way of protecting the precious intellectual property of the architect, a trade secret. Rarely do architect present their construction details which reveal the way in which a specific feature of the building was achieved. Technical details are seen as the firm’s private, in-house “family secrets,” a shared knowledge and mythology that create each firm’s identity and legacy.

It is interesting, and perhaps inevitable, that the psychoanalytic literature adopts the opposite method for sharing analytic work. The literature of psychoanalysis discusses in depth the technical methods and intellectual framework in which the analytic process takes place. Not being able to “show” the analytic product or the cured patient, or to demonstrate positive progress in the patient’s life, much of the written accounts describe progress through the changes and improvements within the analytic dyad’s relationship. The patient’s ability to tolerate a wider range of affects toward the therapist, both intimacy and aggression, love and envy, are proof of analytic progress. Without showing the patient, as the product

of the years of joint work, the currency analysts use to construct a hierarchy of success and creativity becomes the stories of the analytic technique processes, those same trade secrets that the architect conceals.

But there are also many similarities between architecture and psychoanalysis. Both are charged to make life more pleasant and to widen the range of personal and social experience (Sperber, 2014a). Although psychoanalysis is barely over 100 years old while architecture has a history as long as human history itself, both professions as we practice them today evolved a response to the project of modernity and the evolution of the urban metropolis of the 20th century.

Urbanization and the growing density of the 19th and 20th centuries demanded new ways of living within society. New typologies of city dwelling evolved out of the growing urbanization and industrialization, a complex layering of infrastructure, transportation systems and cultural institutions. The high-rise building, the office tower, suburban sprawl, strip malls and school campuses were new typologies for a new time. Public spaces were designed for use by the masses and recreational spaces were reconceived, adding parks and stadiums to the urban fabric to provide respite from the rushed and crowded city environment. The design possibilities created by modern building technologies and computer programs have further accelerated these innovations in architecture.

Psychoanalysis similarly came into being as a reaction to pressures of modernity on the individual (Homans, 1989; Zaretsky, 2004). Changes in family structures and group affiliation, the depersonalized and blasé conditions of city dwelling and the uncertainty of the new capitalistic economy, all join together to destabilize people's inner life. The industrial revolution paired with social isolation and indifference brought much discomfort and unhappiness. Roles were shifting, boundaries were changing, and previously clear social hierarchies, gender expectations and religious and ethical foundations were no longer firmly understood. As architecture struggled to provide light and air, running water, electricity and access to green outdoor space for the ever-growing numbers of city dwellers, psychoanalysis attempted to give them back their ability to "work and love," to find personal space for emotional intimacy and creativity and authenticity within this new human environment.

The architect and the psychoanalyst share not only the influence of a certain moment in history, they also share a dependence on a client to enable them to do the work they love. It is true that Freud discovered the

importance of dreams through his own self-analysis, and that similarly some architects get their first opportunity by building a home for their own family (Philip Johnson's Glass House, Frank Ghery's Santa Monica house) or their parents (Venturi's house for his mother—Vanna Venturi), and that architectural competitions offer architects the opportunity to develop their thoughts independent of a specific client. Nevertheless, these forays are the exception and the vast majority of architectural work is done for a client. The success of the design depends on a good interaction, a financial contract and a mutual trust between client and designer. Psychoanalytic treatment similarly depends on a working relationship between analyst and analysand and self-analysis, while often very productive, omits crucial aspects of the analytic process such as the ability to depend, to be vulnerable and intimate with another person. It is hard to imagine a process of termination in self-analysis.

If current-day architecture and psychoanalysis share a common historical set of circumstances and the goal of making human experience more varied and more pleasant, perhaps these two professions can influence and illuminate one another.

Heroic autonomy

Christine Battersby (1989) in her book *Gender and Genius* traces the origins of the notion of the heroic independent, autonomous, male genius to 18th and 19th-century Romanticism. The heroic artist and architect does it on his own. He conceives and executes his vision despite and in the face of resistance from society and those around him. Heroic autonomy and independence, packaged as neutrality and rationality, were also at the core of the image of early and mid-century psychoanalysis. Aron convincingly shows how aspects of therapy that focused on caring, compassion and mutuality were split off and redefined as psychotherapy of consulting social work. Aron traces this splitting to the traumatic origins of the field of psychoanalysis, much like personal trauma which splits off and dissociates painful affect. The valuation of autonomy and independence is born of an attitude that defends against the mutual dependence and vulnerability of analyst and patient.

Although the major currents of mid-century ego psychology presented ego strength, independence and mastery as the main goals of analysis (Hartmann, 1939), other views can be traced alongside this leading understanding, views that acknowledged and valued the interdependence of

patient and analyst and the value of other modalities of thought. Ferenczi (1949) notes that the neutrality, suggested as the correct position of the analyst, might at times re-traumatize the patient who feels yet again alone with his overwhelming pain. Harold Searles (1999/1975) suggests that in treatment there is a point in which the patient heals the analyst, a view that transcends the usual dichotomy in which the analyst is the healer and the patients is the one who needs healing.

This heroic image burdened not only psychoanalysis but the arts and sciences as well. Women are of course the largest group excluded from this version of cultural history, as we are reminded by the haunting words of the 19th-century physician and criminologist Lombroso, "There are no women of genius; the women of genius are men" (Battersby, 1989, p. 4). Battersby illustrates how eccentricities, gender ambiguity and an insatiable need for love or solitude were all celebrated as signs of the creative male genius while these same traits were condemned as madness in woman. Following Aron, one realizes that at the heart of this lone, autonomous genius artists is a similar dissociative resistance to a world that is always anaclitic, mutually enacted and alive in the complex field of relational interactions.

In the title of her seminal paper, art critic Linda Nochlin (1971) asked "Why have there been no great women artists?" (p. 203). Unlike Lombroso, who argued that artistic genius was a form of hereditary insanity, an essentialist view of the artist as a uniquely gifted person, Nochlin sees art as a situated practice that involves both talent and education. She suggests that:

[A]rt is not a free, autonomous activity of a super-endowed individual, "influenced" by previous artists, and more vaguely and superficially, by "social forces," but, rather, that the total situation of art making, both in terms of the development of the art maker and in the nature and quality of the work of art itself, occur in a social situation, are integral elements of this social structure, and are mediated and determined by specific and definable social institutions, be they art academies, systems of patronage, mythologies of the divine creator, artist as he-man or social outcast.

(p. 203)

There were no great women artists ("nor have there been any great Lithuanian jazz pianists, nor Eskimo tennis players," she notes) because women were excluded from the educational institutions of teaching, supporting and exhibiting art. To rephrase this in the terms used in this

chapter, art is a relational practice which happens within personal and cultural social ties, and these ties were denied to women, therefore excluding them from this creative field.

If Nochlin suggested that artistic creativity is a learned part of human culture, Pierre Bourdieu (1993) further expands the situated nature of art by arguing that it originates from a field of artistic productions. This field of production includes the individual artist, the social group, the critic, the historian and the museum curator, who together produce what we define as the work of art. Freud in *Group Psychology* (1921) makes a similar suggestion. In comparing the mediocrity of group thinking to the higher achievements of the individual, he writes that all great progress “in the realm of thought and momentous discoveries and solutions of problems [is] only possible to an individual working in solitude.” Yet, he adds, it remains a question “how much the individual thinker or writer owes to the stimulation of the group in which he lives, and whether he does more than perfect a mental work in which the others have had a simultaneous share” (p. 83).

I want to make clear that while I emphasize the relational nature of creativity, I do not wish to deny or devalue the role of the individual, the personal inventiveness and the power of agency (Slavin, 2010). Many ideas, works of art and scientific discoveries are in fact discovered by gifted individuals. Yet even those individuals who labor in their isolated labs or studios are situated within a historical, political and intellectual network that is ever present. Aron’s (1992) well-known insight that mutuality does not equate with symmetry is well taken and appropriate for collaborative creative work as it is in the analytic dyad.

Freud was both a genius and a product of his own time, shaped by turn-of-the-century conventions of autonomy and masculinity. When Freud’s fiancée, Martha Bernays, mentioned reading John Stuart Mill, Freud (1883) wrote back to her, stating his view of a woman’s role: “I dare say we agree that housekeeping and the care and education of children claim the whole person and particularly rule out any profession” (p. 75).

But we are no longer in the late 19th or even the 20th century and Aron and Starr (2013) provide a new lens through which to bring psychoanalysis up to date. As the authors write:

No longer invulnerable, we cannot remain safely behind the couch in our private practices. We must become socially, politically, and environmentally active and bring complexity, depth, dialectic and

dynamic understanding to problems in our communities and in the wider world.

(p. 402)

I now turn to explore how the psychoanalytic quest for a less rigidly divided world, one that accepts co-creation and experiences the ever-presence of an intersubjective field, the creativity of mutuality and the ethics of vulnerability, might affect the architectural practice and theory of its production.

Form follows libido

On the continuum between autonomous individuality at one extreme and collaborative vulnerability at the other, the modernist architect can be located on the autonomous side. Typically the image of the architect was of an inventor who imagines bold, new ideas which he then struggles to realize by overcoming the client's resistance, budgetary constraints and the conservative restrictions of approval agencies. The architect oversees and enforces the implementation of his exact vision by the team of contractors and a suppliers who follow his instructions.

While this view of the architectural profession was celebrated in the 20th century, it has its origins earlier in the Renaissance. Mario Carpo (2011) traces how Alberti (1404–72), in his classic book *De Re Aedificatoria* (1452, *On the Art of Building*), created our modern understanding of the architect as the sole creator of the building. The architect produces plans and elevations which form a one-way communication between the architect and the construction team who are expected to follow his vision. Brunelleschi (1377–1446), working around the same time, had a very different approach. Rather than providing plans, Brunelleschi was continuously present on the construction site, engaged in dialogue, negotiation and argument with the site masters and guild laborers. In current architectural practice we continue to struggle with the modernist legacy of architecture as omnipotence, a tradition that enabled Le Corbusier to propose replacing the beauty of medieval Paris with a series of towers in the park and in which Mies van der Rohe's skyscraper heritage evolved into the alienating glass towers of corporate America.

Alongside this view of architecture there have always been other understandings of the profession. In her seminal book *Women and the Making of the Modern House* (1998) Alice Friedman studies a number of iconic

modernist buildings, suggesting that the women clients who commissioned these homes played a central role in their design and construction, a role that has been overlooked or perhaps repressed in the telling of the modernist history, which gave all the credit to the male architects. An in-depth exploration of the collaborative nature of the design process can also be found in Lambert and Bergdoll's recent book (2013) on the making of the Seagram building, a masterpiece that came into being because of Lambert's foresight as the client, and a complicated yet fascinating collaboration between the architect Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson who was at the time the building's lighting designer.

As it so happened, while I was reading Aron and Starr's (2013) book *A Psychotherapy for the People*, on which Chapter 2 of this volume was based, I finally surrendered to Amazon's algorithm that had long insisted "people like me" would enjoy Sylvia Lavin's (2007) book, *Form Follows Libido: Architecture and Richard Neutra in a Psychoanalytic Culture*.

Richard Neutra is one such architect who does not simply fit the archetype of the heroic creator. In Lavin's book I learned that Neutra and psychoanalysis were born at the same time and place, late 19th-century Vienna. Much like the shifting of the psychoanalytic center from Vienna to the U.S., so did Neutra immigrate to America in 1923. Interestingly, Neutra was a frequent guest at the Freuds' home, being a close friend of Freud's son Ernst with whom he took a study trip in 1912 to Italy and the Balkans. They had both studied architecture at Adolf Loos's independent architectural school. Neutra worked at the offices of some of the greatest architects of the time, first in Loos's studio in Vienna, then with Erich Mendelsohn in Berlin and briefly with Frank Lloyd Wright in the United States.

Neutra was a prolific architect and a cultural celebrity in his day, widely known for his case study houses; he was on the cover of *Time* magazine in August 1949. After moving to California he promoted a unique style of regional modernism, which was clean and new yet sensual and visually pleasing. Although Neutra is often included in 20th-century architectural narratives, Lavin (2007) argues that:

he is always cast in a supporting role: helping structure triumph over decoration but doing so less vigorously than Mies; pursuing the social program of the avant-garde but with less engagement than Gropius; and blazing the trail of the New Pioneers but with less clarity than Le Corbusier.

(p. 11)

Neutra wrote extensively, believing that psychological suffering, health ailments and unhappy marriages were all caused by inhabiting deficient environments. He claimed that the architect possesses the power to remedy these sufferings by providing spaces that awaken and enliven the client's senses (Neutra, 1954).

In Neutra's legacy, I find an endearing, if curious, complexity. Neutra was, on the one hand, heir to the Albertian, modernist legacy of the all-too-familiar omnipotent grand master who solves the world's problems with insight and fine design. Yet Neutra was also a humanist. Lavin writes about his "unusual sensitivity to his client and their wishes and needs" (Lavin, 2007, p. 14); he was attuned to the collaborative aspect of design and was sensitive to the delicate relationship of the new house, existing landscape and local climate. In an article about his case study house No. 6 from 1945, Neutra describes his careful interest in the client's ideas: "It is always an interesting story when the clients descend on the expert, who makes himself a sponge to absorb all the weighty information and also those imponderables, which make us know each other as human beings" (Neutra, 1945). Although he designed the Von Sternberg house in 1935, the house in which Ayn Rand lived, his manner of working with clients was not at the least similar to Rand's hero, Howard Roark, the architect in *The Fountainhead*.

Neutra was drawn to the concept of *empathy*, a central idea in aesthetic theory of the late 19th century. Translated as empathy, the term was introduced in 1909 by Theodor Lipps (coined originally by Robert Vischer) to explain our capacity to understand the other by mirroring and reflecting their feelings. Through empathy, which literally means "in-feeling," we feel the emotion embedded in an object of art, in space and in the mental states of other people (Mallgrave, 2010). In an unpublished essay Neutra writes that "infeeling" and love are experiences of "being favorably stimulated by the recognition that one is oneself a stimulus to the other individual" (Lavin, 2007, p. 33). Empathy translates perception and sensation into emotional recognition in a reciprocal process. The notion of *Einfühlung* resonates with the contemporary understandings of mentalization (Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, & Target, 2002) as a process of understanding oneself through the ability to see and understand the minds of the others (Sperber, 2014a). The mutuality and recognition of empathy also fits well with Aron's understanding of the relational field.

Neutra saw the architect's work as similar to that of the psychoanalyst, a co-created process which is based on the understanding of the client's inner desires and memories:

An architect producing the proper rapport with the client's aspirations and expressed or half-expressed need is actually acting very closely to the patterns and procedure of a psychiatrist. His analytical searching and retrospections into infantile precedent, conditions, trauma lead to an understanding, supplementary to empathy which so puzzlingly makes co-creativity as affective mutual attitude and a dynamic phenomenon of the most eminent social and cultural significance.

(as cited in Lavin, 2007, p. 49)

Lavin writes that for Neutra "empathy transforms architecture into a love triangle between the architect, the client and the postwar house" (p. 40) and Neutra "fathered" over 300 homes with his residential clients. Both the architect and client depend on the house to fulfill their needs and hopes. One of Neutra's clients, Constance Perkins, asked him to design a house that "she could love so much that it would make her homesick" (p. 42). Neutra took similar comfort in this house, saying he returned to visit the Perkins house "whenever he felt low" (p. 42). Therefore it was not only a methodology of creating the architectural design that relied on the co-creation of architect and client; rather they also shared the design product as a shared object that brought calm and comfort to both of them.

Kissing architecture

From Sylvia Lavin's book on Neutra, I now free associate to Lavin's (2011) more recent book *Kissing Architecture*. *Kissing Architecture* explores a new type of hybrid building that incorporates digital art and interactive structures on the static architectural structure. Lavin (2011) regards these interactive systems as disciplines that have come to kiss the fixed architectural discipline. She writes:

The kiss offers to architecture, a field that in its traditional forms has been committed to permanence and mastery, not merely the obvious allure of sensuality but also a set of qualities that architecture has long resisted: ephemerality and consilience. However long or short,

however socially constrained or erotically desiring, a kiss is the coming together of two similar but not identical surfaces, surfaces that soften, flex, and deform when in contact, a performance of temporary singularities.

(p. 5)

I get a bit excited when I read Lavin's phenomenology of kissing. Not just because kissing is sexy, but because Lavin employs kissing to suggest a way for two disciplines to interact. She continues to describe a process that puts "form into slow and stretchy motion, loosening form's fixity and relaxing its gestalt unities" (p. 5).

The excitement Lavin (2011) describes of "slow stretchy motion" is what I imagine attracts everyone interested in cross-disciplinary work, a place that facilitates "new definitions of threshold that operate through suction and slippage rather than delimitation and boundary" (p. 5). I am excited to envision a place in which the field of psychoanalysis, and its acceptance of the disorganized human mind, can kiss the thoughtful reasoning of philosophy, the wonderment of religion and perhaps even the concrete usefulness of architecture. Kissing, as Lavin writes, is "a union of bedazzling convergence and identification during which separation is inconceivable yet inevitable" (p. 5).

And so kissing brings us back to Aron's "Mutual Vulnerability" because a good kiss depends on surrender, openness, fluidity, relationality and mutuality. In kissing, gender roles soften, age is irrelevant and the dichotomies of "doer and done to" are transcended. It is this call for vulnerability that I adopt from Aron's work and transfer back to my world of architecture, a call that permits, demands, even pleads for us all to occupy the entire spectrum of human behavior from autonomy to dependence. Aron offers an image of mutual vulnerability and physical fluidity leading "not to disgust and shame but transformed, sublimated, and spiritualized into healing" (Chapter 2, p. X). We would all be enriched, in our various disciplines, from a softening of the boundaries that restrict us to heroic positions of autonomous self-creation, a softening that invites our own disciplines to kiss others.

Note

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