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FreudSpace

Architecture in Psychoanalysis

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I believe that the task of inventing better futures may stagger the imagination and paralyze hope, but we cannot relinquish this holy call.

—Emilio Ambasz, architect

Although Freud thought structurally (early on he employed the word “architecture” to designate the peculiar organization of hysteria; Freud, 1897), his theories never inspired experimentation in spatial thinkers that they did in narrative and visual artists—among whom filmmakers perhaps hold pride of place. (Lacan is the more usual link with film, but other studies have also emphasized Freud. See MacCannell, 2000.)

True, Freud rarely neglected to mark the site-specificity of the key mental events that set off his speculations—events befalling him or his patients, or even whole civilizations: the Acropolis, Vienna, Thebes, Egypt, Sinai. Yet space hardly seems as crucial to his theory as the newly effracted dimensions Freud discovered in time. Thus we recall his awakening to long-repressed memories when he finds himself on the Acropolis, and not the architectural wonders surrounding him in that spot (Freud, 1936). We focus more on the phobias induced in “Little Hans” by the horses in the streets of Vienna than on the streets themselves, or on the splendors of the Schoenbrunn Palace (although, it too, plays its part in Hans’ mental disturbance; Freud, 1909). And we think more about the unconscious desires of the son and his oedipal guilt (or his perverse enjoyment) than about the particular spatial arrangements of his mother’s bedroom, although Freud sometimes offers such details (Freud, 1909).

If Freud uncovered the melodramatic return of a repressed ancient Thebes,

Egypt, or Sinai in today's mental and cultural acts, we nonetheless regard his use of these sites more as historical turning points in subjective life than as particularized locations, specific built environments, or divine and natural landscapes. As for the way Rome figures in Freud, it is not its monumental architecture that counts, only the way it symbolized his father's lack of place in civic life (whence his own fearful fascination with the eternal city). True, Freud did employ the excavation of Rome as a forceful analogy for Proustian "time lost" and repressed memories; for him, the archaeology of the Forum's layer upon layer of buried histories chronicled the past of vanquished peoples and indexed the time of unremembered events. Yet even here Freud used the way the earth conceals three-dimensional objects to illustrate how psychical time superimposes one memory over another, without hinting at the reverse.

What seemingly matters most in Freud's style of psychoanalysis, then, are those temporal, historical events whose connections to the present are hidden, lost, and dropped out of the sequential narrative of life, but which have never actually been severed from it. Analysis attempts to recuperate these by means of an unrelentingly retrospective process: by pinpointing the moment of the trauma and by elaborating protocols of timing for the pacing and rhythm of the analyst's interventions to reach it. That is, psychoanalytic procedures are devised in order to arrive at a singular, primal event, the moment when the original object of satisfaction was lost: an object whose loss is subsequently masked (and yet indirectly indicated) in myriad everyday disguises in the ordinary, familiar objects that are its substitutes, appearing as our wishes, daydreams, hallucinations, or delusions. A moment, then, is dropped from the history of the subject, but nonetheless impacts the whole ensuing chronicle of its mental life.

In contrast to Freud's uncompromising pursuit of and systematic investigation into the obscure operations of unconscious mental time, we find (at first blush) no parallel effort with respect to space. Nor do the manifestations of the unconscious in three-dimensional reality command a great deal of Freud's attention. Freud, that is, does relatively little probing of spatial thinkers beyond, say, the sculptures of Michelangelo and the peculiar landscapes of Leonardo, although he obviously made some fuss over the spaces in which he himself worked at 19 Berggasse. Still, to mention Freud and space in the same breath brings mainly to mind his various two-dimensional sketches, his schemas of the topological systems, or his cartoonish graphics delineating the logically separated yet oddly continuous-contiguous mental spaces of id, ego, and superego—slashed through smartly by a gap called "repression." Freud's miniaturized pictures of mental structure even manage to reduce the collective mentality of entire social groups to diagrammatic flatness, as when he illustrates the process whereby a Leader becomes a focal object

that replaces his followers' individual ego ideals (Freud, 1922, p. 116).

Freudian flatness, Lacan would eventually remind us, relates primarily to his enduring attention to the ego and its imaginary structuring—an ego that ceaselessly draws a controlled circle around itself while warding off the alternately graceful or awkward pirouettes of instinctual vicissitudes. Even Freud's descriptions of the arcs and oblique circuits of drive are more like pencil drawings of serpentine lines than like constructs with mass, and more like verbal tropings (the twisting and turning aside from normal linguistic meaning and usage) than like three-dimensional architectural objects.

In Freud, that is, space seems to play analytical second fiddle to the temporality of psychical events. And so it seems, where the architectural object is concerned, it was up to Jacques Lacan and those he influenced to fill in the void of Freudian spatial inspiration. Lacan paid elaborate attention to Moebius strips, Klein bottles, knots, mathematical topology (1973), Baroque architecture and *trompe l'oeil* (1986), "Little Hans's" maternal bedroom (1994), and anamorphosis (1973). Lacan's seminar of 1964 (1973) developed the concept of the *démontage* ("dismantling": sometimes translated as "deconstruction") of the drives, which in turn "influenced" Jacques Derrida. Derrida is considered the French thinker who has most affected recent architectural practice, mainly through his critique of Heidegger's "enframing" using Kant's *parergon*; his work directly informs Peter Eisenman's deconstructive architecture. (See Ledofsky, 2004, pp. 42–45.) A long detour is required, then, to mark out Freud's architectural fortunes.

More pointedly, it seems clear that our traditional sense of space has not been much budged by Freud—or certainly not as much as our conventional understanding of time, which at length has yielded to Freud's complex rhythms of temporal contradictions and reversibilities. And yet, a case might be (and certainly remains to be) made that Freud's own sense of space was equally revolutionary, and that we may have simply failed to acknowledge, much less appreciate, his radicality in its regard. (See MacCannell, 2003a).

Let us for a moment reconsider the *space* we encounter at the end of an analysis. Here we will have reached the very first time that space was framed for the psyche. Poised on the threshold of an aperture, we look back through it to the beginning of the patient's subjective time, looking toward the empty place of the missing object of satisfaction—an object whose loss will have motivated the entire psychical history of that subject.

Even the most successful analysis, however, never "finally" arrives at this lost object. If it is true that the primal scene of the object's dramatic cleavage from us is never actually accessible directly, this is due less to its loss in the "mists of time" than to the special mental *space* its loss has shaped: a space fashioned

around and formed by a fantasy unconsciously constructed to obscure the object's loss. Unconscious fantasy *locates* the object of satisfaction as somehow still in the picture—still there, or rather, *not yet* lost. This fantasy models or determines all of the subject's subsequent desires in a very particular way. It frames all “real” objects by mobilizing them to fill in for the missing object: they will promise, yet can never deliver, its form of satisfaction. Unconscious fantasy thus makes the reality experienced through its frame appear isomorphic or symmetrical with one's *desire*. It governs how the subject historically (or autobiographically) apprehends and systematically distorts reality.

Unconscious fantasy achieves distorted expression in visual and spatial forms. Fascist spectacles, for example, are notoriously centered and symmetrical, intended to be seen only head-on. This makes the viewing subject feel he is at the center of things; in reality, of course, the whole design dwarfs and belittles him. It offers him the glory of reveling in “total” fulfillment, but its psychical appeal requires a subject who feels utterly devoid of power and satisfaction: the fantasy supplies their lack. An American architectural example, not directly connected with fascism, is Philip Johnson's AT&T Building in New York. Johnson's rather traditional skyscraper ends in a roofline designed to honor (by imitation) the top of a Queen Anne style dresser or highboy. The architect is establishing that there is no distinction between domestic and public, social space; the ease of the architectural simile provides the viewer a familiar, comforting place in public, civic space: he is there as though in his own living room; no anonymous citizen, but the king of his home. (The AT&T building was not loved, however; efforts to reinforce the subject's sense of its “true” place in the fantasy often fall flat when they are too obvious or direct.) Across the opening delineated by the fantasy frame, in fact, there is drawn something that absolutely divides the subject from its own lost object—at the same time as it is also the screen on which the subject projects its unconscious amendment of reality. Slavoj Žižek (1997) vividly paints fantasy's frame:

fantasy is the very screen that separates desire from drive: it tells the story which allows the subject to (mis)perceive the void around which drive circulates as the primordial loss constitutive of desire. In other words, fantasy provides a *rationale* for the inherent deadlock of desire; it constructs the scene in which the *jouissance* we are deprived of is concentrated in the Other who stole it from us [pp. 33–34].

(*Jouissance* is the French word for enjoyment, bliss, orgasm, and a number of other nuances. Lacan uses it to mean the satisfaction of a drive, not an instinct. The word is now commonly used in English in its French form. See MacCannell, 2003b.)

The task of analysis would then seem to be to grasp the unconscious fantasy mechanism at work behind the screen that curtains off the *jouissance* that lies just behind, or just on the other side, of the gap or aperture that fantasy screens. Focused on this singular moment, analysis becomes largely a procedure for revealing the secrets of the patient's vanished time, and the discordant, warring temporalities that disturb and destroy his or her mental balance.

Yet if we begin to attend to space as well as time, we realize that once an analysis has reached this point, Freud actually makes a new departure, and does something that no temporal approach anticipates. He does not attempt to gain access to the lost moment, nor does he try to pierce the veil of fantasy that conceals it. Not directly. Instead he presents a fundamental alternative to the patient's time and history, an alternative devoid of temporal character. To divine what is hiding in the unconscious, Freud sets up what he calls a "construction" (Freud, 1937 and 1918).

Freud was certainly the first to bring out starkly the two-step, interrupted time of trauma and the unseen manner in which the past continuously places a warp into conscious memory and present perception. But he is rarely acknowledged for being equally innovative in inventing the *construction* as a *spatial* metaphor for its treatment: a singular construction, in which moment and place, time and space, are not easily separable. In perhaps the most notable example, Freud's patient, the "Wolfman," has a dream in the course of his analysis that is so vividly visual he is able to draw Freud its picture. The "Wolfman" describes the dream this way: a window sash is suddenly thrown open to reveal a tree outside in which several white wolves with upright tails sit staring at him.

After searching together through the patient's childhood fairy tale books for a historical or biographical source of this precise image, Freud decides to take a different tack. Rather than trying to cross the barrier the patient has raised in front of his trauma, Freud now rearranges the setting that appears in the Wolfman's screen-dream. The theory is that the Wolfman's fantasy is erected on the very site of the original trauma; a site Freud calls the "primal scene." This scene is not the object of a perception or the subject of historical verification, for it is neither real nor unreal, neither an actual event nor a fantasied one. Freud reaches it only indirectly. He will not break through the fantasy screen, but he will subject its dreamscape to a remarkable series of *spatial reversals* that will mark out the presence of the trauma it conceals.

Freud first rotates the dreamer's position inside the dream: now the window that flies open is not something looked *at* but something looked *through*: the aperture becomes the infant's own eyelids, startled suddenly apart. The infant, who is now the one who sees (and not the one stared at by the set of pale wolves), finds its

visual object transformed into the darkly hirsute figure of his own lupine father, as he mounts the child's mother the same way that a furry, four-legged animal sexually enters his female (Freud uses the Latin phrase for "from behind": *a tergo*). The scene's *trauma* is constituted by the alternate appearance and disappearance of his father's penis; an alternation that makes this into the scene, then, of the Wolfman's encounter with castration (Freud, 1918; 1955, p. 45).

Freud has thus redesigned the setting of his patient's traumatic scene by carefully but dramatically shifting the spatial coordinates of the subject embedded in the fantasy scene that had masked or screened it off. Once Freud turns his patient's dream space around, he *rearticulates* the Wolfman to his fantasy constructs in an entirely new way, so that the truth of the castration anxiety hidden in them can now be "seen."

Lacan (1973) eventually offered Freud's radical reversals of space a proper name: *anamorphosis*. But from the very start, Freud already granted due weight to the spatial element in mentation: his story of the origin of the infant's mental life begins with its turn away from the source. In *The Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1897–1903, p. 283), Freud theorizes that normal mentation quite simply arises from the anamorphic spatial turn, when the baby turns aside from its frontal view of the breast—the fount of satisfaction—so it now sees the breast only in profile. This evokes the formation of a mental image of the now-absent breast: one that still satisfies, but only *imaginarily*.

Freud's therapeutic move with the Wolfman is the same move as the baby's in reverse: by reorienting his patient's mental space completely crosswise to the space of the fantasy that harbors and preserves the trauma, Freud turns his patient's glance aside, which then permits him to (re)construct the Wolfman's primal scene, where he finds the stillness at the center of the Wolfman's whirling drive energy—the whole history of the patient's recurrent failures in life and love, and his compulsion to replicate again and again the lost causes of his peculiar sexuality. (The "Wolfman," for example, falls in love with any woman he happens to see from behind in a kneeling position, fixating sexually her posterior.) Freud builds an alternative construction of the primal scene in order to supplant the Wolfman's already-in-place fantasy edifice, and to redirect his patient's drive energy down different paths.

At a certain moment, that is, the analyst–patient couple had reached the point where *time* was at a stop, the time of the patient's history and of the progression of the analysis. This sticking point is a dead, unmoving instant, which has nonetheless been the power source of all the psychical energy transporting the patient through time and motivating the shape of his psychical "reality."

At this point of stubbornness, the adamancy and immovability of his traumatic, buried memory resists any and all change that might be wrought by time and experience.

And as Freud found, this point remains to be grasped less as a *moment in time* than as a *point in space*. For there, in the middle of the coursing stream of subjective time stands something petrified, stony, unbudging—something with dimensionality, with *weight*, yet empty and insubstantial. An opaque, traumatic spot, a *thing* of obdurate resistance to time, change, and reality. The very thing, indeed, that amplifies the natural nervous energy gushing past it, by converting it into something far more powerful than the stream of experience generated by itself: a psychical turbine, so to speak, in the middle of the river of time that constitutes the subject's history, a history that has flowed from this spot at the same rate as his conscious memory has fled from it. (Lacan makes this analogy: “a hydroelectric plant set midstream in a great river, the Rhine, for example” [*une usine hydraulique électrique qui est en plein milieu du courant d'un grand fleuve, le Rhin par exemple*]); by cumulating and augmenting natural forces [energy] it contributes to the constructed, fantasmatic character of *Wirklichkeit* [reality]. Lacan 1994, pp. 32–33).

Once Freud makes his “construction,” time loses its simple orientation. The past tense becomes indivisible from an *other* past that is inexplicably and unbearably still *present* in it. Freud calls this uncanny point of time-space “drive”—death drive—and Lacan calls it *pulsion* (“impulsion”: Lacan distinguished drive from natural instinct, and translated Freud's *Trieb* into this quasi-mechanical equivalent). Death drive is the transubstantiation of time into space: into a compulsive circling that has all the trappings of a temporal movement, but which is actually stuck, cycling around a traumatic point of fixed, almost mineral immobility. With drive, time is trumped by space, and Kant's antinomian mental coordinates are discovered as coeval and co-equal.

Truth and Consequences

Once the threshold of fantasy has been crossed figuratively by analysis, where do we go? Two clear directions have appeared since Freud, the one speculative and temporal and the other plastic and three-dimensional. The philosophical, speculative option takes a good hard look at fantasy and suggests that the subject should realistically resign himself to the fact that if the fantasy frame is deconstructed, the death-drive that motivated its construction will appear in all its stark horror. The philosophical option accepts a “dead end” to analysis, just as it accepts the same of

time and history. The other, “architectural” option adopts a somewhat sunnier view of human possibilities and sheds a different light on what Freud’s spatial method might bring.

The consequences to disattending the spatial dimension of Freud’s analysis are grave. Slavoj Žižek, who calls himself a “philosopher of psychoanalytic ontology” (1997), faces squarely the fact that the screen and frame of fantasy are never finally or fully breached. Analysis, he points out, ends with a “traversal of the fantasy” that “suspend[s] the fantasmic frame of unwritten rules that tell us how to choose freely” (p. 29). But this does not mean breaking “through the screen” (p. 30) or liberating ourselves from the restrictive viewpoint of fantasy. Žižek instead emphasizes, using the late Lacan, that at the end of analysis, the subject at last apprehends that death drive alone lies beyond the screen of projected desires: “Once we move beyond desire—that is to say, beyond the fantasy which sustains desire—we enter the strange domain of *drive*: the domain of the closed circular palpitation which finds satisfaction in endlessly repeating the same failed gesture” (p. 30).

According to Žižek’s interpretation, a successful analysis destroys all the illusions fashioned to dissimulate the finite character of death drive, which Žižek calls “a radical closure” (p. 31)—or nothing other than the “end” of time.

Žižek argues vigorously that what one usually thinks of as the aim of analysis (as “opening” the subject to his or her possibilities), is simply a way to “maintain [a] false opening (the idea that the excluded choice might have happened)” (p. 33). Any analysis that supported this vain hope is destined for disappointment. Instead, Žižek affirms the end of analysis to be an impasse where the drive that endlessly cycles around an impossibly lost object is finally and fully realized.

Moreover, Žižek counsels acceptance of this “unbearable closure of being” (p. 30); thus, he asks: “What if ‘traversing the fantasy’ involves the acceptance of a radical ontological closure? The unbearable aspect of the ‘eternal return of the same’—the Nietzschean name for the crucial dimension of *drive*—is the radical *closure* this notion implies: to endorse and fully assume the ‘eternal return of the same’” (p. 31).

Such acceptance, Žižek goes on to say, actually yields another sort of enjoyment, one more profound than its original model: a joy-in-death-drive, if you will. Like all revolutionary fervors, it comes from *renouncing* any hope and all faith in the false promises of “opening.” He writes that in “the ‘eternal return of the same’ . . . we renounce every opening, every belief in messianic Otherness” (p. 31); moreover, “in ‘traversing the fantasy,’ we find *jouissance* in the vicious cycle of circulating around the void of the (missing) object, renouncing the myth that *jouissance* has to be amassed somewhere else” (pp. 33–34).

Satisfaction is (philosophically at least) rediscovered at—and *as*—the *last moment*.

But Žižek's hyperbolic conclusions are clouded somewhat by his deeper neglect of space. Just as his mesmerizing analyses of cultural objects spiral round and round their several possible interpretations (following an essentially Hegelian time, with its own end to history), his "psychoanalytic ontology" presents itself in *The Plague of Fantasies* as one-sidedly *temporal*. For Žižek, the opposite of time is not space, but *eternity*; and like Hegel's, this is an essentially religious viewpoint. Žižek "endorses and fully assumes" an "end-time" that realizes itself as a perpetual whirl emptying into a void.

Žižek (1997, p. 31) assumes that "the point is . . . to oppose the radical closure of the 'eternal' drive to the opening involved in the finitude/temporality of the desiring subject." But what, after all, is Žižek's "unbearable closure of being" when looked at spatially? Surely it is no more, nor less, than that final empty space, the one awaiting us all at the end of our time: the grave. When we are face to face with time's deadest point, psychoanalytic ontology, even at its most radical, must stop; logically so, for it is organized by what *is*.

Žižek's antisentimental view of the analytic experience, while plainly consonant with Freud's demystifying spirit, is nonetheless more than just quizzically awry with respect to Freud's analytic aims. If the orientation of psychoanalysis is primarily retrospective, then Žižek would be correct that its final goal has to be to reach the zero point of time where drive energizes the fantasy that masks it, and where *eternity* offers the only alternative perspective on that time.

But, to turn the tables a bit, let me ask whether the spatial reorientation of the fundamental fantasy Freud effected in the Wolfman does not offer an entirely different resolution to the traversal of fantasy from the resignation Žižek envisages (and recommends)? Aren't there other possible lines of flight from this stillest of all points? After all, Freud took full responsibility for shifting the Wolfman off his position in the fantasy scene. Everything had been nicely arranged in his fantasy so as to screen off knowledge of the primal scene of his trauma. With the anamorphic shift in subjective perspective that Freud insists on for the Wolfman's dream, a wholly different prospect materializes for his patient and provides them both with a crucial perspective on the Wolfman's truth.

Once it is space, not time, that is psychoanalytically reversed, the architectural option for traversing the fantasy emerges. A "radical" architecture, set toward new departures (not ending up back at the uterine enclosure), can also move us around inside our fantasy spaces: a radical architecture that turns its subject *sideways*, making him look in the unexpected direction—back through the fantasy frame that obscures his past and present realities. The stake of spatial psychoanalysis and radical architecture alike would be to re-start subjective time by treating it with space, providing a *spatial* prospect for a mental gaze blinded by the fantasy of what "is" to the critical importance of what "is not."

Architecture in Psychoanalysis II: Critical Space

Let me begin where Freud so often did, with everyday reality (the one I am saying is shaped by unconscious fantasy). Everyone knows from the daily papers what intense emotional reactions innovative architecture stirs up whenever it appears to establish some new or aberrant kind of object: an object that departs in an elemental way from the ordinary “objects of desire” that constitute our world, by substituting for and screening off the lethal satisfaction of our final objective, death drive.

When it comes to the passions this type of created object brings out, psychoanalytic insight is rare. This is understandably so, since psychoanalysis has tended to give priority to time over space, which it often sees largely as the surrogate or stand-in for the lost object. For example, a psychoanalyst friend once remarked: “Don’t you think architects love their mothers too much?” The remark indicated to me that he regarded the task of analysis as chiefly a matter of reversing time, with space as little more than the representative of the time outside of human time. He also obviously took it for granted that architected space was a container or enclosure; that architectural space symbolized either a return to the womb or foreshadowed the tomb. (In a recent paper for Yale University 2003, I question this fundamental assumption).

Something more fundamental is nonetheless at stake in the question of space in and for psychoanalysis. To repeat my original question: why do so few objects (apart from legendarily scandalous art objects) raise as much emotional commotion as architectural ones? And why do those who react so viscerally to architecture do so in such highly affective and extremely personal ways? It is as if innovative architecture disturbed some deep layer of existence that puts the fundamental structure of the world (or our fantasy place in it) in danger—or at least in doubt.

Consider a whole host of unique architectural projects proposed in the last few years for San Francisco: Rem Koolhaas’s new Prada store, wrapped in a stainless steel exterior pierced at regular intervals by uniform holes, was immediately hated and labeled a big “cheese grater”; the new, copper clad de Young Museum in Golden Gate Park by Herzog and de Meuron features a tower people instantly found reminiscent of a prison. Visceral, emotional reactions to architecture are often characterized by a tendency to link the new architectural object to some familiar, everyday object (for example, a cheese grater) that, in its gigantic appearance as a major edifice, are then deemed ridiculously “out of place.” Yet in contrast, objections to “developments” that blanket hundreds or thousands of acres with uniform, unimaginative houses are generally voiced affect-neutrally, and couched impersonally: expressing, for example, fear of potentially negative environmental

consequences, not how uneasy they might make us feel. One objects to them, as it were, for the sake of “nature,” and not because these built environments might well produce negative mental effects. This is because uniform and completely predictable buildings, installed in conventional, gridded spaces, model a ready-made psychical reality into whose fantasy picture we have already fitted ourselves in a conventional location, our “proper place.”

What, then, would a Freudian *revolution* in space look like architecturally—or to put it another way, what kind of architecture could invert the reactions noted above? As I researched this paper, I found that it probably would not look like “postmodern” architecture. Postmodern architecture deploys the same neo-Hegelian temporality as Žižek’s, which invokes the “end of history”; similarly, postmodernism promotes the infinite “recycling” of established forms. While the postmodern avoids the trap of neoclassicism by deploying discordant techniques to collage forms from long-ago historical styles and disparate cultures, its aim is still the same as the one outlined by Žižek: to collapse or telescope time into a greater “all-time” that, in fusing with the end of time, becomes an imitation of eternity and a *jouissance* of an “eternal return of the same.”

There are nonetheless architectural indicators of other possibilities. It would seem obvious to begin with Frank Gehry, the architect who so clearly challenged the customary way we “see” ourselves in space. His Bilbao Guggenheim breaks away from the conventional framing of space that supports our fantasies of the familiar. But there is more to be learned from another contemporary architect, Emilio Ambasz. At least that was my first, and now lasting, impression of his work.

To look at Ambasz’s work is to wonder, “What if, instead of trying to go through the rabbit hole or the fantasy frame to the horror behind it—the missing object; the whirling void of death drive; or the end of time—we refused to question the frame and simply turned aside and looked through the frame anamorphically?” What would happen, that is, if we looked upon the kind of life that might materialize before our now repositioned gaze. Wouldn’t it mean that the endpoint of fantasy’s frame could no longer be considered only as the bottomless pit of unreal foundations, but a revolutionary vantage point on ourselves, and our future selves?

Emilio Ambasz: The Architectural Object versus the Lost Object

Emilio Ambasz has described his architecture as the “pursuit of alternative futures” (Sorkin, 2004, p. 108). Ambasz’s creations are often portrayed as having a distinctly uncontemporary, almost atemporal feel; some even argue they purvey the sense of

the mythic time before time, while others honestly describe their reactions as the opposite: that Ambasz seems to be looking towards an enigmatic future in which our entire relation to time, space, and nature will be fully disclosed.

Neither orientation—past or future—is quite adequate to his opus. His enigmatic architecture, at the very least, reverses the retrospective temporal orientation, and thereby the directives, usually ascribed to psychoanalysis—and that psychoanalysis usually ascribes to architecture. Still, what Ambasz really engages is not entirely obvious. His best interpreters agree that time seems somehow implicated in his architecture, but also that it is secondary to, or even dependent on, his innovations with space. Lauren Ledofsky, for example, describes Ambasz as “bring[ing] forth the earth” when he half-buries more or less “canonical” buildings (such as a Mediterranean villa), and thus enables what Ledofsky calls the “emergence of the earth over and against architecture” (Ledofsky, 2004, p. 44). Indeed, the motto of Ambasz’s architectural enterprise is “Green over Gray,” or, in other words, landscape over architecture (Ambasz, 2004).

In Ambasz’s world, the habitants of the earth appear to be comparatively few and they seem not to have marked (or ruined) nature in any highly visible or indelible way. Yet they are not dwarfed by the “nature” they dwell in, either. Ambasz’s works are unmistakably human-oriented creations that—although indeed often half-buried, with unclear exits and entrances and with no obvious ways of escape or lines of flight from them—are nonetheless often islands of a peace and a harmony that simply do not appear in a vertical, temporal perspective (eternal time) in which man is under earth and both are under God. It is not the unruffled calm of a perfect consonance with nature that Ambasz’s buildings exhibit.

For his buildings, while pictured as balanced in and not merely on the earth, are nonetheless suffused with a striking potential energy that could break in any of several ways, some terrifying, some radiant. In fact, the seemingly obvious idea of green-over-gray does not really describe how Ambasz’s architecture actually relates to the earth. In one project, for example, he attempted to build a lake in a park that tilted at a 45-degree angle. His fellow architects are often quickest to comprehend that Ambasz’s earth is perhaps as far from ‘natural’ as possible. As Ettore Sottsass remarks, “Ambasz’s earth is not at all the picturesque botanical compendium of the pastoral” (cited in Ledofsky, 2004, p. 42); while Robert Wines terms Ambasz’s a “Daliesque Landscape” (Wines, 2004, p. 89).

Some writers suspect Ambasz of an undue “maternal attachment” because he sets his architectural objects into their landscapes in such a way that they cannot really be detached from them: they could not be constructed just anywhere. But this view ignores that he subjects his buildings’ landscapes to the same powerful stresses, the same distinctive viewpoints, that he brings to bear on his constructions—and this

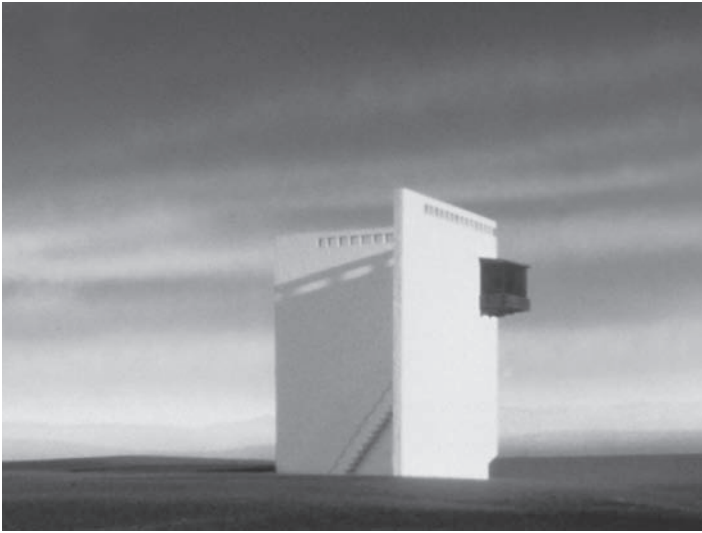


FIGURE 1. Casa de Retiro Espiritual, Emilio Ambasz, Cordoba.

aspect of his architecture runs completely counter to the belief that Ambasz exalts ground over construct.

Indeed, Ambasz's architectural objects are neither laid in the earth—that is, fully swallowed by the grave—nor do they completely ignore this possible “end” to their history the way a housing development does. But it is also the case that Ambasz's architecture is simply not looking toward time past as it cycles into a future that will merely repeat it, at a higher or lower level. He is instead moving space off of the opposing yet fused temporal axes we try to reduce it to—vertical, synchronic, eternal time; flowing diachronic time—that hold it within a familiar, fantasy framing.

In Casa de Retiro Espiritual (figure 1), this marvel of a house, Ambasz disorients space in an especially anamorphic way: as if a wall that should surround was swiveled aside, and the stairs that should lead to an interior look at first as if they go nowhere, and then seem to lead the visitor out before they lead him in. The result: the house makes a departure, disclosing a direction for time and experience that only a twist in space can really convey. Instead of unearthing the natural past or the archaic legacy of buried horrors, Ambasz's architectural objects materialize a space that confounds our fantasies of nature and history and produces something else—which is, for Lacan, *the elementary form of desire: “le désir d'autre chose”* (the desire for something else) (Lacan, 1994, p. 303).

Of his own work, Ambasz writes that “sometimes I fancy myself to be the last man of the present culture, building a house for the first man of a culture that has not yet arrived” (in Sorokin, 2004, p. 86).

In this paper I have argued that space for Freud was as crucial a factor as time in the work of analysis, and that contemporary practitioners might be advised to reconsider its potential importance in treatment. If a fundamental fantasy shapes the patient’s subjective life, and operates specifically by blocking access to his or her initial trauma, the effort to break its frame—to reach the time before the original traumatic moment—are not necessarily the only, or even the most effective, approach. By its very nature, fantasy bars the way to the time before its construction; and though a philosopher of will like Žižek might believe we can force a face-to-face confrontation with our subjective origin (and end) by traversing the fantasy, the result is ambiguous at best: we meet the death drive in ourselves, and this becomes its own form of satisfaction.

A rather different path is available to the analyst, with a different possible outcome. That is to take the fantasy for what it is, a *spatial* conceit. The analyst’s task would be to discover where the subject has positioned itself and secreted his lost satisfactions in this unconscious fantasy picture; and then to reorient the subject’s spatial position inside the fantasy. Apocalyptic breakthroughs to original time are rendered unnecessary, because the positional shift opens its own vista on what the subject has hidden away in the fantasy: a sense of its overwhelmingly defining loss (e.g., the Wolfman’s fear of castration). It can do this, moreover, without forcing the ultimate destination—subjective destitution before death drive—that postmodern psychoanalytic ontology stipulates.

Architecture, wherever its spatial reorientations can dislodge us from the predictable traps, dead-ends, and blind corners we unconsciously cement ourselves into, can offer this same opening. At its most imaginative, that is, architecture may serve as one of the finer metaphors for the significance of Freud’s achievement in making a space where we can see our “world”—and ourselves in it—*otherwise*.

Good art can make the same subjective difference good analysis makes: artists, Freud said, are out ahead of analysts, who only follow their path. In this essay, I hope to have made this case also for radical architecture, which can begin to take its place as a powerful guide to a new, spatially oriented form of psychoanalytic treatment. Great architecture—anonymous, quotidian, or produced by a singular brilliance—can even perhaps now be defined as something that creates a “new” *scene* for human dreaming, by performing its own virtual/virtuoso analysis of where culture is “stuck” and where we are “stuck” in it (or with it) by virtue of our unconscious fantasies. Any transformative, revolutionary effect that architecture

may realize will parallel—and will not simply imitate—Freud’s crucial method: identifying the conservative unconscious indirectly expressed in conventional fantasies, and articulating how we are caught up in and by it.

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