VOID AND MEMORY

THE ARCHITECTURE OF LIBESKIND IN BERLIN

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Daniel Libeskind, who exerted so much influence and made a reputation by not building, is now building the "Extension of the Berlin Museum with the Jewish Museum" in the city of Berlin. He calls this project "Between the Lines." This title prompted Jacques Derrida to write a letter to the architect friend, Peter Eisenman, to remind him that he should look more carefully to what Libeskind is saying in this project. (Eisenman, of course, did not like this recommendation.)

Sometime later, the philosopher, David Farrel Krell wrote a letter to Libeskind to remind him that the reason Derrida in his letter to Eisenman drew attention to "Between the Lines" is because it is about the impossible possibility of maintaining *mourning*. Then he said this is the reason that you and he should be drawn to each other, precisely because your building "organized around a void" is all about not forgetting, and "your museum eschews anamnesis and spurns the allure of hieratic origins." David Krell insisted Libeskind should meet Derrida. In the letter, Krell gives the reason: "... he [Derrida] is a real bastard, he is wicked as Heidegger's being. I love him and so will you, so do as I say and get together with him soon. Incidentally, he is a thinker."²

We do not know whether Libeskind met Derrida, but we want to suggest that you should join us to meet Libeskind. He is a real bastard; yes, he is also as wicked as Heidegger's being. We love him and so will you. Incidentally he is a thinker in architecture. Derrida and Libeskind are both thinkers of a very special kind, they are the thinkers of Auschwitz. So today, we want to speak to you about the notion of the Void in Libekind's "Between the Lines."

What is the void of space? And what do we mean by the psychopathology of the emptiness in the void? Freud, on his death bed, wrote:

Space may be the projection of the extension of the psychical apparatus. No other derivation is probable. Instead of Kant's a priori determinants of our psychical apparatus. Psyche is extended; knows nothing about it.³

Thus, according to Freud, space is a psychical reality, rather than a physical reality. But there is the problem of "carryover" in this model of space as mental category. It in survives the remains of optical and geometric perspectival model based on the "cone of vision" that are

retained in the analysis of the psychical space formed by projection and introjection. The modern idea of space was predicated on the notions of the fullness of space, a transparent space infinitely extended and cleansed of all human mental and psychopathological disturbances.4 This category of space, which defines the space of Newtonian physics, was entirely reconstructed at the end of the 19th century as an open space and was perceived in the space of the modern metropolis. This open space is based on the hypothesis that every positive entity occupies some (empty) space: "It hinges on the difference between space qua void and positive entities occupying space, 'filling it out.' Here space is phenomenologically viewed as something existing prior to the entities that 'fill it out:' if we destroy or remove the matter occupying a given space, the space qua void still remains."5

But Void is constitutive of space itself, a condition of absolute anteriority; it keeps space open as such. If therefore we were to erase this void, we would not get the empty space that the void filled out. The logic of modern, open space operates on the exclusion of the Void as a category and on the exclusion of its uncanny dimension. The repressed Void and its psycho-pathological dimension is always already present in the internal limit of this open space; it returns like a specter to haunt and disturb the subject and its space. This void no longer can be avoided. But at the same time, it is an impossible possibility. The Void is the cause of space, its primal scene.

From the psychical reality of space that Freud had talked about emerged the notion of the Void in Lacan's return to Freud. With Lacan, we are opening the door to another wicked thinker. In Lacanian theory, the subject is the void.⁶ In the economy of the Lacanian terms, this subject is the subject qua \$ (the split subject); the void is the Real, objet petit a, the hard kernel of the subject more so than the subject itself. To the Lacanian definition of void qua objet petit a, Slovaj Zizek adds:

We reach thereby one of the possible definitions of objet petit a: that surplus of the Substance, that 'bone,' which resists subjectivization (Zizek here is referring to Hegel's phrase "the spirit is the bone"); objet a is correlative to the subject in its radical incommensurability with it. Secondly, we have the opposite notion according to which the subject is

that very 'nothing,' purely formal void is left over after the substantial content has wholly 'passed over' into its predicates-determinants: in the 'subjectivization' of Substance, its compact In-itself is dissolved into the multitude of its particular predicates-determinations, of its 'being-for-other'; and the 'subject' is that very X, the empty form of a 'container,' which remains after all its content was 'subjectivised.'...a[objet a] is the 'stuff' of the subject qua empty form.'

To understand the void as the psychopathological disturbance of space is, of course, to interpret the problem of space and to wit: the void as object-cause of desire, is the empty frame that provides the space for the articulation of desire. Zizek writes that: "When this void is saturated, the distance separating a from reality gets lost: a falls into reality. However, reality itself is constituted by means of the withdrawal of objet a: we can relate to 'normal' reality only in so far as jouissance is evacuated from it, in so far as the object-cause of desire is missing from it." My argument in this paper is to connect this psychopathological space of void to the question of the "Jewish subject" and the "Jewish memory" in Libeskind's "Between the Lines."

The Berlin Museum is located at the center of the old city of Berlin, on Lindenstrasse, near the famous baroque intersection of Wilhelmstrasse, Friedrichstrasse, and Lindenstrasse. Opened to the public in 1969 as a substitute for the Märkisches Museum, which was cut off from the west when the Wall was raised, the city museum is housed in a baroque building that was constructed in 1734-35. In the early 19th century, this building was the seat of the Prussian supreme court, it housed the offices of German author, composer, and critic, E.T. Hoffmann. Severely damaged during the Second World War, the present building is a reconstruction that was not completed until 1967-69.9

The new building that results from Libeskind's additions to the existing museum constitutes: 1 addition, 2 buildings, 3 Visible forms, 4, separate structures, 5 Voids, 6 voided sections, 7 Buildings in the oblique, 8 Undergrounds, 9 Void Walls, 10 Connections, 11 original lines, 12 Tones, 23 Angles, 24 Walls, 25 elevations, 39 Bridges, 81 Doors, and no fewer than 365 windows. The architect explains, "The building goes under the existing building, crisscrosses underground, and materializes itself independently on the outside. The existing building is tied to the extension underground, preserving the contradictory autonomy of both the old building and the new building on the surface, while binding the two together in depth, underground." The surface is additional to the extension underground.

The design is based on a four-fold structure: The first aspect is the invisible and irrationally connected star which shines with the absent light of the individual address; the second aspect is the cut through the Act II of [Schoenberge] Moses and Aron which has to do with the non-musical fulfillment of the word. The third aspect is that of the deported or missing Berliners; the fourth aspect is Walter Benjamin's urban apocalypse along the One way Street."¹²

Libeskind calls his design "Between the Lines" because

"It is a project about two lines of thinking, organization, and relationship. One line is straight line, but broken into many fragments, the other is a tortuous line, but continuing indefinitely. These two lines develop architecturally and programmatically through a limited but definite dialogue. They also fall apart, become disengaged, and are seen as separated. In this way, they expose a void that runs through this museum and through architecture, a discontinuous void." 13

These intersecting lines, i.e., the zigzag of the Line of Fire and the straight line of the Berlin Wall, represent two discontinuous yet intertwined histories of Berlin and modernity. Libeskind further describes his design: "The new Extension is conceived as an emblem where the not visible has made itself apparent as a void, an invisible." The idea is simple, he says: "To build the museum around a void that runs through it, a void that is to be experienced by the public. Physically, very little remains of the Jewish presence in Berlin - small things, documents, archival materials, evocative of an absence rather than a presence. I thought therefore that this 'void' which runs centrally through the contemporary culture of Berlin should be made visible, accessible. It should become the structural feature that is crystallized in this particular space of the city and laid bare in an architecture in which the unnamed remains because the names keep still."14

Why should this void be visible and accessible? Can the void be accessible and also be reduced to a physical reality? We will come back to this later. Libeskind suggests that within the culture of the city of Berlin Jewish history constitutes a void, and that this void is associated with the absent traces, and therefore can be made present. As Mark Taylor suggests: "The line charting the Jewish history of Berlin is a void." ¹⁵

Therefore, this void is not simply the physically empty spaces in the city of Berlin caused by allied bombardment. It can be constructed architecturally. The "constructed void" in the midst of the museum comprises one third of the total volume of Libeskind's addition. Incomprehensible to cost-conscious contractors and builders — and an ideal space for plumbers, who wanted to use this residual space as a plenum or a mechanical chase — for plumbing, this empty space remains useless, excessive, nonfunctional. 16 Libeskind frustrates the desire of plumbers to get a hold on this space — plumbers love to break into unoccupied spaces; they love secret places and secret documents! At any rate, this void remains void, although a physical construction, the object of planning and composition. In the addition, the void is only accessible to the eye and comes into negative and positive play with the zigzag space of the Line of Fire.

But what is important is that for the architect, this void can be experienced as void in this particular site, with its specific Jewish history. By triangulating the addresses of E. T. Hoffmann, Heinrich von kleist; Rachel Varnhagen, Arnold Schoenberg, Erich Mendelssohn, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and Walter Benjamin, Libeskind defines a Magen David, the Jewish star, which establishes the coordinates that situates his addition to the Berlin Museum. Libeskind suggests that the experience of the void has to be connected to memory and anamnesis. He comments: "Around the site on Lindenstrasse there lived

so many famous Germans, and many famous Jews. Jews, Germans, Berliners, people who formed the culture we know as 'Berlin'. At the same time, I felt that the physical traces of Berlin was not the only trace, but rather that there was an invisible matrix or anamnesis of connections in relationship."17

What is the promise of the memory and anamnesis in Libeskind thoughts? How is the thought of memory connected to the thought of the question of "Jewish memory?" How does the archivization of memory function in Libeskind's project? In the text of the moderns, errancy is and has always been the ground of memory. 18 Jacques Lacan writes, "Recollection is not Platonic reminiscence -it is not the return of a form, an imprint, a eidos of beauty and good, a supreme truth, coming to us from the beyond. It is something that comes to us from the structural necessities, something humble, born at the level of the lowest encounters and of all the talking crowd that precedes us, at the level of the structure of the signifier."19 But the thinking of the memory trace, Derrida suggests, is the thinking of ashes, the fire of the holocaust, and cinder. Derrida's feu la cendre testifies to the memory of trace and the trace of memory. It memorializes the trace.²⁰ "Ash both preserves and loses the trace. Preserves it through all the heat of incineration, holocaust, immolation, and passion."21

The ash that is the remains of the Holocaust, Mark Taylor writes "is the trace of something that is unnameable and immemorial and as such is always already forgotten. The forgetting of this unnameable is a strange forgetting. The immemorial is not simply forgotten but is inseparable from a remembering that is not a remembering and recollection that is not a recollection. The memorial to the immemorial recalls a lapse of memory that dismembers. Inasmuch as memory struggles to take into itself what it cannot interiorize, recollection inevitably entails something like an impossible mourning."²²

The Cinder is about a fire that is still burning at the origin of language. Derrida writes:

But the urn of language is so fragile. It crumbles and immediately blow into the dust of words which are the cinder itself. And if you entrust it to paper, it is all the better to inflame you with, my dear, you will eat yourself up immediately. No, this is not the tomb he would have dreamed of in order that there may be a place, as they say, for the work of mourning to take its time. In this sentence I see the tomb, the monument of an impossible — forbidden, like the memory of an cenotaph, deprived of the patience of mourning, denied also the slow decomposition that shelters, locates, lodges, hospitalizes itself in you.... An incineration celebrates perhaps the nothing of the all, its destruction without return but mad with its desire and with cunning (all the better to preserve everything, my dear) ...

This is the language that bears within itself the remains of a burning. When this is translated into the language of architecture, we suggests that it is the language of Typography in Libeskind's architectural thinking. Typos refers to blow, impression, image, and figure — to the

incision of memory; Graph means "to write; to express with written characters." Inscription, marking by incision, is one of the earliest meanings of the word graph; it denotes the embroidery needle, the engraving tool, the paintbrush, and the stylus for writing and marking on a wax tablet. We are thinking about the impression made by the soul on the body. Libeskind turns the institution of architecture, which is indistinguishable from the institution of typology, against itself. His architecture is Not Architecture. And his notion of memory is not the strong notion of memory; rather, it is the weak notion of memory, the weak trace, which is not a typological but rather a typographical Construction.

For this reason the question of memory can not be generalized; it is a "Jewish" memory that envelopes his project. It resists both the functional and figurative connotation of "museum" and develops an architecture along intertextual, or typographical lines. Libeskind grafts the museum into the historical site of Berlin; he inscribe the radical universality of Jewish memory in the space of institutional disjunction. The Jewish memory and the unutterable presence of the Holocaust occupies the metaphorical turn to negativity which can be located in the absence of dwelling and the condition of homelessness that characterizes modernity. Thus the institutional elimination of the Jews must be considered as an historical instance of the marginality and effacement of the Other as "Jew." The space of the Other is a psychopathological space. It is unbeimlich.

The mourning of the irreconcilable other is endless, for this other is not merely outside but is 'inside' as an 'outside' that cannot be interiorized. The displace of mourning is the deserted crypt. A dark, obscure crypt that is something like an urn for ashes or cinders.23

The *unbeimlich* space of the other has been translated into architectural space by Libeskind. The Addition is sealed from the outside, like some ancient tomb or crypt. In the midst of the old building, Libeskind inserts an empty volume. This void cuts through every floor of the baroque building and disrupts the classical unity of the homogenous space of the exhibition. At the base of the empty space is located a stairway that leads to an underground passage connecting the two structures. Descending the staircase, one enters an uncanny labyrinth. The Jewish collection of the museum will be shown in this underground labyrinth and on the walls of the sealed void that severs the dominant zigzag structure. As Taylor notes: "By restricting the display of Jewish history to the underground and the discontinuous straight line that interrupts the story of Berlin, Libeskind attempts to make the invisible visible without completely erasing its invisibility. The two axes of the X represent the two poles of Jewish history. Surreptitiously establishing a link between inside and outside, Libeskind's disruptive X charts the course of both the Holocaust and the Promised Land."24 The optimism in Libeslind's Jewish messianic world view is close to Walter Benjamin.

Libeskind wrote: "The absolute event of history, the Holocaust, with its concentration camps and annihilation

— the incineration of meaningful development of Berlin and for humanity — shatters this place while bestowing a gift of that which can not be given by architecture: the preservation of the sacrifice and the offering: guardian or night watch over absent and future meaning."25 And Derrida in Feu la cendre [Cinders] writes: "A cinder is what burns in language in lieu of the gift or the promise of the secret of that 'first' burning, which may itself be repetition. Something persists, something keeps ringing and burning between these repetitions; it is this something that gives the strange gift of a cinder."26 Emerging "Between the Lines," is the question of the possibility of an architectural of remembrance of this historical "negativity," this burning of everything. The fragility of modernity, already assumed by Walter Benjamin in the fragile glass of the Paris Arcades, has been transformed into ruins and ashes - "it will be spectacle: the fall of crystal palace. But coming down in total black out, without one glint of light, only great invisible crashing,"27 as Pynchon put it on page one of Gravity's Rainbow.

In Libeskind project, the institutional typology of the old Berlin Museum is countered by the proposed "Extension" in a gesture that deinstitutionalizes remembrance. The abyss of the void becomes the operational notion within which Libeskind situates an affirmation of remembrance. Libeskind's "Extension" is a text or an inscription of the void which marks the petrified pages of the book of the city of Berlin so that the forgetting of the remembrance of the Holocaust can be delayed. This "Extension," which is a Muse singing Schoenberg's unfinished opera Moses and Aaron, turns the "inaudible music" into the constructed void of space. The Extension is supposed to be a place to archive the historical documents of the Jewish history of Berlin, that is, a place to preserve its memory. But something is inherently paradoxical about the idea of an archive of the Jewish memory. The paradox can be located within the idea of archivization itself. In a recent article entitled "Archive Fever, A Freudian Impression," Derrida discusses Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi's book, Freud Moses, Judaism Terminable and Interminable. 28 This essay is the lecture Derrida gave on June 5, 1994, in London, during an international conference entitled: "Memory: The Question of Archives." The concept of archive, Derrida writes, shelters the memory of the name arkbe. "But it also shelters itself from this memory which it shelters: which comes down to saying also that it forgets it."29 Arkhe, we remember, names at once commencement and commandment. The meaning of "archive" comes to it from the Greek arkbeion: "initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the archons, those who command."30 In this domiciliation, in this house arrest, the event of archives takes place, Derrida states. "The dwelling, this place where they dwell permanently, marks this institutional passage from the private to the public, which does not always mean from the secret to nonsecret."31 Derrida, refers to the fact of turning Freud's house in London, where he lived after he left Austria, into a museum and offers following comments:

But, the point must be stressed, this archiviolithic

force leaves nothing of its own behind. As the death drive is also, according to the most striking words of Freud himself, an aggression and destruction (Destruktion) drive, it not only incites forgetfulness, amnesia, the annihilation of memory, as mneme or anamnesis, but also commands the radical effacement, in truth the eradication, of that which can never be reduced to mneme or to anamnesis. that is, the archive, consignation, the documentary or monumental apparatus as bypmnema, mnemotechnical supplement or representative, auxiliary or memorandum. Because the archive, if this word or this figure can be stabilized so as to take on signification, will never be either memory or anamnesis as spontaneous, alive and internal experience. On the contrary: the archive takes place at the place of originary and structural breakdown of the said memory.

"There is no archive without a place of consignation, without a technique of repetition, and without a certain exteriority. No archive without outside."³²

Thus, archive always happens in an external place, it has to take place outside. Associating the archive to the death drive and destruction, Derrida draws his conclusion: "if there is no archive without consignation in an external place which assures the possibility of memorization, of repetition, of reproduction, or reimpression, then we must also remember that repetition itself, the logic of repetition, indeed repetition compulsion, remains, according to Freud, indissociable from the death drive. And thus from destruction. Consequence: right on what permits and conditions archivization, we will never find any thing other than what exposes to destruction, in truth what menaces with destruction introducing, a priori, forgetfulness and the archiviolithic into the heart of the monument. The archive always works, and a priori, against itself."33

We will not go further into this Derridian line of inquiry, but we must say that if the work of Libeskind is uncanny, Not Architecture, then this double, this repetition, on the one hand, protects the memory against destruction and forgetfulness. On the other hand, Libeskind's Extension is architecture as monument in its common meaning, by providing a place, archivizing documents of the Jewish memory in the consigning to it of a place, and therefore monumentalizes it. In this sense architecture and archivization conspire to a secrete affinity. They both shelter in the act of commending and commencing. But this the topic for another inquiry.

Let us conclude by returning to the notion of the void. In Libekind's Extension, the void is sealed, but visually accessible. In the constructed void, at spaced intervals, there are narrow openings and slender slits in the walls that make it possible for the viewer to peer into the empty space. Is this viewer in the same situation as the viewer who peers through the hole in the door of Marcel Duchamp's *Etant donnes*? Is this viewer, who peers into the Libeskind's empty space, a voyeur at the base of the "conic vice" in the field of space with scopophilic drive.³⁴ We suspect that remnants of geometric perspectival in the cone of vision survives in

the viewer peering into this empty space which "fills out" the void of subject. The pyschological projection of space and the void in the subject runs into constant danger of being canceled out by finding its object outside itself, out there in external reality.

We do not pretend that we have an answer for this question. We do not wish to get into other people's business. But we would like to send a postcard to Libeskind and remembering him not to forget Rene Magritte. Magritte was also a real bastard, a wicked painter, as wicked as Heidegger's being, (who was, incidentally, a thinker). We particularly suggest that Libeskind take a look at Magritt's 1963 painting called, La lunett d'approach ("The Fieldglass"). In this painting, through the windowpane, we see the external reality (blue sky with some dispersed white clouds), yet what we see in the narrow opening which gives direct access to the reality beyond the pane is nothing, just a nondescriptive black mass. The uncanny effect of this painting is achieved in the black void perceptible in the crack of the half-opened window, which is the empty place of the *Thing*, not to be filled out, but to be affirmed as a void as such, in its priority over any positive entity that strives to fill it out. "The painting would translate thus: the frame of the windowpane is the fantasy-frame which constitutes reality, whereas through the crack we get an insight into the "impossible" Real, the Thing-in-itself."35

NOTES

- ¹ David Farrell Kreil, "I made it on the Verge'," in *Assemblage*, no. 12, (1990), p. 56.
- ² Krell, op. cit. p. 55.
- Sigmond Freud, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmond Freud (London: Hogarth 1953-71), vol. XXIII, p. 300, cited in Victor Burgin's "Geometry and Abjection." see note 4 above.
- ⁴ See Anthony Vidler, "Bodies in Space/Subjects in the city: Pscychopathaology of Modern Urbanism," in differences, vol. 5, no. 3, (Fall 1993).
- ⁵ See Slovaj Zizek, *The Metastasis of Enjoyment, Six Essays on Woman and Causality*, London, Verse, 1994, pp. 115.
- 6 Slovaj Zizek, Tarrying With the Negative, Kant, Hegel, and the Criticque of Idealogy (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 1, "Cogito: The Void Called Subject."
- ⁷ Zizek, op. cit. pp. 21-22.

- 8 Zizek, The Metastasis of Enjoymen, op. cit, p. 76.
- ⁹ For these information see Mark Tylor, "Not Architecture," in Nots (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).
- Daniel Libeskind, in *Daniel Libesdind Extension to the Berlin Museum with Jewish Museum Department*, ed. Kristin Feireiss, (Berlin: Emst & Sohn 1992), (no pagination).
- 11 Daniel Libeskind, op. cit., (no pagination).
- 12 Libeskind, op. cit.
- 13 Ibid
- 14 Ibid
- 15 Taylor, op. cit., p. 115.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Libeskind, op. cit.
- ¹⁸ See Ned Luckacher, Primal Scenes, Literature, Philosophy, Psychoananlysis (Ithaca: Cornell University, Press, 1986).
- ¹⁹ Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundemental Concept of Psychoanalysis, (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), pp. 47.
- ²⁰ See David Farrell Krell, Of Memory, Reminiscence, and Writing, on the Verge, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).
- ²¹ Krell, op. cit., pp. 311.
- ²² Taylor, op. cit., p. 155.
- 23 Taylor, ibid.
- ²⁴ Ibid., p. 151.
- ²⁵ Daniel Libeskind, "Between the Lines," in *Assemblage*, oO. 12, (1990), p. 49.
- ²⁶ Derrida, Cinders, op. cit., p 9.
- ²⁷ Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow* (New York: Viking, 1973), p. 3.
- ²⁸ See Jacques Derrida, "Archive Fever, A freudian Impression," in *Diacrritics*, no. 25, (Summer 1995). Also see yosef hayim Yerushalmi, *Freud's Moses Judaism Terminable and Interminable* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).
- ²⁹ Derrida, "Archive Fever," op. cit., p. 9.
- 30 Derrida, ibid.
- 31 Ibid, p. 10.
- ³² Ibid., p. 14.
- 33 Ibid.
- ³⁴ Amelia Jones, "The Absence of Body/ the Fantasy of Representation," in *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*, no. 9, (May, 1991), p. 121.
- 35 See Zizek, Tarrying with Negative, op. cit., pp. 103. For our discussion of the Magritt's painting we are indebted to this test.