

2005-06-01

Libeskind: Memory Foundations

Noel Brady

Technological University Dublin, noel.brady@tudublin.ie

Follow this and additional works at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/bescharcart>



Part of the [Architecture Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Brady, N.:Libeskind:memory foundations. *Architecture Ireland*, 2005 June, v.208, p.59-60. doi:10.21427/D7PN67

This Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Dublin School of Architecture (Former DIT) at ARROW@TU Dublin. It has been accepted for inclusion in Articles by an authorized administrator of ARROW@TU Dublin. For more information, please contact arrow.admin@tudublin.ie, aisling.coyne@tudublin.ie, vera.kilshaw@tudublin.ie.



Libeskind – Memory Foundations

Lecture by Daniel Libeskind, Cork

Review by Noel J. Brady

Within the space of two weeks, Ireland hosted lectures by two luminaries in the international architectural scene. Both spoke about architecture from opposite ends of architectural ideas and production. Both are mature architects; Herman Hertzberger (73) spoke as part of the AAI lecture series in Dublin and Daniel Libeskind (59) spoke as part of Cork 2005 European Capital of Culture programme. Even the 14 years difference cannot account for the chasm between them. While Hertzberger has practised his trade from graduation, Libeskind had to wait until 55 to complete his first major work, the Jewish extension to the Berlin Museum. Both come from a background of teaching, albeit from different pedagogical perspectives.

Hertzberger explained that his role as an architect was to identify the significance in the human relationships and organisations, from the bottom up. Libeskind finds significance not in people (social structures) but in historical events (although this is largely a topographical interpretation); it is this top down process around which all of his works are anchored. Increasingly this is becoming a singular event, a singular datum.

Libeskind's lecture had the atmosphere of a (rock) concert with Sean Ó Laoire as the 'warm up act', leading with some well-chosen references to Isaac Bashevis Singer.

"The very essence of literature is the war between emotion and intellect, between life and death. When literature becomes too intellectual – when it begins to ignore the passions, the emotions – it becomes sterile, silly, and actually without substance." (1)

Ó Laoire's introduction had disarmed us, preparing us for a performance of rattling proportions. The entry onto the stage by Libeskind was akin to a soloist taking the stage and just stopped short of the standard "great to be back in (insert your own city here)". We did not have to wait long as Libeskind offered us his love of Cork, to be followed by wonderful Dublin, great Milan and magnificent New York, ecstatic everywhere. With little time to absorb the information that raised even more questions, meanings were drawn down upon sites, drawn into singular designs, which in the face of mounting changes (WTC) shifted under the uneasy burden of memory, of a particular perspective.

Questions.....

The projects seemed to be chosen not because of a thematic relationship but of their currency and partial relevance to the title. The Jewish extension to the Berlin Museum lost out to an illustration of a major master planning project in Milan with a host of 'starchitects' acting under the maestro's baton. If it weren't for the rapid delivery these would be subject to serious critical debate.

Libeskind's work does offer a visceral theatre of experience, even if the poetics are abandoned in favour of the physical, a particular expression of the Zeitgeist. Often the motivation for the project is a device to brand the building (Pompidou) or place (Bilbao). Meaning has been reduced to the skin, widely documented and celebrated by Venturi Brown, SITE, Herzog & De Meuron and others.

Questions.....

I had to remind myself of the generous introduction that exhorted us to imagine the impossible, to welcome the different. However I could not get the issue of "image first" out of my mind, building as sketch, sketch as building. To my mind significance is not a cloak you can wear or a label, it arises from the historical relativity of time, place and culture. Things are significant after the fact and



Daniel Libeskind outside the Eighteen Turns Pavilion, Cork

sometimes for reasons that were not of their design, one can look at the Millennium Dome in London as either a marvellous image of futurist Britain or as a symbol of waste and overblown political posturing. Time will tell. Regardless of the visual cues, Libeskind's work has emerged out of Post Modernism, where everything that is past is open for reinterpretation, for use and reuse. In one case, Libeskind showed what could only be considered a risible idea for a building in Milan using a rotational composition of Leonardo Da Vinci's very famous Vitruvian Man, because of his link to Milan.

More Questions.....

The opportunity for answers came at the end. Libeskind and Ó Laoire sat in a comfortable simulated living room, Parkinson like, fielding the 'love-in' that was threatened from the start with a number of the audience offering congratulations and celebrating of Libeskind's now famous openness and generosity.

Answers.....

In the televised documentary of the WTC design 'competition' when it came down to a showdown between the THINK Team and Studio Libeskind, the television crew were allowed 'behind the scenes'. This highlighted the considerable difference of Libeskind to his peers. Rafael Viñoly heading up the THINK Team consortium was shown in his studio exhorting his colleagues and staff to work harder, revising models and drawings in front of the camera. In Libeskind's case we were not allowed to see behind the curtain. Instead we witnessed a polished performance of explanation and presentation of an idea, whole, inviolable. There was no competition Libeskind had already won. It would appear that it is ideas that make you free, but presentation makes a winning commodity.

Regardless of the philosophical questions the lecture raised, one cannot fault the open experimentation that is Studio Libeskind. With what appears to be an exponentially escalating workload, experimentation will give rise to interesting results. This freedom to explore is not without consistency. The images of the building under construction, of the Denver Art Museum expansion

shows remarkable resonance with an earlier work; *Micromegas*, completed at Cranbrook in 1979 and published as part of a collection of his drawings that the blurb purports “*radically challenges the current post modernist trends*”.[2] Not without irony this collection was a mixture of surrealist collages, early modernist imagery, Russian constructivist compositions and surrealist sketches. However when the DAM receives its internal skins, much of these resonances will disappear into a series of discordant white spatial planes.

In Surrealism dreams were used as gateways to the imagination and the possibility that they might illuminate the mysteries of life. In dreams some new things will emerge, and if we suspend our disbelief for a time we might be rewarded.

“For those who are willing to make an effort, great miracles and wonderful treasures are in store.” [3]

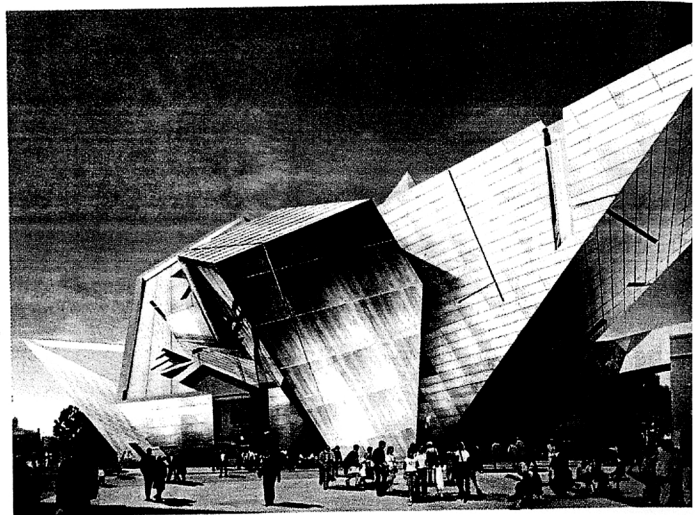
To complete the surrealist event while returning to Dublin by train, I noticed a sign standing in the middle of a field, in the countryside, a property sign. On this sign were the words “Space, any size, any shape, any question”.

Notes

[1] Isaac Bashevis Singer 1904 – 1991

[2] Daniel Libeskind, *Between Zero and Infinity: Selected Projects in Architecture*, Rizzoli, New York 1981

[3] Isaac Bashevis Singer 1904 – 1991



Denver Art Museum