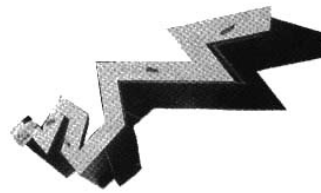


## Jewish Museum of Berlin: Dancing Between the Lines

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**Abstract:** *Architecture provides the site for this exploration of the relationship between museums and performance, which focuses on the Jewish Museum of Berlin. Between 1999 and 2001 the Jewish Museum operated solely as a venue for architectural tours. Rather than housing static objects it became a location where the experiential body on the move was central to its existence. This was particularly apparent in June 1999 when the Sasha Waltz Dance Company performed 'Dialogue '99 II' within the museum as a response to, and exploration of, the provocative and haunting interior architecture of Daniel Libeskind. This paper examines the interiority of the museum as a performative site activated by dancing and spectatorial bodies. It posits that its 'emptiness' held a greater plenitude for memorialising, constituting a radical moment for museum architecture.*

**Keywords:** *architecture and dance, museum, interior design*



### Once...

*All art is rooted in memory...*

*nothing new can arise without recollection and retrospect (Pieper, 1995).*

In a public presentation at New York University, entitled 'No art no history', (19 October, 1999), Professor Donald Preziosi suggested that the modern museum has had its day and that performativity may be a new way of thinking about and presenting our history. Preziosi saw the museum as a machine for the productions of certain effects, orchestrating a theatrical experience and confronting truth; the greatest link between fiction and theatre<sup>1</sup>. For Preziosi, museums are inextricably bound up in architecture, not as built artifacts but as forms of theatre.

Interior architecture is the principle site for this exploration of the relationship between the museum and theatre. In discussions surrounding art-galleries and museums, the interior tends to be absorbed into the amorphous concept of 'space', its edges blurred into a uniform whiteness and relegated to the background as a, preferably neutral, container of the objects it houses. However, it has a greater part to play in the discourse and, in taking center-stage as

a revolutionary element, is capable of changing the role of the contemporary museum. The example focused on here is a conspicuous work-of-art in itself with distinctly sharp edges. Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum of Berlin has been widely discussed and photographed since it was completed and opened to the public in February 1999. However, before it housed the collections and exhibits for which it was built, it was solely a spectacle in itself; a site for architectural tours. In June 1999 it provided a venue for performance in Sasha Waltz Dance Company's *Dialogue* project, as part of the Berlin Festival *City as Stage* (images from which are utilised in the text, from a performance video made by the company and used with their permission).

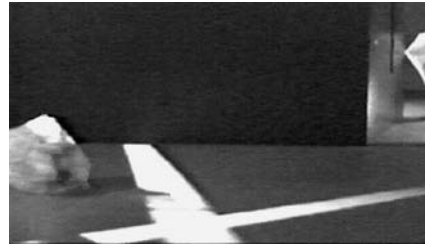


## **Dialogue**

Dialogue, as a conversation between two or more people, is particularly associated with a theatrical script or a scholastic exercise. This paper endeavors to discuss how architecture and the performing body converse within the particular confines of the museum, by focusing on the architecture of the Jewish Museum and the Sasha Waltz dance piece that took place within it. Waltz and her dancers worked for four weeks in the building to develop a promenade performance where the audience was lead by the choreographer herself through the fractured architecture of Daniel Libeskind. The performance posited a new way of approaching the museum as a place of exchange where the built form and the bodies moving within it take precedence over objects on display.

The *line* played a significant role in both Libeskind and Waltz's projects. For the architect, lines were the conceptual, historical, geographical and graphical generators of his building. Libeskind has titled the Jewish Museum 'Between the Lines'... 'because it is a project about two lines of thinking and organisation and about relationship. One is a straight line, but broken into many fragments; the other is a tortuous line but continuing indefinitely' (Libeskind 1996, p. 6). Sasha Waltz and her dancers then worked with these lines to generate the performance. Her project is a dialogue with the architecture; a dialogue between the lines, between the dancing body and the built form.

The line of my argument negotiates between the architecture and the performance, endeavoring to capture the dialogues they establish. Like Libeskind's architecture, which presents a discontinuous spatial script, it traces an irregular path, zig-zagging between idea and artifact, memory and experience. It establishes architecture as a storyteller and the museum as a performative site. In the end this is neither the telling of a museum, of a building, nor of a performance, but rather the telling of experience itself. Our guide is *Mnemosyne*, goddess of memory and mother of the Muses. It is her thread of remembering that leads us metaphorically through the labyrinth of my argument and literally through the fragmented labyrinth of the Jewish Museum.



### **Storyteller**

The storyteller is the first performer we experience, whose narration captures things, shifting them from one space to another. Stories related to us as children are both performed and told, through the body enacting all their forces, characters and movements. The child becomes witness to the tale, through the language of the body. These stories are then remembered through play, infiltrating the space of the child who encounters obscure places within which the stories are then re-enacted.

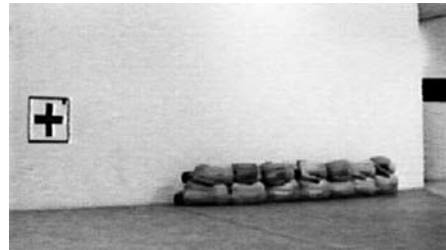
Architecture, linked to memory, has its own stories to tell.

The origins of the museum lie in a peripatetic architectural experience, where memory was inscribed into the building, spatially locating knowledge in the architecture itself. Architecture therefore provided an aid for memory, which was experienced by a body on the move.

The building itself acts as a storyteller.

Walter Benjamin considered telling stories as an exchange of experience rather than information. Passed on from mouth to mouth, from the performing body of the storyteller to the receiving body of the listener, it is neither linear nor does it neatly frame the account. Plausibility is not the issue. The 'spirit of storytelling' is where 'the psychological connection of the events is not forced on the reader. It is left up to him [sic] to interpret things the way he

[sic] understands them and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks' (Benjamin, p. 89). For Benjamin the value of information does not even survive the moment, whereas a story expands itself, preserving and concentrating a strength, which it continues to release into the future (p. 90).



### **The end of the museum**

This paper suggests that the museum, as a place of performance, provides a site where memory is activated through storytelling, rather than information. Interpretation has precedence over accuracy, and time as the fourth dimension ruptures the Cartesian perspectival. Objects and viewers are no longer hermetically sealed within the vitrine, the diorama, the frame and the constructed homogeneity of museum space.

Within the epic and tragic story of Berlin and its Jewish inhabitants, the Jewish Museum is an event in itself, to which Sasha Waltz and her dancers responded and established a dialogue. Bernard Tschumi asserts that architecture is as much about the events that take place in spaces as the spaces themselves. This 'event dimension' replaces static notions of form and function by 'attention to the actions that occur inside and around buildings - to the movement of bodies, to activities, to aspirations; in short to the properly social and political dimension of architecture' (Tschumi, p. 103).

The museum becomes a place between the lines; dancing between the boundaries that demarcate museology, art, architecture, and performance. This interstitial turn suggests a reworking of both the museum as we know it and the built environment as we perceive it. It favors the experiential, positing architecture as a space within which we act and which acts upon us. In order to locate the reader and set the scene for Sasha Waltz's dialogue, a walk through the building is necessary; an architectural tour of Berlin's Jewish Museum.



### **The architectural tour**

The difference between the standard models of the theatre and the museum is that in the former the spectator is traditionally seated, and accordingly static, whereas the latter concerns the body moving through scripted space. A building is therefore 'known' through a bodily experience and a spatial narrative of the architecture.

The Jewish Museum was formally inaugurated as an independent institution in January 1999, over a decade after Libeskind won the international competition for the new wing to the Museum of Berlin. His 'radical' entry, offering a 'quite extraordinary, completely autonomous solution' (Spens, p. 41), was physically separated from the Baroque Courthouse-turned-Museum to which it was a proposed 'extension'. It therefore pre-empted and encouraged the subsequent administrative separation of the institutions.

Following this commission in 1989, the wall was breached and preparations began for Berlin to resume its role as the Capital City of a unified Germany. Once more Berlin's landscape was devastated, this time with a program of rebuilding rather than its previous destruction through war. Potsdamer Platz became, according to Michael Spens, a commercial center of 'tamed block plans and disingenuous facades', against which 'the Jewish museum stands out as a miraculous intervention' (p. 41). For Libeskind it was no longer the time of the façade; 'It is a different time and while the word façade might still be around, I don't think anyone is looking at them, even if the architects of Berlin are still constructing them' (1999, p. 35). Instead he was concerned with the museum as a container for sharing historical objects and meanings on a range of differing levels.

The internal experience was therefore paramount in the design of this curious object located in the haphazard bricolage of Kreuzberg's bomb-scarred neighborhood. Recalling the cinematic landscapes of 1920s German expressionism, this angular and fractured architecture allows for an internal sequential route for visitors, whilst disorientating them within the zig-zag of its corridors and exhibition spaces. It is experienced as both a processional series of spaces and a curious labyrinth within which to make discoveries.

Libeskind's primary goal was for the Museum to express the complex history of Jews in Berlin in architectural form, making that story relevant to the present. He chose to focus on the exile and execution of Berlin's Jewry in the 1930s and 1940s. 'Absence' therefore became the central metaphor in the architecture, expressed through a series of voids around which the entire building is staged. What follows is a description of the journey within the built artifact that first served as a site for architectural tours alone.

Although standing apart from, and in sharp contrast to, the municipal museum, the new building must nevertheless be entered via the older institution. The harmony and clarity of the Baroque building is shed by the visitor in the descent of a black slate staircase, which leads to an underground tunnel connecting the buildings. In his LA Times' article 'The pain and the hope live on', architectural critic Nicolai Ouroussoff wrote: 'The deflected entry is a subtle psychological ploy; by temporarily drawing you away from the Jewish Museum and anchoring the entry in a building devoted to Berlin's history, it reminds you of the abandonment that made the Holocaust possible. It is as easy to ignore the truth here as it is to confront it' (p. 80). You are then faced with a series of pathways leading to the E. T. Hoffman Garden of Exile and Emigration, the Holocaust Tower, or the stairs redirecting one upward into the museum proper where the ground is once more sighted. This junction of underground passages establishes the labyrinth as a significant spatial experience, serving to destabilise the visitor from the outset; an experience continually reinforced by networks of converging and diverging lines in the floors, walls and ceilings.

The inclined ground further undermines the body as do tilting forms in the underground garden, representing the 'nausea of instability' faced by the German Jews who escaped into exile. A sign outside the Holocaust Tower advises visitors to enter individually, allowing a heavy steel door to shut behind them. As light enters in from the upper reaches of this raw, concrete space the experience tends to be profound. Ouroussoff writes of its 'chilling effect' and one's awareness of 'sudden helplessness' (p. 80). Michael Wise writes that it 'induces feelings of claustrophobia and despair...' (p. 128), whilst Anthony Lewis, of the NY Times, experienced it as 'oppressive' and 'suffocating'. These emotive reactions (by critics who took the 'tour') are based on a combination of the architecture itself and the stories that each visitor brings to this space; stories which may be deeply personal or conveyed as 'history' by history, education and the media.

The ascent back to ground level is described by Ouroussoff as a 'painful reawakening', as you rise up the main staircase with its walls braced by skewed concrete beams. Glimpses caught through cross-shaped and slicing apertures in the skin of the buildings reconnect you with the

site and its surroundings. The ensuing journey is a pathway through subdued white-walled galleries linked across the voids by spatial intervals, signified by the dark graphite surfaces. Here, the pervading tension and melancholy are more subdued than in the claustrophobic underground spaces. However shards of light, cutting through walls and spaces, as well as glimpses into dark, inaccessible voids, assure these sensations are never dispelled.

The journey threads through a *seeming* labyrinth, crossing back and forth across the five voids which interrupt, and are interrupted by, the zig-zagging form of the building. This maze-like quality is reinforced by dead ends, acute corners and tilting ramps and walls. Black bridges, which cross the voids, highlight the sense of disorientation as you find yourself doubling back upon your pathway. Slots in the walls, stairwells and lift towers provide a visual layering and create further spaces through which to squeeze or find oneself at an impasse.

This is not the architecture of order or reason, but rather one that deliberately confounds, disorients and threatens the mind and body of the viewer. It is laden with stories and meanings, some immediately apparent, some suggestive and some forever elusive. As Bruno Cadorini, an architect who guided visitors through the museum, explained to Michael Wise; 'This building invites associations and a search for meaning' (p. 128). In his tours Cadorini referred to the architect's intentions whilst finding additional resonances and connections of his own. Museum visitors also have their own readings, many of which relate to the Holocaust. Sasha Waltz and her dancers worked with this layering of meaning and interpretation in their 'dialogue' with the building. Such open-endedness in architectural interpretation derives from a conceptual complexity, forming a deliberate departure from the closed scripts and spatial homogeneity of conventional museum and gallery architecture.



### **The end of space**

The architecture of Libeskind's Jewish Museum signifies the end of a constructed view of space; the end of a body's particular position and relationship in space; the end of scenography. 'Scenography' is a word that belonged to 'art', 'architecture' and 'theatre', spatially and representationally. Etymologically it is the writing of the stage and, since the

16th century, has become inscribed into our ways of seeing and experiencing space as a disembodied perspectival view. By the end of the nineteenth century this was completely, and literally, encapsulated in the proscenium arch; a framed two-dimensional construction of a three-dimensional phenomenon that simultaneously distances and centralizes the viewer in the event. As object/event it is ordered and removed from the body of the subject/viewer. However in theatre, at the turn of the 20th Century, a revolution occurred that questioned and threatened this construct. Reflected in avant-garde art that was detonated by the World Wars, it exploded Cartesian space with the force that shook the foundations of space-time perception, undermining the very way we perceive ourselves. Whilst space was realigned the body was de-centralised, becoming both the viewer and the viewed, suggesting a more refracted fragmented and heterogeneous space. Some would suggest this was ***the end of space***.

This spatial revolution is captured in Brian O'Doherty's 'Gallery as Gesture' where he writes: 'the pedestal melted away leaving the spectator waist deep in wall-to-wall space. As the frame dropped off space slides across the wall, creating turbulence in the corners. Collage flopped out of the picture and settled on the floor as easily as the bag lady. The new god, extensive homogeneous space, flowed easily into every part of the gallery. All impediments except art were removed' (p. 246). Such a vignette of action, where the static gallery space is animated, metamorphosing into a live and gestural space, is at the heart of the major paradigm shift, which has occurred in 'art', 'theatre' and, more recently, 'architecture'. I would therefore challenge O'Doherty's suggestion of 'homogeneous' space collapsing out of the picture frame, positing instead that as it spilled, dispersed and fractured it rendered itself into a multiplicity, made evident by the de-centralised viewer. Multiple viewpoints become confounded without a frame to restrict and control it.

Daniel Libeskind captured this major paradigm shift when discussing theatre in an interview entitled 'The end of space': 'Space is not one, but space is plural, space is a plurality, a heterogeneity, a difference. That would make us look at spacing differently. We would not be looking for one' (1992, p. 86). The museum, as architecture and artifact, was threatened by this refracted and decentralised space and confronted by work demanding a more active participation. Space around the viewers is activated by the object, implicating them in the work and subject-ing them to the experience. The viewer, neither distanced nor central, is no longer passive, but implicated involuntarily, an active participant. In the Jewish Museum of Berlin, the building itself is an artifact within which the spectator moves; a spatiotemporal artifact generated from complex lines (both physical and conceptual) between which the architecture is formed.



### **Between the lines**

According to Michel Foucault museums, theatres, cemeteries, libraries and fairs are 'heterotopias', set apart from everyday activity, production and consumption, creating illusory spaces that stage and project an alternative world. This was explored at the 1985 Venice Biennale, by Daniel Libeskind, whose Memory Machine was based on Camillo's Theatre of Memory. His shifting structure of fragments, texts, maps and mechanisms was neither functional nor stable, forming what Aaron Betsky refers to as '*the theatrum mundi*, a theatre of a new world inherent in ours, requiring an architect's performance' (p. 73). Libeskind was therefore aware of the notion of memory and a scripted architecture.

Before winning the Jewish Museum competition, which was his first commission for built work<sup>2</sup>, Daniel Libeskind explored notions of chaos and disorder, seeking new orders and architectural forms. His architectural teacher and mentor, John Hejduk, musing on Libeskind's work writes: 'There is an explosion... into space...soundless. The debris is floating in a universe devoid of an ending; but with a difference. Each particle; each element; each sign; each figure; each shape; each plan; each thought is still intact precise' (Libeskind, 1981). For Juhani Pallasmaa 'these architectonic visions interpreted a multi-dimensional space-time experience' (Libeskind, 1981). This is architecture as performance and architect as performer. Libeskind's dance of cacophonous geometries is the work of both architect and musician; one who understands the dynamic possibilities of performative spatial gesture.

Issues of memory and a 3-dimensional tracery of lines have therefore been played out conceptually by Libeskind prior to the built architecture of his Jewish Museum, *Between the Lines*, for which he began his process with the act of inscribing marks into the surface of Berlin's complex and devastated landscape. In order to reveal the Jewish dimension of Berlin's history the architect created a map of imaginary lines connecting the site with addresses of significant figures in the Jewish cultural history of Berlin (such as Kleist, Heine, Arendt, Van der Rohe, Varmhagen, Benjamin and Shoenberg). These lines without beginnings or ends intersect to create a distorted Star of David across the city. Out of this invisible topography

'dynamic bodies' 'were extracted, defining space, configuring mass and projecting structure. The resulting architectural form zig-zags across the site like a serpent struck by a thunderbolt

The shattered form is the result of a forceful explosion, displacing the ground and bringing deeper layers to the surface as the crust of the earth opens up. As Kurt Forster (1992) writes; 'The folio of the earth, folded and refolded, and guttered by immense mechanics opens as a book written in the manner of creation itself; the faults and folds of Libeskind's Museum relate to natural history only like a tattoo to the skin, as a painful engraving of disembodied events on the memory of the living' (p. 22). This analogy to inscriptions on skin is reinforced by the cut and folded walls. The lighting slits created from the displaced topographical lines on the site, and folded up into the elevation, inscribe absence onto the surface of the building's corpus.

The jagged body of the building is dissected by a straight cut, forming an interrupted line, referred to as the void from deep within which is inscribed with the names of all the deported and murdered 'that silent litany at once beseeching and stonewalling the visitor' (Forster, 1992 p. 20). *Der Leere, The Void*; a discontinuous empty space, representing an absent presence, is the structural rib and the organising element. Yet it is not part of the museum. It is the uninhabitable corridor into which glimpses are caught through cuts in the architecture. It is the broken backbone of a society. Neither heated nor air conditioned it gathers dust and, although inaccessible, is constantly encountered within the narrative journey of the interior. It refers to the unrepresentable of the Jewish history of Berlin...the books, artifacts and humans burnt – 'humanity reduced to ashes' (Libeskind, 1999, p. 30).

So as the completed Museum deconstructs space and forms into a heterogeneity of intent and interpretation it was passed into the hands and bodies of others. Upon opening (without the collections, objects and displays it was designed to house) it remained principally a site for architectural tours before exhibits were installed and it reopened as a themed museum in 2001. Whilst 'empty' it was also made available to Sasha Waltz (and the guests she invited to co-create the work), another storyteller guiding us through this labyrinthine building.



### **Between the body and the built**

As Benjamin (1968) posits; 'Memory creates the chain of tradition which passes a happening on from generation to generation' (p. 98). It does so through the story told which fashions the raw material of experience in a 'solid useful and unique way' (p. 108). This recalls the body of the storyteller, elaborating with gestures, movement and breath. Architecture, as a producer of memory, is completed by the physical presence of those who engage bodily with and within it. Libeskind insists that the Jewish Museum is neither monument nor memorial; '... it is a space for the encounter of history: a building and not a memorial'. As a site of encounter we have discussed how the building actively engages the body of the visitor in a perceptual way. This rich and complex experience is further theatricalised by performance itself; by an active dialogue between the body and the built.

*Dialogue '99 II*, as part of the 1999 Berlin Festival, continued Sasha Waltz's ongoing conversation with architecture as a generator of her work. Over the six-week rehearsal period the choreographer and her dancers explored the spaces of the Jewish Museum, whilst guided architectural tours happened around them. The rehearsal period therefore also became a form of performance.

Lisa Densem, who has danced with Sasha Waltz's company since 1999, described the rehearsal process as follows:

*I think Sasha was overawed at first by what the Museum meant and was unsure of how she could approach a space that was speaking so much. Her solution was not to deal with the issues of the museum at all but to work in a completely abstracted way... The only instruction I remember was to respond to the space in some way and work with lines... But having said that I don't think she was oblivious to the fact that certain things, even if they came from an abstract place, would take on a resonance once they were placed in the museum. And I think that she chose to do certain things knowing how they would read, even if we hadn't originally intended them to be read that way. For instance we had*

*a shuffling line, a train, which came from simply tracing lines on the floor of the museum. But placing that before the body mountains, the piles of naked bodies, gave (of course) a whole new poignant and horrifying meaning in the space* (Densem, 1999).

In this case the performers were responding to the space whilst bringing to the place the stories associated with the building.

This dialogue between body and building was referred to in the various reviews the show received. In one article entitled 'To speak and speak back' the reviewer writes of the murmuring architecture interrupted by the silence of the voids and how, without objects, the building speaks for itself until someone (the choreographer) speaks back. For critic Hammerthaler, the piece was at its most successful when the choreography spoke louder than the architecture and in a different language. In *Der Tagesspiegel's* review, 'Wavering on the precipice', Luzina (1999) writes of the challenge for dancers and spectators to explore the expressive and explosive building, suggesting that the museum was already a stage... 'Sasha Waltz, feeling the dispersed forms and interrupted lines, connecting the work to an architectonic archive of memories and significance, created space for her own associations'.

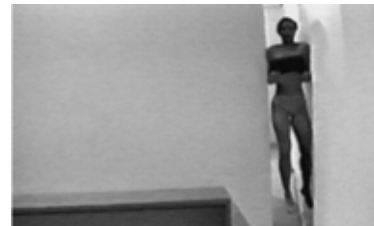
As a procession within the labyrinth the performance reconstructed the building through the experiences of both the visitor and the performer. The performers discover, interpret and represent the building. Through choreography they hold Ariadne's thread<sup>3</sup>; a perceptual strand that constitutes the most important line in this building-of-lines. Their way through is in the dance. Rather than the aerial photographs, interior images and architectural plans/sections by which we traditionally read and understand architecture, *Dialogue* is a discontinuous, interrupted journey of discovery, reinforcing the bodily mode of knowing built form; an architectural tour through movement, sound and light.

It begins at the beginning, the underground junction of corridors, and ends at this same point. The spectators are lead from space to space, by the choreographer, past rooms of dancers (three dancers facing an acute corner) and traces of where they once were (the damp outline of an absent body; sweat on concrete). A dancer, with pheasant feathers strapped to arms and legs, moves over a prone body in the goods lift. A naked man slaps his flesh onto the stone floor of the Holocaust Tower, the sound of which echoes in the concrete canyon. This scene is presided over by a face at the opening in the wall above. A dancer wedges herself in a slot, while another presents a flurry of limbs behind an inclined wall. A man turns to the visitor beside him and opens his mouth from which blooms a red rose. Women move in limp glassy cubes of organza, as if caught in collapsed showcases, whilst the audience

walks amongst them. Naked bodies rearrange themselves in endless piles of flesh. The journey is inherently linear but the performance is overlapping and simultaneously occurring throughout the building. The audience can follow from vignette to vignette or stray to encounter scraps of performance occurring on the periphery. Presence and absence is played out through sound, scent and flesh with the architecture, not as framed view but as an all-encompassing fractured spatial experience.

From the top of the great stair the audience looks down through the three exhibition levels of the building and into the basement. Bodies appear, disappear and reappear on the varying levels and finally move out of sight to complete the performance in the place where the performance began. The final image is of a large window in the corridor and in that window a diorama of moving bodies, trapped and unsmiling behind the glass, like so many specimens in a jar.

Here the disembodied eye of the spectator was replaced by the embodied I as the audience is absorbed into the performance, aware of itself as witness within an historic continuum. Memorialising is therefore engaged through the living.



### **(Re)presentation**

All museums that aim to represent the past have to address issues of absence and presence but it is the extreme quality of the Holocaust that foregrounds the issue most profoundly in the Jewish Museum of Berlin.

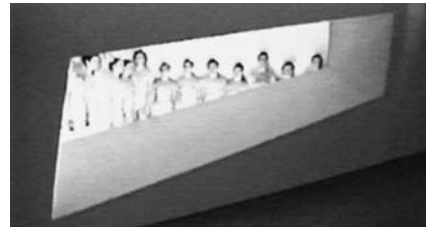
Vivian Patraka begins her book *Spectacular Suffering* by asking how can we represent the unrepresentable landscape of the Holocaust where the material history is so grounded in 'goneness':

*Representation too, inevitably is about goneness...the way in which we continually mark a spectacular and invisible absence in order to remember who once was and what once happened (p. 4).*

For Patraka, 'because performance is so heavily grounded in the presence of the bodies, it is a particularly useful site...' (p. 10). Referring to the museum, she speaks of multiple performances, which allow for multiple interpretations. This multiplicity creates a site for the performance interpretation to become performative (that is, inherently active). Harnessing the 'liveness' and the mutable relationship between the body and the building saves any museum from becoming a burial ground for artifacts.

In the Jewish Museum, the notion of absence is inscribed into the architecture and experienced by moving through it; past glimpses into the deep interiority of the void and out, through slivered views, to an exterior which folds back on itself. The building is storyteller. Writers and critics describing the building speak of the emotions triggered by the architecture in relation to the body. Violinist Isaac Stern commented: 'The forlornness and disorientation was so strong for me... this building says more than a thousand memorials, statues, pictures or screams' (cited by Wise, 1999, p. 128). For Libeskind it was not meant to be 'a fulfilling story' told by the architecture: 'It doesn't offer a catharsis, a kind of 'I've seen it, now I can go on and enjoy the rest of my trip'. It keeps everything in suspense, in tension' (Wise, 1999, p. 128). These comments emerge from connections made between the building and the Holocaust, witnessed in Waltz's response with moving trains of humanity, mountains of bodies and the vulnerable flesh in stark surroundings. Although the deputy director of the museum, Tom Freudenheim, insisted that this 'presence' of the Holocaust would be balanced by the exhibitions where 'we're looking at German-Jewish history and life here – and the vitality it had over time' (Wise, 1999, p. 128), Libeskind's building (where emptiness could be also read as a potentiality) acknowledges the historic eradication of Berlin's Jewry and the literal absence of a collection that had to be created especially for the subsequently installed exhibits.

Benjamin (1968) writes that 'storytelling is always the art of repeating stories and this art is lost when the stories are no longer retained' (p. 91). Like Patraka, he was concerned more with experience and interpretation than with the accuracy of the stories. Libeskind, through his architecture, has called into presence the absence caused by loss and destruction. The stories it re-presents are open to interpretation but are associated with a story of the Holocaust, which we all know well, one that is told and retold in varying forms. It is a story of unspeakable horror kept alive through the pervasive presence of absence, which also opens up a space of possibility.



The archetypal museum, through the muse of remembering, began as a sensual experience with the structured walk. The architect as orator placed images in the built fabric, creating a space of inspiration, re-activated by the organisation and movement of bodies within that space. This strategy was explicitly utilised by Daniel Libeskind whose museum, according to Ourousoff; 'suggests a language closed to the uninitiated – one that is personal to Libeskind and extends through the city's entire fabric. To those willing to decipher that code, the building becomes a map to a silent landscape' (p. 80). Libeskind's ideas have been published widely on this building. These were then communicated on the architecture tours, to which further associations were added by the docents<sup>4</sup>. Whilst visitors bring their own stories and reactions to the building and its narrative, Sasha Waltz and her Company provided a further interpretation and series of stories in their performance dialogue.

The Jewish Museum of Berlin, in the moment when it was housing the dancers and spectators in performance, was presenting an alternative strategy for the contemporary museum. Waltz and her company called upon creative memory, transfixing and transforming the object of architecture. Along with architectural tours, an empty building inhabited by artists and performers presenting ephemeral exhibits and fleeting events, suggests a more radical and appropriate option to a museum housing permanent collections. Libeskind's building challenges the constructed homogeneity of space shattering it into a heterogeneity, which is further activated by spectators on the move. Here are the multiple overlapping spaces of interpretation of which Patraha speaks, situating and producing the spectator as historical subject, and reactivating the museum through a live and bodily 'dialogue'.

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Preziosi was citing the John Soanes Museum in London.
- <sup>2</sup> Libeskind was subsequently commissioned to design the Felix Nussbaum Museum (Osnabruck, Germany) completed prior to the Jewish Museum.
- <sup>3</sup> In Greek legend Ariadne, daughter of King Minos of Crete, gave Theseus a thread to navigate the labyrinth created by Daedalus, kill the Minatour and find his way out safely.
- <sup>4</sup> A docent is a person who leads guided tours especially through a museum or art gallery.