Psychoanalysis and Architecture: mediating our connection to the material world.

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Abstract

The position of psychoanalytic theory in relation to dualistic thought is not clear cut. Freudian psychoanalysis demonstrates that the Cartesian two-world hypothesis which splits the human organism into a mind and body and ascribes to each a different mode of Being, is alien to our everyday experiences of living. According to Freud, life is a negotiation of causal relationships between body and mind, and it’s often when we’re frustrated in life that we experience this relationship most viscerally through psychosomatic complaints. Nevertheless, Freudian psychoanalysis is often so preoccupied with the workings of the mind that it sometimes seems to have forgotten about the body, and as I will argue, also the nonhuman environments we live and dwell in. For Freud, the places we inhabit are themselves psychologically uninteresting and wholly irrelevant to our mental or spiritual lives, even if we were to feel strong emotional attachments to them. If places are mentioned by Freud, they are treated arbitrarily as backdrops to dreams.

While psychoanalysis may seek to go beyond the Cartesian split of body and mind, it draws its own lines of division, splitting the mind into two-worlds of ego-conscious and unconscious, each with their own ways of Being and rules of behaviour. In this respect, Freud remained wedded to Cartesian dualism in his desire to provide a metapsychology or metaphysical framework for his *praxis.* The psychology of C.G. Jung could be similarly charged. However, Jung’s extension of the unconscious world—from the merely personal unconscious proposed by Freud to a collective and autonomous unconscious that seeks purposely to bring humans into harmonious relationship with the cosmos at large—suggests greater scope for uniting body, mind, and the wider non-human environment.

This paper looks more closely at their models of the unconscious in relation to the non-human environment to begin to reconsider the significance of the built environment for their theories. I start with a discussion on the relevance of symbolic imagery more generally before assessing some of their architectural metaphors and self-disclosed personal experiences of architecture. I conclude that Jung’s approach to the built environment is perhaps more defensive or closed off to the ‘outside’ world than one might ordinarily assume, while Freud’s by contrast could be construed as more open to it, and probably more than he himself realized or was willing to accept.