

Architecture and the Pleasure Principle

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In Seminar VII, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan associates Freud's pleasure principle (*Lustprinzip*) with the symbolic order, the linguistic structure of the unconscious. The pleasure principle is connected with the signifier, the seeking of the signifier as a substitute for the absence of the subject at the center of signification, *das Ding*, which results in the "productive function of desire" (p. 3).¹ The pleasure principle is seen in contrast to the reality principle (*Realitätsprinzip*), as the unconscious is seen in contrast to the conscious. The reality principle consists of the laws, established categories and accepted traditions that govern practices, nowhere more dominant than in the practice of architecture. But what role does the pleasure principle play in architecture? The pleasure principle governs primary processes in the unconscious, according to Freud, in the image-making faculty of the unconscious, which are the product of biological need. The reality principle governs the secondary processes in conscious thought that link unconscious images to real objects in wish-fulfillment, as described in Chapter VII of *The Interpretation of Dreams*. The primary processes of the pleasure principle determine how we perceive things and think about them. All thought and perception originate in the unconscious, and they are brought to conscious attention through language, through signs or signifiers of pleasure or pain. As the *Sachvorstellung*, the representation of things, becomes the *Wortvorstellung*, the representation of words, it becomes clear that "things of the human world are things in a universe structured by words" (p. 45), by the symbolic processes of language. All architecture originates with the pleasure principle and is then subjected to the reality principle. All architecture is "organized around emptiness" (p. 135), as Lorens Holm also points out in his writing, and is given an organization in relation to the *Wortvorstellung*, the word presentation, signification in language originating in the unconscious. Architecture needs to release itself from the chains of the reality principle and reinvest in the pleasure principle.

¹ Jacques Lacan, Seminar VII, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992 [1986]).