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Speaking Notes

Architectural Mood and Mental Space

Most people think of architecture as a profession that is concerned with aesthetic beauty—designs that please the observer through visual perception of the harmony, symmetry, and good proportions crafted by the designer. But, architecture is more than just aesthetics. Well-designed buildings need to respond to the functional needs of the occupants, and ensure structural soundness for safety reasons. However, I believe Architecture is even *more* than that. True architecture can create feelings and emotions from within, and cause the users to self reflect on their own lives.

Furthermore, I suggest that we, as architects, can provide a healing environment for everyone, especially those who are affected by mental health diseases, such as depression and anxiety. One in five people suffer from mental illness, and fifty percent of those who commit suicide suffer from some form of a mental health disease. More people suffer from depression than coronary heart disease, cancer, and HIV/AIDS. With these numbers only growing exponentially, it is crucial that we explore how the built environment influences our thoughts and actions.

In the duration of my thesis, I will examine the historical approach to health, and how we have progressed throughout time. I will be comparing the most recent neuroscientific evidence with that of ancient thought to gain a better understanding of the mental essence of architecture, in hopes to show the potentiality to redescribe our fiction and reality through the movement through space. **[Slide 2]**

Historically, architecture has been an intentional tool used to alter our mental states, but overtime has been dominated by stimulating aesthetics and building performances, resulting in the loss of the metaphysical dimension of space. Churches, like the Orvieto Cathedral (left) or the Monreale Cathedral (right) were a way to experience the influential effects of design. Encountering the architecture was believed to be a cathartic process, as you followed along with the events engraved on the exterior and interior of the cathedrals. This could be done without even stepping foot into the church, as the exterior facades enticed users, drawing them up to the buildings as they wandered, following the stories each design contained.

We can also see this throughout the ancient Greeks, who were one of the primordial civilizations to comprehend the influential factors our built environment can have on our health. From philosophers like Aristotle **[SLIDE 3]** to physicians like Hippocrates, **[SLIDE 4]** the Greeks were able to develop holistic healing systems that treated the patient, rather than just

the disease. With this knowledge, they began to incorporate these influences within their architecture. One example of this is the *Greek Theatre*. **[SLIDE 5]**

The theatre, cut into the hillside, provided adequate views for each individual. Not only was the view to the “stage” important, but also what was happening behind the actors. The spectators not only looked down on the plays, up to the shifting skies and around at one another, but also out over the full sanctuary of the theatre and other familiar districts of the area. This layering of spatial dimension and depth expanded the overall reaction it had on the participating viewers. **[SLIDE 6]**

We can see this illustrated throughout the *Theatre of Epidauros*, built for Asclepius, the Greek God of Medicine, and was utilized as a healing sanctuary in ancient times. This theatre is also considered to be the most perfect ancient Greek theatre with regard to acoustics and aesthetics. **[SLIDE 7]**

This was an especially cathartic experience through the tragedies of the theatre. The plays and festivals containing tragedy allowed the spectators to participate, not physically, but mentally and emotionally. The viewers were able to place themselves within the context of the tragedy, thus discovering a transformation and releasement of emotions like fear and pity into pleasure or contentment, much similar to our personal synesthetic encounters through modern day movies, plays, orchestras, etc. **[SLIDE 8]** The “*chora*”, or the space, and the viewer were in a dance, each giving and taking as the tragedy proceeded, allowing active engagement throughout the play. The actions portrayed allowed spectators an alternative way of seeing, which was often “*more true*” than normal vision. The distance between the viewer and the stage provided for a space of interpretation, allowing users to externalize their own emotions, opening up a self recognition through the other.

Interestingly enough, the most recent neuroscientific phenomenological research validates what ancient philosophers and physicians theorized: to understand consciousness in humans, we must not look inward, but to the ways we go about living in and respond to our environment. **[SLIDE 9]**

Rather than stepping on the specialized ground of neuroscience, I aim to elaborate on the specific mental essence of architecture - a realm that is deeply biologically and culturally grounded. It is my hope that the exciting doors that the biological and neurosciences are now opening will valorize the interaction of architecture and the human mind, and reveal hidden complexities that have thus far escaped measurement and rational analysis, and I believe that neuroscience can reveal and reinforce the fundamentally mental, embodied, and biologically essence of profound architecture against current tendencies toward increasing

materialism, intellectualization, and commodification.

So, yes, our brains are important. However, there is more to human experience than neural activity, says Alva Noë, a professor of philosophy, who focuses on theories of consciousness and perceptions. **[SLIDE 10]**

With modern day philosophers, like Noë, we are able to understand how the traditional view of perception as primarily synesthetic is justified by the recent understanding of the senses as “modalities” that cross over their functional determinations, and that a large part of the influences on our minds are in fact the environments we surround ourselves in. The importance of well designed spaces can be seen as a journey, from beginning to end. **[SLIDE 11]**

In modern medical facilities, our journeys are often focused more of the practitioner, and less on the patient. There seems to be little to no thought about how occupants truly experience the space, therefore allowing specialization to determine treatment methods and outcomes. **[SLIDE 12]**

Most behavioral healthcare units are typically tucked away inside a hospital or various wards. This design decision creates a sense of isolation within the inhabitant, resulting in a flawed system of treatments. If perception is something we do, not something that happens to us, then it is crucial that we examine the spaces we place ourselves in, especially when it comes to our mental health. **[SLIDE 13]**

When we begin to comprehend that our consciousness extends further than our skulls, we are able to understand that the emotive character of our constructed environment matters immensely; in other words, what matters is its material beauty; its power to seduce on one hand, and its capacity to open up a space of communication through intersubjective encounters on the other. **[SLIDE 14]**

The side effects from these mental illnesses can often leave us feeling hopeless and lost, with or without reason; like being tied to an anchor, struggling to reach the surface. I often wonder what the extent of our mental capabilities are if we are able to utilize architecture as a tool to disable the chains that depression and anxiety hold on our minds. Imagine what we are capable of if we release the stresses and tensions within our everyday lives. This is exemplified with Dr. Jonas Salk, who made a remarkable discovery that altered our health on a global scale. **[SLIDE 15]**

Dr. Jonas Salk was convinced that architectural settings profoundly influence our mental and physical welfare, a conviction that stemmed from his personal experience. **[SLIDE 16]**

In 1948, Dr. Salk set out to quantify the different types of polio, but soon extended his mission to develop a vaccine. For seven years, **[SLIDE 17]** Dr. Salk and his team addressed one of the most frightening public health scares in our country, driving himself into a frantic pace, and soon developed brain overload. This resulted in Dr. Salk's decision to retreat to the basilica of Assisi in Italy. **[SLIDE 18]**

The basilica could not have been more different than the lab. The architecture is a beautiful combination of Romanesque and Gothic styles. **[SLIDE 19]** White-washed brick covered the expansive exterior and dozens of semi-circular arches surrounded the plazas between buildings. **[SLIDE 20]** Inside the church, the walls were covered with stunning fresco paintings from the 14th and 15th centuries and **[SLIDE 21]** natural light poured in from tall windows. **[SLIDE 22]**

His experience at Assisi left such a deep impression on him that many years later, Dr. Salk credited the architectural setting there with helping him make the intellectual breakthrough that ultimately led to the creation of the polio vaccine.

[SLIDE 23]

“The spirituality of the architecture there was so inspiring that I was able to do intuitive thinking far beyond any I had done in the past. Under the influence of that historic place I intuitively designed the research that I felt would result in a vaccine for polio. I returned to my laboratory in Pittsburgh to validate my concepts and found that they were correct.”

-Jonas Salk

By withdrawing himself from society and creating a space of interpretation through distance, Dr. Salk was able to experience an alternative perspective, thus resulting in an influential revelation.

So how can movement through architectural space reshape our perceptions? In *The Function of Fiction in Shaping Reality*, Paul Ricoeur argues **[SLIDE 24]** that fictions proceed from simple images by the means of new combinations, and that fictions are merely complex ideas whose components are derived from previous experiences. So if we are able to redescribe these fictions, are we not able to perceive the world through an alternative lens? In my direct and intentional attempt to alter our views on the world, my hope is that users will be able to experience a cathartic journey, something that they can carry within themselves as they proceed through life. This journey will allow them to view the world through a changed perspective, since, as

Ricoeur would state, all experience is in a sense based on a selection and combination of elements. The artefact aided in this discussion.

[SLIDE 25] My artefact was inspired by a Natalija Subotincic, a professor of Architecture at the university of manitoba, lecture in which she studied both the objective and subjective arrangement of Sigmund Freud's office layout, and the spaces in which he practiced his Psychoanalytic therapy treatments. We often regard Freud through his written documentation and spoken linguistics, however, he was heavily influenced by the spaces he lived and worked in, and believed that particular arrangements, spatial constructions and configurations of certain items within these spaces can have potential influences on his patients, and within himself. Within his practice spaces, he had numerous artefacts, each containing a story or important significance, aligning the shelves of his studies. **[SLIDE 26]** Freud was fascinated with these archetypal artefacts because he believed, that like the archeologist, the purpose of psychology and his psychoanalytic theory, is to excavate the unconscious mind, layer after layer, through our external experience within the world. These items allowed a different way of thinking; not through words, but through the visualistic images, physical objects, and spatial relationships, and often found that these artefacts provided a more influential way of expressing himself. As his psychoanalytic treatments progressed, he eventually removed himself of the patient's vision, and remained relatively quiet, allowing them the participate with the space as well. **[SLIDE 27]**

Architecturally, concrete and cement are often utilized to hold structures down, grounding them, and prohibiting them from moving. This is a direct representation of the side effects of mental illness; weighing us down, preventing us from transitioning beyond our struggles. That is why the cement pieces are broken, symbolizing the destruction of the binds that depression holds on our minds. **[SLIDE 28]**

As you transition through space and move around my artefact, you mentally begin to make connections with what is in front of you, and what is behind you; relating the past, present, and future. Each time you move through the shelving system, you begin to continuously make associations, revealing and concealing what once was, and what has yet to come, in a cubistic way.

My artefact also provided insight in how to approach my site. Providing separation and breaking everyday norms is crucial in order for my design to be successful. In doing so, I chose utilize the land located off the north shore of Lake Superior, more specifically Wauswaugoning Bay.

[SLIDE 29-33] Similar to the Greek theatre, site played a crucial role in the development of my project, as well as the cultural context in which it is being placed. In digging into the areas past,

I found a rich history and culture tied to the Native Americans, specifically the tribes of the Ojibwe. **[SLIDE 34]**

Grand Portage was once a popular trading site, being located right off the waters, and the Ojibwe would often trade with the settlers. Since they would name their land and areas by the activities that they performed, Wausaugoning Bay translates into “*those who spear fish by torchlight*.” Being a semi-nomadic culture, they would travel around for their needs; wandering as a way of staying alive. The Ojibwe would inhabit further inland, closer to larger game (deer, elk, etc.) and travel to the bay (my site) for things like fish and water, returning back to their communities with the necessary requirements for survival and fresh resources. Through a modern day approach, I am proposing a similar experience; users who will detach from society, discover their needs, and return with a different perspective on life, re-entering public realms with an alternative mindset, much similar to our eyes adjusting when we experience a transition from light to dark.

Another influential aspect of my site is the native rock formations. The area is filled with diabasis rock, **[SLIDE 37-40]** formed thousands of years ago, through integration of volcanic lava and natural site minerals. The linguistic origins of the word Diabase is Greek for “crossing over”, which was a revelation that I stumbled upon, and informed the material pallet of my design. **[SLIDE 41-43]** Within my site, there are (2) hills with a valley inbetween. My design focuses on utilizing these (2) separate entities, bridging them together through the pathways and journeys, “crossing over” and into one another, like the igneous rock formations.

[SLIDE 44]

The programmatic layout of my design requires (2) one week long visits, within opposing seasons. For example, if you visit during the summer you must return in the winter, and vice versa and so on. Summer visits will focus on the external world, or those experienced outside the body. This entails events done outdoors, on the waters, etc. Winter visits will allow users to experience more personal quests, or those experienced internally. This allows a full circle of journeys, along with providing enough time to break the habitual routines of our everyday norms.

In order to fully achieve a cathartic experience, those who journey to here will be asked to bring an item that resembles an internal conflict within themselves, telling a story about their past. Within the final days, they will be asked to place these items within a concrete mold, leaving these past influences behind, and solidifying the beginning to a new and changed perspective towards the future. **[SLIDE 45]**

When returning on the second bi annual visit, users will find their artefact, excavating and freeing the item from the concrete hold, much like the mind being released from the imprisonment of depression and anxiety. They will then place these items along a shelving system. This shelf will home the representations of the internal conflicts the users went through, offering a tangible presence and spatial arrangement that brings certain thoughts to life in a much more intuitive and visceral way.

The artefacts contained in the cavernous shelf will be within the entrance of my building, providing a physical aspect in which users are able to situate, arrange, hold, or even fondle the collections, allowing an assisted or embodied aspect of thinking for incoming users, foreshadowing an experience that is yet to come. The arrangement of these artefacts will speak of an event of the previous visitors experience, each item showcasing a story in a linear progression. **[SLIDE 46]**

Within the program, there will be personal spaces that provide users an area to rest and recharge, within the comfort of their own space. This allows visitors a private and secure area to decompress, away from others. Each space will feature resting quarters, dressing areas and storage, and bathing areas, as well as access to the outdoors. Adequate views and access to the outdoors will allow occupants to experience the beauty of the site, as well as warmth and vitamin D exposure from sunlight, which has been known to reverse the effects of seasonal affective disorder, or seasonal depression, something that happens far too often in winter heavy area and states like Minnesota. **[SLIDE 47]**

The more public areas will feature community spaces to gather with others. These spaces will promote communication through active participation, and areas that allow embodied interactions with users within similar instances. Transition spaces between private to public can provide an adjustment ease, allowing participants to mentally and physically cross a threshold. Meditation spaces, open to everyone, allow occupants a chance to utilize meditative thinking, focusing on the present and accepting things as they come, and these can range from full classes to one-on-one support. Because my design focuses on those who suffer from mental illnesses, some users may be taking prescriptions, or other medical treatments, therefore there will be spaces for the specialists for consultation or any specific needs of the person, such as a therapist or psychologists. However, with the spatial configuration of journeys and pathways, and the pairing of the programmatic layout, my hopes is that my building will be the psychologist, allowing users to open up through physical contact and movement throughout the spaces. **[SLIDE 48]**

Access to my site requires the journey off of Highway 61, into the native landscape, populated by a mix deciduous and coniferous trees. The pathway brings you to a spot where must leave

your car, subjecting yourself to the mystery and uncertainty of where you are heading. From here, a shuttle will bring you to the destination. **[SLIDE 49]**

Upon entering my building, users are forced to stop along a carve into the ground, redirecting their focus and attention. This act of cutting into the earth allows our minds to imagine through the depths of below. To the left, or our right, is the pathway to the personal spaces. **[SLIDE 50]** This tower features 6 floors dedicated to the personal aspect of each individual. The top 4 floors consist of the personal chambers, where the users will inhabit during their stay. **[SLIDE 51]**

To the right, is where the user will find themselves being greeted by staff, offices, nutritional areas, and so on. As inhabitants make their way through the more public areas, they begin to acclimate themselves with others. This is where users will eat with one another, communicate, socialize, etc. The separation between promotes a feeling of security, providing each individual with their own space, as well as a opportunity to cross a transitional threshold from public to private, and vice versa. **[SLIDE 52]**

As you make your way to the second level, you are where the specialist is; a space where users can experience the benefits of therapy treatments. The diabasis rock, which was excavated from the hillside, will be implemented into these spaces. **[SLIDE 53]** The domestication of the diabase rock will be utilized to form the spaces for the specialist. This represents taking what we pulled from the depths of below, and utilizing in a new and changed way; in a space where we are most personal and vulnerable. **[SLIDE 54]**

[SLIDE 55] Those who come to the Haven will embark on a physical journey as they progress through the spaces, as well as a metaphysical quest for truth within themselves, similar to a journey one might have through therapy or psychology as they transition from sickness to health, or the releasement from a prison like state within the mind. Light plays an instrumental role in the enhancement of the overall effects, since light has often been a metaphorical reference of visceral and intellectual movement, as well as a acknowledging the past that lay deep within our subconscious; a personal quest for inner wholeness. **[SLIDE 56]**

We see this in the Greek myth Orpheus's journey. As Orpheus travels to the underworld to retrieve his deceased bride, he must travel from the darkened underworld into the rays of above, allowing light to be a guide, transitioning from death to life, or **[SLIDE 57]**

Le Corbusiers sketch of the 24hr day, which tracks the movements of the sun above and below the horizon, and informed his designs throughout the Basilica at La Sainte Baume. Light would penetrate through various angles, and draw the visitors through the galleries of the upper and lower realms, and be greeted on the emerging side by the sun. Similar to Orpheus journey,

knowledge would be achieved on the route through darkness into light, and through the engagement of the body. **[SLIDE 58]**

To get to their resting chambers, they must again follow this carve into the earth, always being aware of where it is, allowing it to direct them wherever they need. **[SLIDE 59]** There are a total of 20 chambers, 4 floors with 5 units, each featuring areas to bathe, rest and recharge, and dress. **[SLIDE 60]** Each morning, users will transcend down, cross over into the public areas, experience the existential benefits of the architecture and the program, and transcend into their personal areas. This constant back and forth, crossing over and under, forces the inhabitant to be in constant motion, altering their mindsets and rewriting their perception through the engagement of the architectural setting. **[SLIDE 61]**

A profound aspect of my design is the space where the sliced earth flows into the hillside. This underground, existential space provides a moment for users to be exclusive from the world, a true moment of peace and calmness, through the act of a metaphysical wonder. **[SLIDE 62]** To access this point, you must travel into the ground where I have excavated the earth, digging deep into the ground to extract what is below. Through the act of wandering, users will find themselves being guided by the light from above. Amongst this slice, there are also numerous personal mediation spaces down below, allowing us to fully embrace this key moment. **[SLIDE 63]**

Through further wandering, users will encounter the carve; viewed from every angle, stimulating our curious minds to explore. The pathway will bring users to a point of pure isolation within the hillside. **[SLIDE 64].**

From here, you can travel up and experience the cantevliering system, looking out over the land, like the greek theatres looking out over the neighboring districts. **[SLIDE 65]** The cantilever is the final aspect in connecting the earth, the sky, and the water. I wanted to implement the use of a cantilever because of the ability to look out into nothing, to gain something. This projects and externalizes our thoughts, reaching out over the land, in hopes to gain a moment of true clarity. **[SLIDE 66]**

Buildings mediate between the world and our consciousness through internalizing the world and externalizing the mind. We must learn to confront buildings experientially as encounters between physical structures and our own existential sense through internalizing multisensory perception. This encounter turns physical and geometric space into existential and lived space, and we become an ingredient and measure of the experience itself. This understanding puts the experiencing individual in the very center of the experience.

[SLIDE 67] The mental content and meaning of an architectural experience is not a given set of facts or elements; it is a unique imaginative reinterpretation and re-creation by each individual. The experienced meanings of architecture are not primarily rational, ideational or verbal meanings, as they arise through one's sense of existence by means of embodied and unconscious projections, identifications and empathy. Architecture articulates and "thickens" our sense of being instead of addressing the domain of rational understanding.

My intentions are for users to experience a cathartic journey that forces them to rethink about the way in which they see the world, provide a space for reinterpretation of perception, and a changed perspective throughout their lives. It is only through the conscious world are we able to gain access to the unconscious mind, being actively present, both physically and mentally. Similar to the Greek Theatre, the layers of depth and dimension within the spaces, the content, the architecture, environment, etc. will aid in the outcome of my thesis project, and hopefully change the way we approach mental health in terms of architectural design.